

Using a Four-point Scaled Writing Rubric: Improving the Quantity and the Quality of the Writing in a First Grade Specialized 8:1:1 Classroom.

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Abstract

Educators today are faced with learning to implement the Common Core Standards in Language Arts and Math. Administrators are requiring grade level general education teachers/special education teachers to meet in Private Learning Communities in order to discuss the best ways to implement the CCS as well as to discuss best practices for writing instruction through close analysis of student writing. Research suggests that students use both cognitive and social processes when composing a writing piece (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006). Therefore, this study evaluates the importance of first using the social cultural writing process in order to enhance the cognitive writing process of students before they responded to a writing prompt. The study involved administering a journal entry pre test, post-test, and final test over a four-week time period to eight first grade special education students in a specialized classroom. The results were calculated, analyzed, and conclusions/implications were recorded.

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Currently, in forty-five states and three U.S. territories (National Governors Association Center for the Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2012) teachers are struggling to adapt to the latest trend in U.S. education of implementing the Common Core Standards in reading and writing instruction while still implementing their prospective state content standards. Since the establishment of No Child Left Behind in 2001 and the importance of schools meeting their adequate yearly progress on state standardized achievement tests, efficient and effective teaching strategies for writing instruction has become extremely important to educators. McCarthy (2008) found some teachers were abandoning their writing programs in order to spend more time preparing for state tests. Improving the quantity and quality of students' writing is very important in the current "high stakes" testing climate of education today while maintaining a teaching practice that concentrates on creating critically thinking students versus teaching students to just be proficient or advanced standardized test takers. Teachers need to learn how to balance preparing students for annual state achievement tests as well as preparing students to function and compete in a rapidly evolving technologically based global economy.

Furthermore, special education teachers need to discover efficient and effective ways to help students with special needs to gain access to the common core curriculum, which includes learning to express themselves through writing. Concurrently, the goal of the special educator is to help students with special needs through accommodations or adaptations to be able to

communicate in order to be proficient self-advocators through both verbal and written expression.

Unlike the current studies that focus on the role of active memory in writing, the efficacy of free-writing, and the use of activity theory to understand the context of writing (MacArthur, 2006) seminal studies explored the question: What is writing? Nystrand (2006) explained that the first studies on writing described how instruction needed to move from what a writing product must look like to instruction influenced by observation results and research findings. Nystrand (2006) credits the shift from the emphasis on what a writing piece must look like to the dependency on research to inform teaching strategies for writing instruction on two significant events in the collegiate world: the Dartmouth Seminar, and the Cambridge Cognitive Revolution at MIT and at Harvard.

The Dartmouth Seminar was conducted in order to reform the teaching of English at Dartmouth College. The participants in the seminar believed that competent writing had less to do with reading instruction, writing instruction, and teaching strategies and more to do with basic insights about language processes and how a person learns. This was a considerable shift in the approach of skills based writing instruction to writing instruction based on simple research about an individual's way of learning and how the mind processes information (Nystrand, 2006).

Eventually, the resulting empirical research that came from the Cambridge Cognitive Revolution at MIT and Harvard in the 1960s and Shaughnessy's (1977) study divided the definition of writing into two different schools of thought; one approach defined writing as a cognitive process and the other defined writing as a social cultural process.

The Cognitive Process of Writing

One of the main contributors of the cognitive process of writing along with Piaget (1952) was Chomsky (1957, 1966, 1968). Chomsky's theory of language acquisition is based on the belief that children are biologically prewired to learn language at certain developmental milestones and in a certain pattern (Santrock, 1999) through the Language Acquisition Device. The LAD is a biological device that helps a child to discern certain language rules and patterns such as identifying phonemes, recognizing sentence structure, and processing the meaning of word placement in a sentence (Santrock, 1999). Chomsky's (1957, 1966, 1968) theory is based on the predictable regularity of language milestones "across languages and cultures and biological substrates for language, and evidence that children create language even in the absence of well-formed input" (Santrock, 1999, p. 159). In other words, it is evidenced that children acquire language according to set milestones across different cultures and languages.

Nystrand (2006) credits Emig's (1971) study in which she evaluates the writing processes of Chicago area seniors, as being the first influential study establishing the cognitive element of writing, which created the writing process that teachers use for instruction in their classrooms today. Emig's (1971) study defined the stages of writing as nature of stimuli, prewriting and planning, starting, and composing aloud (as cited in Nystrand, 2006). He also credits Hayes and Flowers's (1980 & 1996) studies as also profoundly influencing the teaching of the writing process in the classrooms of today through their stages of writing which included planning,

translating, reviewing, and mentoring a part of each stage (as cited in MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006). Currently, educators teach the stages of writing, which are planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing using the Writers Workshop Model (Calkins, 1994).

