

## RUBRICS AND EVALUATIONS

By

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*The authors' discussion will describe how classroom leaders at every academic level can use rubrics as a means of self-assessment. This strategy and the use of the rubric as a tool can help to provide effective feedback that can develop into a constant reflection of how effectively a teacher focuses on student success by means of their instructional success. There are many theories on pedagogy but many do not tie leadership and self-evaluation at the end of the day or week. The authors look to expose a gap in literature that could assist teachers in staying motivated in their instruction and bridge the gap of status-quo instruction with the need to set goals and exceed those self-created goals with student success.*

*Keywords: Instructor Rubrics, Teacher Accountability, Student Achievement.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Teacher leaders are responsible and accountable for the culture in the classroom. Danielson (2006) identified that the term 'teacher leader' is not new, however, she defines the term in an informal manner to mean a person who has earned the status from students and the school community. A teacher leader may take on various roles in the classroom to ensure student success. Harrison and Killion (2007) suggested 10 important roles of teacher leaders to be performed including resource provider, instructional specialist, curriculum specialist, classroom supporter, learning facilitator, mentor, school leader, data coach, catalyst for change, and learner. Student success may be sequentially affected by how well teacher leaders are able to reflect on their own leadership in the classroom (Ross and Bruce 2007). These supportive instructional collaborative roles can be met through the use of grading rubrics or instructional checklists.

Students are held accountable for their success with tests and other assessment tools (Birky 2012). These tools have been used to determine the level of success by both teacher leaders and students in the classroom. National, state and local endorsements also hold teacher leaders accountable to pedagogical standards. However, the authors realized that teacher leaders do not incorporate their own system of self-reflection and assessments to see

their successes or shortcomings. Overcoming this, lack of insight can be achieved through the use of rubrics. Rubrics are used to differentiate the levels of passing objectives. A rubric for teachers can help to improve self-awareness of a lesson's success by self-evaluation after a lesson has been completed (Rasheed, Aslam, & Sarwar, 2010). Some readers may criticize that recommendation because they believe that teachers already have more than enough work and so adding more work would be counter-productive. This criticism is met with the explanation that, using a rubric helps the instructor to determine if they did or did not meet the needs of their students. Rubrics also help the teachers to evaluate their motivation throughout the weeks of instruction. To gain a meaningful idea of what should be included in a rubric that reflects the teachers' daily tasks, one must look at what a rubric is, what it does, and when it originated.

The word rubric is derived from the Latin word "ruber" meaning red. The root of rubric refers to the color of red earth. Fifteenth-century monks were the first to use rubrics to mark, in red, sections of books and in religious ceremonies to recite laws (Popham, 1997). Rubrics have been around for centuries although not as people view them today. The uses and definitions of rubrics have changed through the centuries. Today, Merriam-Webster (2013), defines a rubric as a guide listing specific criteria for grading or scoring

academic papers, projects, or tests.

The common method for using rubrics in the education arena has been around since the 1980s. Popham (1997) observed that the use of the word rubric came about in the education community when specialists evaluated the students' written work. Popham added that any word meaning and scoring could have been used, however, rubric sounded more technically attractive. Popham suggested that rubrics began to be regularly used in education in the 1980s to "refer to a set of standards and/or directions for assessing outcomes and guiding student learning". Therefore, a very old word has taken on a new meaning in the education world. Many schools and institutions require the creation of rubrics for content and courses. Every educational conference will almost certainly offer a workshop on rubrics. These are exciting times for the writing of rubrics in all forms and areas. Several programs on the Internet offer detailed assistance on writing rubrics. Some sites even write what the rubric should contain and it will be generated. While some may equate rubrics with checklists. Checklists have limited usefulness for providing or promoting thorough evaluation. When used correctly, rubrics can be a sophisticated tool for judging work quality.

