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What Happens When Students Are Taught To Self-Assess Their Written Responses to Literature?

By

Jennifer Beth Goodwin

August 2007

A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the State University of New York College at Brockport in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Education
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The purpose of this study was to determine what the effects were of students learning how to self-assess their own writing, specifically their written responses to literature. I determined what the effects were by assessing students’ writing prior to and following discussion about self-assessment. The goal of this study was to find out if learning how to self-assess writing affects the quality of the writing.

I conducted my research on two small groups from a suburban elementary school in upstate New York. The participants consisted of three fourth grade students and four sixth grade students. The students were pulled out into a small group setting which mimicked their usual reading/writing instruction. The students discussed what they already knew about self-assessment and what they wanted to know about self-assessment. The students then constructed a rubric to use in order to self-assess their written responses to literature.

The students developed their written response to literature, self-assessed their writing, and turned it in. In order to analyze the students’ writing, I looked at each of the students’ two writing samples to compare and contrast them. I looked to see if the students’ second responses were of better quality or not. I also looked at the students’ responses from a grade level perspective to see which strands of the written response

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to literature the students were using and which strands they were not using. The students’ scores all improved after learning how to self-assess their own written responses. All of the students addressed more strands of the written response to literature in their second response compared to their first response. Each of the students’ self-assessment scores matched the score that I gave them using the rubric we created together. The sixth graders were also more likely to address literary criticism within their responses as compared to the fourth graders. The sixth graders performed better than the fourth graders, most likely due to the fact that they have had more experience with the Reader’s Response. After interviewing the students following discussion and use of self-assessment, the students showed that they had gained an awareness of their abilities as a writer.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Strong writing skills have become an increasingly important commodity in the 21st century... The discipline and skill required to create, reshape, and polish pieces of writing ‘on demand’ prepares students for the real world, where they inevitably must be able to write quickly and clearly, whether in the workplace or in college classrooms.” (Baldwin, pg. 72)

Students are faced with this reality everyday. They are preparing for writing in the world outside of the classroom by completing writing tasks in the classroom. Teachers are doing their best to help students become better writers. We give them expectations, lessons, and grades, hoping that our contributions will help students develop into great writers. The piece that is almost always missing is one of our great, underlying goals for our students which are for our students to be invested in their writing. We want them to care about what they are doing and why they are doing it. I am hoping that my research will shed some light as to one way to help increase students’ motivation when writing.

Problem Statement and Significance of the Problem

The objective of my research is to determine what the effects are of students learning how to self-assess their own writing. I will determine what the effects are by assessing students’ writing prior to and following discussion about self-assessment. The goal of this study is to find out if learning how to self-assess writing will affect
the quality of the students' writing. In turn, it is hoped that the students' motivation for writing will increase.

Teachers complain that students simply complete writing assignments to get them done. Students rarely think about what they have learned or the process they went through to complete their piece of writing. A possible source of this problem could be that students have never been taught how to think about their learning or the process they go through to complete a writing task. It is our job as teachers to encourage students to look critically at their work and think about what they have learned through the process.

Throughout my experiences in various school districts, I have seen self-assessment used very rarely. Most teachers seem to think that having students self-assess their own work will not be a productive use of time. According to The National Capital Language Resource Center (2004), self-assessment encourages students to become more independent learners and can also help to motivate students. It appears that self-assessment would be a good strategy for teachers to use in order to reach their goal of having students reflect upon their own writing.

There are many people who are stakeholders in this research. The most important stakeholders are the students who are involved. They are going to have the opportunity to learn a strategy to help them become better writers. The students' teachers are also impacted by this research because they will be learning from my research as well as potentially using information from it in their own classrooms. My research will add to the current knowledge about the use of self-assessment and its
effects on students’ writing by looking at how self-assessment affects students’ writing.

This research has influenced my own personal teaching philosophy. I can now see the importance of having students self-assess their own writing, and I want to use it in my future teaching. It has also influenced the lives of my students as writers. They are now more aware of how to self-assess their own writing in order to improve it. The teachers of these students have also been influenced by learning about my research and using it within their own classrooms.

**Rationale**

During my time spent as a college student, I have come to find that self-assessment is vital to success as a student. You must be able to look objectively at your own writing and decide whether it is the best work you can do or not. You must be able to honestly reflect upon your own writing in order to become a better writer. After coming to this realization, it made me wonder why I don’t see more students assessing their own writing throughout the various school districts. I don’t think there is any better way for students’ to learn how to make their writing better than for them to look objectively at their writing. We as teachers need to be able to teach students how to self-assess their own writing.

I am conducting this research to see how the quality of my students’ writing has changed after direct instruction about learning how to self-assess their own writing. I am curious to see whether the students benefit or not from learning how to
self-assess their own writing. I know that I want my students to be more aware of what they are capable of and teaching them how to self-assess their own writing should accomplish this goal. In order to support my research in the classroom, I have examined many resources concerning the effects of having students learn how to self-assess their own writing.

### Definition of Terms

**Self-assessment**
A process in which a student engages in critiquing one’s own work, usually for the purpose of improving future performance.

**Metacognition**
The knowledge of one’s own thinking processes and strategies, and the ability to consciously reflect on the knowledge of cognition to modify those processes and strategies.

**Rubric**
A scoring guide consisting of an explicit description of performance characteristics corresponding to a point on a rating scale

**Written responses to literature (Reader’s Response)**
A letter that a student writes to demonstrate his/her thinking around his/her book used for independent reading time which includes making predictions, asking questions, literary criticism, making inferences and making connections.