Social Cultural Writing Theory

By way of, the social approach was born from multiple studies that challenged Flowers and Hayes's (1980 & 1996) findings. An explosion of studies in the 1980s began to explore the possibility that the writing process was not a solitary struggle with individual thought, but an innately social and interactive process in which a person's cultural discourse defines a person's reason for engaging in the writing process (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006, p.20). Shaughnessy's (1977) study on the analysis of logic and errors in 4,000 New York City College students' admissions essays is considered the first study according to Nystrand (2006) to acknowledge writing as being a social act. Shaughnessy (1977) concluded that college students' writing should not be judged by a professor as a lack of cognition or a lack of collegiate academic language on the students' part, but should be judged for the student's ability to reason from his or her cultural lens. Nystrand (2006) further concludes that the increase in the diversity of postsecondary students attending city colleges, because of opened enrollment, further drove the need for empirical research on writing as a social act.

The social cultural prospective of proficient writers as mentors (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006) is influenced by Vygotsky's (1962) theory of development that states children actively construct their knowledge through a cultural lens (Santrock, 1999). Vygotsky's (1962) theory of development introduces the term Zone of Proximal Development that defines that children can learn tasks beyond their ability with the guidance and assistance of teachers or peers (Santrock, 1999). In other words, a student learns the process of writing not only from cognitive processes occurring in his or her own brain as Piaget (1952) and Chomsky (1957, 1966, 1968) suggest, but also from a teacher that scaffolds how an individual participates in the writing process. In a social cultural writing process model, the teacher creates many interactive, collaborative and guided writing opportunities to clearly model the language of writing through a shared writing experience with students (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006).

Vygotsky's (1962) theory further describes how a child's ZPD is elevated when a teacher provides scaffolding for a student until he or she can independently complete a task. The social cultural model of writing instruction asserts that a teacher's role is to be the knowledgeable person that creates guided practice teaching strategies when there is a need to model new writing conventions or provide explicit instruction. During explicit instruction, the instructor also invokes independent student practice moments by alternating the teacher's role with the students' role in order to allow students to assume increasing ownership of the writing process (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). The use of writing rubrics is one way a teacher can try to balance guided teaching practice with independent student practice therefore facilitating students to work within their ZPD.

Use of a Rubric in the Writing Process

Traditionally elementary school teachers use a check list as a rubric (see Appendix A, p. 25) in order to create the guided teaching and independent student practice approach to ensure that their students are working within their individual ZPD during the writing process. Andrade, Du, and Wang (2008) concluded that rubrics provide an indirect learning advantage after reviewing previous studies on the use of a rubric with students' writing assignments and students' responses to the use of a rubric. In their study of elementary school students that used model papers, whole group generated criteria for a rubric and use of a rubric for self-assessment for first draft papers, these investigators found a statistically significant positive correlation between the use of rubrics and students' essay scores (Andrade, Du, & Wang, 2008). Therefore using rubrics can have both have an indirect and direct affect on the quantity and quality of young students' writing.

Current studies on self-regulatory strategies practiced during the writing process also support the use of rubrics as a means to set realistically achievable goals, concentrating on writing for mastery of individual writing needs, and for improving the quality of a student's writing (Brunstein & Glaser, 2011; Kitsantas, Steen, & Huie, 2009; Santangelo, Harris, & Graham, 2008).

Gabriele (2007) suggested that low achieving students given learning goals would accept the goal in order to improve their ability towards understanding and achieving a learning objective, because they increase their effort towards mastery of the learning objective through applying more sophisticated learning strategies as well as more self monitoring and evaluating understanding while learning with a peer. Gabriele's (2007) study focused on the constructive activity of low achieving fourth and fifth grade students assigned learning goals versus performance goals in dyad groups solving a math problem. He found that while learning with a peer on a learning goal, which is a social cultural model, students independently increased their cognitive strategies towards mastery of a learning goal, which is the cognitive model for writing.

Since this investigator was working in a day treatment program in an urban setting, she designed the study to address the cultural deficit of academic language experienced in the home by the special education students (Delpit, 2006; Dyson, 1993; Gee, 1990; Heath 2009; & Valdez, 1996). This author implemented oral language (Cazden, 2001; Lindfords, 2008) practice with her students in order to help the study subjects understand how to formulate a response to a journal entry by using the proper academic language and by using a complete sentence. Based on Gabriele's (2007) recommendation, Cazden's study (2001), and Lindford's (2008) analysis of Vygotsky's (1986) study, this researcher individually scaffolded students by having them orally practice their responses to the writing prompt before they responded independently in their journals. Therefore the social-cultural model was implemented prior to the subjects having to independently use cognitive strategies to construct a written response in their journal.

