INCREASING THE WRITING PERFORMANCE OF URBAN SENIORS PLACED AT-RISK THROUGH GOAL-SETTING IN A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE AND CREATIVITY-CENTERED CLASSROOM

Brittany Estrada
Azusa Pacific University

Susan Warren
Azusa Pacific University

ABSTRACT

Efforts to support marginalized students require not only identifying systemic inequities, but providing a classroom infrastructure that supports the academic achievement of all students. This action research study examined the effects of implementing goal-setting strategies and emphasizing creativity in a culturally responsive classroom (CRC) on urban students placed at-risk of failure in a 12th grade writing classroom. Qualitative and quantitative data include pre-and post-surveys, student writing assignments, grades, pre-and post-focus groups, and teacher-researcher observations. Data indicate writing goals, creativity, and a CRC positively improved the independent writing performance of students and developed their confidence in and value for the writing process. This study will assist educators as they design learning environments and utilize strategies to teach writing to marginalized students.

Introduction

The ability to write clearly and effectively is paramount in determining an individual's success (The National At-Risk Education Network, 2013), yet many students in United States public schools, specifically high school seniors, struggle with writing skills (Graham & Harris, 2007; Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith, & Macgil, 2008; Newell, Koukis, & Boster, 2007). A national computer-based writing assessment in 2012 with 28,100 seniors revealed that only 24% met proficiency and 3% were advanced, while 52% attained a basic level and 25% scored below basic. This writing deficiency in the majority of seniors frequently leads to failure and dropping out of school (The National At-Risk Education Network, 2013).

The lack of writing proficiency is even greater in urban communities where school populations are primarily comprised of students of color and socio-economically marginalized youth who academically trail behind their White middle class and/or affluent counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). These urban students, historically affected by education disparities (Ladson-Billings, 2006), are often illiterate in writing and not provided the support to improve. Ladson-Billings (2006) refers to the educational inequalities, inadequacies, and consequences that many urban students experience as an *education debt*. These students are victims of a debt that represents a systemic lack of investment in the educational growth of its disenfranchised pupils. The opportunity for a quality educational experience is diminished due to two phenomena: (a) ongoing funding inequities that affect resources in poor schools and (b) increasing resegregation of urban school communities.

Inherent in the idea of educational debt is the understanding that the educational system creates conditions in urban schools in which the students are placed at risk of failure. Talent sorting and an emphasis on test scores have resulted in schools frequently placing the blame for students' writing and school struggles on students' family makeup and socio-economic status.

These students are often viewed as deficient based on personal background and characteristics, rather than placing the blame on the schools' inability to support them (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sanders, 2000).

Despite the adverse conditions in many urban schools, educators can transform their perceptions of students placed at risk and create a learning environment that supports students to be academically successful and confident in the midst of an oppressive educational system (Gay, 2010). The current action research study addresses this educational dilemma in a writing classroom by assessing various strategies to teach writing, including developing a caring and responsive environment, goal-setting, and using a creativity-centered approach with academically struggling urban adolescents who have been placed at risk of failure. The following research question guided the study: What are the effects of creating a culturally responsive writing classroom, implementing goal-setting, and using creativity with 12th grade urban students placed at-risk?

Literature Review

Federal assessments in the United States began to show a drop in students' abilities to read and write in the early 1980s (Yao, 2006). Despite recent data showing some improvement, many students, specifically seniors, cannot write proficiently. National writing assessments with seniors indicate that, on a scale of 0-300 with a mean proficiency score of 173, Caucasian students scored an average of 159, Asian students 158, students of two or more races 158, American Indian students 145, Native Hawaiian students 144, Hispanic students 134, and Black students 130 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Students scoring significantly below the mean in writing, particularly the Hispanic and Black students, are further marginalized as they struggle through high school with a lack of support.