**Making Predictions**
Using information from the text to make a guess as to what could happen next in the story.

**Asking Questions**
Writing questions related to confusing parts of a story or things the reader is left wondering about.
Literary Criticism
Studying, discussing, evaluating, and interpreting a story.

Making Inferences
Reading between the lines to determine what the reader thinks the author’s message might be

Making Connections
Relating the story to your own life, another book or something in the world.

Author’s Craft – Thinking about how the author wrote the story (vocabulary and phrase choices, vivid descriptions, interesting characters or plot, use of poetic language, background information)
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Reader's Response

Reader's Response is a writing task given to students to evaluate how well they have comprehended a book. "Reader's Response stresses the importance of the reader's role in interpreting texts" (Mora & Welch, 2007, p. 1). The theory behind Reader's Response is that "learning is a constructive and dynamic process in which students extract meaning from texts through experiencing, hypothesizing, exploring and synthesizing" (Mora & Welch, 2007, p. 2). Through the use of Reader's Response, students become active learners and they become aware of their role as a reader. Students use their background knowledge and experiences to interpret texts. It is expected that students understand that the meaning of a text is not entirely subjective as they must support their responses using the text.

Reader's Response is a "way of sharing your insights, thoughts, and feelings about what you have read" (J. Hyland, personal communication, March 2007). In the classroom where this study took place, Reader's Response occurred in the following fashion. Readers are asked to write a letter to his/her teacher including a short summary of the book to help the reader understand the main idea. The book they are asked to respond to is an independent reading book. An independent reading book is one that the students are reading on their own, without help from the teacher or other peers.

Students are required to address certain strands of the Reader's Response. The strands of the Reader's Response papers are comprehension strategies as defined
by a combination of various experts in the field of comprehension such as Stephanie Harvey, Anne Goudvis, Irene Fountas, Gay Su Pinnell, and Cris Tovani.

“Comprehension is an intricate issue, requiring the simultaneous operation of complex strategies” (Diehl, 2005, p. 58). The comprehension strategies showcase how a reader is relating to a text and constructing meaning. It has been shown that “strategic readers approach reading with a purpose and use the strategies to guide thinking before, during, and after reading” (Diehl, 2005, p. 58). The Reader’s Response shows whether or not a student is using the comprehension strategies to help them construct meaning from the text.

**Inferring**

The first strategy students are asked to address is inferring. The students are asked what kinds of conclusions they have drawn based on text clues (J. Ames, personal communication, 2007). In the classroom where this study took place, students share the reasons for why they think a certain event occurred while using support from the text. Making inferences encourages the students to read between the lines to hear what the author is not saying. Students show that they have inferred while reading by "sharing and explaining insights into a character’s feelings or motives and/or plot, theme or main idea’ (J. Hyland, personal communication, 2007).

**Predicting**

Another strategy students are asked to address is predicting. Predicting is when “students critically speculate what will happen later in the text supported with evidence and also confirm and/or deny the thoughtful predictions they made
Students must specifically identify what they believe will happen next in the story based on clues from the text. They must understand that in order to effectively use the predicting strategy, readers must make, check, and adjust predictions throughout the entire reading of the text. “Predicting helps activate prior knowledge, set a purpose for reading and connect new information to current information” (Diehl, 2005, p. 54).

**Questioning**

Questioning is a strategy that encourages students to challenge the author’s intent or point of view through the use of questions. The questions students ask can be classified into two categories, questions to clarify and questions to wonder (Tovani, 2000). Clarifying questions are used to clear up confusions while reading. These are usually questions that can be answered by rereading. Questions to wonder are not questions that can be answered by rereading. The reader can only make inferences after reading about these questions using what they know about the text and their own interpretations surrounding the meaning of the text.

**Literary Criticism**

Literary criticism is a strategy that students use to share opinions and make judgments about characters, events, ideas or the author’s craft, based on specific details in a book (J. Hyland, personal communication, 2007). Students show that they can evaluate a book by critiquing the author’s style of writing, intent or biases (J. Hyland, personal communication, 2007). Students can analyze many different aspects of the author’s writing style such as their choice of language, character development,
use of vivid descriptions and point of view. Students are encouraged to use quotes
directly from the text to support their critique.

Connections

Making connections is a strategy that students use to relate what they’re
reading to their own lives, another book, or the world. They can use these connections
to help expand their comprehension and create “new understandings” of the book (J.
Hyland, personal communication, 2007). Connections can help the students to better
understand the characters, events or themes within a book because it causes them to
think outside what the author has written and connect it to the world outside the book.
The most important aspect of making connections is that students are able to
recognize the connections and make judgments on the relevance of these connections
(Harris & McKenzie, 2005).

Utilizing Reader’s Response in the classroom allows students to see that there
is not “a single, fixed meaning inherent in every literary work...that the individual
creates his or her own meaning through a “transaction” with the text based on
personal associations” (Mora & Welch, 2007, pg. 1). After looking closely at
Reader’s Response, it is easy to see that it is a beneficial tool for both students and
teachers. It allows students to voice how they are relating to a text and it allows the
teacher to see this usually unseen process. Another unseen process that is vital to
student success as a reader and involved with Reader’s Response is metacognition.
Metacognition

Metacognition or thinking about our own thinking is the key for active and thoughtful reading (Diehl, 2005). In order for students to become active readers, they must be able to recognize how their brain is reacting to what they are reading. Metacognition can also be defined as something that “mediates between the learner and their cognition (thinking)” (Holton & Clarke, 2006, p. 132). When students become aware of this thought process, they are more likely to become an active part of the reading process by using their repertoire of strategies.