This writer was able to create a dyad much like Gabriele's (2007) study in which a more proficient writer was able to help a less proficient writer access more sophisticated cognitive strategies in order to address a writing prompt. In addition, the less sophisticated writer became a more self-regulated writer motivated to use a rubric to monitor his or her writing. In other words, the social-cultural model of writing influenced the cognitive writing process to allow the subjects of this study to work within their ZPD.

Purpose

The purpose of this quasi experimental study was to determine if using a four-point writing rubric would improve the quantity and quality of the journal entries in a first grade specialized 8:1:1 classroom at a special school as opposed to using an elementary school checklist rubric of writing objectives.

According to Wharton-McDonald (2001), exemplary teachers create explicit writing instruction that focused on teaching students to write for an audience as well as teach students specific elements needed in order to create genre centered writing pieces. She also found that exemplary teachers scaffolded student learning while teaching them to monitor their own progress. Her further findings concluded that through self-monitoring with a checklist rubric, at-risk first grade writers were able to generate a page of coherent text (Wharton-McDonald, 2001). The teachers in Wharton-McDonald's (2001) study created well-defined student writing objectives. Similarly, Fountas and Pinnell (2001) stated it is important to create a classroom environment in which predictability and organization allows students to deal with the daily flux of classroom routines, which in turn presents students with clear expectations for what they need to accomplish. The predictability, organization and clearly defined expectations will allow students the ability to plan with confidence (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001).

Through a four-point writing rubric, this researcher tried to create a predictable and organized daily writing routine with explicit writing objectives in order to try to increase the quantity and quality of her special education first grade students' journal entries.

The question explored by this study was whether writing objectives defined on a four-point scaled writing rubric would increase the quantity and quality of first grade students' journal entries as opposed to using writing objectives defined on a checklist rubric would improve the quantity and quality of first graders' journal entries. Next, this researcher will present the method used in order to create this fluctuating combination of social cultural writing instruction with the cognitive processes writing approach.

Method

Participants

This research project was conducted in a first grade 8:1:1 specialized classroom at a private agency day-treatment program for elementary school students in an urban school setting. Six boys and two girls populated the specialized classroom. The student population of the specialized classroom included three African Americans, four Latinos, and one Croat student. The Latino students each spoke fluent English and had parents/guardians that spoke both fluent English and Spanish. The researcher was the students' kindergarten teacher as well as their current first grade teacher. The students were told that the checklist rubric and the four-point scaled rubric were being used in order to help them learn how to write a response to a journal prompt. The researcher's goal for this study was to determine if using a four-point rubric instead of a

traditional checklist rubric would improve the quantity and the quality of first grade special education students' journal entries.

Measures

This researcher used two writing rubrics based on the Common Core Standards for first grade. First, this researcher used a checklist rubric for the non-treatment phase of the study. Second, this researcher redeveloped the checklist rubric into a four-point scaled writing rubric for the treatment phase of the study. This researcher redeveloped the checklist rubric in order to explore if writing objectives defined on a four-point scaled writing rubric would increase the quantity and quality of first grade special education students' journal entries as opposed to using writing objectives defined on a checklist rubric. This researcher explored this question because this researcher wanted to inquire if a checklist rubric was adequate enough to help young special education students increase the quantity and quality of their writing.

Procedure

For this study, a pre-journal entry test was administered on the first day of the study. The pre-journal entry test was scored with a four-point scale-writing rubric (see Appendix B, p. 26) and the results were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet. After the pre-journal entry test was marked, an elementary school checklist rubric of writing objectives (see Appendix A, p. 25) was used for the two-week non-treatment phase of the study in order to teach the first grade students the writing objectives for a journal entry. The daily journal entries were evaluated with the same four-point scale rubric used to assess the pre-journal entry test. The results were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.

In the daily writing routine for the non-treatment phase of the study, the students used open-ended writing prompts such as "The park is . . .?" As a group activity, the students and this researcher orally discussed how a person could complete the open-ended writing prompt (Cazden, 2001; Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006; Linford, 2008). After this researcher and the students orally discussed how to complete the open-ended writing prompt, this researcher had the students state how they found words in the room in order to complete their writing prompts. The students identified that they found words in the room by using the word wall, they formed words using the letter charts (vowel teams, diagraphs, diphthongs, etc.) from the sounds they knew, and they asked for help with segmenting word sounds from this investigator or the paraprofessionals. (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006). The students then independently completed their writing journal entries (Gabriele, 2007).

