STUDENT GENERATED WRITING RUBRICS AND THE EFFECTS
ON ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-EFFICACY

A Thesis
Presented
to the Faculty of
California State University, Chico

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education

by
Andrea Nonaka
Summer 2012
STUDENT GENERATED WRITING RUBRICS AND THE EFFECTS 
ON ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-EFFICACY

A Thesis
by
Andrea Nonaka
Summer 2012

APPROVED BY THE DEAN OF GRADUATE STUDIES
AND VICE PROVOST FOR RESEARCH:

_________________________________
Eun K. Park, Ph.D.

APPROVED BY THE GRADUATE ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

Cris E. Guenter, Ed.D. 
Graduate Coordinator

Maris Thompson, Ph.D., Chair

Laurel Hill-Ward, M.A.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Figures</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Bases and Organization</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Literature Review</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How Assessment-Driven Teaching Methods Affect Motivation</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Rubrics and Student Self-Assessment</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy and Motivation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Methodology</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design of the Investigation</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatment</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis Procedures</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. Results and Discussion</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Reflection Questionnaire</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations and Anecdotal Notes</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td>PAGE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Work Samples</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre- and Post-Student Surveys</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Findings</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. Summary Conclusions and Recommendations</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Question 1: Do You Think Taking Part in Creating a Rubric Has Helped Your Writing?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Question 2: How Has Using the Rubric We Created in Class Helped in Writing Your Rough Draft?</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Persuasive Essay Score Frequency</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Frequency of Preliminary Attitude Survey Scores</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Frequency of Post Survey Scores</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

STUDENT GENERATED WRITING RUBRICS AND THE EFFECTS
ON ENGAGEMENT AND SELF-EFFICACY

by

Andrea Nonaka

Master of Arts in Education

California State University, Chico

Summer 2012

High stakes testing and accountability in schools has forced teachers into a tight corner when it comes to instruction. Districts, in fear of low testing scores, adopt more teacher-centered approaches to all content areas where successful testing is imperative, including the English language arts and writing. Disengagement, low motivation, and students’ low self-efficacy are a result. This research sought to find a more student-centered form of formative assessment that could be used during the writing process. A learning segment was created using an instructional rubric in which student generate the criteria by which they were assessed using different levels of student work examples as models. Students were then explicitly taught how to assess their own writing using this criterion. The research showed that students would not only have a better understanding of what was expected of them, but were also given the skills to monitor
and make adjustments to their own learning, making them more autonomous in their writing. This, in turn, created improved motivation and a greater sense of self-efficacy.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

The educational system in the US has changed dramatically in the past decade. With the re-instatement of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), there is increased accountability required as a result of high-stakes testing, which leaves students wondering what the true purpose of schooling really is, to learn or to pass tests? Bracey (2009) informs us that, “Schools under the gun to raise test scores increasingly rely on strategies that get immediate, but short-lived, results” (p. 34). Instructional methods are increasingly focused on improving test scores rather than encouraging students to become excited to learn. Because of this, students are forced to take a back seat in their learning; teacher-centered methods dominate instruction and assessment. This begs the question, what would happen if students were taught to take part in their own learning, to not only learn how to become their own assessors, but to be able to generate the criteria by which they are assessed?

Educators have used rubrics as a way of grading and assessing student work for decades. Increasingly, there has been a shift from teachers using rubrics as a final assessment to using rubrics that serve as a tool in student’s cognitive development, as well as assessment (Andrade, 1999; Andrade, Du, & Mycek, 2010; Andrade Wang, Du, & Akawi, 2009; Andrade, Du, & Wang, 2008; Popham, 2011; Saddler & Andrade,
2004). Ketter (1997) suggests that “because students are stakeholders in assessment, they should be involved not only in a discussion of the technical aspects of writing assessment, but also in the meta-discussion of how criteria are constructed” (p. 293).

During my student teaching, I was placed at a rural middle school in northern California. The school is located in a very small town that serves a high population of families living in poverty. Approximately 83% of our student population qualified for free and reduced lunch. The middle school was also located in a program improvement (PI) district, a label given to schools that do not meet annual yearly progress (AYP) benchmarks, according to the federal NCLB legislation (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2001). While the school itself is not in program improvement, it is working synchronously with district teachers, district administrators, and a District Assistance Intervention Team (DAIT) in implementing the same new standards being set for the rest of the district schools. My mentor teacher is the case carrier for the seventh grade students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). She is dual credentialed which enables her to teach combined English language arts (ELA) classes, almost exclusively, throughout the day.

During the teacher in-service at the beginning of the year, we examined our upcoming caseload and reviewed the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) results from the previous year. My mentor shared with me a need to support students in meeting seventh grade writing standards. Writing strategies were an area of concern for this school as it had been experiencing difficulty with this strand in previous years. In the beginning of the school year, whenever I observed and taught students, it was clear that ELA is not a favorite subject for the majority of our students. Whenever a new writing
assignment was introduced, a low rumble could be heard as students sunk in their seats and grumbled to themselves at the thought of writing yet another essay. Students would take particular issue with essay length. Many students found the idea of writing over 500 words incomprehensible. Comments like, “How are we expected to write this much?” and “That’s too much writing” were common sentiments. Students did not believe they had the writing skill to accomplish the task expected of them. Due to a lack of self-confidence and self-efficacy, students did not seem engaged in the writing process and therefore were not motivated to become more proficient writers.

Statement of the Problem

All of the ELA classes in our school were leveled, meaning the students were divided into low, medium, and high achieving groups, based on scores and grades from the previous year. Our two, seventh-grade ELA classes consisted of low- to medium-leveled writers. The mentor teacher, another resident teacher, and I taught about 31 students between the two language arts classes. Between these two classes and the other four we taught throughout the day, we were finding that, even with three of us, we simply did not have the time to carefully assess and provide constructive feedback on all of the students’ writing. I cannot begin to imagine how one teacher is expected to do everything, related to the writing process, without assistance. What this means for students is a lack of authentic feedback for their writing. Without giving students specific corrective feedback, the process of editing and revision is much more difficult. Time is also an issue. It takes a long time to read, score, and give genuine corrective comments on student work. If a teacher is working at the middle school level, he or she may teach
up to six classes of ELA resulting in over one hundred students and one hundred writing samples. Grading rough drafts alone may take up to a week before students receive their papers back and are then expected to edit and revise. This was the case in our classroom at the very beginning of the year.

Students were given their rough drafts back a week after they had turned it in because it had taken so long for the teachers to read, score, and provide specific feedback. During that time we had also moved on to another assignment and students then did not understand the point of revising an essay they hadn’t seen or thought of for over a week. Andrade et al. (2010) explains, “The scarcity of feedback in most classrooms is due, in large part, to the fact that few teachers have the luxury of being able to respond regularly to each student’s work” (p. 199). Students’ reliance, solely on teacher feedback, neglects the importance of teaching students to monitor and improve their own writing. These initial insights helped me to arrive at my research questions, which are:

1. What happens when students are allowed to develop their own writing criteria and use this criterion to formatively assess their own work?

2. How does developing their own writing assessment and self-assessment impact/influence feelings of self-efficacy and motivation towards writing?

Allowing students to develop their own writing assessment requires a much more student-centered approach to planning and instruction. The responsibility of assessment is also placed then on the students and not exclusively on the teacher. This shared responsibility necessitates more engagement on the part of the students, and may lead to deeper investment from them as well.
Data collection for this research addressed some of these potential connections. Surveys were conducted to assess student’s feelings of self-efficacy, as well as their overall attitude towards writing. Though overall achievement was not a focus here, student samples, before and after implementation of the treatment, was collected and analyzed. The idea here was to see if student’s knowledge of the criteria could be transferred over to their writing. Finally, anecdotal and observational evidence, or comments made by the students were coded and analyzed.

Purpose of the Study

My research questions grew out of an existing concern at our school site. Writing scores for previous years had been low, and teachers were finding it difficult to meet writing standards. Additionally, there was a seventh grade summative assessment in the spring and students who did not pass this assessment were in danger of being retained in the seventh grade.

The teaching methods for writing that I was observing in the classroom were effective, but there was a definite lack of engagement from students. I believed if student self-efficacy and student buy-in could be increased, and students knew and understood what was expected of them, they would be more motivated to write.

At the time, teachers were using a seventh grade, district writing rubric to grade student writing. A copy of this rubric can be found in the appendix. Students had not had much experience with rubrics in the past. After students wrote their first draft, the teacher read each one, circling or highlighting the rubric in the areas in which the student had ranked for each category. Grading 100 pieces of student writing, for one teacher,
could take weeks. Asking students to revise a draft they completed weeks ago would
certainly take away any motivation that may have been there initially. Also, I believed the
district’s five-point rubric was vague and confusing. Several of the rubric items were
subjective, using adjectives like “few” and “several” in their description. I myself needed
time to look over and practice using the rubric before I began using it to assess student
work. Students also had a difficult time translating their rubric scores when they were
handed their essays back. If students were given the opportunity to create their own, easy-
to-understand writing assessment, research showed that they would have an easier time
understanding what is expected to make it an exemplary piece of writing. Popham (2011)
explains, “A way to help students grasp what they’re supposed to learn is for the teacher
to explain what factors will be used to distinguish between wonderful and woeful
performances” (p. 128). This means, each important element in good writing would need
to be explicitly explained before we, as teachers, could expect students to improve their
writing.