Metacognition becomes vital when cognition becomes more challenging, when problem-solving strategies are needed (Holton & Clarke, 2006). As students begin to read more advanced books, they need to have a solid foundation of strategies to choose from in order to comprehend the material. The more students use these strategies and think about how they are using the strategies, the more automatic this thinking process can become.

“Metacognition is a turning inward, purposely at first and automatically thereafter, to reexamine our processes of comprehending, changing interpretations of the text and our reflections in order to elaborate and deepen our own understanding of a text” (Diehl, 2005, p. 59).

Metacognition is something that mature readers take for granted. We understand how to think about what we’re reading. We can think about the process we go through in order to construct meaning from various types of text. If we don’t understand something, we stop and reevaluate. Students need to be taught this strategy because “metacognition provides the foundation for the specific comprehension strategies to
take root” (Diehl, 2005, p. 59). Students who are good readers not only know what the comprehension strategies are but how and when to use them appropriately. They are able to think critically about their own use of the comprehension strategies. Without metacognition, use of the comprehension strategies would be futile. Students need to understand why comprehension strategies are important before, during and after reading.

The reason we have to teach metacognition to our students is so that it will become an automated process. The more students learn about how to think about the process they use to comprehend a text, the more automated it will become. They will begin to internalize all of the comprehension strategies they have been taught, which makes each student a reader who makes predictions, inferences, critiques, connections, asks questions.

**Self-assessment**

The term assessment “refers to all those activities undertaken...that provide information to be used as feedback to modify teaching and learning activities” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 2). Self-assessment refers to the process of assessment through the eyes of the learner. Students should be taught how to self assess their own work so they can understand the main purpose for their learning and understand what they need to do to be successful (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

Teachers often struggle with allowing students to self-assess their own work, because they think students are not reliable or trustworthy. But in reality, students struggle with assessing themselves because they lack a clear picture of what they are
supposed to be learning. Many students have become comfortable with completing an assignment and waiting for the teacher’s feedback to learn what they did correctly or incorrectly. Although this process is sometimes necessary, it leaves students with no overall idea of what they are learning and more importantly, why they are learning it. When students lack this understanding, they become passive members of the learning community. When students gain an understanding of the evaluation process, they “become more committed and more effective as learners”. Also, the process of self-assessment becomes a topic of discussion for students to engage in with their teachers. This discussion promotes even more in-depth thinking about his/her own thinking which is essential to good learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998).

“Self-assessment encourages students to become independent learners and can increase their motivation” (NCLRC, 2004, p. 2). This is a goal all teachers strive towards; we want our students to become independent learners and become more motivated to learn. So how do we bring self-assessment into our classrooms? We can begin by understanding that students do not learn to assess their own learning on their own. We need to teach them strategies for self-assessment. The teacher must model the strategies, give the students time to practice with the strategies and have a discussion about how the strategies helped or how they need to be adjusted or refined for each student (NCLRC, 2004).

Teachers can help students become comfortable with self-assessment by engaging them in group activities surrounding assessment. Giving students writing from past students and providing them with a rubric to look at and discuss in small
groups will allow students to get used to the assessment process (Baldwin, 2004). Teachers can also provide students with a variety of writing samples from past students and have them rank the writing pieces based on certain features determined by the students themselves (Baldwin, 2004).

Students can also benefit from creating their own rubrics. Their motivation increases when they have self-defined learning goals (NCLRC, 2004). Students can assess their progress more easily when they have goals to work from.

"Using assessment as an instructional tool means students can generate a scoring rubric of their own-one...that is grounded in students' own values and critical judgment. Such a process fosters critical thinking and formative self-assessment-abilities that will serve students throughout life" (Baldwin, 2004, p. 75)

Encouraging students to become critical thinkers and giving them tools to serve them throughout their lives are goals that all teachers set for their students. My research is directed at giving student an opportunity to experience some of these tools such as self-assessment and metacognition. In the next chapter, the methods I used to achieve this goal will become clear.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Objective

The objective of my research is to determine what the effects are of students learning how to self-assess their own writing. I will determine what the effects are by assessing students’ writing prior to and following discussion about self-assessment. The goal of this study is to find out if learning how to self-assess writing will affect the quality of the students’ writing. In turn, it is hoped that the students’ motivation for writing will increase.

Participants

I conducted my research on two small groups from a suburban elementary school in upstate New York. The students are all of Caucasian descent. The students were chosen because they are considered to be of average ability for his or her grade level according to district assessments and teacher observations. The assessments used to determine the students’ academic status were the Developmental Reading Assessment and the teachers’ observations of the students in regards to their performance in all academic areas, including writing. The participants consisted of fourth grade students and sixth grade students. I originally planned for there to be three boys and three girls from each grade level. Due to the number of consent forms returned, the groups consisted of two fourth grade boys and one fourth grade girl as well as two sixth grade boys and three sixth grade girls. All but one sixth grade boy (Dan) were able to provide me with a Reader Response written prior to learning about self-assessment and a Reader Response after learning about self-assessment. Dan was
not able to complete his second Reader Response in time for this study so I was unable to use any of his data.

I felt that choosing students who were performing at grade level in most academic areas would be good participants for my study because I would be able to compare them to students of similar academic abilities due to the fact that they are average achieving students. I chose to work with small groups because in the school district where this study took place, reading instruction is provided in small group settings. All of the participants have had prior experience with writing a Reader’s Response. The sixth grade students have had some instruction based around self-assessment of writing while the fourth grade students have encountered no instruction about self-assessment of written responses to literature.