That large number of marginalized students leave high school unprepared for college or life is perplexing to many teachers, policy makers, and constituents of public schools who may seek simple remedies to *fix* this *problem*. Simple cures or one-size-fits-all solutions do not support the range of students or meet their needs in the classroom. Beghetto and Kaufman (2010) explain the severity of oversimplifying the needs of students in traditionally underperforming schools, citing examples of adopting teacher-proof curricula in hopes of boosting student performance. Historic failure of such reforms suggests that the attitude, beliefs, and traditionally oppressive classroom structures play the largest role in student achievement (Gay, 2010; Wentzel, 2009). Therefore, culturally responsive teaching, goal-setting, and creativity will be defined and outlined as the methods utilized to structure an environment that promotes empowerment and academic growth in writing for marginalized students.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

The goal of culturally responsive teaching is to support diverse urban youth through cultural affiliation, academic achievement, and personal empowerment (Irvine & Armento, 2001). Culturally responsive teachers understand the strong role of culture in the educational system and place culture at the core as they analyze techniques for improving the performance of underachieving, disenfranchised students. These educators largely believe that patterns in academic achievement among groups of students are not a result of individual limitations but

instead are due to the impact of institutional assumptions, structures, procedures, and operational styles of schools, classrooms, and the larger society (Banks, 2006; Gay, 2010).

Culturally responsive educators purposefully integrate the experiences and cultural orientations of students from diverse ethnic, racial, and economic backgrounds into their teaching. They demonstrate caring; communicate in ways to optimize the success of their students; design curricula that are inclusive, meaningful, and connected to students' lives; and utilize effective strategies that support their students' learning (Gay, 2010). These teachers honor their students and their families and seek to develop the talent potential of underachieving diverse students, placing them at promise instead of at risk (Boykin, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Goal-Setting

Goal-setting supports students in understanding that learning is a tool used to mature to higher levels of understanding (Ames et. al., 1992; Maher & Zusho, 2009; Nicholas, 1984). Students' beliefs, perceptions, and choices of action depend on the goals toward which they are working. Specific goals direct students' decisions to be engaged, to remain persistent, and to feel a sense of capability with a certain set of skills or abilities within their environment (Maher & Zusho, 2009). While focusing on the process of learning, students are empowered to commit and apply themselves toward an action with confidence that participating in the process is just as valuable as producing an end result. Redirecting the success of student performance in the classroom, however, requires the perspective of value changing from *product* to *process* (Palmer, 2007). Both change and success start from knowing a valued destination and goal-setting provides a tangible strategy for reaching that destination (O'Brien, 1999).

The emphasis on standardized testing in schools has placed a focus on outcomes, pressuring students to find value only in their ability to produce rather than the growth within the process of learning (Maher & Zusho, 2009). Discouraged by obstacles to achievement, many students in urban schools become marginalized and are placed at risk of failing (Gay, 2010). They lose hope of ever being successful. Furthermore, product-oriented assessments often prohibit the opportunity for students with special needs or English language learners to develop an appreciation for the long-term value of the learning process (Ames, Schunk, & Meece, 1992).

Struggling students, successful students, and students caught in the middle all need to be motivated to succeed in school, and goal-setting has been one strategy to monitor the support of motivation in the classroom. The process of goal-setting and achievement of goals creates personal arousal that stimulates contentment with their academic placement (Maehr & Zusho, 2009; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). While there is little in the research about goal-setting in urban settings, the connection with motivation and achievement suggests that this is a worthy area to explore.

Creativity-Centered Classroom Environments

Creativity allows individuals to take knowledge, challenge it, and recreate it to benefit the community (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010; Kaufman, 2009). Creativity in this study refers to "the interaction among *aptitude, process, and environment* by which an individual or group produces a *perceptible product* that is both *novel and useful* as defined within a *social context*" (Plucker, Beghetto, & Dow, 2004, p. 90, emphasis in original). Students in a creativity-centered classroom

are encouraged to undertake this process in an environment where they feel safe to take risks (Kaufman, 2009). Four teachable skills that cultivate creativity in the classroom are specifically used in the current study (Fredericks, 2005):

1.   Fluency: the ability to produce large numbers of ideas/divergent thinking.
2.   Flexibility: the ability to make connections between unrelated concepts.
3.   Originality: the ability to make unique ideas.
4.   Elaboration: the ability to manipulate an idea until it is well formed.

