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Cultivating Metacognitive Growth: Teacher-student Rubric Co-construction for Enhanced College Writing Instruction

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Overview

Rubrics, often perceived as scoring devices, are pivotal in assessing students' writing proficiency. Effectively utilizing rubrics can improve grading efficiency and consistency, guiding students in reflecting on their learning and comprehending the teacher's feedback. Although rubrics are commonly used in writing classrooms, students may find them unclear as they are typically constructed solely by teachers or other evaluators. Consequently, students may struggle with understanding the content of a rubric and rarely have opportunities to share their input in constructing it, which undermines the potential of using rubrics as teaching and learning tools.

Can any approach improve the transparency of the rubric while also including student voice in its creation? My answer is yes: implementing teacher-student rubric co-construction as a formative assessment activity can address these concerns. This approach enhances the clarity of learning expectations by involving students in the creation of criteria through communication and negotiation with teachers. As Paul Black explained, formative assessment involves "Formulating aims, Planning activities, Implementation, Review of the learning achieved, and Summing up" (4–5). Panadero and Jonsson, in their review of the formative use of rubrics in classrooms, pointed out its effect of supporting students' metacognitive development in learning. They pointed out that engaging students in rubric construction helps them set personal and realistic learning goals and aids in monitoring and regulating their learning progress

through active participation in classroom assessments. Further evidence from Zhang and Weng's implementation in an ESL context shows that combining this activity with self-assessment and peer assessment enables students to generate and utilize feedback from themselves and peers, thus supporting their future writing (7).

My experiences with applying this activity span from first-year writing courses to English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. Key lessons learned from the implementation include the importance of adapting rather than merely adopting the activity. Our students come to the task with diverse levels of familiarity with rubrics and varied understandings of writing genres, which impact the activity's effectiveness. Thus, the important role of teacher facilitation and guidance cannot be overstated.

Time Commitment

1-2 class sessions

Materials

Students should bring a pen and paper to write down their discussion notes on the handout. They should also bring their notes from reading the sample papers to help them describe the criteria they used for assessing the qualities of the sample papers.

Teachers should prepare three student writing samples that demonstrate high, mid, and low levels of performance. These writing samples should be assigned as homework in the previous class session.

Activity Process

- Prior to creating the rubric, students will be assigned sample writings to read as homework. In the homework, the teacher prompts students to evaluate which samples demonstrate high, medium, or low levels of performance. Students will be

asked to take notes explaining their evaluations, as well as identifying the strengths and weaknesses found through analyzing the samples.

- During the rubric co-construction session, the teacher will ask students to form 4 to 5 small groups. In the first 10 to 15 minutes, each group will be asked to share their assessment of sample writings. Students will discuss the reasons for their evaluations, and each group will write down 5-8 strengths and weaknesses they found from these samples on a handout.
- In the next 30-40 minutes, ask students to share their lists of strengths and weaknesses by writing them on the blackboard. This will allow the entire class to review and discuss the group notes together.
- Following the previous step, students will be asked to categorize the lists into criteria, and teachers will give students some guidance on detecting the duplicated information or some obvious unclear descriptions.
- Later, students and the teacher will condense the duplicated details, categorizing the lists of strengths as “Exemplary” and weaknesses as “Unacceptable”. Once the entire class has reached a consensus on these two levels in the preliminary version of the rubric, the teacher could proceed to write the descriptions for the “Good” and “Average” performance levels of the rubric after the class.
- After class, the teacher finalizes the rubric and shares it with students via email or LMS. The teacher also reminds students to note down their questions about the rubric.
- At the beginning of the second session, the teacher could hold a brief Q&A session to answer students’ questions about the co-constructed rubric.

- In the next 10 to 15 minutes, ask students to assign percentages or points to each criterion and level of performance. The teacher will ask students to explain why certain criteria are worth of higher percentage in grading or more points, and provides necessary suggestions or guidance based on the understanding of the writing assignment shared with the entire class.

Learning Outcomes

Students engaging in this activity/assignment will:

- Develop clear expectations of the assignment by constructing rubric criteria and engaging in dialogue with the teacher.
- Enhance metacognitive skills by engaging students through critical reading analysis and self/peer assessment by using the co-constructed rubric.
- Prompt reflections on writing progress through reoccurring peer-to-peer and student-to-teacher discussions.
- Foster peer feedback generation and uptake.
- Prompt writing knowledge transfer to future writing tasks.

Learning Accommodations

- The teacher should let students know that they will use the co-constructed rubric to give feedback. Teachers may also create self-assessment or peer assessment activities based on the rubric's criteria to help students reflect on their writing metacognitively.
- To accommodate various learning needs, the activity can be presented in both face-to-face and online classes, allowing flexibility for different learning environments.

- If students are familiar with evaluating writing quality, they may be able to skip the steps of reading and analyzing samples and instead begin by identifying and describing the criteria required for the writing assignment.
- Rubrics could be constructed in different formats (e.g., checklists) to make sure students could use them easily.

Works Cited

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