Figure 3.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Val</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Measures

My problem statement involves the use of self-assessment on the quality of Reader’s Responses. In order to for the students to self-assess their work, I had a discussion with them about self-assessment, what it is and how it works. The students took what they already knew about self-assessment and the Reader’s Response and created a rubric to assess their work. Each group created their own rubric to use and each student was able to contribute to the rubric through the use of a KWL chart, which lists what the student already knows about the topic (self-assessment), what they want to know about the topic and what they learned about the topic. The rubric that they created was used by all of the students. The rubrics are valid and reliable for each specific group of students because they used their background knowledge about what a good Reader’s Response consists of along with deciding specifically what aspects make up a great, mediocre or poor response (Appendices 1 & 2). It is easy to see that the rubric measures what it is meant to measure because it was created specifically for the purpose of assessing the various components of the Reader’s Response.

The Reader’s Response is also used as a form of assessment because it demonstrates, through the use of comprehension strategies, how a student is relating to and comprehending a text. If a student addresses the various strands of the Reader’s Response well, it is clear that they are relating to and comprehending the book. If a student has trouble addressing the various strands of the Reader’s Response, it is clear
that they need some help, either with using the comprehension strategies or with choosing appropriate books. The comprehension strategies are valid strategies for determining whether or not a student comprehends what they are reading. They have been developed and researched by numerous experts in the field of reading (Harvey & Goudvis 2000, Fountas & Pinnell 2001, and Tovani 2000). These strategies have been used with all students of varying reading levels and cultural backgrounds and are beneficial to all readers. If students are able to make predictions, ask questions, make connections and make inferences, it shows that they comprehend the text.

Procedure/ Instructions

I began my research by collecting the Reader's Responses that the students wrote prior to learning about self-assessment that had already been evaluated by their classroom teachers. Then, I collaborated with the classroom teachers to find a time to work with each group of students. I found that taking the students from independent reading time caused the least amount of problems for students at both grade levels. On the first day, the students met with me in a small classroom that was available for us to use. I met for two, forty minute blocks with each group of students. I began by asking the students what they knew about self-assessment, or judging your own work. After discussing this topic for a few minutes, I asked the students to write down anything they already knew about self-assessment on the Know section of the KWL chart. I then asked the students if they had any experience judging their own writing and when/how they did it. After having a discussion about that, I asked them to talk
about and write down (on the W section of the KWL chart) what kinds of things they would want to know about judging their own writing.

On the second day, the students looked back at the KW sections of the KWL chart. They looked for things that would help someone write a better Reader’s Response. We talked about some of the tools they had used in order to improve their Reader Responses (Appendices 3-5). We combined what they wrote down on their KW chart and what we saw from the tools they had previously used, in order to create a new rubric to self-assess with. I wrote the numbers 1-5 on a piece of chart paper and wrote what the students described as what a Reader’s Response would look like for a score of 1-5 (Appendices 6 & 7).

I typed up the rubric that the students created. The students wrote their next Reader’s Response and self-assessed it using the rubric they created. After that, I interviewed the students in order to find out what they learned about self-assessment (Appendix 9).

My research is based on a triangulation of the data. I am comparing the Reader’s Responses of my students, the responses they gave during their interviews, my observations, and my literature review in order to increase the validity of my results.

**Data Analysis**

The data that my research is based on is of a qualitative nature. Flippo (2003) describes qualitative data as “the teacher observing many samples of students’
motivations, work and strategies to get a more complete view of each student in order to decide the most useful ways of helping the student” (p. 14). I approached my research in this way. I collected multiple samples of the students’ work. I also interviewed them about their thoughts surrounding the use of self-assessment. I used the students’ self-assessment rubrics and my own evaluations to look for more information beyond the score (Flippo, 2003). I think using all of these different resources allowed me to develop a clearer picture of my students as readers and writers.

In order to analyze the students’ Reader Responses, I looked at each of the students’ two writing samples to compare and contrast them. I looked to see if the students’ second responses were of better quality or not. I also looked at the students’ responses from a grade level perspective to see which strands the students were using and which strands they were not using.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The objective of my research is to determine what the effects are of students learning how to self-assess their own writing. I will determine what the effects are by assessing students’ writing prior to and following discussion about self-assessment. I have organized my results by discussing the different strands used by each student in each students’ first and second Reader’s Response.

Grade 4

Becky

Becky’s first Reader Response, written prior to learning about self-assessment was written in response to the book *Who Was Harriet Tubman* by Yona Zeldis McDonough and Nancy Harrison. Her response consisted of one large summary. She included many details from the plot and character development. She did not address any of the strands necessary to a Reader Response like asking questions, making connections, making inferences, making predictions or addressing literary criticism. She earned a score of one out of five according to the rubric that we created together (Appendix 1).

Becky’s second Reader Response, written after learning about self-assessment, was written in response to the book *Stone Fox* by John Reynolds Gardiner. Becky began with a summary of the story. She included details about the plot and characters. She addressed her connections to the book next. She connected to the part of the book when the boy is taking care of his sick grandfather because she also had to help take care of her sick grandfather. She also connected to the book
because one of her favorite movies is all about a sled race and the dogs involved in the sled race. Becky was able to connect to the idea of sled racing because of her background knowledge about it. Becky did talk about some literary criticism as well. She said that she liked the book because she was able to relate to it. She earned a score of three out of five according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 1). She gave herself a score of 3 as well after using the same rubric. She earned these scores because our rubric defines that a Reader's Response should address at least three strands and Becky addressed only two stands.