Rubrics are used for a variety of tasks in the field of education; however, they are predominantly used to evaluate students work. They are useful for helping a teacher leader plan and analyze the expectations of the class, course or assignments. Rubrics can be used to determine the degree or level of mastery a student has achieved on a certain task. For example, a measurement on a rubric can be excellent, good, or needs improvement. Another way to measure is by attaching a score to each expectation, objective, or criteria listed on the rubric. Rubrics also help to explain the expectations to students, parents, other teachers, and others about the expectations of a task. When a score or measurement is attached to a letter grade, teachers can explain what was done correctly and where improvements need to be made to achieve or maintain a certain grade. They also give detailed feedback about how well expectations were met (Cooper & Gargan, 2009).

Rubrics are also used to evaluate teachers and other educators. This is usually done on a matrix that involves performance areas, such as pedagogy, content knowledge, and performance skill. Educators use rubrics every day as an effective tool to measure the performance of others. However, educators often overlook rubrics' applicability to evaluate themselves on how well they are carrying out their organizational daily duties in the classroom. Research shows that teachers are the most important element in the classroom because they have the greatest influence on student achievement (Stronge, Tucker, Hindman and Ward 2007). Maintaining that influence requires understanding of the behaviors that are effective at achieving educational goals. Charting those behaviors and tasks on a rubric would help teachers to increase their effectiveness in the classroom. It could give classroom teachers a view of what should be accomplished, what has been accomplished, and how well it was accomplished.

Rubrics are also considered as self-assessments for charting individualized progress. Self-assessment can be an influential tool for a teacher leader in any classroom (Roskos and Neuman 2011). Schon (1983) linked self-assessment and teacher-efficacy together as a predictor of success for teachers in the classroom environment. Reflection and assessment of day-to-day tasks can help to evaluate and clarify strengths and opportunities for growth in classroom management and organization, which will provide data to demonstrate success. In 1983, Donald Schon used this observation to develop a theory called Reflective Practice. His theory posited that, with self-reflection, one could analyze what has been learned in theory and compare it with his or her everyday practices. Donald advanced that these reflections could lead to a better understanding of job performance. Moreover, Schon's research revealed that reflective instruction has led to positive results in the classroom such as classroom management, teacher-student communication, and academic success.

## Evaluation

Teacher education programs require evaluations related to performance and knowledge. Additionally, teacher-

leader disposition standards have been added to those key elements in the past few years. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is a preeminent teacher accreditation organization. NCATE's first standard is content knowledge and professional dispositions. NCATE (2008) requires pre-service education programs to include teacher dispositions as a part of the teacher certification program. Another influential organization, the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) (2013), also has standards that emphasize teacher reflection. InTASC's third standard is learning environments. The teacher leader works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning as well as encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation. Many higher education institutions ask their pre-service teachers to do a self-reflection on their dispositions. By incorporating reflection into their practices, teachers not only ask questions to enhance effectiveness, but they also use the answers to guide and change their practices to be more effective.

Classroom organizational rubrics may be an effective tool for practising teachers to reflect upon how well they have navigated through the daily classroom environment. Teachers know, by theory, that a well-organized classroom is an important element in the learning process. Routines and procedures must transit smoothly during the day. Research has shown that teachers with good organizational skills are more effective and have a stronger positive environment for learning. Self-assessment is a powerful tool for helping teachers recognize strengths and needs for professional development. Using a rubric as a tool for self-assessment and reflection could guide the teacher leader in a self-reflective process to better assist student academic success.

When developing an organizational environment rubric, one must first decide the important criteria to place on the rubric. What would be the most important daily tasks that a teacher leader must perform? Of course, it must define what an effective day is in the classroom. Does it mean the teacher leader had to discipline two students today instead of 10? Does it mean four students were able to

apply the skills and knowledge that the teacher leader had taught that day? Ultimately, a question arose that, Is effectiveness defined by student behavior or what the teacher leader does in the classroom? Procedures and routines are flexible in the elementary classroom; however, certain elements must occur at some point in the daily activities for a learning environment to be effective. Some of those elements included are as follows,