After the students completed their daily journal entries, this author and the paraprofessionals reviewed the journal entries with the students using the checklist list rubric (see Appendix A, p. 40). A writing goal for each student was established at the end of the first journal writing session from one of the items on the checklist rubric. The goal was reviewed each day (Gabriele, 2007). If the student achieved the journal entry-writing goal, a new journal entry-writing goal was set for the student from the list rubric.

Then, after the two weeks of instruction were completed for the non-treatment phase of the study, a post journal entry test was administered and scored with the four-point scale rubric. The results of the post journal entry test were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet in order to compare and contrast test results from the pre-journal test with the post journal test.

During the treatment phase of the study, the same four-point scale-writing rubric that was used to score the first grade students' journal entries in the non-treatment phase of the study was used to teach the first graders the writing objectives for a journal entry. The same writing routine for instruction from the two-week non-treatment phase of the study was used in the two-week treatment phase of the study. The four-point scaled writing rubric was used in order to evaluate the students' journal entries as well as create writing goals for the students. After two weeks of instruction, a final journal entry test was administered. The final journal entry tests were evaluated with the four-point scale-writing rubric and the results of the tests were recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.

When the four week study was completed, the results of the pre-journal entry test, the post journal entry test, and the final journal entry test were analyzed to see if there was a statistically significant increase in student writing quantity and quality from the pre-journal writing test to the final-journal entry writing test.

Analysis of Data

For this study this researcher used a *t* test to analyze the pre-test and the final test scores to determine if using a four point rubric had a statistically significant effect relative to the improvement of the writing products of first grade students. Next, the author will present the results from the data, which was collected from the pretest, post-test, and the final test.

Results

Table 1 below represents the raw scores on the writing prompt test.

Students	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Final Test
#1	4	4	4
#2	4	Absent	4
#3	1	1	0 (Absent)
#4	4	0 (Counseling)	0 (Counseling)
#5	1	1	1
#6	1	1	1
#7	1	4	4
#8	4	Absent	1
Totals	20	11	15
Mean	2.5	1.375	1.875

Table 1. Writing Prompt Raw Scores

Table 1 reflects that the students' scores were either 4 which indicates the students completed most of the writing objectives independently or the students' scores were a 1 which indicates the students did not complete the writing objectives independently.

First, the mean was calculated for all of the tests. Table 1 indicates a decrease from the pre-test to the post-test (-1.125). The table reveals a repeated pattern of scores for students 1, 3, 5, & 6 and an improved score of only student 7. Furthermore, the numbers indicate there was a decrease in the mean (-0.625) from the post-test to the final test.

Finally, the data also indicates a decrease in the mean (-0.15625) from the pre-test to the final test Table 1 also indicates that only student number seven improved his or her score from the pre-test to the post-test.

The final test scores (M= 2.5, N= 8) did not produce a statistical significant positive result in the difference between the mean scores of the pre-test to the post-test (M=1.875, N= 8).

Table 2 lists the statistical data analyzed from the three tests. The table below displays the mean, variance, observations, Hypothesized Mean Difference, df, the t Stat, the t Critical one-tail, and the t Critical two-tail.

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	2.5	1.875
Variance	2.571428571	3.267857143
Observations	8	8
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	0
df	14	
t Stat	0.731551909	
P(T,=t) one-tail	0.238254838	
t Critical one-tail	1.761310136	
P(T,=t) two-tail	0.476509676	
t Critical two-tail	2.144786688	


Table 2. T-test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

This researcher will further explain the findings of this study by examining the student work samples of the pre-test and the post-test, which are subsequently provided.

Students Work Samples

Student 1 – Pre-test and Pre-Test Rubric

On the computer,
 I Palyscix and vnot,
 X-MAN.



Rubric	4 - Excellent	3 - Good	2 - Satisfactory	1 - Unsatisfactory
I will put the date on my paper.	I independently wrote the date on my paper.	I wrote the date on my paper with some assistance.	I wrote the date on my paper with assistance.	I did not write the date on my paper.
I will create a picture that matches my writing.	I independently created a matching picture.	I created a matching picture with some assistance.	I created a matching picture with assistance.	I did not create a matching picture.
I will write two or three sentences about my picture.	I wrote 3 or more sentences.	I wrote three sentences.	I wrote two sentences.	I wrote one sentence.
I began each sentence with an uppercase letter.	I independently started my sentence with an uppercase letter.	With some assistance, I started my sentence with an uppercase letter.	With assistance, I started my sentence with an uppercase letter.	I did not start my sentence with a capital letter.
I ended my sentences with a period, question mark or exclamation point.	I independently ended my sentence with the proper punctuation.	With some assistance, I ended my sentence with the proper punctuation.	With assistance, I ended my sentence with the proper punctuation.	I did not end my sentences with the proper punctuation.
I have space between my words.	I independently put space between my words.	With some assistance, I put space between my words.	With assistance, I put space between my words.	I did not put space between my words.
I used the word wall to help with my spelling.	I independently used the word wall in order to spell words.	With some assistance, I used the word wall in order to spell words.	With assistance, I used the word wall in order to spell words.	I did not use the word wall.
I wrote neatly with all words touching the lines.	I independently wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	With some assistance, I wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	With some assistance, I wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	I did not write neatly with the words touching the lines.
I spelled words using the sounds I that know	I independently spelled words using the sounds that I know.	With some assistance, I spelled words using the sounds I that know.	With assistance, I spelled words using the sounds that I know.	I did not spell words with the sounds that I know.
I read what I wrote to an adult.	I independently read what I wrote to an adult.	With some assistance, I read what I wrote to an adult.	With assistance, I read what I wrote to an adult.	I did not read what I wrote to an adult.

