The Use of Genre-Specific Evaluation Criteria for Revision

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ABSTRACT
Revision is a challenging step of the writing process and students often focus their attention to mechanics or grammar instead of making organizational and meaning changes. It is important for students to critically read and independently evaluate their work when revising. This practitioner article discusses the importance of genre-specific evaluation criteria in revision. Knowledge about genre-evaluation criteria can strengthen students' understanding about writing for different purposes and audiences, can support their ability to critically read and comprehend, can affect their confidence, and can lead students to independent evaluation. Similarly, teachers can use the same evaluation criteria to give feedback to students and grade their work. Preparation for teaching and teaching procedures are explained.

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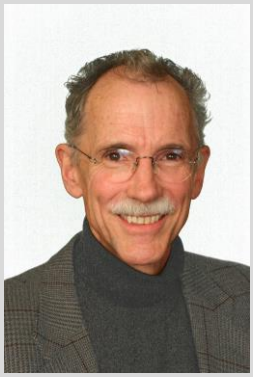

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Introduction

"Revising is basically checking your work, making sure everything is nice, clean, all the punctuations are where they're supposed to be." Nelson*, Fourth-grade student
"Revising is spelling changes, punctuation changes, and I'm not using words that repeat on and on and on. That's too much of it. I use different words. Like instead of using "awesome" "awesome" "awesome" or "good" "good" "good", I'd say "great" "nice" "amazing". Jordana, Fourth-grade student. (All names used are pseudonyms.)

The comments made by Nelson and Jordana offer insights into their understanding about revision. When they are asked to revise, students often emphasize changes in punctuation, word choice, mechanics, grammar, and addition of details (Fitzgerald, 1987; Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Chanquoi, 2001). Their troubles with revision on the level of ideas, organization and content may stem from a lack of understanding about the task and a lack of strategies on how to evaluate writing (Hayes, Flower, et al., 1987).

Much research on revision processes is guided by cognitive models of writing and revising (Bereiter & Scardamalia, 1987; Hayes, 1996; Hayes & Flower, 1980; Hayes, Flower, Schriver, Stratman, & Carey, 1987; for a review see MacArthur, 2015). All these models share some common characteristics. First, they view revision as a problem-solving process, which can be activated at any time during the writing process and can lead to changes of the written text and of the writers' writing plans. Second, revision greatly depends on the writers' critical reading ability, purpose, knowledge of structure, and self-regulation. Hayes' models (Hayes, 1996, 2004; Hayes et al., 1987) emphasize the role of reading for revising. Evaluation and revision require more cognitive effort for the readers than reading comprehension (Roussey & Piolat, 2008). Reading to comprehend text differs from reading for evaluation in order to revise. Reading comprehension can take place even when there are problems with the text, as the reader can apply inferential skills and overlook challenges with text-construction problems (Hayes et al., 1987). However, when reading to evaluate and reading for revision, the reader needs to apply critical-thinking processes and utilize a larger set of goals (Hayes, 2004). Hayes et al. (1987), as well as Hayes (2004), also point out that reading to evaluate can lead to discovery of opportunities. Simply said, the reader in the process of revising the text may locate problems but also discover opportunities to make substantial changes to the content and meaning of the written text.

Several instructional approaches have been studied in an effort to identify specific methods that can support students' evaluation processes and improve their revision practices. The use of procedural facilitators (e.g., De La Paz, Swanson & Graham, 1998), the practice of observing readers (e.g., Moore, & MacArthur, 2012) and the use of goal setting procedures (e.g., Graham, MacArthur & Schwartz, 1997) have all had positive effects on revision (see MacArthur, 2015 for a review). A commonality among them is the use of specific-evaluation criteria as a guide for revision. A recent meta-analytic review of research on writing assessment (Graham, Hebert, & Harris, 2015) found that teaching self-evaluation had a positive effect on the quality of student writing.

The purpose of this article is to provide specific guidelines for teachers about how to support students when they evaluate to revise their work. The term "evaluate to revise" is purposely used instead of the term evaluate and revise. This is because critical evaluation is done in order to lead to effective and specific revisions. The use of clear evaluation criteria can guide students' cognitive effort and help them manage the complexity of the revising process. We recommend teaching genre-specific evaluation criteria rather than general analytic criteria because the more specific criteria provide more support for students' evaluation and revision, and, thus, are more likely to help students learn to self-evaluate, which is critical to the development of independent writing ability.