My goals were to make the assessment process available to the students by
making expectations clear and allowing the students to be greater stakeholders in their
own writing. Additionally, if students were taught to assess their own writing, and
perhaps the writing of peers, they would get more immediate and more frequent feedback
about their work. This would allow them to revise their writing more quickly than if the
teacher was solely assessing their work. This puts the evaluation practice opportunities in
the students’ hands because they are the ones who need to develop these skills, rather
than the teacher who is most likely a proficient writer already. The understanding of what
constitutes good writing can allow students to make decisions about their learning as
well. For example, after a self-assessment, teachers can set up stations so students can choose to improve a specific area of their writing. Peers whose strength is in a particular area can tutor other students who are struggling. Teachers can also lead a station or work one-on-one with students (Popham, 2011). Not only are students in charge of their own assessment, but of making adjustments to their learning as well.

Lastly, assessments can be used to “analyze the strengths and weaknesses in students’ work and to plan instruction” (Andrade, Buff, Terry, Erano, & Paolino, 2009, p. 4). An example of rubrics being used in this way would include a quick analysis of students’ self- or peer-evaluation rubrics, in which the teacher will easily see what elements are commonly missing in the student’s writing, and then quickly develop a mini lesson to compensate.

Theoretical Bases and Organization

This research draws from past research done regarding student writing engagement and student-created criteria and for self-assessment. A list of student-created criteria, using several model examples, was used to create a rubric with which students assessed their own writing, and the writing of their peers.

A lot of the research is based on Bandura’s (1986) theories on the way in which people learn, called Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). The major tenets of SCT include learning by vicarious reinforcement, forethought activity, self-regulatory capabilities, self-efficacy, and self-reinforcement. Learning by vicarious reinforcement means that people learn through the use of modeling and imitation. An example that illustrates this in my research was the use of exemplary models and cognitive modeling
we did in evaluating those pieces of writing. Forethought activity has to do with an anticipation of consequences. If a student studies hard for spelling test, then it is likely that the student will score well on the test. The terminology self-regulatory capability has to do with setting goals for yourself. Student setting goals for their writing, like writing a paragraph a day, is an example of this type of behavior. Self-efficacy, which was a focus of this research, has to do with self-confidence in completing a specific task. A more detailed explanation of self-efficacy will be examined later. Lastly, self-reinforcement has to do with a person’s ability to persist or be motivated in a task, even when initial goals are not met. Self-efficacy plays a big role in self-reinforcement.

Primarily, I was examining motivation and self-efficacy, by way of a more student-centered approach to assessment. My students struggle with both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to become better writers possibly because they have never had an opportunity to choose the way in which they learn. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), learners are more motivated when they feel they have influence over their own learning. If students are able to develop their own writing assessment, not only will they understand the importance of certain components of writing, but their self-efficacy, or belief in their ability, will increase, which will directly effect their motivation to become better writers.

The reason teacher assessments alone are not as effective as a student’s self-assessment is because practice with self-evaluation can help the student learn how to identify, autonomously, where improvements need to be made. The use of scoring rubrics and self-evaluation may only serve, however, to increase student understanding of the qualities and expectations teachers look for in effective writing, but “translating that
knowledge into actual writing is more demanding” (p. 4). This understanding of the criteria will only aid a student in understanding why a score was given, but may not translate to improving motivation or writing skills (Andrade, Wang, et al., 2009). Bandura (1986) has long studied this phenomenon through his work on social cognitive theory. He claims that although a person may have the knowledge to complete a task successfully, he or she may not be motivated to attempt their best work because they lack the belief that a specified task can be completed successfully, also called self-efficacy.

Limitations of the Study

Because of the small sample size (30 students), and because the research is primarily qualitative, the study described here did not include a control group. Participants in this study consist of two seventh grade ELA classes. My mentor teacher was the primary teacher for both classes. Originally, another ELA class was considered for the control group, but because that class has a different primary teacher, too many external variables would have affected the results, so a control group was excluded. These limitations may have made it difficult to pinpoint whether the treatments described in this thesis, or simply class time and practice with similar writing assignments, affected the changes in scores, self-efficacy, or motivation. As mentioned above, the majority of this information came from essay scores, coding student survey responses, and anecdotal comments made by students during the treatment process.

Additionally, you cannot generalize the findings from this study to other classrooms or schools as it’s a small and focused study on one classroom’ experience.
with student generated writing assessment. Also, some lessons were customized for this particular group of students based on need.

Definition of Terms

Formative

Formative is defined here as “the kind of ongoing, regular feedback about student work that leads to adjustment and revision by both the teacher and the students (Center for Educational Research & Innovation, 2005)” (Andrade, Buff, et al., 2009, pp. 2-3).

Rubric

A standards-based form of assessment, rubrics generally score on five-point grid, five for advanced and exemplary work, a four for proficient writing, a three for basic work, a two for below basic, and a one for writing that is considered far below basic. An explanation of each criterion is included at each level.

Self-Assessment

Self assessment is defined here as “a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria, and revise accordingly” (Andrade & Boulay, 2010, p. 199).

Self-Efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations” (p. 2).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001, there has been a huge pedagogical shift in the US educational system. Title I of NCLB (2001) states that the “The purpose of this title is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging State academic achievement standards and state academic assessments” (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). Though well meaning, NCLB has forced districts, schools, and teachers into a tight corner by forcing them to focus increased class time in preparing students to take high-stakes tests rather than focusing on individual student need and authentic learning.

Increased accountability and high-stakes testing have greatly influenced content taught in schools. The term, “teaching to the test,” is often used when referring to districts who focus instruction exclusively around content areas being tested. Methods of instruction have also been altered. Musoleno and White (2010) suggest, “With pressures of testing, sufficient time for students to explore and discover are being replaced by carefully scripted programs—ones that prepare students to perform well on tests” (p. 3). Bracey (2009) would agree and adds that, “Schools under the gun to raise test scores increasingly rely on strategies that get immediate, but short-lived, results” (p. 34). During the school day, more instructional time is spent teaching skills that increase test scores,
leaving less time for activities that increase authentic engagement and learning (Higgins, Miller, & Wegmann, 2006). The talent of good teachers is being wasted and students are forced to take a back seat in their own learning. This type of negligence, of both teacher and student talent, blocks the students’ ability to become independent, autonomous learners.

This research explored the idea of creating a more student-centered approach to the writing assessment process.

**How Assessment-Driven Teaching Methods Affect Motivation**

Writing, as a component of English language arts (ELA), is one of those content areas in which additional instructional time has been given because the ELA standards are so heavily tested. However, a lack of authentic learning experiences for students devalues the goal of becoming a better writer. If a student does not believe successful completion of a task is important, that task has a low attainment value (Eggen & Kauchak, 2009). Attainment value effects motivation. With a lack of truly authentic writing instruction, what are students to believe is the value of becoming a better writer? When there is so little time for authentic, real world writing opportunities, attainment value and motivation remain low, especially for struggling writers. For students to understand that the goal of becoming a proficient writer is to communicate effectively thoughts and ideas using the written word, teachers should explore alternative approaches to writing instruction that deepen student engagement. One idea for deepening student investment in their own writing is the use of student-generated rubrics and student self-assessment (Ketter, 1997; Andrade et al., 2010; Andrade et al., 2008). If students were
taught how to participate in the assessment process and how to evaluate pieces of writing, perhaps this evaluative skill would translate to better writing skills as well.

Instructional Rubrics and Student Self-Assessment

In order to create an effective and authentic form of assessment, Andrade (1999) suggests the assessment must have three main characteristics. The first is to articulate clear criteria by which the writing will be assessed. Essentially, this will be a list of expectations the assessor has and will be looking for during the scoring process. Grade-level standards are included in this criterion. The second characteristic asks students to assess their own writing. Andrade et al. (2010) define self-assessment as, “a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria, and revise accordingly” (p. 199). The word, “formative” is important here because it suggests that assessment should be done during the writing processes to allow students opportunities to improve their writing through revision, which is the third characteristic of effective assessment. One example of this type of assessment is the instructional rubric.

Traditionally, teachers have used typical scoring rubrics, a standards-based assessment tool, in many cases, as a summative assessment (Andrade, 1999), at the end of a writing assignment. Commonly, rubrics score on a five-point scale. A score of five indicates advanced and exemplary work, a four for proficient writing, a three for basic work, a two for below basic, and a one for writing that is considered far below basic. The NCLB requires students to write at the proficient level (a score of 4) in order to keep schools from being placed in program improvement. An example of our district rubric,
which is a five-point rubric, can be found in the appendix. Andrade et al. (2008) indicate that the explanation and use of scoring rubrics alone may only serve to increase student understanding of the qualities and expectations teachers look for in effective writing, but “translating that knowledge into actual writing is more demanding” (p. 4). This understanding of the criteria will only aid a student in understanding why a score was given, but may not translate to improve motivation or writing skills (Andrade, Wang, et al., 2009).