Student 1 - Final Test and Final Test Rubric

Final Test
①

My foveit games is,
Bybat by b.

Final Test #1

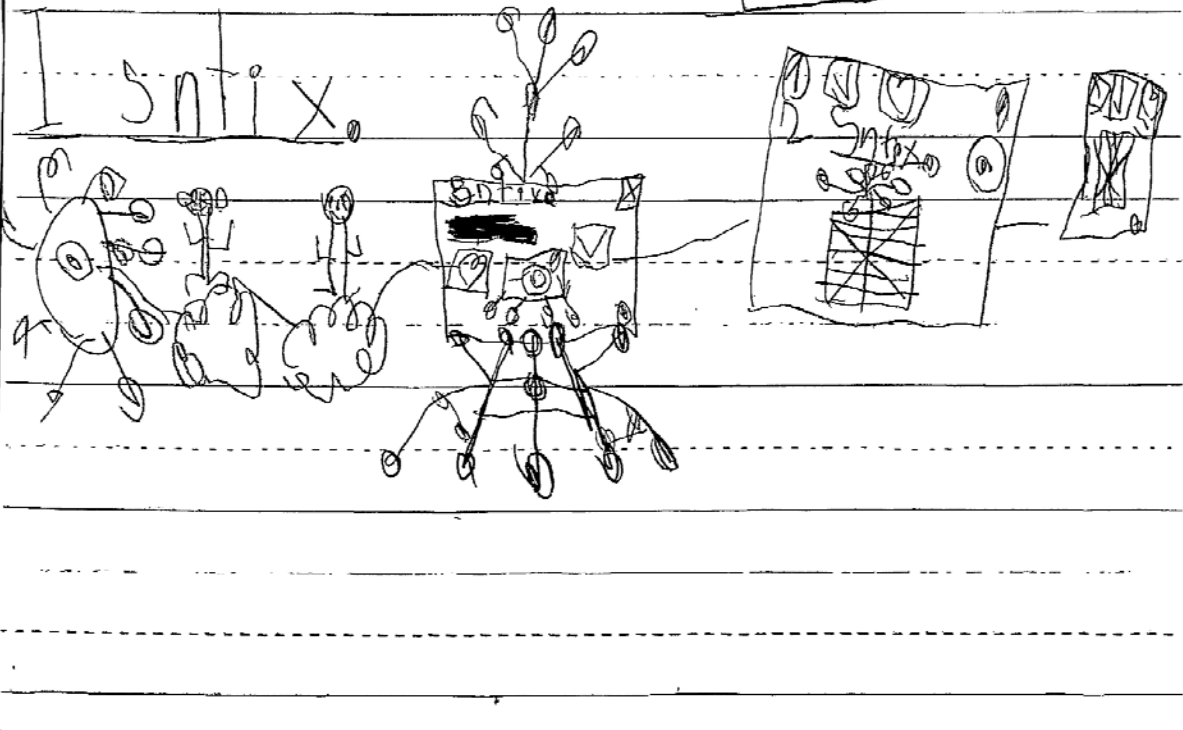
Rubric	4 - Excellent	3 - Good	2 - Satisfactory	1 - Unsatisfactory
I will put the date on my paper.	I independently wrote the date on my paper.	I wrote the date on my paper with some assistance.	I wrote the date on my paper with assistance.	I did not write the date on my paper.
I will create a picture that matches my writing.	I independently created a matching picture.	I created a matching picture with some assistance.	I created a matching picture with assistance.	I did not create a matching picture.
I will write two or three sentences about my picture.	I wrote 3 or more sentences.	I wrote three sentences.	I wrote two sentences.	I wrote one sentence.
I began each sentence with an uppercase letter.	I independently started my sentence with an uppercase letter.	With some assistance, I started my sentence with an uppercase letter.	With assistance, I started my sentence with an uppercase letter.	I did not start my sentence with a capital letter.
I ended my sentences with a period, question mark or exclamation point.	I independently ended my sentence with the proper punctuation.	With some assistance, I ended my sentence with the proper punctuation.	With assistance, I ended my sentence with the proper punctuation.	I did not end my sentences with the proper punctuation.
I have space between my words.	I independently put space between my words.	With some assistance I put space between my words.	With assistance, I put space between my words.	I did not put space between my words.
I used the word wall to help with my spelling.	I independently used the word wall in order to spell words.	With some assistance, I used the word wall in order to spell words.	With assistance, I used the word wall in order to spell words.	I did not use the word wall.
I wrote neatly with all words touching the lines.	I independently wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	With some assistance, I wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	With some assistance, I wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	I did not write neatly with the words touching the lines.
I spelled words using the sounds I that know.	I independently spelled words using the sounds that I know.	With some assistance, I spelled words using the sounds I that know.	With assistance, I spelled words using the sounds that I know.	I did not spell words with the sounds that I know.
I read what I wrote to an adult.	I independently read what I wrote to an adult.	With some assistance, I read what I wrote to an adult.	With assistance, I read what I wrote to an adult.	I did not read what I wrote to an adult.