Evaluation: Using Elements of Genre

Instruction in evaluation begins with some set of evaluation criteria. These criteria can take the form of questions, a checklist, or a rubric. Students learn to apply the evaluation criteria as they read to evaluate their own work or their peers' work during peer review. Learning evaluation criteria is a key way in which students learn the characteristics of good writing.

Evaluation criteria can be general or genre-specific. General criteria can apply to any type of writing. For example, typical analytic rubrics examine ideas and content, organization, voice and tone, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions (Diederich, 1974; Culham, 2003). These criteria can be applied to narrative, persuasive, and informative text, even though these papers serve different writing purposes and have different organizational structures. However, students may have difficulty applying these general criteria because the meanings are not specific enough to guide their attention. Studies that have examined the effects of instruction in general analytic criteria on writing quality vary in their results and significant differences are not consistently found (for a review, see MacArthur, 2015). Perhaps, the best-known analytic rubric for writing is 6 + 1 Traits (Culham, 2003); a recent meta-analysis (Graham, Hebert, & Harris, 2015) found no significant effect of the 6+1 Traits program in four studies. Use of such general criteria may be a challenge for students who may need more specificity in their efforts to evaluate their work.

One way to make evaluation criteria more specific is to base them on specific genre elements. Genres are types of writing that have specific organizational structures and are written to satisfy different writing purposes (Meyer, 1985). For example, a story has a *beginning* that introduces and describes the characters, the setting, and the problem, a *middle* that includes actions to solve the problem and complications, and an *ending* that solves the problem and may discuss the emotions of the character (Philippakos, MacArthur & Coker, 2015). In contrast, a procedural, "how to" paper has a *beginning* that introduces the importance of learning the task and the materials for it, a *middle* with steps in order, and an *end* with a conclusion that evaluates the completion of the task. Such genre-specific criteria can be easier to understand than general ones. For example, the question, "Is the organization clear for the reader?" is less clear than, "Is there a clear introduction that describes the characters, the time and the place? Is there a logical problem?"

Explicit instruction on genre elements, or text structure, is an important part of most strategy instruction in writing, an approach with strong evidence of effectiveness (Graham, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007). In studies that taught students genre-specific evaluation criteria as part of peer review or revision, students produced better-quality revised drafts (e.g, Midgette, Haria & MacArthur, 2008; Philippakos & MacArthur, in press). Genre-specific criteria can provide direct guidance to students on the organization of the genre and on the genre's expectations. For example, in persuasive writing, the evaluation questions can be very specific for each element. Additional evaluation questions that refer to other quality features of writing could be included (see Table 1 for an example).

How to Teach Students to Use Genre Elements in Evaluation and Revision

Because evaluation and revision can be vague processes to students, teachers need to make the process clear and visible to students.

Preparation

Prior to instruction, it is important for teachers to clearly identify the genre and its elements, create a rubric that would include those elements, and select writing samples

Table 1. Elements of Persuasive Writing

Beginning	**Topic:** What is the topic and why should the reader care to read about it? **Position:** What is the writer's position on the topic? Is it clear?
Middle	**Reasons:** Does the paper have clear and convincing reasons that explain the writer's position? **Evidence:** Are there examples and evidence that support each reason?
End	**Restate Position:** Does the paper have a conclusion that tells the reader the writer's position in different words? **Think:** Does the paper leave the reader with something to think about?

that will be used for evaluation. We encourage teachers to do this preparation collaboratively (in grade-level teams), but they could also work independently.

Identify genre elements. First, teachers should identify the genre that they will focus on, the elements of the genre, and the evaluation criteria. For example, Table 1 shows the elements and related evaluation criteria for persuasive writing without an opposing position. Teachers may consider organizing their instruction around genre to better support students' writing and evaluation (e.g., units on opinion writing, on stories). **Create rubric**. Second, teachers create a rubric with those elements. Additional evaluation criteria could be added that would be relevant to the genre and grade-level expectations. For example, in persuasive writing, questions could be added regarding the use of transition words, or the use of appropriate tone to the reader (see Figure 1; adapted from Philippakos, 2012; Philippakos, MacArthur & Coker, 2015). The rubric should include a scoring system, so writers can assign a score per element. We recommend a simple scale of 0, 1, 2 (see Figure 1) for ease of use by students, but a different-point scale can also be used. In our own professional development (PD) practice, teachers tend to assign half points or explain to students how an element may be a "low 1" or a "high 1".