There is strong evidence in favor of the use of formative assessments, rather than summative, to improve student learning (Popham, 2011). Fitting in with a student-centered and democratic approach to learning, Popham (2011) describes, “the purpose of enabling students to use assessment evidence to monitor their own progress and decide whether they need to change the manner in which they’re attempting to learn” (p. 19). Students are given the power of choice and the power to actively participate in their own learning process. Popham (2011) discusses that the type of student autonomy teachers continuously seek can be found with improved classroom assessment. He describes the following:

Students who are actively reviewing their own classroom assessment data, are connecting these outcomes to their own inputs, and making changes so that their efforts will yield more satisfactory results. Students engaged in learning tactic adjustment take an active role in their education, and this self direction will surely serve them well in their future endeavors both inside and outside of school. (pp. 19-20)

Currently, research shows that the use of instructional rubrics, or rubrics designed for the purpose of explicitly teaching writing skills, are an excellent example of this type of formative assessment. Instructional rubrics are used throughout the writing
process. Using these rubrics, a teacher can either assess student work and report the results to the students, or students, themselves, can be trained to assess their own work. In either case, students are taught to interpret the assessment data and choose the way in which they will change their efforts in the attempt to learn a new skill (Popham, 2011). Teachers can also use this data to tailor their instruction (Andrade, Buff, et al., 2009; Popham, 2011; Saddler & Andrade, 2004). For instance, if the assessment data reports that a majority of students are struggling with a particular issue, like comma usage, the teacher can decide to include a mini-lesson on proper comma use the next day. In this way, rubrics can be used as reflective data with immediate results making teaching more customized to that set of students. This customization gives teachers an opportunity to differentiate instruction and tailor lessons according to student needs while still preparing students for testing.

Using this approach, much of the guesswork is taken out of writing and students become more engaged in their learning because they have a greater understanding of what is expected of them to produce an exemplary sample of writing (Saddler & Andrade, 2004).

There are many reasons why teachers may be hesitant in using this instructional approach. For example, teachers may be adverse to allowing students to assess their own writing, citing that students will give themselves better than deserved grades, causing them to not see the value in revision (Saddler & Andrade, 2004). Popham (2011) notes also that there is a great deal of planning and affective nurturing involved in this form of assessment, teachers may not feel they have the needed experience to guide them in this approach. Additionally, Popham admits this is not a fail-safe method.
Students are encouraged to, and are given the skills to become independent learners, however, this is not proven to work for all students. In this student-centered approach, students are given choices. Should a student choose not to participate in improving his or her own learning, the teacher may decide to employ more traditional methods that may work better for the individual student, so as not to leave that student behind.

To alleviate some of these concerns, special attention should be spent on the assessment process itself and teachers should spend considerable and thoughtful time in training students on how to become their own assessors. There is a great deal of evidence that supports students assessing their own work. This research indicates a strong relationship between self-assessment and the quality of work that students produce (Andrade, 1999; Andrade, Wang, et al., 2009; Andrade et al., 2010; Andrade et al., 2008; Saddler & Andrade, 2004). Increasingly, research shows that student self-assessment and learning is even more effective if students take part in the creation of their own rubrics (Andrade et al., 2008; Andrade et al., 2010; Ketter, 1997).

Although empirical evidence on the idea of students creating their own assessments is still limited, Ketter (1997) acknowledges that, “Because students are stakeholders in assessment, they should be involved not only in the discussion of the technical aspect of writing assessment, but also in the meta-discussion of how criteria are constructed” (p. 293). Student generated criteria can be created by analyzing exemplary models of writing. Exposing students to exemplary models and cognitively discussing the elements of writing that makes it superior builds student schema that they will hopefully draw from in future writing experiences.
Popham (2011) describes modeling as one of the “three most potent procedures for altering students’ affect” (p. 125). The use of models, specifically cognitive modeling, is also one of the core concepts of social cognitive theory as well as an influencing factor in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1986) describes cognitive modeling as teachers or students “verbalizing aloud their thoughts as they solve problems and thoughts as they solve problems and form judgments” (p. 422). When thought of in the context of students generating criteria for a writing assignment, teachers would first model the process of critiquing differing levels of student writing samples, verbalizing their analysis as they go. Subsequently, students could form groups and take additional samples through the critiquing process and then on an individual basis. With two levels of cognitive modeling, one by the teacher, and several by other students, students then can begin to generate a list of the criteria needed for an effective essay. There is a possibility that this type of activity will raise self-efficacy on this type of writing task because once students have a better understanding of the criteria that is expected, and several models showing how that knowledge can be executed, students will create higher expectations about their own ability to complete the task successfully (Bandura, 1986; Popham, 2011).

Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Bandura’s (1986) definition of perceived self-efficacy “is a judgment of one’s capability to accomplish a certain level of performance” (p. 391). He claims that although people may have the knowledge to complete a task successfully, they may not be motivated to attempt their best work because they lack the belief that a specified task can
be completed successfully. He terms this belief in an ability to perform successfully, “self-efficacy.” Students who demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy, are more inclined to accept challenging tasks, exert more effort on challenging tasks, and are more persistent, even when tasks are not initially completed successfully. This type of student holds a strong belief that that he or she will succeed and maintains a lower level of stress when goals are not met. Conversely, students who demonstrate low levels of self-efficacy avoid challenging tasks, use little to no effort on tasks believed to be challenging, and give up completely when goals are not initially met. These students hold the belief that they are incompetent and express a higher level of anxiety and frustration when goals are not reached (Eggen & Kauchak, 2009). Students with a high sense of self-efficacy tend to score much higher on assignments than a student with low self-efficacy, even if they are equal in ability because students with a higher self-efficacy are more effective in improving their writing through the editing and revision stages of writing.

It is important to note here that self-efficacy is not an overall belief about ability or about confidence in general, but rather, is task specific and may be related to self-efficacy on other tasks (Bandura, 1986). For instance, you cannot assume that a student who has a high self-efficacy in writing narrative essays will have the same sense of self-efficacy when it comes to writing a persuasive essay. Eggen and Kauchak (2009) describes the four main factors contributing to one’s self-efficacy, the most influential being past performance. For example, if a student consistently receives positive feedback and good scores on past writing assignments, that student is more likely to have a higher sense of self-efficacy on similar writing assignments in the future. The opposite is also likely to occur with negative past experiences. Another important factor influencing self-
efficacy is the use of modeling. Exemplary student work can provide information about the specific skills needed to perform a task successfully. This information acts as a bridge to close the gap between knowledge and execution for struggling students. Ultimately, the student raises his or her expectations about self-efficacy on this specific task and changes behavior accordingly (Bandura, 1986). Verbal persuasion and psychological states are the two final factors influencing self-efficacy to be described. Verbal persuasion can come in the form of encouragement by the teacher, essentially, persuading the student that he or she can perform the task successfully. Specific and authentic comments are the most effective in increasing self-efficacy. Bandura (1986) cautions teachers to stay away from making over-the-top beliefs about a student’s ability because it may have an adverse effect. The concern is that if students fail to live up to such high praise, they will have a lower sense of self-efficacy when faced with similar tasks in the future. Finally, it is difficult to determine whether the psychological state is affected by self-efficacy, or if self-efficacy affects one’s psychological state. Either way, when thoughts of failure and anxiety about completing a task take up a person’s working memory, task completion becomes more challenging and self-efficacy is reduced (Eggen & Kauchak, 2009).

Conclusion

The findings mentioned in this review of the literature strongly point to the potential success of increasing a student’s autonomy and self-efficacy in writing by fully including them in the assessment process. When teachers use model writing samples and cognitive modeling approaches, students can be guided through generating their own
criteria for assessment. Social cognitive theory suggests that the use of models will allow students to be able to transfer this knowledge of criteria and learn the specific skills they need to improve their own writing (Bandura, 1986).

In this approach, teachers initially take a more explicit role as students are trained to become their own assessors. Over time, students move to the driver’s seat and decide where it is their learning needs to go. In this way, they become self-monitoring, and more autonomous writers, which may help them inside and outside of the classroom (Popham, 2011). The idea is to remove the negativity out of assessment or testing by teaching students to think of the informational rubric as a tool that helps them to decide, what kind of adjustments they need to make to their learning that will ultimately improve their writing. Giving students the power of choice increases motivation and ultimately their sense of self-efficacy (Eggen & Kauchak, 2009).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I was placed in a rural middle school in northern California as a resident education specialist teacher for my Rural Teacher Residency. My mentor teacher taught two periods of seventh-grade English language arts (ELA) classes, and during my many initial observations, I noticed that there was a lack of engagement from the students when it came to writing or ELA in general. Additionally, students made negative comments regarding their writing skills; sentiments like, “I’m not good at writing,” and “I don’t think I can write that much” were commonly expressed. This negativity may be due to the fact that writing at the seventh grade level becomes increasingly complex and both the state and the school district require a student-writing sample as part of their grade-level assessment. Students must pass two out of the three district ELA assessments in order to pass the seventh grade. Due to these high-stakes assessments curricula is influenced by becoming less creative and less personal. Teachers are forced to provide the students with simply more practice in writing essays. Increasing the number of essay assignments takes class time away from more creative or authentic writing activities. Also, national and state assessments of writing are increasingly moving toward expository (like persuasive essays), rather than narrative writing. This again devalues student creativity and story writing.
According to the current seventh grade ELA standards for California, students are expected to learn how to write a five-paragraph persuasive essay. Similarly, the newly adopted common core standards for California, required by the 2014-2015 school year, include persuasive writing amongst its requirements for seventh grade. As part of the adoption process, the seventh grade team of teachers decided to use the more detailed persuasive essay standards as outlined in the common core standards. The district rubric is similarly aligned to California’s future seventh grade, common core standards. The district rubric for seventh grade writing is a five-point rubric. In order to earn a score of five on a persuasive essay, students are expected to have writing that is well planned and developed with a strong topic. Students are taught to plan essays using the foursquare model. This helps students to outline and plan their writing before beginning composition. A more detailed description of the writing expectations is explained later.