Mike

Mike's first Reader Response was written in response to the book *A Week in the Woods* by Andrew Clements. His Reader Response included no summary of the story. He made a prediction in the beginning of the story that the main character must be sneaking out of his room at night to sleep in the barn. Later on in the book, Mike realized that the main character is allowed to sleep in the barn, so his prediction was incorrect. Mike wondered what the main character's plan was while he was reading but he didn't ever answer the question using support from the text. Mike earned a score of four out of five according to the rubric we created (Appendix 1).

Mike's second Reader Response included a concise summary of the book *Willie Mays* by Louis Sabin and John R. Jones. The summary was an overview of Mr. Mays' life. He made a prediction that Mr. Mays would move into his dream house. He later confirmed this prediction by saying that Mr. Mays did move into his dream
house. Mike also made a connection to this book. He loves baseball and has been playing it since he was a little boy, just like Willie Mays. Mike also asked a question while he was reading. He wondered if Mr. Mays would ever go back to his milling job to see his son. He answered that question using details from the book. Mike earned a score of five according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 1). Mike gave himself a score of five according to the same rubric. Mike earned these scores because he addressed three strands of the Reader's Response in a well organized and thoughtful manner.

Nate

Nate's first Reader Response was written in response to the book *Abe Lincoln Remembers* by Ann Turner and Wendell Minor. His response consisted mostly of a summary. The summary was comprised of details about Abe's life from the time he was small until he became a leader for our country. He included some details from the story that could have been used as a segue into the strands but he did not address any of the strands. For example, Nate wrote that Abe did not yell at his sons for playing rough but he didn’t go any further to make any inferences or connections. Nate earned a score of two out of five according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 1).

Nate's second Reader Response was written in response to *Magic Tree House: Revolutionary War on Wednesday* by Mary Pope Osborne. This response included a concise summary of the story. He included character names and an outline
of the plot. Nate inferred that Jack must have been nervous at a certain point in the book. He used a quote to support his thinking. He also used some literary criticism in his response. He talked about how the author wrote the book in a way that made it easy for kids to understand what life might have been like during this time period. Nate earned a score of four out of five according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 1). Nate gave himself a four out of five after using the same rubric. Nate earned these scores because he did address the strands of inferring and literary criticism well but he didn’t address enough strands to earn his a score of five out of five.

Grade 6

Ann

Ann’s first Reader Response was written in response to the book Judy Moody Predicts the Future by Megan McDonald. Her response began with a good summary including all of the main characters and an outline of the plot. Ann made a prediction that Stink would tell everyone Judy’s secret. Ann returned to her prediction later in the story and confirmed that she was right. Ann made a connection to the story when Judy gave her ring to Stink. Judy decided she wanted it back and so she lied to Stink to get it back. Ann remembered when her cousin lied to her in order to get her butterfly net. Ann wondered if Judy would give the ring back to Stink based on the fact that Judy looked sad when she saw Stink. Ann earned a score of four out of five according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 2).
Ann’s second Reader Response was written in response to the book *Room One* by Andrew Clements. Ann began with a short summary of the story’s plot. She inferred that the family was running away from the mother’s ex-boyfriend. She inferred this because the ex-boyfriend had been following the family for about a year and the family seemed scared of him. Ann made a connection to the main character because he likes to read mystery books and solve the mysteries before the author does. Ann also had some literary criticism for the author. She said that sometimes the amount of detail he used became confusing and caused her to reread in order to understand what was going on. Ann earned a five out of five according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 2). Ann gave herself a five out of five using the same rubric. Ann earned these scores because she addressed three of the strands necessary to a Reader’s Response in a well-organized and thoughtful way that reflected her use of comprehension strategies throughout the book.

*Sherry*

Sherry’s first Reader Response was written in response to the book *Dear Dumb Diary, Can Adults Be Human?* by Jim Benton. She began her response with a summary including details from the plot and character names. Sherry made a connection to the book by talking about how her uncle married someone she didn’t like at first, which is a theme in this book. She said that she could form a prediction based on the other books in the series. She predicted that Angela and Jamie would become friends but she never confirmed or denied her prediction. Sherry scored a
four out of five on her response according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 2).

Sherry’s second Reader Response was written in response to the book *Hoot* by Carl Hiaasen. Sherry began with a summary of the story. She predicted that Roy would get caught causing trouble because he has always been caught by the bullies. She also predicted that the pancake house won’t be built for three reasons. These three reasons were mentioned in the text, but she had to infer that those would cause the pancake house to not be built. Sherry made a connection to the kids who were bullied in the book. She always noticed the kids on her bus who were bullied and made sure to be nice to them. Sherry also had some literary criticism for the author as well. She said she likes the way that he uses humor to write stories that you can relate to. Sherry scored a five out of five according to the rubric we created together (Appendix 2). Sherry scored herself at a five out of five using the same rubric. Sherry earned these scores because she addressed three strands of the Reader’s Response in a way that demonstrated her use of the comprehension strategies in order to understand what she was reading. Also, she used literary criticism which is a very difficult strand to address. She used it in a way that demonstrated her understanding of the purpose of literary criticism.

*Tim*

Tim’s first Reader Response was written in response to the book *Wood Song* by Gary Paulsen. Tim begins with a short summary about the story and how it is like
an autobiography. Tim makes a valid prediction that Gary will give up hunting because he is becoming one with the wild but he never confirms nor denies this prediction. Also, Tim made a connection to a time when he was in the woods and how he felt like part of the woods. Tim scored a four out of five on his response according to the rubric we created (Appendix 2).