The goal of creativity in the classroom is not to generate a one-size-fits all model, but rather to design an environment that effectively enhances the curriculum and helps students identify their strengths (Plucker et al., 2004). All too often marginalized students bury their creative instincts to fit into an expected mold created by the school system (Baldwin, 2010). The creative traits that such students throw away are very often the coping methods that keep them from giving up. For example, the humor and symbolism traits in African American students can be capitalized on as a means to develop new ideas or criticism of certain literary works (Baldwin, 1985).

The importance of creativity in the classroom is evident. In the midst of the scripted classroom, there is a necessity for a fresh representation of ideas that is relevant and connects to the lives of diverse urban students (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010; Kaufman, 2009). Creativity needs to be embraced in the writing classroom to eliminate the stress that prohibits students from writing well and to illuminate the students' strengths. Focusing on these creative skills gives students the opportunity to realize that writing is an achievable process.

Method and Data Sources

This action research study employs a mixed methods approach. The teacher conducting an action research project also serves as the researcher. S/he was thus able to implement new strategies as she documented and evaluated the actions within the high school writing classroom. "Action research is based on a systematic, reflective, and collaborative process that examines classroom and school issues to plan, implement, and evaluate change" (Warren, Doorn, and Green, 2008, p. 261).

Participants

The participants in this study were 24 female and 29 male students in two sections of an Expository Writing course developed to provide senior high school students with opportunities to advance their writing and analysis skills. The classes met in a Southern California comprehensive high school with a student population of 2,221, of which 452 were seniors. The school suspension rate was 52.7% and the dropout rate was 29.4%. Only 27% of the high school students scored proficient or advanced in English Language Arts based on the most recent state assessments. The school was located downtown in a large city with 213,295 residents, of which 20.3% had less than a high school degree, 41.8% spoke Spanish in the home, and 30% lived under the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). The 53 students in the study self-identified as 70% Hispanic, 19% African American, 9% White (non-Hispanic), and 2% Asian. All participants were socio-economically disadvantaged based on qualification for free/reduced

lunch, two students were teen parents with an infant, and five seniors had previously been classified as English learners. Thirty-two (60%) of the students were failing this class before the research was implemented and 43 (81%) failed their first writing assignment prior to the onset of the study, which included 39 of them not completing the assignment.

Procedure

 Writing is a complex process which requires students to work through multiple cognitive levels (Levine, 2003). Since most of the students had been academically unsuccessful in the writing class and many had experienced failure, the teacher first created a classroom environment in which students felt respected, appreciated, and valued. Implementing culturally responsive teaching included developing a writing curriculum that connected with the students' lives, engaged them, and encouraged them to feel safe to take risks with their writing (Gay, 2010). Creativity complemented the curriculum allowing students to focus on the "novel and personally meaningful interpretation of experiences, actions, and events" in their writing (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010, p. 195). Finally, the focus of the class was on students setting performance-oriented rather than product-oriented goals. It is important to give challenging goals that are also attainable by the students, provide them with skills so that the tasks do not undermine the students' progress, and motivate them to perform at a higher level (Levin, 2003; Schunk & Pajares, 2009).

 The students participated in the following activities during a 45-minute writing class over a 10-week period. The activities integrated the four skills of creativity which are fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration (Fredericks, 2005). Students set weekly goals in order to manage the workload and obtain satisfaction from accomplishing smaller tasks.

 First activity: Culturally responsive and creative dialogue. The teacher explained the focus of the research study to the students during the first week and reviewed it during the fourth and tenth weeks of the study. This included how the classroom structure was changing to be more responsive to students and how creativity and goal-setting would be integrated. She intentionally used the words *creativity*, *writing process, originality*, *divergent thinking,* and *risk takers* in the classroom to describe the students, their assignments, and the writing process. She subsequently encouraged the students to intentionally use these words as well.