During the 2011-2012 school year, the seventh grade focus was on persuasive writing. The students were required to complete a number of persuasive essays in preparation for the district grade-level assessment. The researcher also chose persuasive essays as the focus for this action research project because there would be more data to collect in the way of student examples. More data means a better analysis of results could be formed. The persuasive topic for these essays were given to the students in the form of a prompt and they were asked to choose a side by giving strong details and support of their choice. In order to earn full credit, students are expected to write a five-paragraph essay with an introductory paragraph, conclusion paragraph, and three body paragraphs, with a minimum of 500 words for the total essay.
According to the district rubric, the introductory paragraph is expected to have an interesting first sentence, a clear thesis statement, and three subtopics. The subtopics for a persuasive essays are “reasons,” “why the reader might not agree,” and “solution.” Each of these subtopics has their own corresponding body paragraphs that should include a topic sentence, at least three details with support each with a concluding sentence that transitions to the next subtopic. In the concluding paragraph, the thesis and subtopics are to be re-stated and there should be a last sentence that shows a strong understanding of the main idea of the essay. Finally, in order to be considered a high-level piece of writing, the entire essay should use many different types of sentence structures, specific nouns and adjectives, correct word choices, and have few mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

With all of these requirements, it is important for students to know and understand what the components of a high-level piece of writing are in order to produce one. Our students had some practice with persuasive writing during sixth grade, but at the beginning of their seventh grade year, we saw that they were still missing crucial content. My mentor teacher and I discovered one main issue was that the students were lacking appropriate support for their details; students also had difficulty organizing their ideas. Because of this, we began using the district writing rubrics with the students. While our students had some prior knowledge and experience with writing rubrics the previous year in sixth grade, we began working more intensively with them this year after we noticed a common trend of missing important information in their writing. When using the rubrics themselves, the students found them wordy and difficult to understand and were still missing some of the important writing components such as topic sentences and sufficient
support of their details. This was evidenced by comments made by students and the number of questions with regards to understanding the rubric. In order for students to better understand the required components of writing, specifically the persuasive essay, my action research focused on allowing building engagement and self-efficacy in writing through a series of lessons in which the students created their own writing assessment and the scored their own writing, and the writing of their peers using this new rubric.

Design of the Investigation

My research questions asked, “What happens when students are allowed to develop their own writing criteria and use this criterion to formatively assess their own work?” I wanted to see if a more student-centered approach to assessment would teach students to identify the components of good writing and transfer that knowledge into improved writing skills. My sub-question asked, “How does developing their own writing assessment and self-assessment impact/influence feelings of self-efficacy and motivation towards writing?” Basically, does improving these evaluative and writing skills improve attitudes towards writing and feelings of self-efficacy?

In order to investigate these questions the treatment was designed to have students building the criteria for, and designing a new rubric that they would use during the writing process to remind them of the necessary elements of writing. After a rough draft had been written, students would use the new rubric to evaluate their writing to make improvements and to evaluate the writing of their peers.

Initially, teachers were using the district rubrics to score student essays as a summative assessment. This was a way for us to communicate to the students why they
received the score they did. Afterwards, and with some instruction, we had the students use the district rubrics as a tool to help remind them of what needed to be included in their essays during the writing process. As I was observing those lessons, it became clear that the students were having difficulty using the district rubrics stating they were “wordy” and “confusing.” One student, while looking directly at the scored, district rubric asked, “Why did I only get a two?” After reviewing the score with him and the marking by the teacher, he still had several questions regarding his low score. “What does it mean when it says ‘several spelling errors that interfere with the meaning?” and “How many is several?” were some of his questions. During my reflections on these lessons, I wondered if the students would have more success if they were able to create their own rubrics. At that point, I began developing a set of lessons that would allow students to work in groups and, as a class, develop a writing rubric that was in their own words and of their own creation. I would work as a group facilitator and guide to make sure the student rubric aligned with the district rubric requirements.

This intervention was designed to be flexible and while a lot of planning went into the initial design of the lessons, it frequently changed to meet the needs of the students. The customization aspect of the learning segment was a strength of its design. The first day the activity was introduced, I held up a copy of the district rubric and reminded the students of the comments they made after using the district rubric, comments like, “This is confusing,” and “I don’t understand why I only received a two.” I then explained that we needed their help to design a new, easier to understand, rubric to be used for the rest of the year, and possibly for next year’s seventh grade classes. The students became excited to hear that their rubric design might be used in future
classrooms. In order to give better context to the learning segment, I had to introduce some writing terminology that related to creating the rubric. Some of these terms included academic language they should have been familiar with such as thesis, subtopics, and persuasive.

After introducing the activity the students were asked to fill out a blank rubric and list all of the important elements of good persuasive writing that they could remember. This activity was used to assess what the students already knew about good writing and the results would inform my instruction by allowing me to focus on areas or writing elements that were commonly missed. I was able to review and write feedback on the rubrics. For example, many students had not listed, “thesis statement” as an important element of persuasive writing. The thesis statement is a very important element in persuasive writing because it tells the reader what side the writer has chosen to defend. Without a thesis statement, the reader may confuse the main ideas of the essay. If students missed it, I would then write on the rubric, “How would you let the reader know what topic you were writing about?” This questioning caused them to think more deeply about the expectations of good writing. I also chose to plan a mini lesson on thesis statements at the beginning of class the next day, just one example of the customization element in this lesson design.

The following day the initial rubric assessments were handed back to the students, we brainstormed as a class some of the elements that were missing, like the thesis statement, and then the students were placed in groups so they may combine their individual information into a more complete rubric. Groups of four were heterogeneously planned previously to make sure students with stronger writing skills were grouped with
students needing more support. Group members were also given specific jobs that were chosen randomly so ensure maximum student participation in the group activities. Job titles included a group leader, who made sure students took turns providing input and suggestions for the group rubric. There were two recorders, the first would be recording information from the group on to a blank rubric during that day’s activity, and the second recorder’s job was to write information from the group rubric down on the master rubric that would be created during the following day’s lesson. The final group job title was reporter. The reporter was responsible for getting up in front of the class with recorder number two to explain what they were writing on the master rubric and why. I continuously expressed to the students that the “why” was the most important aspect of this activity because I wanted the students to think more deeply about the criteria they were putting into their rubric and have a deeper understanding of why those things were included.

The final day of group work involved combining the information they had collected in their groups on to a large piece of paper taped to the board at the front of the class. We called this our master rubric and it was broken out into four sections, introduction, body, conclusion, and overall. If an element were placed in the “overall” section, things like proper spelling and punctuation, you would expect to look for those elements throughout the essay. One at a time, the groups were expected to send their reporter and their second recorder up to the front of the class and not only write down what element of good writing they were putting up on the master rubric, but where and why. Again, I emphasized the importance of reminding students why these elements were so important. Groups performing their tasks successfully were given point, which I
believe kept groups on track and paying attention. Groups not paying attention while other groups were at the front of the class had points taken away. The group with the most points at the end of the activity were given a sweet treat from the treat bag, a common reward system used in our classroom for certain student participation activities. After completion of the master rubric activity, I typed up the information on to a sheet of paper titled the Persuasive Rubric List. At this point, the student rubric is not yet complete. While the list the students had compiled was fairly comprehensive, they had not included elements like topic sentences that tell the reader what each paragraph is about or concluding sentences that link the subtopics had not been included. During the next lesson, copies of the Persuasive Rubric List were handed out to students and these elements as well as other information were added during the cognitive modeling stages. We first evaluated exemplary writing samples and discussed as a class the writing components that made the example superior. We then evaluated medium and low scoring writing examples to flesh out the medium and low sections of the rubric. We had decided as a class that a three-point rubric would be easier to navigate than the five-point rubric the district employed. Students were eager to point out errors found in the essays. Students were asked to not only raise their hand and tell me what was missing, but to give a comment about how the writer could fix their error. This became good practice for the next activity where students would begin to evaluate writing samples on their own using the new student-generated rubric. Time did not allow for several rounds of practice evaluating model essays and if I were to extend this research in the future, I would spend more time on this portion of the learning segment. After each round of practice evaluations, students and I would make suggestions on things we could add or change
and we fine-tuned our rubric. A copy of the student-generated rubric can be found in the appendix.

The first writing assignment using the student-generated rubric was a practice persuasive essay that would prepare students for the seventh grade district writing assessment, which was also in the persuasive genre. The writing prompt asked the students to persuade a city developer or franchise owner to bring their favorite establishment to their small town. I had to introduce some academic vocabulary that pertained to the writing prompt used for the treatment. The terms introduced in this portion of the lesson were *franchise, establishment, development, citizens,* and *community.* Students were introduced to these terms; the class discussed each term and came up with examples for each. Students were strongly encouraged to use higher levels of vocabulary in their writing.