Tim’s second Reader Response was written in response to the book Saving Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds. Tim started his response by providing a summary of the story and how this is the last book in the Shiloh trilogy. He made a connection to an experience that Marty had which was watching an animal being killed. He connected to the way that Marty felt during this experience. Tim wondered why Marty didn’t enlist the help of an adult in solving the mystery. He also had some literary criticism for the author. He thought that the way Shiloh found the last clue was not realistic. He thought that it was too far away and he didn’t like that it seemed impossible. Tim scored a five out of five using the rubric we created (Appendix 2). Tim gave himself a five out of five using the same rubric. Tim earned these scores because he used the comprehension strategies to demonstrate his thinking throughout the book Saving Shiloh. Tim addressed making connections, asking questions and criticizing literary elements of the book.

Val

Val wrote her first Reader Response about the book Eragon by Christopher Paolini. She began with a summary of the story including all of the main character’s
names. The first strand she addressed was making connections. She made a connection to Eragon because he has a special connection with his pet Saphira, just like Val does with her dog, Opie. Val also asked a question while she was reading. She asked why Brom had to die. She didn’t understand why he had to die; she thought that Eragon could have learned a lot more from Brom. Val scored a three out of five according to the rubric we created (Appendix 2).

Val’s second Reader Response was written in response to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by J.K. Rowling. Val started her response with a very clear summary of the story including the main characters and plot line. The first strand that Val addressed was asking questions. She asked why Snape hated Harry so much. She didn’t answer this question but it did lead her into a prediction that Snape and Harry might become mortal enemies. Val made another prediction that the three-headed dog was guarding the stone so that Snape couldn’t steal it. She inferred that Snape might steal it due to the fact that Harry overheard Snape asking Filch how to “keep an eye on all three heads at once”. Val scored a five out of five according to the rubric we created (Appendix 2). Val scored herself a five out of five using the same rubric. Val earned these scores because she addressed three strands of the Reader’s Response, questioning, predicting and inferring in a way that demonstrated her thinking while reading this particular book.
Figure 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Reader’s Response 1 Teacher Score</th>
<th>Reader’s Response 2 Teacher Score</th>
<th>Self-assessment score for Reader’s Response 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tim</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Val</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMON THREADS

The students’ scores all improved after learning how to self-assess their own Reader’s Responses. All of the students addressed more strands of the Reader’s Response in their second response compared to their first response. Each of the students’ self-assessment scores matched the score that I gave them using the rubric we created together (Appendices 1 & 2). The sixth graders were also more likely to address literary criticism within their responses as compared to the fourth graders. The sixth graders performed better than the fourth graders, most likely due to the fact that they have had more experience with the Reader’s Response. In the next chapter, I will discuss and interpret the results from this study as well as examining the results of the interviews, due to their qualitative nature.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The objective of my research was to determine what the effects were of students learning how to self-assess their own writing. I was able to determine what the effects were by assessing students’ writing prior to and following discussion about self-assessment. As shown in chapter 4, there were many common threads among the participants in the study.

Prior to this study, the students had all been exposed to the process of writing a Reader’s Response. It was always a completely independent activity that was meant to demonstrate how the students were using the various comprehension strategies in order to construct meaning while reading. Although one teacher used a type of self-assessment in regards to the Reader’s Response, it was a checklist that was created by the teacher. The students were not a part in deciding what makes a good Reader’s Response. The students rarely looked closely at their work to see how to improve it. They were required to merely fill out the checklist and turn it in with their response.

The process that the participants followed was very different from what they usually were expected to do. The students took part in deciding what made a Reader’s Response meaningful. They used their own criteria to evaluate their own work. Since the students were beginning with an idea of what their responses should look like (according to the rubric we created together), they were able to construct a higher quality Reader’s Response.

The research shows that each of the fourth grade students’ first Reader’s Response consisted mostly of a few strands that were weakly addressed. They made
some inferences but didn’t use much support from the text. None of the students used any literary criticism or direct quotes from the books they were reading. The second Reader’s Responses were of much better quality. The students made inferences using direct quotes from the text. The students also made predictions that they later checked back on. One student even began to address literary criticism, which is one of the hardest strands to understand. It might be suggested that each of the students increased their Reader’s Response score by at least one point out of five due to the fact that they assessed their own work based on a rubric that we created together (Appendices 1 & 2). The students’ self-assessment scores agreed with the score given by the teacher. This may demonstrate that the students were aware of the progress they have made as a writer and are experiencing metacognition.

The interviews conducted with the fourth grade students explained their feelings about self-assessing their own writing. The students noticed that the rubric helped them to notice if details were missing. They also noticed that the rubric helps them to better revise their own work. The students also commented that using a rubric helps them to make sure that their writing makes sense. All of these statements show that through the use of the self-assessment rubric, students are able to gain an awareness of their abilities as a writer.

The research shows that each of the sixth grade students’ first Reader’s Responses were not as strong as their second Reader’s Responses. The students’ first responses consisted mostly of connections and predictions. These are two of the easier strands to address which is usually why students’ pick them first. There was a
large focus on connections and not much support used from the text. The same trend occurred with the predictions. The students would state a prediction but not show the basis for their prediction.

This research shows that the students' second responses were of much better quality. Each student scored at least one point higher out of five than they did on their first response. The second responses addressed more strands of the Reader's Response and they were each addressed better. Many of the students used support directly from the text to demonstrate their knowledge of making predictions, connections, inferring, questioning and criticizing literary elements. Many of the students asked multiple questions, made multiple connections, predictions and inferences without even being required to. Two of the students used literary criticism to demonstrate their use of the comprehension strategies. They made valid critiques of the literature as well as supported their critiques with information from the books they read. One of the students recognized that a certain literary feature of the text caused her to reevaluate her comprehension. She talked about how the author used such an overwhelming amount of details that she became confused and in order to clear up that confusion, she had to reread. This same student also explained that predicting is her favorite strategy because she feels like a detective solving a mystery. These are examples of students developing metacognition.