Figure 1. Sample Persuasive Rubric for Evaluation

	1. not there 2. So-So 3. Amazing!	0	1	2	Comments
Beginning	**Topic:** What is the topic and why should the reader care about it?				
	Opinion: Is the writer's opinion clear?				
Middle	**Reason 1:** Is the 1st reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?				
	Evidence: Is there enough evidence to support the reason? Is the evidence explained?				
	Reason 2: Is the 2nd reason connected to the opinion				

	and is it clear and convincing to the reader?				
	Evidence: Is there enough evidence to support the reason? Is the evidence explained?				
	Reason 3: Is the 3rd reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?				
	Evidence: Is there enough evidence to support the reason? Is the evidence explained?				
End	**Restate Opinion:** Did the writer restate the opinion?				
	Think: Did the writer leave the reader with a message to think about the topic?				
Other!	Is there a title that clearly refers to the information of the paper?				
	Is the paper's tone appropriate for the audience? Was the writer respectful to the reader?				
	Are there clear and appropriate transition words used throughout the paper?				
	Philippakos, MacArthur, & Coker, 2015, *Developing Strategic Writers Through Genre Instruction: Recourses for grades 3 to 5, Guilford Press, Adapted with permission of Guilford Press.*				

Select papers. Teachers identify sample papers that will be used for modeling and student practice. These papers need to represent a range of quality and can be from previous classes or from other teachers' classes. Student identifying information should be removed and papers could be assigned a number or be identified by their title.

Teaching

The teacher will model the process of evaluation and explain why an element is clearly presented or not and how it could be improved. With the use of think aloud modeling provided by the teacher, students will be taught the scoring and evaluation process and the thinking process that the teacher uses to determine 1) if an element is present, 2) if it supports the overall quality of the paper and the overall writing purpose, 3) if it requires revisions, and 4) what revisions could possibly lead to improvements.

After the teacher-led think aloud, teacher and students collaboratively repeat the process. At this stage, student participation will be higher and the teacher should encourage students' involvement. The teacher will facilitate the process, but the goal is to engage students in the identification of the elements, in discussions about the quality of those, and about suggestions for effective revisions. Students could also work in smaller groups to collaboratively evaluate. Finally, students will work independently. Overall, the process of instruction is based on the gradual release of responsibility model, which supports students' transition from novices to experts. In this model, the teacher is the knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978) and functions as a model for the practice that students are expected to independently apply. Students are given

the opportunity to practice the same approach as a group with the guidance of the teacher, to work in smaller groups or attempt the approach with teacher support until they are able to independently apply the approach (Fisher & Frey, 2007; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). This release of responsibility does not need to be completed within a class period. The modeling and collaborative practice can be completed in two class sessions of approximately 35 minutes each. The process is explained in the following section.

Discussion. The teacher discusses with students the purpose of the specific type of writing and explains the elements of the genre. For example, if the focus is persuasion, sample questions might be, "Why do people write persuasively? What does it mean to persuade? What is a convincing reason? What is evidence?"

Modeling. At the modeling stage, a range of papers that vary in quality should be used. In our work we usually include a well-written paper that represents the goal for students' performance for the end of the year and a weak example that is missing specific elements (e.g., a first reason or a conclusion), or it has poorly developed elements (e.g., a conclusion that ends by saying *The end).*

The teacher models the application of the elements for evaluation by thinking out loud. During evaluation, the teacher reads each question, underlines the information in the paper, and labels each element (see Figure 2 for an example from the evaluation of a fourth-grade weak example).

Then the teacher assigns a score for each element using the rubric. The important aspect of this step is that students are given an explanation about how and why the teacher assigns a specific score. It is also important to provide suggestions for improvement (see Figure 3 for an example).