Students were expected to use new rubrics during the writing process to remind them of the elements that needed to be included. After the first rough draft was complete, students were required to do a self-evaluation using the rubric. Following the self-evaluation students did two rounds of peer-evaluations. During peer-evaluations, students were expected to not only score the essays using the rubric but provide on the back of the rubric, one compliment about the writing and a minimum of three comments regarding corrective feedback. Again, this required students to express, in different ways, the importance of each element in good writing and further deepened their understanding of them. The repetition also helped some of them to gain the knowledge they would then transfer into improving their own writing.
Normally, the students in my class got along fairly well, yet some of the more socially minded, or popular students spend more time talking to one or more students and less time on-task writing or participating in class activities. Because of this behavior, I wanted to focus that energy by giving students more opportunities to talk to each other in groups. I had not observed this class working in groups previous to this intervention so I did foresee some off-task behaviors until the students became more used to this type of activity. Preparation and monitoring on my part was necessary to make sure the group discussions were focused on the task at hand. My thought was that working in groups and the discussion that takes place between the students would engage the students in learning.

Population

The school where I was placed during my residency was a rural middle school in northern California. This school is a public school that was in year one of program improvement (PI) (Educational Results Partnership, 2012) during the 2011-2012 school year, a designation that comes from failing to meet annual yearly progress as required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001). There were approximately 410 students, eighty-two percent of which were considered to be socioeconomically disadvantaged and almost eleven percent of the school’s students were English language learners. Additionally, just over nine percent of the student population had documented disabilities. Disabilities included specific learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, attention deficit or hyperactive disorders (ADHD), and intellectual disabilities. Those
with diagnosed disabilities all qualified for special educational services and accommodations.

Though my placement was with an education specialist, both of our seventh-grade ELA classes were considered to be leveled, general education settings. Both of these classes consisted of students performing at the middle range in comparison to their peers. That means that on a scale ranging from far below basic to advanced, the majority of them were performing at the basic level. Students were required to score at the proficient level, unless otherwise stated in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan, in order to be considered for promotion to the eighth grade. It is in these two classes that I conducted my action research. I will define the two classes as Group A and Group B.

Both Group A and Group B had relatively low class sizes. The small class size was due to the higher level of support the students required. Though these students were considered to be performing in the basic/middle range compared to those of their peers, they were placed in this small class setting because of their need to have more one-on-one attention. The age range of the students combined was twelve to fourteen. Group A had a total of eighteen students, with eleven males and seven females. Only one student in Group A was designated as having an intellectual disability (ID). For this he had an IEP with reading, writing, and math goals. His writing goals included shortened writing requirements and more time given to complete assignments. Similarly, Group B had thirteen students, with six males and seven females. One student was removed from the research study because he came into the class late in the year and was eventually transferred to another class. Again, only one of the students in Group B had an IEP. This
student was diagnosed with an Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He was very high functioning and had a writing goal of independently producing a five-paragraph essay with 70% accuracy. However, he needed frequent checks for understanding and time on task reminders. From this point on, I will refer to these students as a combined population.

With regards to level of language acquisition and skill-level, just one student in the research population was ever designated as an ELL, but this student earned her re-designation in elementary school. While I did not have any English language learners in my class, there were varying levels of vocabulary skills.

Treatment

The process of data collection in this study involved preliminary and post student surveys which were meant to evaluate students’ self efficacy and general attitudes towards writing. After the preliminary survey, a preliminary assessment was given to the students to obtain an idea of what, if anything, the students already knew about the components of a high-level piece of writing. A blank rubric was given to the students and they were asked to fill in as many writing components as they could remember. My reflection on these pre-assessments informed my lesson planning as well; for example, what components of writing would need to be explicitly taught.

During the learning segment, there were several methods of data collection used including quick, formative assessments at the end of lessons to check for understanding and anecdotal notes taken during the lessons by both the mentor and
resident teachers. Additionally, all of the lessons were videotaped and transcribed to catch student interactions and comments that may have been missed.

Finally, student work samples were scored as a summative assessment to check whether students were able to improve their writing by including more of the writing components required for a high-level writing sample.

**Student Surveys**

After my initial observations and to formally assess student attitudes towards writing, students participated in a preliminary survey. The survey used a Likert type scale and asked students to rate their answers from one to five along the scale. For example, question number one says, “I like to write.” The student would then answer a one if he or she “almost always” likes to write, a two if he or she “often” likes to write, a three for “sometimes,” a four for “seldom,” or a five if he or she “never” likes to write. These initial surveys were conducted in small groups of four to five students so that I could thoroughly explain the purpose of the survey and to make sure students understood how to complete it. For both of the students with IEPs, to make sure they understood what was being asked of them, I worked with them one-on-one to complete the survey. During administration of the survey, students were told that the results of their surveys were to be kept confidential and they were asked to be thoughtful and truthful with their answers. The exact same survey was given as a post-survey assessment to see if attitudes towards writing had changed during the treatment. The second time, the survey was administered as a whole class as they were already familiar with the expectations.

After we had designed the writing rubric as a class and had completed the rough draft of their first writing sample using the new rubric, “A Place we Need in
Oroville,” I had decided to conduct an informal questionnaire that asked the students if they found the process of creating their own writing assessment rubric useful in writing, what they liked about the learning segment, or suggestions on what they would like to see done differently if the lesson were to be taught again in the future. With this informal survey, I was also able to collect useful anecdotal notes.

**Anecdotal Notes**

From my initial observations through the end of the learning segment, both the mentor teacher and myself took anecdotal notes. We were specifically looking for comments made by students about the writing process in general, feelings towards writing, or interesting comments made about the learning segment. All of these notes were taken in a shared composition notebook placed on my desk. I often carried the notebook around with me during group activities and silent work time to jot down comments or working habits of the students. The comments that may have been missed during observations were caught on videotape and later transcribed.

Anecdotal notes, more than any other data collection procedure, were the most influential pieces of data when it came to student self-efficacy analysis.

**Student Work**

Student work samples consisted of peer rating rubrics and the completed essays. The peer rating rubrics were collected as a way to analyze whether students were skillful in finding components of writing in the works of others. My hope was that if students were able to effectively and objectively score the essay of a peer, using the newly generated rubric, then they would then be able to transfer that skill when addressing the revision process with their own writing. As a class, we rated several model
essays using the new rubric, and then, after their rough draft, the students did several rounds of peer rating. They were asked to fill out the rubric as well as give corrective feedback and an overall score. Again, this was a formative assessment to see if students were able to identify the necessary components of writing.

During my action research, two forms of summative assessments were given, the Post-Student Writing Attitudes survey and the completed essays. The post-survey, as identified previously, was administered as a final assessment on student attitudes towards writing and self-efficacy. The essays were their final assessment to see if the learning segment was effective in teaching the necessary components of writing. The students were asked to give a self-rating of their final essays using the student-generated rubric as well.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data collected in two seventh-grade English language arts classes were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The qualitative data included the student reflection questionnaire, teacher observations, and the observational/anecdotal notes. The notes were coded and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe grounded theory analysis as a way to generate a theory or to discover themes found within data. It is both a systematic and creative process that “help[s] researchers to identify, create, and see the relationship among parts of the data when constructing a theme” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 223).

When working with qualitative data it is important to triangulate results using multiple data collection tools. As Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) suggest, I used four
different methods of data collection including observations, student surveys, student work, and the anecdotal notes in order justify and validate themes discovered within the data.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

While conducting research to find an answer to my question, “What happens when students are allowed to develop their own writing criteria and use this criterion to formatively assess their own work?” I found several themes emerge from the data. A deeper analysis of the data also looked to answer the question, “How does a student developing his or her own writing assessment (and subsequent self-assessment) impact/influence engagement and feelings of self-efficacy towards writing?”

The data collected in two seventh-grade English language arts classes were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. The data included a student reflection questionnaire, teacher observations, and observational notes were coded and analyzed using a grounded theory approach. Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe grounded theory analysis as a way to generate a theory or to discover themes found within data. It is both a systematic and creative process that “help[s] researchers to identify, create, and see the relationship among parts of the data when constructing a theme” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 223).

In order to triangulate my results, as Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) suggest, I used four different methods of data collection including observations, student surveys, student work, and anecdotal notes in order justify and validate themes discovered within the data.
Student Reflection Questionnaire

Student reflections can be invaluable in providing information for the teacher, but also allowing students to internalize and keep track of their own learning as well. When administering self-reflections, it is an important part of instruction to ask students to show the teacher what they have learned in a lesson and to explain how they have grown in their use of written language compared to before the lesson was taught. The student reflection questionnaire that I administered to the seventh grade English language arts classes following their first rough drafts using the new student-generated rubrics, was seeking to do just that. After administration, I analyzed the questionnaire by memoing and coding the individual answers given by the students for each of the four questions.