 Teamwork, engagement, and relevant experiences describe the culturally responsive writing classroom. The teacher encouraged students to ask questions, research topics of interest to them and beneficial to their community, and even question the processes of research and writing. Every Friday students participated in a Socratic circle which allowed the students to dialogue with one another and the teacher as they shared information and expressed their concerns about their work. During this activity the teacher also conversed with the seniors about the negative influences in the school climate and how others in the school community perceived their achievement. Most importantly, through constant discussion and feedback, the teacher encouraged the students to work beyond what had been expected of them in the past (Gay, 2010).

 Second activity: Senior project goal sheet. Students were given a worksheet at the beginning of the study that listed each assignment and writing goal for the ten-week period. The sheet was structured like O'Brien's (1999) goal-setting checklist which monitored the students' assignments listing them as completed on time, late, or incomplete. Students were responsible for monitoring and grading their own senior project goal sheet.

 The goal sheet empowered the students to be honest not only with the teacher but with themselves. It explicitly broke down the writing assignments that were to be finished at a specific

time during the ten weeks so students could manage and compare their drafts in a timely manner. The students and their peers were encouraged to work at their own pace and assess progress.

Third activity: Weekly creative environment activities. Based on Kaufman's (2009) creativity in the classroom activities, divergent thinking and flexibility were promoted in the classroom by allowing students to choose the location of the classroom (indoors or outdoors), seating arrangements, and the amount of light or noise in the classroom (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1989). The following are examples of the creative activities performed with the students in this study. First, the students played a word game, *Mind Dump,* once a week to teach fluency and flexibility with the vocabulary relevant to their individual research and writing. This game called for students to write down as many words or phrases that came to mind in 60 seconds related to the word the teacher or student wrote on the board that day. Second, the seniors also played charades, acting out the vocabulary words to practice originality. Third, to teach elaboration, the students held mini-Socratic circles at the end of each week to discuss and give each other feedback on the progress, barriers, questions, successes and struggles in their research or in life.

These specific tasks and others were included to promote growth of the students' cognitive (intellective) and affective (feeling) development. Cognitive-intellective behaviors include fluent thinking, original thinking, and elaborative thinking, while affective-feeling behaviors include risk taking, complexity, curiosity, and imagination (Williams, 1970). These activities took a substantial amount of classroom time, but allowed the students to academically diverge from the pressure of the writing process while training their brains to expand.

Fourth activity: Creative research project. The teacher assigned all seniors a final research project for the spring semester. The students were asked to choose a research question that was original and valuable to their community. Students had the option to research and write with a group or individually (Graham & Harris, 2007; Levine, 2003). The creative research project consisted of an argumentative paper as well as a creative presentation to be presented to their peers (Guthrie & Codington, 2009).

The teacher asked the students to be creative and flexible in choosing how they wanted to share the information they gathered and what information they believed was valuable to share. The students did not receive sample lists or guidelines for the creative presentation, but they were provided with explicit guidelines, expectations, and goals for the research essay. The teacher assessed the students' complete cycle of creative thinking through their ability to internalize the research, share their findings, and explain its importance to the surrounding community (Baldwin, 2010).

Fifth activity: Correction goal sheet and peer review check list. During the last six weeks of the study, students were asked to complete three drafts of the research essay. Using a rubric, the students evaluated their peers on eight specific writing performance skills during weeks three, five, and seven. They also used a peer review checklist that focused on corrections and feedback for improvement (Frank, 1979; Levin, 2003).

The students utilized a correction goal sheet as a tool for self-evaluation. The authors of the draft were able to grade their own work based off of a four point Likert scale with 0 meaning "need help with this" and 3 meaning "personal best." While the three drafts were recorded as credit or no credit, feedback in the form of grades was given to encourage students to strive for excellence. The feedback (grade) for each draft was based on the combined evaluation from a peer, the author, and the teacher. The correctional goal sheets supported students' growth in the process of writing.