The interviews conducted with the sixth grade students also gave some insight as to what the effects of self-assessment are for students. The students noticed that self-assessing their own writing helped them to write better Reader Responses. They
also noticed that it was easier to revise their writing through the use of a rubric. The students commented that self-assessment helped them to process their writing, making it better. The students thought that through the use of a self-assessment rubric, their writing was better organized. These statements also show how students have gained an awareness of themselves as a writer.

Each of the students’ scores increased by at least one point out of five, after learning how to self-assess their own writing. The students’ self-assessment scores agreed with the teacher’s score for their second Reader’s Response. This shows that the students were developing an awareness of metacognition. They were able to think about their own use of the comprehension strategies and put their thinking into words.

Some possible reasons for the increase in quality of the students’ Reader’s Responses were that the students were able to brainstorm (during the first session that we met as a group) about self-assessment to see what they already knew about it using a KWL chart. They were also able to brainstorm about the Reader’s Response using the KWL chart. Also, the students were able to create their own rubric to use in deciding what constituted a score of five on a Reader’s Response as opposed to a score of one on a Reader’s Response.

The results from this study are consistent with the current literature review in many ways. One example is that through the use of Reader’s Response, students become active learners and they become aware of their role as a reader. The research shows that students did become more aware of their role as a reader through the use of Reader’s Response. This was demonstrated by the way that the students addressed
the strands in their responses. The literature states that in order for students to become active readers, they must be able to recognize how their brain is reacting to what they are reading. These students have shown that they know how their brain is reacting to each text by addressing the various strands of the Reader’s Response in their own personal way. The literature also states that students should be taught how to self-assess their own work so they can understand the main purpose for their learning and understand what they need to do to be successful (Black & Wiliam, 1998). These students have shown through developing their own rubric and using that rubric to self-assess their own writing that they do indeed, understand what they need to do to be successful.

CONCLUSION

Implications of Results

The results of this study show that it is important for students to develop an awareness of metacognition and that self-assessment can be valuable to a student’s growth as a writer. This study shows educators that students should be aware of what they are learning and why they are learning it as well as being part of the assessment process. This study shows students that they are capable of using self-assessment to become a more proficient reader and writer.

Strengths and Limitations

This study contained many strengths and limitations. A strength of this study is the validity and reliability of the assessment tools. The rubrics were created by a group of students for their own use. They used their background knowledge and
experiences to create the assessment tool. The rubric measured what it was supposed to for this specific group of students. Another strength of this study is that students can see that they are capable of being part of the assessment process. They can understand what constitutes a great writing piece versus a poor writing piece. A final strength of this study is that the students were able to have a consistent environment to work in. They were able to work in a small, quiet classroom that was undisturbed by other students.

Some limitations were present in this study as well. I had only seven participants to work with which makes it difficult to figure out what the implications might be for future educators and students. Another limitation is that I had a very short amount of time to work with the students, only two, forty minute sessions. If I had had more time with the students, we could have delved deeper into the uses and benefits of self-assessment.

If I were to do this study again, I would have more participants over a longer period of time. I think this would make my study more valid and reliable. I also think that I would have the students self-assess more pieces of writing to see whether the trend of the increase in students’ writing quality would continue.


# Reader Response Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **5** | • Paper has 5 paragraphs, at least 4 sentences per paragraph  
• At least 3 strands are talked about  
• Each strand has at least 3 details from the book  
• No misspelled words, all correct grammar |
| **4** | • Paragraphs only have 3 sentences  
• Each strand had 2-3 decent details  
• Only two strands are described  
• Some misspelled words, some incorrect grammar |
| **3** | • 2 strands are weakly described  
• Details don’t match the strand  
• Introduction and conclusion are missing  
• Many misspelled words and errors in grammar |
| **2** | • Body only has 1 paragraph  
• 1-2 strands are poorly written  
• Few good, quality details are used  
• Leaves reader with questions  
• Poor grammar and spelling |
| **1** | • Paper is 1 paragraph  
• No specific details are used  
• Strands are mixed together  
• Very poor grammar and spelling |

Grade 4  
Appendix 1
# Reader Response Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5     | All strands have 2-3 supporting details  
       | Paper has talked about at least 3 strands  
       | One quote is used per strand  
       | Brief summary of what’s happened so far  
       | Nicely organized and correct grammar is used |
| 4     | Most strands have 2-3 supporting details  
       | The details don’t always support the strand  
       | Not all strands have quotes  
       | Summary doesn’t have enough supporting details  
       | Some misspelled words and incorrect grammar. |
| 3     | Most strands have 1-2 weak details  
       | Most details do not support the strand  
       | Only 1 strand uses a quote  
       | Paper becomes off-topic at times  
       | Summary is only 2-3 sentences  
       | Many misspelled words and incorrect grammar |
| 2     | Stands have very few, if any, details  
       | Paper is not well organized, strands are mixed together  
       | Summary is only one sentence  
       | Paper has run-ons, misspelled words and incorrect grammar |
| 1     | No details are used or they do not support the strand  
       | The strands are mixed all together  
       | Paper is only one paragraph  
       | No summary is included |

Grade 6
Appendix 2
A GOOD WRITTEN RESPONSE...
...is your way of sharing your insights, thoughts, and feelings about what you've read.
It also shows how well you understand what you have read.

1) First, review what you have read to recall information.
2) Always summarize enough of the story to help the reader understand the main idea.
3) Weave your own ideas and feelings into your response.
   - Mention characters by name.
   - Establish the setting (place and time).
   - Refer to key events.