Question number one asked students if they thought that taking part in creating a rubric had helped their writing, and to then explain their answer. Out of the 29 responses to question one, 24 of the responses (83%) were positive. A majority of the students stated that participating in the assessment process, specifically through creating a rubric, had better informed their writing by helping them remember what important elements go into a good essay. Some students mentioned that creating a rubric helped them to better understand the different elements, which, in turn, helped to improve their grade. Only three students responded by saying that creating the rubric did not help with their writing. Two students stated that the rubric creation helped their writing, but that certain aspects, like how to use the rubric for scoring self-evaluations or peer-evaluations were still difficult for them to understand. The last two responses were coded as neutral, neither positive, nor negative. A breakdown of the answers can be found in Table 1.
### Table 1

**Question 1: Do You Think Taking Part in Creating a Rubric Has Helped Your Writing?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It helped me by helping me know what to put in an essay/Helped to memorize. (Positive)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It helped improve my writing to get a better grade. (Positive)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. It did not help my writing (Negative)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Only partially helped my writing/Had difficulty with scoring (Neutral)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>29</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second question asked the students, “How has using the rubric we created in class helped in writing your rough draft?” While many of the responses mirrored the student responses to question number one (65% of the responses stated that creating the rubric helped in writing the rough draft by showing them what needed to be included), another theme also emerged. Part of what I was noticing while I was first observing these English language arts classes, and before I had decided on a research topic, was that the students were either unable, or unwilling to improve their writing. The consensus from the students was that they didn’t understand why they had to write a final draft. Perhaps they felt this way because of an inability to find errors in their writing and make improvements. In analyzing the responses to question two, I noticed that the second most popular response (26%) stated that using the rubrics during the writing process had helped them know what was missing in their writing, and it helped them to make
improvements to their rough draft. For example, a student answered by saying, “It helps me understand what I missed and what I can do better.” I cannot determine whether it was an inability to see what was missing, or a lack of interest to make improvements before, during my initial observations. However, the students’ responses indicated that after creating the rubric together as a class and using the rubric during the writing process, that more students were able to recognize when improvements need to be made. Similar to question one, the majority of responses were positive, and just two of the twenty-four students responded by saying they did not believe that using the rubric helped in writing their rough draft. It is noteworthy that one of these two students responded to the questionnaire with all negative answers. To improve my teaching of this lesson in the future and for data purposes, it would have been beneficial to meet with this student to discuss his answers and in what ways he felt we could have improved his writing experience. However, I did not require that the students put their names on the questionnaire. In doing that, they were given more freedom to provide more candid and thoughtful answers. A breakdown of the answers to question two are found in Table 2.

Question number three asked students to describe something they really liked about the rubric lessons (creating the rubric). The responses from this question were not coded as positive or negative as it asks the students to describe something they “liked” about the lessons. I would expect all answers to be positive and for this reason, coding them as positive or negative responses would provide false data. However, the responses were still informative. While the correlation is difficult to verify, a majority of students, 65.5% of the responses, stated that they liked having a say in what went in to the rubric and that working together in groups and getting up in front of the class to
Table 2

**Question 2: How Has Using the Rubric We Created in Class Helped in Writing Your Rough Draft?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It helped by reminding me what needs to be included/Makes writing easier/Easier to make goals for my writing (Positive)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It helped me identify what was missing in my writing/Helped me improve my writing (Positive)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I don’t know how it helped my writing.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. It did not help my writing.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23</strong></td>
<td><strong>99.9%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

make the big rubric was “fun.” Having a voice in the process appeared to impact their writing and their feelings about their own writing. One student said, “I liked how we were in groups because we all got to discuss what was needed.” A similar student response stated, “I like it because everyone got to share about what they thought was good and bad writing.” Not only did both of these students enjoy working in groups, but they also enjoyed sharing ideas about what goes into a good piece of writing. Much of Vygotsky’s (1978) research on sociocultural cognitive development details the importance of social interaction as a way to drive cognitive development. Through the process of students getting into groups and working as a class to create a writing assessment, student engagement in the writing process increased and it seems their
attitudes towards writing have become more positive as well. Similarly, their knowledge and skills about the writing process increased.

Additionally, this student-centered approach to learning through their construction of a writing rubric gave students more opportunities to choose the way in which they learned. For example, students were able to use the student-generated rubric as a tool to help them decide what kind of adjustments they needed to make to their learning in order to improve their writing. Moreover, they were ultimately able to make the choice to improve their writing and the power to actively participate in their own learning process. Giving students the power of choice increases motivation and ultimately their sense of self-efficacy (Eggen & Kauchak, 2009).

A more comprehensive data analysis of attitudes towards writing will be described later when discussing observations and anecdotal notes.

The final question on the reflection questionnaire asked the students to provide suggestions for me if I were to teach this rubric lesson again in the future. Of the 23 responses to this question, 20 students (90%) responded by stating that they had no suggestions, simply said, “don’t change anything”, or suggested that I definitely teach the lesson again to future classes. One helpful suggestion from a student was that that I take more time to teach students each element of writing in greater depth. I would agree with this student. If it had been my own classroom and I had more time to teach the learning segment, I would have taken more time to teach each element and then have the students put together this section of the rubric using the information we had build over several weeks of instruction. The last student suggested that I do not teach the lesson again because it was too hard; however, his responses to the other questions were positive. I did
not find any grand themes with question four responses except that the majority of students responded positively, which indicates that student recognized the benefit to the assessment creation process.

Overall, students responded positively to the questionnaire items, which suggest that they at least have a positive attitude towards this learning segment. Students were not only able to recognize how this activity had improved their writing, but were able to verbalize and express in writing their feelings as well. One of the objectives of this set of lessons was to help students to not only know what goes in to a good piece of writing, but also know why those elements are important. According to this data, especially responses to questions one and two, it appears that for the majority of the students, that goal was met. This theme may not have emerged without the use of the student reflection questionnaire. I will certainly increase the number of student reflections in my future teaching practice.

Observations and Anecdotal Notes

My initial observation of behaviors and comments made by students about the writing process and about their confidence, or lack of confidence, is what led me to conduct this research. Most of the comments made by students in the beginning could be categorized as negative. For example, while my mentor teacher was introducing a new persuasive writing assignment, I overheard a student complain by saying, “Why do we have to write so much? Writing is so boring.” Another common question from students came after they had completed their rough drafts and it was time to edit, revise, and rewrite the final draft. One student stated, “What? Why do we have to write this over
again?" Admittedly, seventh grade standards require a substantial amount of writing, but at this level, students are expected to recognize areas where their writing needs to be improved. It was clear that the students in these classes needed some explicit training on the editing and revision process. These observations led me to ask the questions that then led to this research on how having students participate in the assessment process might improve student engagement and buy-in for their written work.

Over the course of my research, I kept written notes on student behaviors and comments that related to the question, “How does a student developing his or her own writing assessment (and subsequent self-assessment) impact/influence engagement and feelings of self-efficacy towards writing?” I coded these comments and observations as positive, negative, or neutral to see if there was evidence of an increase in engagement or if there was a change in the number of positive or negative comments made by students relating to their attitudes towards writing or their writing self-efficacy.

Discussing the issue of engagement first, there were several comments and observations made throughout the learning segment that were related to engagement. Notes were taken by myself, my mentor teacher, or were transcribed from the video recordings of the activities. All notes were written down in a shared composition notebook that was either carried around or placed in a readily available location in the classroom to ensure accurate note taking.

One of the first noted comments, made by a student after the set of rubric lessons had begun, asked, “Aren’t we going to do the checklist rubric today?” The mentor teacher had something else scheduled that day, and the student was disappointed to learn that we were not continuing our work on rubric building that day. Approximately a week
after I began the learning segment, my mentor teacher administered a persuasive plan quiz. The students were taught to use the foursquare model when planning a persuasive essay. This is a simple format designed with five boxes. One small box is centered in the middle and this is where the thesis statement and subtopics are planned. Four squares surrounding this middle square give space to plan each of the three subtopics and the conclusion. The mentor teacher had noticed one student listing items from the master list of writing elements the class had compiled. It was clear the learning segment had helped him to memorize several of the persuasive writing elements. A different quiz for a narrative plan administered by my mentor teacher was given a week later. This time, a different student began listing the elements of the persuasive essay from memory; however, this was an overgeneralization and was not suitable for components of a narrative essay. These two observations at least verified the fact that students were absorbing the content they were learning through the set of rubric-building lessons and were generalizing/overgeneralizing that knowledge in different areas.

Through working in groups, the majority of students became more engaged in the writing process through increased “talk time” and discussion of writing elements. However, I found that the group work initially lead to some students becoming less engaged by letting other group members do all of the work. I attempted to alleviate some of this by assigning specific jobs to each group member. For example, the number of students in one of the English language arts classes could not facilitate four full groups, and one group was short a group member. Because of this, one student in that group had to accommodate two jobs. This had led to the other two students becoming disengaged and depending on the one student to carry the group. If I were to observe this behavior
again, I would have had the student doing all of the work to sit out for a few rounds and encourage the other two students to become more independent and engaged.

It was also interesting to review the observations and comments related to the students’ self-efficacy. Observations and comments related to self-efficacy were also interesting. As I mentioned earlier, during my initial observations in the ELA classrooms, students expressed negative attitudes towards writing and negative comments about their writing ability. On a preliminary survey that measured student attitudes towards writing, the students responded to the question about anything else they wanted to share about their writing with comments like “I don’t like to write because I suck at it.” This is a glaring example of a student expressing a very low sense of self-efficacy in writing and expresses the link between motivation and skills. Surprisingly, the student who made this comment frequently writes at the proficient level and he is one student, whose score remained the same during the treatment. His self-efficacy however rose substantially. During the treatment, he was one of the students who became excited to show off his work. This student is a perfect example of a person who had the knowledge to complete a task successfully but was not proud of his work because he lacked the belief that the task could be completed successfully (Bandura, 1986). It seems that this student was more excited to show his work once his self-efficacy for writing persuasive essays increased.