Student one received the same score on his Pre-test as he did on his Final Test, which indicates that the rubric was not able to measure the improvement in the student's written response to the journal entry question about the computer. Most students received the same score on their pre-test and their final test; with some students receiving improved scores because of better penmanship or spelling.

Student one learned from the pre-test to the final test how to independently respond to the journal entry prompt by generating a sentence to answer the question rather than just complete the given open ended journal entry prompt. This indicates a significant growth in the quality of the student's response.

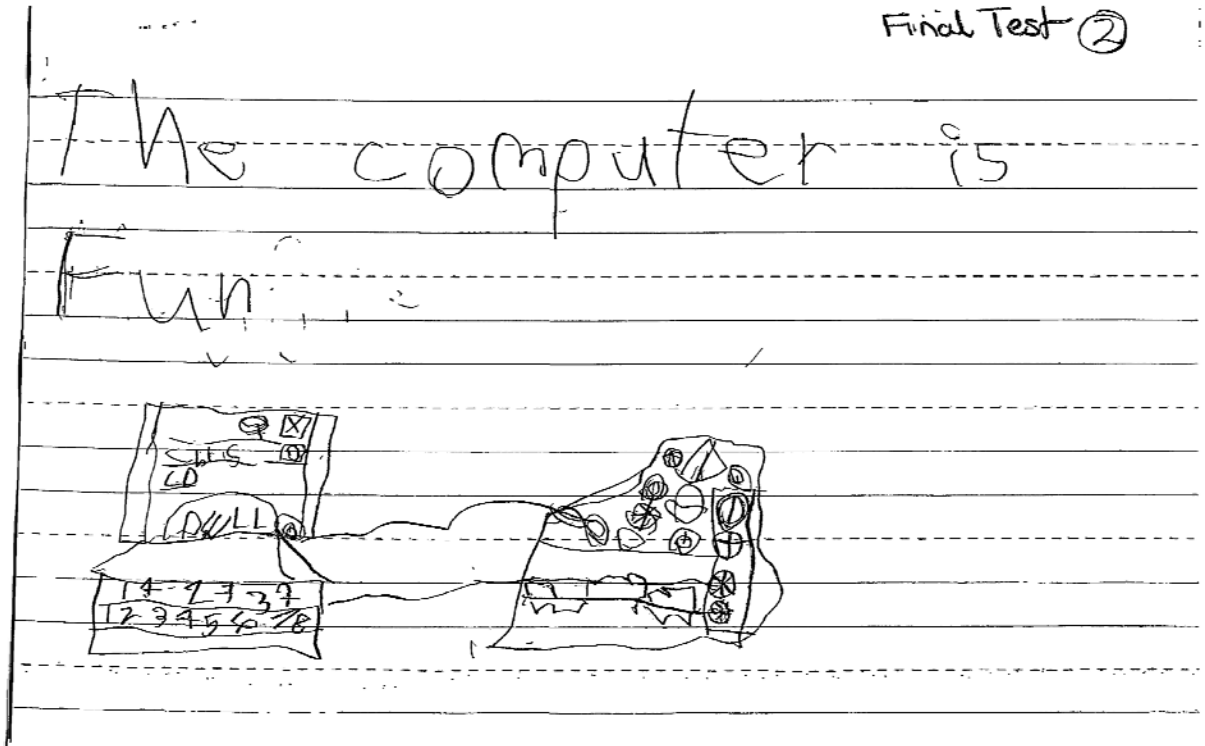
Student 2 - Pre test

On the computer I ②



Student 2 – Final Test

Final Test ②



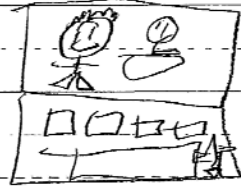
Student two moved from independently generating an incomplete sentence to the open-ended journal prompt question to writing a complete sentence from the open-ended writing prompt.