Data Sources and Analysis

A mixed method of data collection included five sources of data from the students. Descriptive statistics were used in analyzing the quantitative data, while a constant comparison methodology was utilized for the qualitative findings. The quantitative data were compared to the qualitative results.

Quantitative

The first source of quantitative data were pre- and post- surveys with 16 Likert scale items (Newell, Koukis, & Boster, 2007) asking students if they liked writing, thought they were a good writer, felt comfortable asking their teacher for help, planned prior to writing, and proofread their writing. The second quantitative data source was the three student essays. Students completed the first essay prior to the study. Students wrote the second essay at the beginning of the study with a few of the strategies implemented. The third essay was written after the goal-setting and creativity strategies were implemented in the classroom. Data from the essays revealed areas of student achievement through the percentage of students not submitting the assignment, scores based on a rubric scale of 5-10 (10 being the highest) to measure eight specific writing skills, and overall essay grades based on a percentage of 1-100. Analysis of the quantitative data utilized descriptive statistics to summarize the sample (Trochim, 2000) and indicate any changes in student perceptions or performance throughout the study.

Qualitative

Three sources of qualitative data were collected and analyzed. The first data source was the pre- and post- open-ended survey responses with questions gathering information about the students' general interest in writing, topics, and perceptions of the teacher's role. The second source was the pre- and post-focus group interviews in which students were asked four open-ended questions at the beginning and end of the study about the most difficult part of writing, what skills they learned in school that helped them with writing, what they did when they felt they could not complete a writing assignment, and any other comments they had about writing. The third qualitative data source was the teacher-researcher's observation field notes taken during student-teacher sessions and creative activity times.

Analysis of the qualitative data utilized a constant-comparison method (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). A team of two researchers collaborated in determining the initial coded categories. By process of seeking consensus, they re-confirmed, re-named, or re-grouped the categories as needed to determine the aspects of change, if any, perceived in the students through their experience in the writing class that introduced cultural responsiveness, goal-setting, and creativity. The researchers triangulated the three sources of qualitative data in determining the final emerging themes.

Results

Results from the study indicate that overall this group of high school seniors who had been placed at risk of failing made substantial increases in their achievement in the writing class. Quantitative results represent improvement in writing skills and performance. Qualitative data

show growth in students' interest and confidence in writing, as well as their appreciation for writing.

Quantitative

The quantitative data indicate that students improved their academic writing performance during the study. This is evident as students reported having less difficulty with writing, a decrease in the number of students failing to complete the essay writing assignments, mastery of writing skills improved, and the number of students with passing essay grades in writing increased.

Students' perception of writing as difficult decreased. Table 1 shows a 1.67 point decrease in the number of students believing it is difficult to express themselves in writing from the beginning to the end of the ten-week study. This item out of a set of six revealed the greatest change on student perspectives about writing.

Table 1.
Student Pre- and Post- Survey Results Focused on Writing Strategies
(based on four point Likert Scale)

Survey Statement	Pre	Post	Change
Question #5: It is hard to get my ideas into words when I write.	2.67	1	+1.67

