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Fixing mechanics: a study in cross-curricular use of rubrics to grade writing

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FIXING MECHANICS:
A STUDY OF CROSS-CURRICULAR USE
OF RUBRICS TO GRADE WRITING

A Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Teachers who assign and grade writing sometimes use rubrics to assist in this process. A rubric usually consists of a set of rules, guidelines, or criteria that must be met for students to obtain a passing grade. Rubrics are intended to take the subjectivity out of grading writing and to give feedback to the student for further improvement. Because even English teachers disagree about the use of rubrics to grade writing, and the criteria that is most important within the rubrics, hearing from teachers in other subject areas could help all teachers better understand how to grade writing assignments. This case study examines teacher perspectives on the use of rubrics to grade student writing. Within one private K-12 school, teachers from grades K-12 in every subject area were asked for their opinions of the elements of good writing, their use of rubrics to grade writing, and the criteria they value in writing. Teachers at the high school level use rubrics and value elaboration and details, but expressed frustration with common mechanical errors in student writing.. This study was conducted in two parts – the first at the high school, and the second at the elementary and middle schools. Findings indicate that elementary and middle school teachers, in general, characterized good writing as writing that is free of mechanical errors. These elementary and middle school teachers then collaborated, created, and implemented a rubric for assessing mechanics in student writing. In follow up interviews, students expressed some annoyance that every teacher was now grading their writing, but admit that they are now more careful to proofread their work. Hearing from teachers in other subject areas did help all teachers better understand how to assess writing assignments. Most agree that using a rubric is the best tool for grading student writing, and even worked together to address those common mechanical errors found across the curriculum in our students' writing. This open communication and collaboration needs to extend to other critical areas of literacy.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Narrative

Mrs. V., the principal at First Academy called to order the faculty meeting of elementary and middle school teachers with a request for an instrument that would help every teacher to more effectively grade student writing. As a new member of this faculty, I wanted to help and felt that my recent graduate studies in the topic of rubrics used to assess writing across the curriculum could help me contribute to this request. I raised my hand to offer some advice, but immediately lowered it when I heard her insist that we come up with something in a week. My heart started racing when all eyes turned to me, the only English teacher on staff who had high school teaching experience. When we finally had about twenty minutes to discuss the subject, at least ten of the science and social studies teachers complained to me that students "just can't write anymore," and they started to blame the English teachers for not teaching the basic fundamentals of mechanics. We three English teachers, on the other hand, felt the need to defend our methods and processes and convince the other content teachers that we do indeed teach mechanics and hold students accountable for their writing.

Teachers across the curriculum at this school needed an effective tool for holding students accountable for good writing mechanics that have been taught in English classes. Most of the frustration and confusion among the faculty stems from the topic of the elements of good writing and more specifically writing mechanics. Ideally, more research needs to be conducted, and a consensus among faculty members reached, before a school-wide writing mechanics rubric could be implemented and analyzed for effectiveness.

The principal appointed me as the lead in this collaboration, but I had to negotiate for more time and research. I asked for time to research what collaborative efforts of teachers in

other schools had produced in the area of grading writing assignments. I also requested time to work collaboratively with this group of teachers to assess what their perceptions of writing and methods of assessment of writing were. I felt this was a great opportunity for colleagues to share impressions, work collaboratively, and implement a tool for evaluating writing. This would empower our students to become better writers across the curriculum.

This opportunity to assist the elementary and middle school came at a most opportune time. I had taught the previous three years in the high school of our K-12 school, and during the past year, we high school teachers had initiated this same conversation about grading writing effectively and consistently across the curriculum, prompting me to begin a study of content area teachers' perceptions of rubrics as effective assessment for grading writing. Five of the high school teachers in English, science, math, and history, were cooperative and insightful, but not very optimistic about the common rubric concept, insisting that the problems in writing that we were experiencing began in elementary and middle school and that is where the solution needed to begin. Moving to the middle school arm of our school, I hoped, would provide me with the opportunity to continue the study that I had begun in the high school nearly a year earlier.

That original study began with the question, are rubrics the answer to grading writing assignments? My fascination with this topic began in a summer graduate class. The class debated the rubrics question, and surprisingly, a room full of English teachers could not reach consensus on this hot topic. I shared with the class that as a student in the 70's and 80's, I had no recollection of a rubric or even the word rubric. My English teachers graded arbitrarily, and I remembered the frustration of not knowing why I received a grade on a writing assignment and of not having any feedback from the instructor. I vowed not to become one of those teachers.