Student 7 – Pre-test

On the computer I play razz kiz

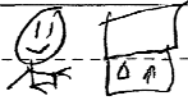
On the computer I play incretbl

On the computer I play pinball



Student 7 – Final Test

4/2/12 ①
The computer is fun. The computer
is cool. Because I like to play
jump start 1 grad



Student seven was able to make the most improvement in the quantity and the quality of his writing. He was able to write three unrelated complete sentences to answer the open-ended writing prompt on the pre-test. On the final test, he was able to write three related sentence on the topic of the computer.

Discussion

The p value is 0.476509676 therefore this research must accept the null hypothesis and conclude that there is not a statistically significant difference between the means of the pre-test scores and the final test scores. The use of a four-point rubric versus a list rubric did not appear to help improve the quantity and quality of the writing of first grade students in a specialized 8:1:1 class.

After analyzing the student pre-test and final test work samples, it is clear that students made some improvements in their writing, but based on the declining scores on the students' post-tests and final tests, the improvement in the students' writing does not appear to be due to the use of the four point rubric. This researcher's students were able to move from responding to an open-ended writing prompt to answering a question in their journal. The students learned how to use the words in a question-writing prompt in order to formulate an answer in their journal during the treatment phase of the study.

Student one and student seven made the most progress on answering the open ended writing prompt from the pre-test to the post test by learning to generate an answer sentence independently of the open ended writing prompt; as well as by responding to the prompt with a multiple sentences answer that stayed on topic. Student two made progress by learning to write a response in a complete sentence. Student three was able to improve by generating a response in a complete sentence with better penmanship. Student five was able to show improvement in the quantity of her writing response even though the response was not formatted in complete sentences. Student six was able to learn to write a complete sentence from an open ended writing prompt. Student eight was able to attempt to generate a complete sentence independently of the opened ended writing prompt much like student one was able to achieve (see Student 1 Work Sample, p. 14).

Despite having to accept the null hypothesis relative to the efficacy of the intervention, the students' writing did improve over the course of this study. This author found that working in the teacher student or teacher paraprofessional dyad did create an environment that allowed students guided practice in a social cultural context that inspired the students to use a self-monitoring approach and advanced cognitive strategies in order to achieve the learning goal. Student one's work showed that the student used self-monitoring to independently use more sophisticated cognitive strategies to master the learning goal of responding to a writing prompt by generating a response with a sentence using the appropriate words for the response rather than just reformulating the words of the prompt. In other words, this researcher did replicate some of the findings in Gabriele's (2007) study on low achieving students working in a dyad in order to achieve a learning goal.

Limitations

Limitations of this study were the small sample size, time constraints, student absences due to illness or crisis intervention, and the lack of the use of a teacher rubric in order to grade the pre-test, post-test, and the final test. The way the four-point rubric was written was also a limitation to this study. Students only received four points or one point based on whether they independently completed the writing objective or did not independently complete the writing

objectives. The students were not given partial credit for improvements made in their writing. The rubric did not allow for partial credit for student improvement in their writing.

Implications/Further Research

One of the implications of using a four point rubric with first grade special education students in an urban setting is that it does appear to promote a learning advantage for writing instruction despite the lack of a statistically significant difference between means of the pre-test and final test (Andrade, Du, and Wang, 2008). The student improvement in writing may be due to the consistent repetitive morning journal writing routine. Additionally, whole group oral practice prior to writing a response to the prompt, during the treatment phase of the study, may have also affected the students' ability to respond to the open ended prompt with a complete sentence or with an independently generated sentence. Interactive oral practice prior to the writing of the journal prompt may have had a larger affect on the students' journal responses than the rubrics. Roth and Guinee (2011) found that interactive writing with first grade students improved their independent writing. The results of this study may imply that interactive oral practice may positively impact first graders' independent writing, as does interactive writing.

The findings of this study suggest that a rubric may allow less sophisticated, but yet self regulated writers to monitor their writing. Likewise, the author found that through engaging the less proficient writer in the social cultural writing process, through verbal rehearsal prior to answering the journal entry in writing, may have permitted the less sophisticated writer access to more complex cognitive strategies to address the prompt. In addition, the investigator found that teachers should use a separate rubric to assess students' writing development as opposed to evaluating their writing with the same rubric the students use as a guideline to construct their response.