Fortunately, as we progressed through the lessons, there was an increase in the positive comments made by students regarding their confidence as writers and their self-efficacy. One day during the lesson segment, the students were given class time to finish up their rough drafts. While walking around and asking the students questions about how
they felt this writing assignment was going, one student told me, “It’s getting easier and I’m getting better.” This was especially significant because a student who generally complains about everything made the comment. The student’s comment also summed up a general change in the majority of the students’ attitudes toward writing tasks. In general, I observed less complaining and stalling and greater participation in the writing activities. Also, fewer students raised their hands for help.

That same day, after students were finished with their rough drafts, they were expected to use the newly generated rubric to self rate their essays. One student was ready to turn in his rough draft in when I asked him if he had self-checked it first. He then asked, “Do I have to proof read? I don’t like to read anything I wrote.” This comment suggested to me that this student’s self-efficacy in writing had not yet improved. While I might have simply directed a typical student making this comment to review his essay using the rubric, I responded differently to this student. Because this student has an Autism spectrum disorder and an IEP, I sat with him and asked him to read through his essay and mark on the rubric where he thought he scored. While sitting with him I noticed him making several corrections including improved vocabulary and spelling corrections and checking off boxes on the rubric as he went through each component. It was clear this student would not have made these types of revisions independently without the use of the rubric. Improving skills in editing and revision was one of the objectives of this lesson and again, this was evidence that this objective had been met for this student. Another positive comment overheard that day was from a student who got my attention and said, “Ms. Nonaka, I have over 670 words!” I told the student, “That’s
great! Do you feel you have a lot of detail and supporting sentences?” The student responded excitedly saying, “Totally!”

The observations and comments were all generally positive during the learning segment, leading me to conclude that engagement and student self-efficacy in writing persuasive essays had increased.

**Student Work Samples**

The student work samples I used for data collection in this research were persuasive essays only. This was due to the fact that students were assigned several persuasive essays this year to get them prepared for their trimester three, district writing assessment that took place in the spring. In order to pass this high-stakes assessment, students must score at least a four, to be considered proficient. The district’s goal is to have all students writing at the proficient level by the time they leave the seventh grade.

I compared scores from a previous persuasive writing assignment done earlier in the year with the persuasive writing assignment written during the learning segment. I was primarily looking to see if essays scores changed after the students created and used the new student-generated rubric. In Table 3, I also included the percentage of students scoring at the proficient level in the table. My initial theory was that if students were participating in the assessment process and the creation of a writing rubric, which they would then use to evaluate their writing, it was very likely that the students’ knowledge about the characteristics of an effective persuasive essay would be evident. The students would then have the knowledge and skills to edit and revise their own writing that would in-turn improve their scores.
Table 3

*Persuasive Essay Score Frequency*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Essay #1 Assigned before learning segment</th>
<th>Essay #2 Assigned during learning segment</th>
<th>Essay #3 Assigned after learning segment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Score of 2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 2.5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 3.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 4.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Score of 5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of student scoring proficient or above (&gt;4)</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 3, the scores increased significantly between essay number one and two. The percentage of students scoring at the proficient level or above increased from 23% to 67%, a significant gain. Practice with the persuasive genre may account for some of the increase seen in the student scores. However, when comparing the essay scores with the date from the student reflection questionnaire, it appears that the set of rubric lessons
indeed helped students improve their writing, especially with remembering the criteria necessary for a good piece of writing.

After completing the learning segment, the students were again assigned another persuasive essay. This time, the students were given the rubric they had created to be used during the writing process and for self- and peer-evaluations. However, I did not explicitly remind students to use the rubric as I had been previously. Also, there was not as much explicit instruction regarding the peer-evaluations. This led to a significant decline in the scores, visible in the table above. While the percentage of students scoring at or above the proficient level was still higher than Essay #1, there was a 34% drop from Essay #2. This data was surprising. Comments by students when Essay #3 was introduced may provide some insight as to why the scores dropped so much. One student complained, “Oh man, why are we doing this again?” Another student exclaimed, “Not another persuasive!” Perhaps the repetitiveness of the assignments caused the students to lose interest and become disengaged. It is clear the students were not ready to work independently and still needed a higher level of structure and continual encouragement to use the new tools they had helped to develop. Another possibility is that the writing prompt used in the treatment interested them more than following persuasive prompt. If I were to continue this research, I would try to maintain the same level of structure and instruction as I had during the learning segment with subsequent writing assignments. I would also try to alternate writing genres and activities to try and lessen some of the repetitiveness.
Pre- and Post-Student Surveys

Preliminary and post-surveys were administered at the beginning and end of my research. The survey was created to measure student attitudes towards writing. Two of the questions also addressed confidence in writing and self-efficacy. The survey consisted of ten questions and used a Likert scale. Researchers and psychologists, to quantify qualitative data, use Likert scales (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011). For example, statement number one on the writing attitudes survey says, “I like to write.” Students then answer by circling a one if they “almost always” like to write, a two if they “often” like to write, a three for “sometimes,” a four for “seldom,” and students circle a five if they “never” like to write. Statement number six asks students to evaluate their self-efficacy by rating the statement, “I think I am a good writer.” By adding up the student answers, I arrive at a quantifiable score that represents the students’ overall attitude towards writing. Scores range from ten, representing a very positive attitude towards writing and a high self-efficacy, to fifty, which represents a very negative attitude towards writing and a very low self-efficacy.

There is a fairly standard distribution of scores in the frequency (Figure 1), similar to that of a bell-curve. Forty-seven percent of the students, prior to participating in the set of rubric generating lessons, (47%) scored in the mid-rage, between twenty-three and thirty-three percent. Only seven students scored below 23 (23%), which indicates that these student have a more positive attitude towards writing while the remaining nine student at the other end (30%) have a more negative attitude towards writing and a lower self-efficacy.
Figure 1. Frequency of preliminary attitude survey scores.

After the set of rubric lessons, this same survey was administered to the students with slightly different results. In Figure 2, again the scores fall within a fairly normal distribution. However, there was a ten percent decrease in the number of students that fell within the midrange, scoring between 23 and 33 (37%). Nine students scored below the mid-point (30%) meaning there was a seven percent increase in the number of students with positive attitudes towards writing. The remaining ten students (33%), a three percent increase from the preliminary survey, still have a negative attitude towards writing.

Figure 2. Frequency of post survey scores.
Discussion of the Findings

In the beginning of this action research, I asked the question, “What happens when students are allowed to develop their own writing criteria and use this criterion to formatively assess their own work?” I also wanted to discover how students’ development of their own writing assessment impacts or influences engagement and feeling of self-efficacy towards writing. After analysis of the data, three major themes emerged:

1. Through the revision process, students were better able to recognize elements that were missing in their writing and make improvements autonomously using the student-generated rubric.

When compared to scores from a previous persuasive writing assignment, not only did scores increase during the intervention for all but two students, but also there was also a 44% increase in the number of students scoring at or above the proficient level. Responses from students on the reflection questionnaire also confirmed that using the student-generated rubrics helped to remind students of the expectations, which then improved their writing in the process. Eighty-three percent of the student responses to question one, “Do you think that taking part in creating a rubric has helped your writing?” were positive, stating that creating the rubric had help inform their writing and identify what was missing. Practice in evaluating model writing samples prepared students to identify what elements are needed for good writing as well as to identify writing that is lacking required elements and how to fix those errors. Self-evaluations during the intervention, using the student-generated rubric, again helped students to identify areas in their own writing that needed improvement while peer-evaluations also
helped students to fine-tune their writing. I am reminded of Popham’s (2011) quote that states, “Students who are actively reviewing their own classroom assessment data, connecting these outcomes to their own inputs, and making changes so that their efforts will yield more satisfactory results” (pp. 19-20). I sat with one student, who is diagnosed with an ASD, as he self-evaluated his essay. Without assistance from me, he recognized several spelling errors and found many sentences missing proper punctuation. I also watched him count on his fingers, making sure he had a sufficient number of details and support in each body paragraph, a technique we had modeled during our practice evaluation sessions. A student who previously displayed very low levels of self-efficacy and negativity towards reading his own writing was now autonomously revising and improving his writing.

2. Student engagement increased through group work during the rubric creation activities.

Throughout the entire treatment, students were given multiple opportunities to talk about writing, particularly about the elements of good writing. The students, who were placed in our low- to mid-level writing skills class, were still missing some of these basic elements in their writing samples. During this intervention, students not only discovered what elements are necessary for a superior persuasive writing sample, but then repeated this information several time during group activities and cognitive modeling sessions. During group work, students took turns discussing and sometimes arguing about what elements of good writing should be included in their rubric. While creating the master rubric, students were again required to provide an explanation of what their group was
listing on the rubric, as well as where they were placing it, and most importantly why they were including each element.

Sessions where students practiced evaluating writing samples required a lot of participation from the students. As we evaluated writing samples, students were eager to raise their hands and point out errors. I used this eagerness to my advantage by also requiring students to give corrective feedback after acknowledging errors.

Previous to the intervention, students were not as engaged in the writing process, perhaps because they were not given opportunities to discuss the writing process. Students also commented on the reflection questionnaire that they enjoyed working in groups and participating in activities that allowed them to discuss their opinions in what went into the rubric. Some students also enjoyed getting up in front of the class and sharing the ideas of the group.

3. There was an increase in positive comments about student self-efficacy and the writing process in general.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), learners are more motivated when they feel they have influence over their own learning. Students were given the opportunity to choose what criterion they were assessed on and through that process developed their own writing rubric. This intervention not only helped these students to understand the importance of certain components of writing, but also increased their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief that a specified task can be completed successfully (Bandura, 1986), and students learned to use the student-generated rubric as a tool during the writing process and to use the rubric to self-evaluate their work, making them more autonomous.
writers. Autonomy while performing any task improves motivation and creates a greater sense of self-efficacy (Popham, 2011).