Unfortunately, during my first years of teaching I followed the 50% mechanic/50% content formula that my department chair insisted we use to grade writing. This method, in my opinion, was still very time-consuming and arbitrary in communicating to students the constructive feedback they needed to improve as writers. Years later, at a National Council of Teachers of English conference, I was introduced to rubrics and my first impression was one of relief, because finally here was a way to communicate to students in a concrete, constructive manner using specific criteria. The problem for our school was in choosing or creating the "perfect" rubric. Even in a school with only six high school English teachers, we could not come to a consensus as to which rubric to use. One year we used what the department chair insisted we use; for a few years we each used our own favorites; and finally we collaborated and created a generic rubric for the English department. We soon discovered two problems with a common rubric: 1) not every teacher used it because he or she disagreed with the rubric altogether, and 2) new teachers' ideas and suggestions were rejected because we had worked so hard on the one rubric we had and did not want to revisit the process. I was one who did use the rubric, and I found it a valuable tool. I did modify the rubric assignments depending on the learning styles of my students, but I felt that the rubrics helped me to stay objective and helped me to communicate more effectively with students and with parents.

In the past five years of teaching English, I have used rubrics to grade oral presentations, technology assignments, and creative performances. I have many generic rubrics that I keep on hand, but modify for each assignment based on student ability, differentiated instruction, and objective. I have also learned to get students involved in the creation or modification of each rubric including point value and timeframe. I give the rubric at the beginning of the assignment

and have students refer to it often during the writing process so that there are no surprises at grading time.

Clearly, my experiences with rubrics have been positive, and I was pleased to share with these graduate students, several of whom are English teachers, that my high school students have told me that they like having a rubric. They say it keeps them focused and is a great peer editing tool as well. Rarely do students question or argue a grade anymore; the evidence is in the rubric. They clearly understand what is expected, and they can expect their grade to reflect their performance based on the criteria. I wish I had been so lucky in my own academic experiences.

As other members of the class shared their rubrics experiences, I was surprised at the variety of their experiences which ranged from never having used a rubric and grading completely subjectively, to somewhere in the middle of the two. One particular story made me stop and question my own practices concerning rubrics. Sherry, a highly qualified teacher of four years, was not exposed much to rubrics in pre-service classes, but got her fill of them as a teacher. As a teacher of English and Advance Placement English for four years, she encountered her share of positive and negative experiences with creating and using rubrics as an assessment tool. She felt that rubrics were supposed to clarify learning goals to students, and she liked that they would eliminate hours of grading. Sometimes, though, she found herself being as subjective when grading writing assignments with rubrics as she had been before the rubric. The element of creativity is subjective in itself, she shared, so the teacher must be subjective in assessing what defines creativity. In four years of teaching AP English, she could not figure out how to narrow down one generalized idea that each individual student was expected to expound on identically. She stated, "How can we expect students to arrive at the same conclusion about an idea that is subjective in itself? It's impossible!" She asked our group, "How do you tell a

child her analysis is wrong when the text supports it, but it's just not the argument you or the rubric support?" Sherry's negative impression of rubrics was further complicated by the district in which she was employed that required teachers to use rubrics for every assignment. After a while, using rubrics became a tedious process in itself, and not the time savers they were supposed to be. To make matters worse, the administrators dictated what should be assessed on each rubric. She admits, "It was micromanagement at its finest." Her experience with rubrics was summed up in her own words:

> "What is our goal as educators when we force teachers to use rubrics and force them to assess what we want them to assess? Are rubrics useful and effective assessment tools? Of course they are; however, they are not always the best form of assessment when grading writing assignments."

All of the teachers in that summer graduate course agreed that a clear method for grading writing is needed that provides some feedback on assignments that would help students prepare for future assignments. Even though we differed in our attitudes towards rubrics, we recognize that students need to know what is expected, need to have feedback, and need to be encouraged and challenged in their writing. A tool must exist that communicates to students in a concrete, constructive manner using specific criteria. What concerned me at this point in the debate was that if we English teachers cannot consistently grade writing assignments, how much more complicated grading writing must be for teachers of other disciplines who have not been trained to teach or assess writing.

I believe that English teachers need a better understanding of how teachers across the curriculum grade writing assignments. What do these teachers value as writing, how do they acquire the rubrics they use if they use them, and what have their experiences been with rubrics? Can English teachers do a better job of communicating expectations and criteria to students if we are aware of what other teachers are expecting from the same students? It is time to ask teachers

across the curriculum about grading writing assignments. The start of the school year following this summer course provided just an opportunity. At my high school, during teacher in-service days and even at faculty meetings, teachers of all content areas often expressed their frustration with student writing, and I usually assumed that they believed it was the English department's job to fix the problem. I shared with the faculty that I do indeed teach writing basics, and that students, for the most part, demonstrate that they can write effectively for me, but that there must be other factors at work we need to examine so that students write consistently across disciplines. Our administration's push toward Common Core Standards, with its heavy emphasis on cross-curricular approaches to student learning, was additional motivation to find a solution to the writing problem.

The frustration we as a faculty feel and the need we have to improve student writing led me to begin this case study of teachers' perceptions of rubrics as writing assessment. The second stage of this study was prompted by the need to further explore experiences of the elementary and middle school teachers of our school and then to attempt to collaboratively incorporate the development, implementation, and development of a school-wide writing assessment. This case study of opinions and collaboration of teachers across the curriculum to affect positive changes in student writing is vital to the canon on rubrics. Very little research exists in which the voices of teachers of subjects other than English have been considered on the subject of rubrics. Collaboration of teachers across subjects and grades is also very rare in the canon. Teachers, not just English teachers, need to understand each other in order to work together to affect change.