Ideas and feelings might include:
- personal feelings or opinions about characters, setting, and events. (Tell what you thought or felt while you read the story and why.)
- predictions based on information that you’ve read. Also, confirm or change past predictions.
- connections to other books, to other movies, to your life, or to the world.
- questions or comments on parts that make you wonder. (“I wonder why the boy didn’t call his grandma. Maybe that happened because....”)
- events that surprised you and why.
- big ideas - theme(s) or messages. (Why do you think the author wrote this? What is the life lesson?)
- comments on author’s craft. Think about how the author wrote it. (explain vocabulary and phrases, tell what you liked about how the author told the story: vivid descriptions, interesting plot, characters, use of poetic language, how they researched information to write the piece)
- comments on how the setting is important to the plot or to the character(s)
- how you would feel or behave if you were one of the characters.

Other assigned responses might include:
* Sketch to stretch
* Cartoon strip.

Appendix 3

38
Independent Reading Response:
Please choose two different ways to respond to the book you are currently reading independently.

**Book Title**

**Author**

**Inferring:** Share your ideas for why you believe something happened or why someone did/said something that hasn't been explained in the book already. First explain what happened and then give your opinion as to why based on details in the book.

---

**Predicting:** Share your ideas about what you believe will happen later in the book and give supporting details to prove your thoughts.

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(Handwritten, 2001)

Appendix 4
**Ask Questions:** Share your question(s) about what you are wondering as you read about the characters, actions, themes and events in your book. Then give a response to your own question(s) that seems reasonable and makes sense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question(s)</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Literary Criticism:** Share your opinions and judgments about characters, events, ideas or issues based on specific details in the book. You might tell how you feel about them and why.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinion/Judgment</th>
<th>Reason(s)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Connections:** Share the connections that you made using details to support your ideas (text-text, text-self). Your connections should help you understand characters and events better.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connection</th>
<th>Support Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strands</td>
<td>Page #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Drawing conclusions based on text clues)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character's Feelings:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot to text or theme or main idea:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicting</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(What will happen in the future based on text clues)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction 1:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prediction 2:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask Questions and Discuss Meaning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(To challenge the author's point of view)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Criticism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(State opinion on characters, plot, event, author's craft)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author's Style</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author's opinion</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Author's purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strand 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Relate text to something else you know about)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Self Assessment

- Connections
- Explain
- Predictions
- Graphs
- Look at pictures
Self-assessment:
Judge your own writing

Rubric: assess your work

How do you rate?
How do you feel about your writing?

Outline:
- Introduction
- Background
- Theme
- Details
- Setting

Thesaurus:
- How to use a thesaurus

Appendix 7
## Grades 3 – 6 Comprehension Assessment

### READER RESPONSE RUBRIC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Grade:</th>
<th>Teacher:</th>
<th>Instructional Level:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

#### Circle text sample: Fiction or Non-Fiction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strand</th>
<th>Grade 1</th>
<th>Grade 2</th>
<th>Grade 3</th>
<th>Grade 4</th>
<th>Grade 5</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Interpreting</td>
<td>Unable to identify any insights or motives of a character or plot or theme or main idea</td>
<td>Identifies vague insights or motives of a character or plot or theme or main idea</td>
<td>Identifies general or less significant insights or motives of a character or plot or theme or main idea</td>
<td>Identifies some insights or motives of a character or plot or theme or main idea</td>
<td>Shares insights with adequate explanation, into the feelings or motives of a character or plot or theme or main idea</td>
<td>Effectively shares and explains insights into a character’s feelings and motives, or plot or theme or main idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Predicting</td>
<td>States unrelated predictions</td>
<td>States vague predictions</td>
<td>States reasonable predictions with some support</td>
<td>Students speculate what will happen later in the text based on evidence from the text</td>
<td>Students reasonably speculate what will happen later in the text supported with evidence as well as confirm and/or deny some of the predictions they made previously</td>
<td>Students critically speculate what will happen later in the text supported with evidence and also confirm and/or deny the thoughtful predictions they made previously</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Ask Questions/Draw Meaning</td>
<td>Poses unrelated questions</td>
<td>Poses vague questions</td>
<td>Poses general questions tied to the literal meaning of the text</td>
<td>Poses questions to clarify meaning that begins to go beyond literal meaning of the text</td>
<td>Poses questions to enrich meaning, may still be tied to the text (e.g., questions about the author’s intentions or point of view)</td>
<td>Poses questions to explore and challenge author’s intent and point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Literary Criticism</td>
<td>Makes an unclear or indecisive statement</td>
<td>States personal opinion without support (e.g., I like..)</td>
<td>States personal opinion with support (e.g., I like.. because..)</td>
<td>Makes judgments about characters, events, ideas or issues in order to make a recommendation based on specific evidence from the text</td>
<td>Critiques characters, events, ideas or issues in order to identify text importance</td>
<td>Critiques author’s style, intent and biases in order to identify text implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Connections/Synthesis</td>
<td>Makes unrelated connections</td>
<td>Makes insignificant or vague connections</td>
<td>States general connections tied to text (text-self)</td>
<td>Explains connections (text-text, text-self) using details</td>
<td>Begins to synthesize information with connections (text-text, text-self, text-world) to draw conclusions</td>
<td>Effectively synthesizes information with connections (text-text, text-self, text-world) to create new understandings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Date:**

**Score:**
Interview Questions

Name: 

Date: 

1. What have you learned about self-assessment?

2. Do you think that learning how to self-assess your written responses to literature helped you? How?

3. How could you use what you’ve learned to help your writing in the future?