Observations and the post-survey on student attitudes towards writing validated these results. There was a seven percent increase in the number of students who scored in the lower range (23-33) on the student attitudes towards writing survey, signifying an increase in the number of students who gained a higher sense of self-efficacy when writing persuasive essays. It also indicates a more positive attitude towards writing.

Observations and anecdotal notes that showed an increase in self-efficacy included one student, who tended to complain about everything, including and especially school related topics. This student told me, “It’s getting easier and I’m getting better” when asked how his writing was going. Other students would be excited for me to read their essays as soon as they were finished. This eagerness made me excited as well, because it became evident that students were displaying higher levels of self-efficacy then they had before and were eager for me to see what they had accomplished. It was this excitement about writing that I was hoping to create in designing this action research.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

What is the point of writing instruction? In today’s educational climate, the purpose is unclear. With such a heavy focus on high-stakes testing, much of the creativity and authenticity in writing instruction are less evident than they have been in the past. While NCLB may have raised educational standards, schools serving low-income communities suffer the consequences that come from not meeting these standards. Many schools are forced to use scripted curricula and employ teacher-centered, “kill and drill” methods, all in an effort to increase test scores. It is also important to mention scripted curricula, especially ELA curricula, are mandated for many PI schools and these impact instructional methods. Bracey (2009) writes that, “Schools under the gun to raise test scores increasingly rely on strategies that get immediate, but short-lived, results” (p. 34). Additionally, as teaching methods narrow to focus on test achievement, the ways in which students learn is very diverse and some students struggle to learn. Students are forced to take a back seat in their learning while teacher-centered methods dominate instruction and assessment. As a result of this antiquated learning environment, students become disengaged and bored with learning. Popham (2011) suggests that improving classroom assessment can improve student autonomy and allow students to take a more
active role in their education, he writes, “this self direction will surely serve them well in their future endeavors both inside and outside of school” (pp. 19-20).

In my own experience as a resident teacher, my mentor teacher and I both observed students complaining and becoming disengaged with the curriculum, specifically in the English language arts. It was also evident that students were still missing important elements in their writing, even with sufficient practice. Writing elements like topic sentences and a clear thesis statement was commonly missing in their persuasive essays, which were the focus of my research.

During my initial observations in the English language arts classroom, I asked myself, “What if we, as teacher, were to delegate more of the assessment power to the students? What would happen if students were given the opportunity to take part in their own learning, to not only learn how to become their own assessors, but to be able to generate the criteria by which they were assessed?” Allowing students to develop their own writing assessments would be a more student-centered approach. The responsibility of assessment would then be shared with the students and not rely so heavily on the teacher. This shared responsibility would necessitate more engagement, and students would ultimately become more invested in their own writing. My research looking into this question revealed some promising results.

I found several studies that focused on the use of instructional rubrics as a way of teaching the necessary components of writing while also teaching students to take-part in their own writing assessment. Rubrics have been used historically as a means to objectively score student writing. Teachers have primarily used rubrics, a standards-based assessment tool, to score writing assignments, as a summative assessment. Rubrics are a
way for teachers to communicate with their students why a particular score was given. The instructional rubric takes the next step and is used during the writing process, before the final draft is written. Teachers can use instructional rubrics or students may be taught to use these rubrics to self-evaluate their writing or to evaluate the writing of their peers. Andrade et al. (2010) suggest that students are able to more effectively, “reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals or criteria, and revise accordingly” (p. 199).

Instructional rubrics are used throughout the writing process and either the teacher can assess student work and report the results to the students or students can be trained to assess their own work. In either case, students are taught to interpret the assessment data and choose the way in which they will change their efforts in the attempt to learn a new skill (Popham, 2011). Students are given the power to choose the way in which they improve their writing based on these assessments. Teachers can also use this assessment data to tailor their instruction.

This action research took instructional rubrics a step further by allowing students to generate the criteria of the writing rubrics by evaluating several models and pulling out the important elements. Ketter (1997) acknowledges that, “Because students are stakeholders in assessment, they should be involved not only in the discussion of the technical aspect of writing assessment, but also in the meta-discussion of how criteria are constructed” (p. 293). The use of models in generating criteria was also very important. The use of models, specifically cognitive modeling, is also one of the core concepts of social cognitive theory as and an influencing factor in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). When thought of in the context of students generating criteria for a writing assignment,
teachers would first model the process of critiquing differing levels of student writing samples, verbalizing their analysis as they go. Subsequently, students could form groups and take additional samples through the critiquing process and then critique them on an individual basis.

Data from this research suggest that student self-efficacy did increase based on comments made by individual students. Initially, students made comments like, “I’m not good at writing,” or “I don’t like to write because I suck at it.” During and after the treatment, negative comments like these decreased, indicating an improved self-efficacy for writing. For example, a student who previously had a low self-efficacy towards writing and low confidence in school in general, was excited to tell me how he had written over 670 words in his essay. This illustrated his excitement in his achievement and an indicator of improved self-efficacy and attitude now, with the possibility of continuing in the future. Data from the pre- and post- “Student attitudes towards writing” surveys also indicated evidence in an increase in self-efficacy and student attitudes towards writing. As seen in the “Frequency of post-survey scores” table seen previously, there was a seven percent increase in the number of students scoring in the lower range meaning an increase in the number of students who have a more positive attitude towards writing and an increased self-efficacy.

An increase in student engagement was another positive result of this intervention. Prior to this research, students had little experience with the writing assessment process. Peer evaluations done in the past using the district rubric was difficult for students because according to their assessment of the rubric, it was, “too wordy” and “confusing.” Students had also not had much training in effective evaluation
so peer evaluations done previously may have been superficial. Students were exposed to and participated in a lot of authentic discussion about writing. This occurred when students were working in groups to decide on criteria they thought was important to add to the rubric, as well as during the cognitive modeling sessions where previous student writing samples were used to flesh out criteria for low, medium, and high portions of the rubric. When evaluating writing as a class, students were expected to point out good aspects of good writing as well as provide corrective feedback in areas where the writing sample needed work. Students were then able to more easily transfer the knowledge to evaluating their own essays as well as those of their peers. This was evident in comments made by students during the modeling sessions and the feedback written on scored rubrics. Students who had not previously raised their hand much in class were willing to raise their hand and offer compliments or corrective feedback. It was gratifying for me to have students pull me aside and be excited to show me their work because they are proud of their work quality.

Reflecting on my original research question, when students are allowed to develop their own writing criteria and use this criterion to formatively assess their own work, for this group of students, the results were positive. There were increases in student engagement and participation as well as increases in positive attitudes towards writing and students’ ability to demonstrate higher levels of self-efficacy. As a result, students became more independent and autonomous during the writing process. Generating the criteria for the rubrics helped students learn what elements of good writing were necessary. Students also learned to use the student-generated rubric as a tool during the writing process and during the editing and revision process. Rather than relying solely on
the teacher’s feedback to make corrections, students were using the student-generated rubric to identify areas of their own writing that needed improvement. This was something that was not seen prior to the intervention.

If I were to extend this research again in the future, I would suggest collecting more data regarding positive and negative comments made by students. I would use interval data sheets to count the number of times positive or negative comments were made prior to the treatment and then compare the data with interval data recorded at the end of the treatment providing more quantifiable data showing a more definite increase in positive comments and engagement.

Other recommendations would include a more intensive training of students to become more effective evaluators and an increase in group work during the editing and revision process. These ideas warrant action research projects on each of these subjects individually. Because of my time frame, I was not able to find out how effectively students were scoring themselves or each other, but in the future, I would spend more time evaluating their scoring. This evaluation could be done by having the teacher score student writing after a round of self- or peer-evaluations, and then compare the two scores. This would hold students accountable for taking their time and scoring essays properly and also possibly indicate where the teacher could improve instruction about particular writing elements and/or the use of the rubrics. This review of student scoring would also give the teacher an individualized account of which students may need more explicit instruction. For example, perhaps students were still unable to identify certain elements of good writing; instead this would become evident during this process. Students need time to practice these skills. Rubric development takes time and so does
exposure to this kind of teaching. The length of the future research should take this into account.

Additionally, to increase peer work during the editing and revision process, when students complete a rough draft following a round or two of self- or peer-evaluations, the teacher could set up stations that students can choose to improve a specific area of their writing. Peers whose strength is in a particular area could tutor other students who are struggling. Teachers can also lead a station or work one-on-one with students (Popham, 2011). Again, not only would students be in charge of their own assessment, but of making adjustments to their learning as well.

Overall, I feel that this experience in action research has been positive. I certainly have taken much knowledge away from this process, and I genuinely feel my students have benefited from this research as well. My hope for my students is that they will now view writing assessment as a tool to be used during the writing process rather than something to be feared. I hope that they are also able to more clearly identify the elements of good writing and incorporate those elements into their own writing as well. It’s important to note that change in students’ writing development and their feelings about that development is difficult to capture in surveys, writing samples, or comments, especially over the span of just a few months. Becoming a better writer does not happen overnight and it’s important to note that what I have found in my research is preliminary but clearly a strong start in future research and the use of student generated rubrics.
REFERENCES