The number of students who failed to complete the essay assignments decreased. Figure 1 shows a decrease in incomplete writing assignments. Thirty-nine of the participants in the study did not turn in an essay for the first assignment, resulting in 74% of the students receiving a grade of zero. Following the first assigned essay, eighteen students did not submit essay two, leaving 34% of the observed students with a failing grade. At the conclusion of the study, only one student failed to turn in the essay, meaning that 98% of the students turned in completed essays.
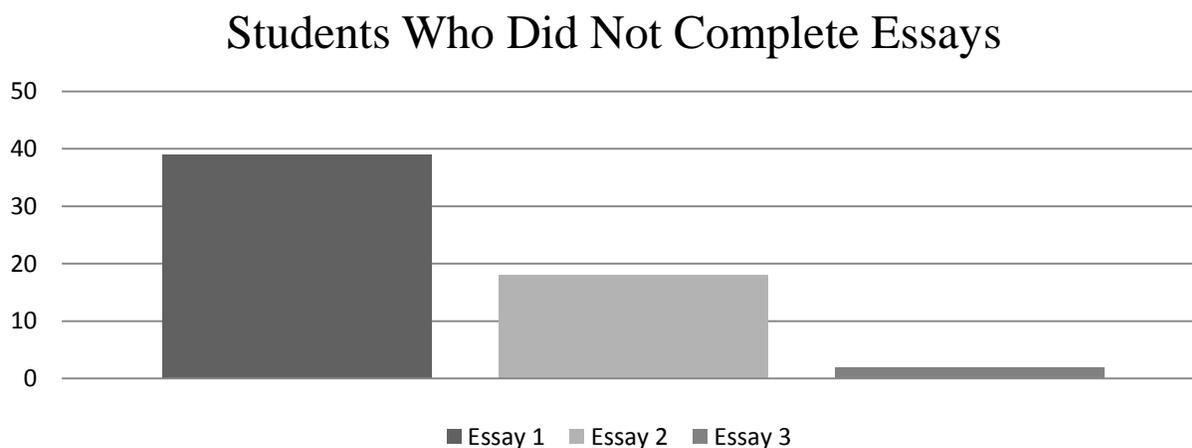

Figure 1. Number of students who did not turn in an essay.

Students' writing mastery improved. The quality of the students' writing improved in the eight areas assessed on the rubric (see Figure 2). While students made gains in all eight skill areas from the first to the third essay, the largest gains were in their ability to create a concluding sentence (3.11 point gain) and to decrease grammatical and spelling errors (2.47 point gain).
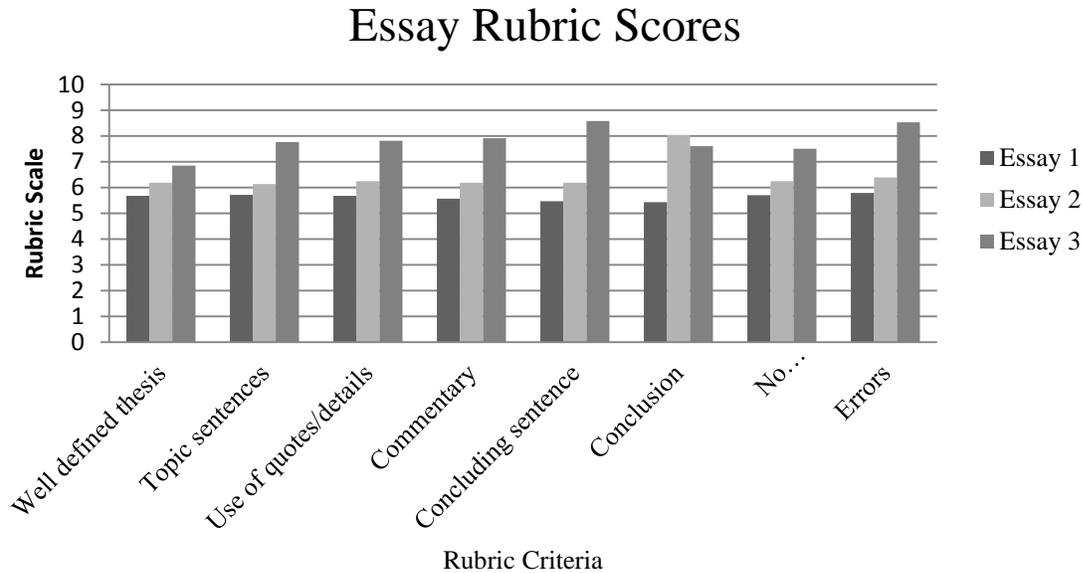
Essay Rubric Scores

Figure 2. First, second, and third essay rubric scores of specific skills.