- Getting materials ready for the day,
- Distributing and engaging materials to students at the minute they walk into the classroom,
- Talking with visitors,
- Taking attendance and lunch counts,
- Collecting money,
- Monitoring restroom and water breaks,
- Distributing and collecting papers,
- Writing reports,
- Grading assignments and recording the grade,
- Providing bus duty, hall duty, cafeteria duty, nurse duty, counselor duty, and recess duty,
- Conducting parent conferences,
- Releasing students,
- Administering classroom discipline,
- Planning lessons,
- Coordinating with special teachers,
- Answering telephone calls,
- Repairing items in the classroom,
- Attending staff meetings

These are all activities that regularly occur in the elementary classroom. One can see how maximizing time for teachers is essential (Miller and Pedro 2006). There appears to be too many duties and not enough hours to fit everything in the day. However, working with a rubric for those duties may help elementary teachers assess and prioritize duties in the classroom and then reflect on how well they performed. Because reflection improves effectiveness in the classroom, teachers may use the rubric to guide and to bring about change.

According to Sharon, Moya, and O'Malley (1994), the

assessment process can be a powerful tool when students are actively involved in the process. Involvement allows students to take ownership of their learning and builds confidence in their ability over time. Reliable formative and summative evaluations supply classroom teachers with the data needed to make educated decisions about instruction, thereby making them more responsive to the needs of their students. Formative evaluation is an ongoing process that can occur at any time during the life of a project or the process. Summative evaluation is the process of reviewing and critiquing the entire process or project after the fact. This is the model used most often in the educational institutions (Palloff & Pratt, 1999). The rubric process can be used as either type of evaluation or it can be used to create a hybrid of the best of both approaches.

Rubrics can promote by using skills related to critical thinking, address the learning needs of dissimilar learners, and offer the opportunity to students for reflection and growth through suitable feedback (Sharon, Moya, & O'Malley, 1994). The assessment of higher-order skills, often through open-ended problems, are an important innovation and, with the use of students and teacher leaders rubrics will consider cultural and educational contexts (Sharon, Moya, & O'Malley, 1994). The basis for rubrics is setting up standards or levels of proficiency through an analysis of knowledge and skill. This can help the teachers to gain the most instructional growth (Geva, Yaghoub-Zadeh, & Schuster, 2000).

Sharon, Moya and O'Malley (1994) stated that rubrics should evaluate the ability of users to construct, broaden, and reflect on defining what they have read across diverse texts. Rubrics, as tools, must acknowledge the strengths and weaknesses of proven evaluation tools and apply the most suitable tool for the desired individual measurement target (Sharon, Moya, & O'Malley, 1994).

Elbow (1969) wrote that learners cannot grow their critical thinking skills without feedback, so one focus in teaching should be to determine what evaluation method does the best job. Elbow also believed that evaluations have two purposes such as, to communicate with audience by an accurate evaluation of the student's performance and, one that is often overlooked in creating evaluations, to

enable the student to be able to effectively evaluate his/her own performance. Students are empowered in this manner would mean, and Elbow is very clear here, "teacher's grades should be with importance, if not in fact".

Palloff and Pratt (2001) noted that evaluations should not just consider numerical grades like those resulting from rigidly defined, subjective tests. Even with feedback immediately after the test, much of the learning process is left untouched. Rather, evaluations should provide regular feedback through progressively completed assignments, formalized question and answer opportunities, and interactivity through various scaffolding exercises. These activities offer opportunities to learn as the project or process moves toward completion not only for the student but also for the instructor. In other words, an effective evaluation and feedback system needs to be more interactive throughout the life cycle of the evaluated subject. It needs to adequately identify what is being evaluated, how it is to be completed, and the results produced by various levels of performance. As such, the communications needed to make it work are more than just the final, post-process commentary found in most checklists. In education, the evaluation tool that has proven most effective in meeting the learning needs of the student and the instructor is the rubric.