This author's recommendation for further research is to repeat this study with a redesigned list rubric and a redesigned four-point rubric that allows a student to receive a score of one, two, three, or four as well as an added third rubric used only by the teacher to grade the pre-test, post-test, and final test. The third rubric should contain extensive elements, which can definitively measure improvement in the quantity and quality of the students' journal writing responses. The rubric should use the curriculum-based measures of beginning writing as identified by McMaster, Du, Yeo, Deno, Parker, and Ellis (2011).

This writer recommends a study design that has a treatment group in which the students verbally practice a journal prompt response prior to completing the writing prompt. The control group should also use a four-point rubric in order help the participants self regulate their journal entries. The study should also contain a control group in which students are only allowed to use a four-point rubric as a guideline for their written response to a journal prompt.

A third suggestion relative to a related study is to include a student questionnaire after the pre-test, the post-test, and the final test by both the control group and the treatment group to further investigate if the oral practice provided before the students responded to the writing prompt was beneficial to the treatment group participants. With this design the researcher may be able to

discern whether the oral practice had a greater effect on the improvement of the students' writing as compared with the use of a rubric.

After searching the NIH Computerized Retrieval of Scientific Projects database using the studies which explicitly had writing in the title or abstract, Miller & McCradle (2010) concluded that future research needed to be conducted that explored the relationship between writing development and its relationship to oral language among young students, especially those that struggle with writing as well as ESL students. Therefore, a study designed to measure the affect of verbally practice to writing a journal prompt response would be very timely and relevant.

After analyzing the data of this study, the author found a separate teacher's evaluating rubric is necessary to more accurately assess a student's writing for authentic development. The rubric should evaluate if the students are verbally rehearsing their journal responses with others or independently, prior to writing, as well as evaluate if the scholars are using more sophisticated cognitive strategies during the creation of their responses. Finally, the rubric should assess if the writer is addressing the normal elements of responding to a journal entry (Appendix B, 26). Through a rubric of this type an educator will more accurately evaluate students' writing development therefore precisely identify students' individual writing needs, which in turn allows an instructor to more accurately make informed decisions for writing instruction (Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin, & Schwarcz, 2010).

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About the Author

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Appendix A

Journal Entry List Rubric

_____ **I will put the date on my paper**

_____ **I will write two or three sentences**

_____ **I will create a picture that matches writing**

_____ **I began each sentence with an uppercase letter.**

_____ **I ended my sentences with a period, question mark or exclamation point.**

_____ **I have space between my words**

_____ **I used the word wall to help with my spelling**

_____ **I wrote neatly with all words touching the lines.**

_____ **I will spell words using the sounds I know**

_____ **I read what I wrote to an adult.**

Appendix B

<u>Rubric</u>	<u>4 - Excellent</u>	<u>3- Good</u>	<u>2- Satisfactory</u>	<u>1 - Unsatisfactory</u>
I will put the date on my paper.	I independently wrote the date on my paper.	I wrote the date on my paper with some assistance.	I wrote the date on my paper with assistance.	I did not write the date on my paper.
I will create a picture that matches my writing.	I independently created a matching picture.	I created a matching picture with some assistance.	I created a matching picture with assistance.	I did not create a matching picture.
I will write two or three sentences about my picture.	I wrote 3 or more sentences.	I wrote three sentences.	I wrote two sentences.	I wrote one sentence.

I began each sentence with an uppercase letter.	I independently started my sentence with an uppercase letter.	With some assistance, I started my sentence with an uppercase letter	With assistance, I started my sentence with an uppercase letter	I did not start my sentence with a capital letter.
I ended my sentences with a period, question mark or exclamation point.	I independently ended my sentence with the proper punctuation.	With some assistance. I ended my sentence with the proper punctuation	With assistance, I ended my sentence with the proper punctuation	I did not end my sentences with the proper punctuation.
I have space between my words.	I independently put space between my words.	With some assistance I put space between my words.	With assistance. I put space between my words	I did not put space between my words.
I used the word wall to help with my spelling.	I independently used the word wall in order to spell words	With some assistance, I used the word wall in order to spell words	With assistance, I used the word wall in order to spell words.	I did not use the word wall.

I wrote neatly with all words touching the lines.	I independently wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	With some assistance, I wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	With some assistance, I wrote neatly with the words touching the lines.	I did not write neatly with the words touching the lines.
I spelled words using the sounds I that know	I independently spelled words using the sounds that I know	With some assistance, I spelled words using the sounds I that know	With assistance, I spelled words using the sounds that I know	I did not spell words with the sounds that I know.
I read what I wrote to an adult.	I independently read what I wrote to an adult	With some assistance, I read what I wrote to an adult	With assistance, I read what I wrote to an adult.	I did not read what I wrote to an adult.