Increase in passing grades. Figure 3 illustrates that 77% of the participants failed the first essay, assigned prior to the study, with a D or F grade. Thirty-six percent of the students failed to receive a passing grade on the second essay, which was slightly modified using the correctional goal sheet and feedback from the prior essay. Nine percent of the students received a failing grade on the final creative writing assignment.
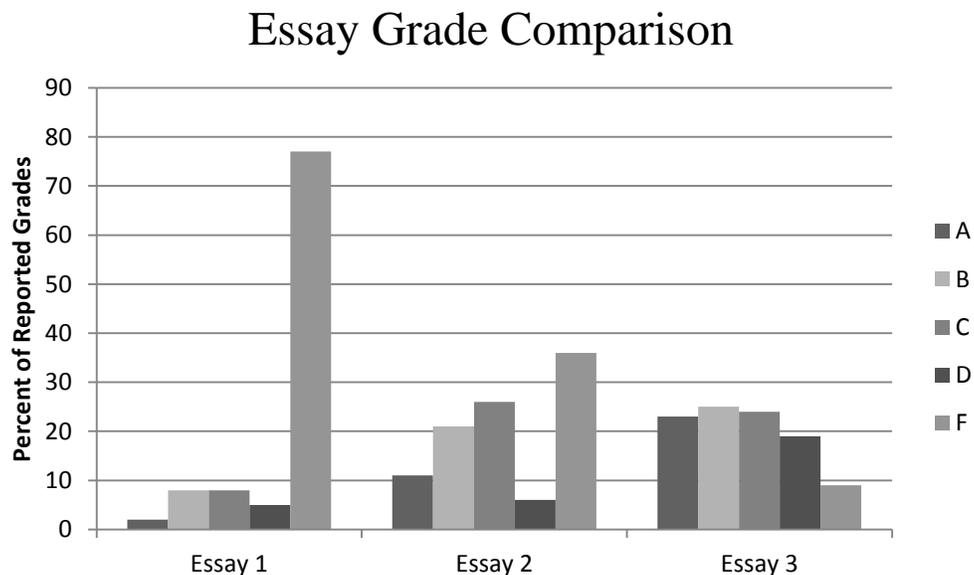
Essay Grade Comparison

Figure 3. Students' grades by percent for essays 1, 2, and 3

Qualitative

Three qualitative themes emerged from the analysis of data. The first theme is that the students' intrinsic appreciation for writing increased. Baer and Garrett (2010) found that when students are at the focal point of the classroom and given creative resources, their performance and appreciation of writing increases. The second theme is consistent with Molden and Dweck's (2000) findings: students gained the belief that being incapable of executing a written assignment does not reflect who they are as lifelong writers. Finally, the third theme from the students supports the research that consistent feedback and self-assessment is crucial in building writer confidence and performance enhancement (Piirto, 2010).

Writing as a vehicle of expression rather than a tool of power. The pre-survey asked students, "Is writing important? Why or why not?" One student wrote "Writing is only important when you want to look like you know what you're talking about or want to act smart." This student viewed writing as a means to appear more intellectual than others. Illustrated by one student's pre-survey answer, another common range of responses indicated that writing was useless unless an individual's desired career involved writing or social status.

> In my opinion I don't feel writing is important if I want to be a doctor I'm not going to write a five paragraph essay on why their ankle is broken. I will just scribble some notes and still get paid.

The responses to the post-survey indicated an increase in the value of writing as a means to communicate interpersonal thoughts, as well as a vehicle for sharing and expressing personal feelings. One student wrote "Yes!! It's important because it's a way to express your feelings." Another wrote, "Yes, writing is important because writing is one way in which you can express your thoughts towards something." At the conclusion of the study, students' perceptions of writing included the idea that it can be a vehicle in which one can express creative and emotional thoughts.

Students' perceptions of writing changed from a talent to a process. Many students initially expressed frustration with writing and a dislike toward the writing classroom. Prior to the study, students were asked in a focus group, "Is there anything you have learned to do that makes writing easier for you? Who taught you this?" Illustrated by the sample quote below, the consistent finding for this response was the perception of writing as a difficult task and even a form of punishment:

> Writing is never going to be easy for me. I never know what to write about or how to start it. I'm not good at spelling and I think that I would rather just talk to people. Writing is just kinda dumb.