Goodrich (1996/1997) wrote that, "The rubric is a scoring tool that lists the criteria for a piece of work, or what counts .It also articulates gradations of quality for each criterion from excellent to poor" (p. 14). Rachael Whitcomb (1999), discussing rubrics for a music program, defined a rubric as "a set of scoring guidelines for evaluating students' work. Rubrics list the elements that students need to include in their work in order to receive a particular grade or evaluation". Turley and Gallagher (2008) defined a rubric based on extremes of beliefs. They wrote that, Rubrics are sorting machines or they are useful instructional tools. Rubrics lead to standardization or they help us connect with individual students. Rubrics rest on false claims to objectivity-or they make subjectivity visible. Rubrics put teachers and students on autopilot-or they enrich conversations between teachers and students. It is time to move beyond rubrics or it is time to embrace them.

The rubric process is such that it will work in virtually any profession and in any type of environment with participants of any learning abilities. Rubrics have been a keystone in education for years although, initially, they were found most often in higher education. Rubrics have been criticized for their weaknesses, however, weaknesses result from human decisions made in creating the tool, not from the tool itself. "When thoughtfully crafted and used with discretion and understanding, rubrics can be the most useful among the instructional tools (Spandel, 2006). Interestingly, in the analysis of rubrics, Spandel may have identified one of the significant reasons that instructors do not like to use rubrics. "They keep honest, for when people put their thinking on paper, there is no longer a place to hide" (p. 21).

### Criticism of Rubrics

Rubrics can be used at any level of education from kindergarten to a doctoral program as there is no formal structure or content required to produce an effective rubric. Cooper and Garigan (2009) identified three outcomes that could impact the results such as, rubrics can still be subjective, rubrics can make more work, and rubrics can restrict education". Without great care in the construction of content, the requirement for earning an excellent grade could be so prescriptive so as to penalize the creativity that often accompanies and enriches learning. This outcome illustrates the need for instructor training to avoid these kinds of unintentional traps. Abraham Maslow (1966), noted psychologist, postulated that "if the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail". Educators are often unintentionally constrained by what they know, a condition that creates a barrier to designing new learning opportunities for their students

The process of creating an effective and meaningful rubric requires effective analytical and evaluative skills on top of a solid understanding of how differently the students learn, various learning theories, the objectives of the learning process, as well as the desired and actual competencies of students at the instruction level. These elements must be clearly defined and integrated before a formal rubric can be created. Stephen Brookfield (1995) wrote, "Knowing something of how students experience learning helps to

build convincing connections between what wants them to do for their own concerns and expectations". Creating an effective rubric is not just about what is to be learned; it is about the student and his or her relationship with the topic and the learning process.

Each rubric is a product or more accurately a picture of what the teacher leader feels and believes about learning and education. It is the truth that contains the seeds of its own downfall. Creating a rubric requires a teacher leader to think about the learning he or she is trying to convey in a very broad sense. How the rubric is structured can define what is learned and how it is learned so if the teacher leader is not fully aware of the big picture, the student will lose.

### Rubrics not acceptable in many educational circumstances

The teacher leader does not want the world to know what they think because then it would be open to criticism. The teacher leader does not know how to structure a rubric that is meaningful to the teacher and the learner. Open communications between student and teacher leader is critical for the development of an effective rubric. This open communication, is done properly, if it could open the teacher's beliefs up to questioning by the student.

In effect teacher leaders do not like rubrics (and therefore refuse to use them) because "rubrics force teachers to assess assignments using explicitly stated standards or guidelines" (Hitt & Helms, 2009), which requires the real or perceived loss of autonomy in decision making. Teachers may feel they do not have enough time in the day to complete everything required of them. Instructional time is most important in the classroom; however, teachers spend a significant part of the day on non-instructional tasks. For this reason, teachers may benefit from reflecting and completing a self-assessment on just how much time they spend on non-instructional time. Effective classroom organization has been found to be a positive element in the learning process. Evaluating one's effective work can be a daunting task. However, reflecting and evaluating one's organizational skills in the classroom has advantages.

### Conclusion

Rating scales for students may range from observations to letter grades. The tools used to rate or grade also vary.

Rubrics are among the most popular tools. Rubrics allow the teacher leader the time for reflecting and assessing how well non-instructional organizational objectives are achieved in the classroom. This instrument can be used at any level. The limited amount of criticism is overshadowed by the creative and positive results of the reflective rubrics.

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