If the paper has received a low score (zero or one), the teacher writes suggestions for changes and notes (e.g., The reason is not that clear, and I was confused. Perhaps if you want to say _____, you could write, _____; It would be helpful to have a transition in this paragraph. Perhaps you could say _____).

It is also important to show to students how to overcome challenges and to model that the use of the rubric can help them guide their attention. Therefore, during the modeling process, the teacher uses the elements as a map to guide attention and effort. For instance, the teacher may seem confused after reading a section. Instead of quitting the task, though, the teacher can look at the rubric to confirm what element s/he was looking for and return to the text to decipher its complex meaning.

Finally, the teacher selects an element that has received a low score and models its revision. It is important for students to observe how to make a revision (see Figure 4). For this task the teacher can use sentence starters and frames to guide students' sentence production (e.g., A second reason that _____ is___).

Collaborative and guided practice. Teacher and students evaluate papers together and negotiate ideas about the scoring and suggestions to the writer. The teacher will read each element, ask students for their score and for an explanation. The teacher should ask "why" questions and ask students to refer to the text to explain their reasoning. The teacher should also ask for suggestions for revision and teacher and students could work together to make a few revisions.

Figure 2. Sample Evaluated Paper with Elements Underlined and Labeled

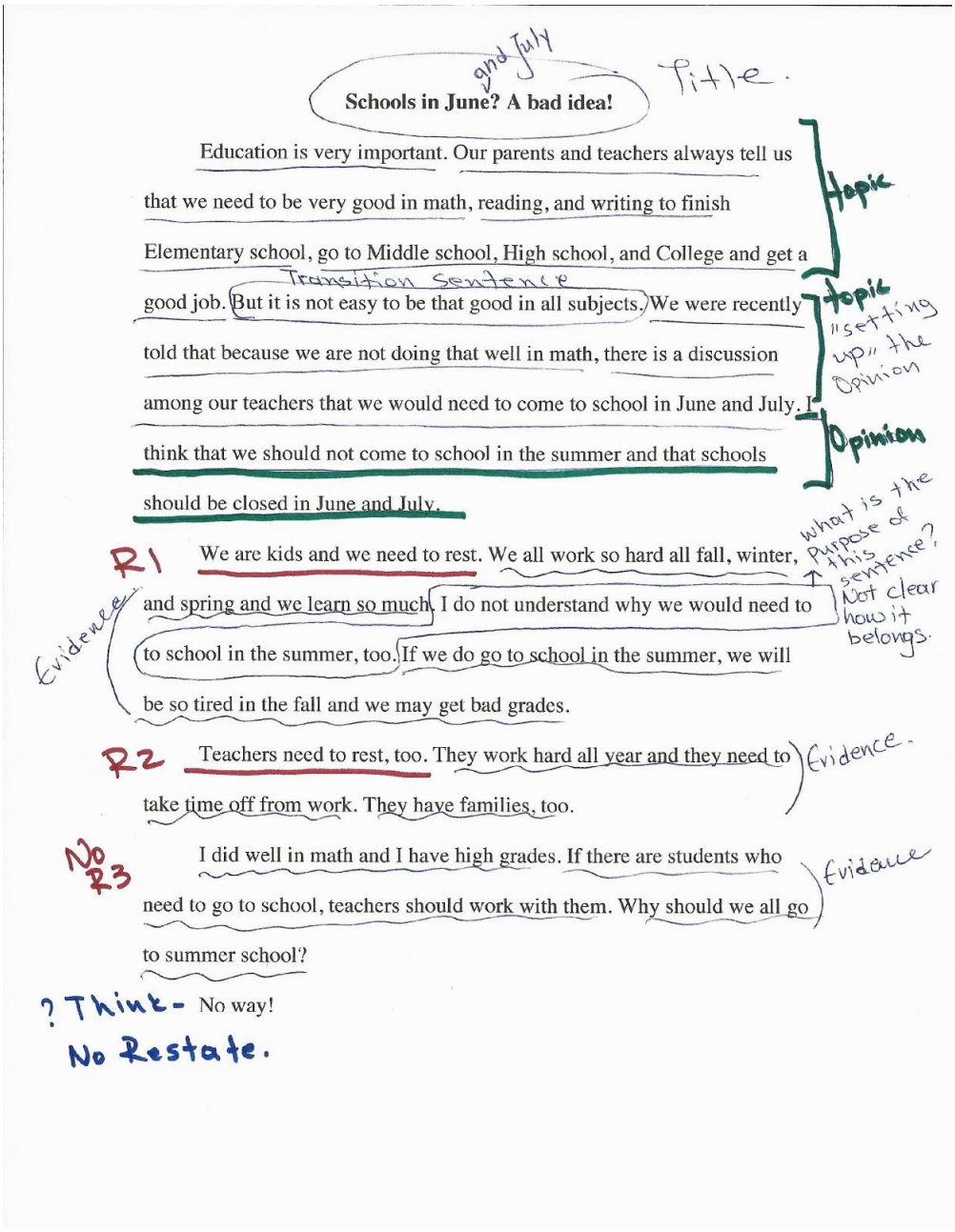
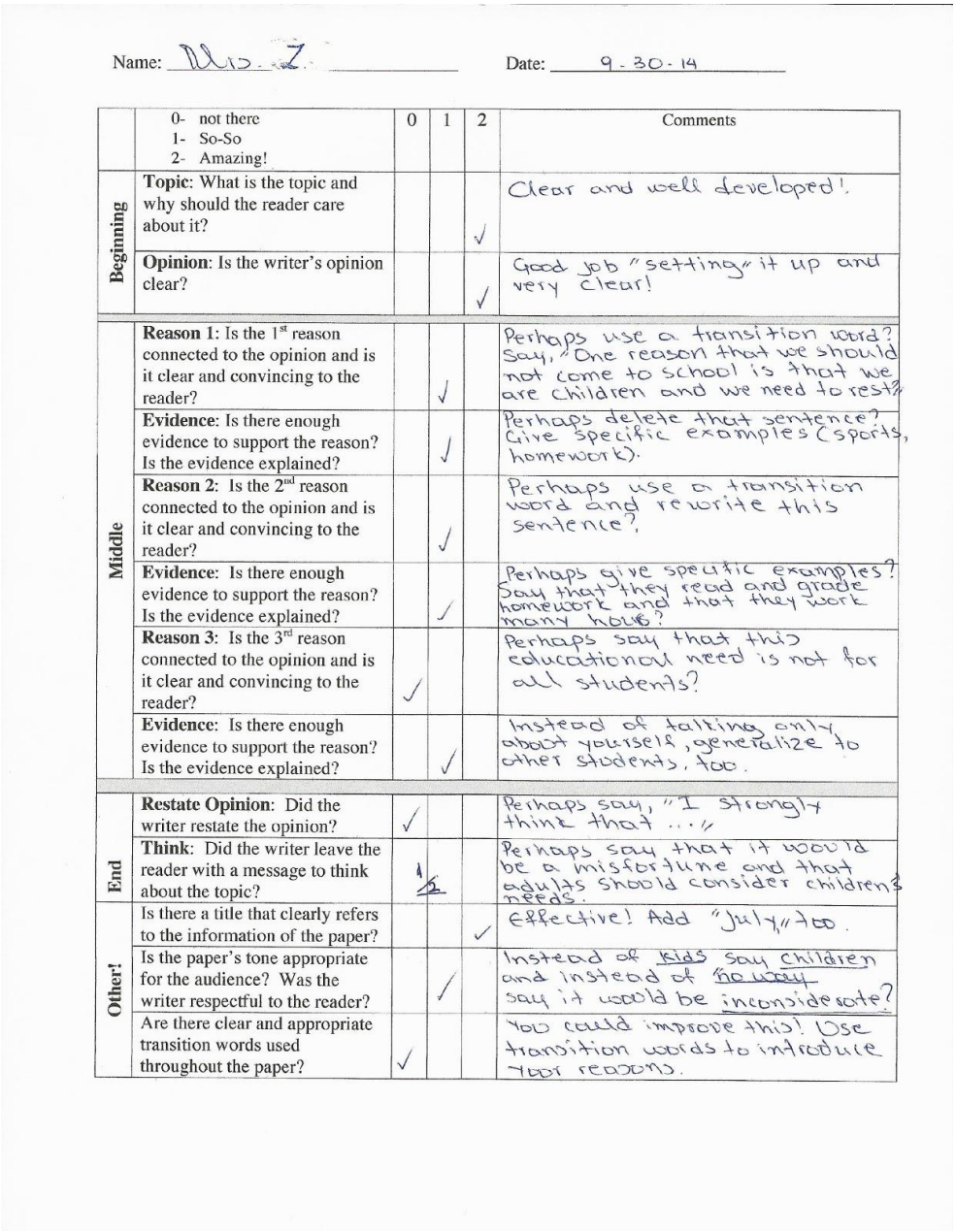