Other responses show some students' initial beliefs that writing is an inherent skill that may be connected to one's race or linguistic background. One student shared, "I've never passed an English class in my life. And don't plan on it now. I'm Mexican so how am I really supposed to be good at this stuff?" The majority of students in the study had never experienced success in the writing classroom and attributed all writing failures to personal characteristics such as native tongue, family make-up, cultural background, and innate talent. As illustrated by the quote below, in the post-focus group interview, students showed a general shift in perception toward writing as a process that can be learned, practiced, and experienced rather than an ability that

only comes naturally:

> Before this class I thought that I was the worst writer in the world. Now it is easier to write because I know that there are steps to take to make sure that my writing is good or bad. I think what really helped me though, the most, was the feedback that you [the teacher] gave and like checking up on us and our goal dates. Like when you gave us like a checklist, and a timeline and stuff, I really could see that I could do it and get help from like the homies too. It's not as bad as I thought it was really. It just takes time.

Planned feedback and self-assessment promote awareness of growth and confidence in writing. Analyzing observational field notes indicates that students appreciated being given explicit corrections on their writing as well as immediate feedback of written work. One student, after failing an advanced placement (AP) class, joined the class and commented:

> Thank you [the teacher] for actually grading my essays and writing comments on my papers where I did good and where I messed up. I took an AP English class and that teacher never told me what I was doing wrong. She would just say I got an F. I actually feel like I can go to college and write an essay without being embarrassed.

Students indicated an appreciation for explicit feedback and criticism as well as excitement in having the ability to compare their own growth and assess their level of improvement. The teacher noted:

> Two female students were talking about the comparison of their papers with excitement today. One girl said, "Yea, I'm really getting better with my quotes. I like understand how to fit them in now compared to my first essay." The other student replied, "Yea! I looked at my last essay and can't even believe I wrote that bad."

Discussion

This study's findings illustrate that students' perceptions of writing and their writing skills improved when a culturally responsive curriculum was implemented, attainable goals were set, and specific creative skills were integrated into instruction. Moreover, setting appropriate writing goals that promote progress and growth towards writing mastery motivates students to complete assignments. The findings support Kaufman's (2009) creativity theory, *The Four P's,* identifying four interconnected domains (product, process, person, and press/environment) that affect a student's mastery level. The improvement in grades and writing mastery was dependent on the comfort and support that the culturally responsive environment provided (Gay, 2010; Kaufman, 2009).

The data also demonstrate the positive effect of reciprocal student-teacher and peer-to-peer communication. The relationship between the teacher and the student must be equally important to maintain a classroom environment that promotes correctional feedback (Baer & Garret, 2010). As students expressed more confidence in the process of writing, they began to simultaneously value the importance of rough drafts and self-assessment activities. Additionally, the focus on process-oriented assessment rather than product-oriented assessment increased essay grades and writing participation.

In summary, focusing more on the creative skills of fluency and flexibility supported

students' abilities to communicate their thoughts in writing. Also, by focusing on reasonable, appropriate writing goals through the 10 week study, students were given more time to comfortably complete assignments and confidently turn these in by designated due dates. Furthermore, the practice of elaboration in Socratic circles and self-assessment in the correction goal sheet and peer review checklist increased students' abilities to identify weaknesses in their writing and address them. As a consequence, students overall grades also increased.

Conclusion and Educational Significance

Teaching students how to write requires educators to do much more than give worksheets, assign writing assignments, or show examples. Teachers must assess student interests, fears they have about writing, and the value they see in writing. Furthermore, teaching students to set goals is not a force that motivates students to perform; rather it guides students to envision their destinations. By structuring an environment that promotes creativity, the teacher is creating the opportunity to foster a deeper relationship of trust and excitement that encourages students to confront the challenge of writing rather than abandon it. Teaching creative skills in the writing classroom and assessing the process of writing rather than the product allows students to realize that their interpretation of experiences, attempts, and actions has value (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). Most importantly, teachers must be willing to take risks in their own classrooms and trust in the opportunity to support the achievement of marginalized, urban students.

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