*Figure 3***.** Sample Completed Rubric with Suggestions



Name: Mia. Z. Date: 9-30-14

	0- not there 1- So-So 2- Amazing!	0	1	2	Comments
Beginning	**Topic**: What is the topic and why should the reader care about it?			✓	Clear and well developed!
	Opinion: Is the writer's opinion clear?			✓	Good job "setting" it up and very clear!
Middle	**Reason 1**: Is the 1st reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?		✓		Perhaps use a transition word? Say, "One reason that we should not come to school is that we are children and we need to rest."
	Evidence: Is there enough evidence to support the reason? Is the evidence explained?		✓		Perhaps delete that sentence? Give specific examples (sports, homework).
	Reason 2: Is the 2nd reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?		✓		Perhaps use a transition word and rewrite this sentence?
	Evidence: Is there enough evidence to support the reason? Is the evidence explained?		✓		Perhaps give specific examples? Say that they read and grade homework and that they work many hours?
	Reason 3: Is the 3rd reason connected to the opinion and is it clear and convincing to the reader?	✓			Perhaps say that this educational need is not for all students?
	Evidence: Is there enough evidence to support the reason? Is the evidence explained?		✓		Instead of talking only about yourself, generalize to other students, too.
End	**Restate Opinion**: Did the writer restate the opinion?	✓			Perhaps say, "I strongly think that ..."
	Think: Did the writer leave the reader with a message to think about the topic?	½	½		Perhaps say that it would be a misfortune and that adults should consider children's needs.
Other!	Is there a title that clearly refers to the information of the paper?			✓	Effective! Add "July" too.
	Is the paper's tone appropriate for the audience? Was the writer respectful to the reader?		✓		Instead of kids say children and instead of no way say it would be inconsiderate?
	Are there clear and appropriate transition words used throughout the paper?	✓			You could improve this! Use transition words to introduce your reasons.

Philippakos, MacArthur, & Coker, 2015*, Developing Strategic Writers Through Genre Instruction: Recourses for grades 3 to 5, Guilford Press, Adapted with permission of Guilford Press.*

*Figure 4***.** Sample Completed Revision for Reason 2

Original:	**Revision**:
Teachers need to rest, too.	A second reason why schools should remain closed during June and July is that teachers also deserve to have a vacation and time away from school.

Later, students in small groups practice the same procedures. Grouping students can be a challenging task and teachers often ask us how to do this. We suggest that they form groups that vary in writing performance. Some students may be poor writers, but they can still express their thoughts verbally with clarity. Also, student interactions can better support students' understanding about the elements. Teachers could also differentiate instruction and work with a group of students that struggles significantly. During students' collaborative work, teachers give feedback on the application of the rubric, both on the scoring and on the clarity of the comments. It is very important that students are given multiple opportunities to practice how to give feedback and also receive feedback from their teacher on their work.

Independent practice. This would be the last stage of the training process. Students apply the evaluation rubric independently. This may extend to self-evaluation and peer review. For example, teachers could ask their students to meet and evaluate each other's work using the same genre-specific rubrics that they had previously used to practice learning about evaluation criteria for that specific genre.

Reflection

It is important for student growth that they have opportunities to reflect on the overall task and on their learning and carefully think about information they can transfer to other situations. For example, now that they know what the elements of persuasion are, what do they think that the elements of a cause-effect paper would be? These discussions could involve the whole class or they can be in small-groups. Students may also respond in journal entries and teachers could review them to address challenges that students face. Questions to lead those discussions/responses could be:

- What was helpful to you as a reader/evaluator and writer? Why? How did it help you?
- What can you use now? What can you use again in future tasks?)

Beyond Paper-Pencil Practice

The instruction and students' practice do not need to be limited to paper and pencil applications. Instead of limiting students' ability to participate by only providing one medium, the use of technology can enhance students' involvement and also improve their understanding. Technology and its applications could be especially important for diverse learners and learners who may struggle with transcription skills, who may lack motivation, and who may not be comfortable to orally express their thoughts.

Therefore, teachers could complete the modeling and collaborative practice via the use of Interactive boards and color code the identification of elements. In our practice we have also encouraged teachers to consider the use of Voicethread as a way for their students to evaluate papers and to conduct peer review. Voicethread is a web 2.0 tool that allows the provision of comments via audio, video, and text. Users can access a document, make marks on it (on different colors) and make comments. Teachers could ask students (e.g., in pairs) to each evaluate a paper and then each student to listen to the comments of their peer and contribute or add or initiate a discussion. This specific approach can support students who struggle with handwriting or spelling but have stronger speaking skills. Through technological affordances such as the ones provided by Voicethread, individuals can still express their thoughts by typing or talking and recording their comments. That way, they can still participate in class activated as equal members of the learning community. This same approach could be used in peer review.

Remember Nelson and Jordana? After Nelson and Jordana received instruction and practice, and after they revised their paper, they were asked to comment on the process they used

to revise their work and on what they had learned (data from Philippakos, 2012). Nelson's response shows growth in his understanding about text structure. He is able to identify the parts of a persuasive paper and comment on the importance of them. Also, his response demonstrates an increased sensitivity to the needs of the audience.

"Yes. I learned that I had, like, you have to add more details in your sentences and in the beginning, state what the person thinks, and state why the person thinks [that] and a conclusion. A juicy beginning because if you don't have a juicy beginning, people don't want to read it so you have to suck them into it. And the rubric helped me because it brought attention to things I never really looked for and it helped me because sometimes it [an element] wasn't really there and I wasn't looking for it.

Similarly, Jordana's response suggests a shift in her view of what matters in writing in general and persuasion in particular. Her response shows a thoughtful view of the need to write for readers, engage and intrigue them but also address their different ideas in an informative manner.

A really good persuasive essay is when you have 3 clear details and a hook at the beginning that grabs the readers' attention so they want to read on. And also some things that others think and why you say they are wrong and you are right. When Jordana was asked about the advice she would give to another student about how to revise, her response suggested a balance between surface-level changes and genre-related changes.

I would first see if he had any spelling errors. Then I'd read the beginning twice so I could understand the piece and then I'd tell him to correct any spelling errors and the beginning stuff too. Some people don't even give 3 details and if they do, sometimes [it is only] for the first detail. Sometimes they don't add details to their writing. And then with the other people, if he doesn't have that many things about the other people and telling why they're right and he's wrong, I'd ask to give examples. [Also,] don't use the same exact transition words because if you use the same words throughout, it gets boring!

Overall, both students seemed to benefit from this practice and this process changed their view of revision. Instead of treating revision as an editing task, they viewed it as a genre-related task and an opportunity to address the readers and their needs as those related to the rhetorical task.

Parting Words

Overall, the use of genre-specific criteria in evaluation and revision can be beneficial for students and their teachers. First, for students this practice can strengthen their understanding about writing purposes and increase their sensitivity about audience awareness (Common Core State Standards, 2010). Second, knowledge about discourse elements and genre can guide their comprehension and critical reading. Third, this approach can help them set their own goals for improvement, monitor their progress, and reflect on their learning – all important aspects of self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2001). Finally, if this approach is used in preparation for peer review, the use of evaluation criteria can guide students' comments so students can have targeted discussions. For teachers this practice can better guide their comments during conferences. Also, they can use the same criteria to develop their own grades. That way they will be better able to communicate with students and students will be better able to understand their suggestions.

Revision is a challenging task (Fitzgerald, 1987) but one that is necessary for writers to develop in order to effectively communicate with readers. The use of genre-specific evaluation

criteria can improve their revision practices. Most importantly, though, it can promote students' independence - making them strategic, self-regulated writers.

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