1.2 Problem Statement

Teachers across the curriculum at our school complain that students "just can't write anymore," and tend to blame the English teachers for not teaching the basic fundamentals of

writing. In order to assist the teachers and the students, I wanted to know more about teacher perceptions of good student writing and the assessment of writing. If the teachers in our school system could open the lines of communication, perhaps we could find the source of the problems we were experiencing with student performance on writing assignments. Perhaps we could continue to work together toward a solution to the writing inadequacies. Together, perhaps, we could create an effective tool for holding students accountable for good writing mechanics that have been taught in English classes.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

Writing, like speech, can demonstrate how we make meaning of our world. According to Burke (1950/1969), "only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of the voice within" (p.39).   In order to encourage those inner voices and provide students with opportunities to speak, teachers should allow students the freedom to write. Elbow (1997) posits that when we allow students the freedom to write, they may learn to communicate as effectively as they do in their speech; they might embrace rather than fear the writing process; and they could become creative and inventive. He asserts that all teachers, not just English instructors, should give students opportunity to write and to hold students accountable to the established criteria.

> Students may complain, "But how can you grade on the basis of writing when this isn't a writing course?" We mustn't forget here a basic pedagogical principle: we are not obliged to teach everything we require. We don't teach typing, yet we often require it. Must we stop requiring skilled reading unless we explicitly teach it? Besides, if we require students to explain their learning on paper, we will be doing a big favor to our campus writing program and writing teachers. Writing courses only work well if students *need* writing to prosper in their other courses." (Elbow, 1997 p.9)

This study is driven by the notion that the purpose of K-12 writing is to prepare students to be confident, skilled writers in all of the courses they will encounter at every level.   Since

writing expectations, trickle down from the college level to the high school level, and then to the elementary level, it only makes sense that all educators must prepare students to write for the next stage. To this order, I agree with Graves's theory on the process of writing. Graves's, early work, *Balance the Basics; Let Them Write* (1978) was pivotal in introducing to the classroom the concepts of writing with a purpose, expression of individual voice, allowing choice in writing topics, and response to writing. Graves has been an advocate of, and even been dubbed the father of, the writing process, which includes steps such as pre-writing, drafting, editing, re-writing, etc. He also recognizes that the teacher must be integral in each of these steps if the student is to grow as a writer. There must be feedback at each level that is encouraging, yet challenging (Graves, 1985). Although he warns that students can get easily discouraged by the teaching of meaningless minutia that can easily be gauged by standardized tests, he acknowledges that,

> "component skills are important. If children do not learn to spell or use a pencil to get words on paper, they won't use writing for learning any more than the other children drilled on component skills. The writing-process approach simply stresses meaning first, and then skills in the context of meaning." (Graves, 1985 p.4)

Rubrics can enable teachers to give the feedback that students need to progress through this writing process. This feedback will assist them in making meaning and communicating effectively. It is in this context of meaning that this study is based. Unarguably, most teachers at my school want to prepare students for college and life, especially in the area of writing. There exists, however, conflicting perceptions on what is good writing, how to teach writing, and the process of grading student writing. As a small group of educators, we can attempt to find meaning in context that can translate to more empower and skilled writers.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study the following questions were proposed:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers across the curriculum regarding good writing?

2. How are teachers in content areas other than English evaluating student writing?

3. Can a common rubric be developed that would aid teachers across the curriculum in grading the mechanics of student writing?

4. How do students perceive the role of evaluation of their writing when completed by non-ELA teachers?

1.5 Brief Study Description

This research study was conducted using the qualitative case study approach, drawing upon Cresswell's (2007) guidance. Teachers representing grades K-12 and all subject areas were surveyed and interviewed regarding their perspectives of writing and the assessment of writing. Students in grades six and seven were also surveyed and interviewed about their writing. As teachers in this study worked collaboratively to develop a rubric, the process was closely monitored and chronicled. Student samples before and after the rubric were collected and compared to assess the effectiveness of the new rubric. The data was collected and analyzed using the constant comparative method relying on the guidelines proposed by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). The findings and conclusions were recorded, and the entire research study was communicated in narrative form.

CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The original meaning of the word *rubric* had little relation to the scoring of students' work (Popham, 1997). However, nearly 20 years later, educators have adopted new connotations for the word. Initially, measurement specialists used these instruments to score students' written compositions and began using the term "rubric" to describe their set of rules or criteria that guided their scoring (Popham, 1997). Although these instruments were being used to guide scoring, it is important to remember that in the beginning, these scales were not designed to improve writing (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). Nevertheless, since educators coined the term *rubric* as an assessment tool, its purpose has taken on many roles in the realm of education. Scoring rubrics allow students and teachers to focus on the most important elements of learning, while also encouraging self-awareness and self-assessment among the students (Broad, 2000). Brualdi (1998) defines rubrics as a rating system used by teachers to determine the level of proficiency a student demonstrates to complete a task or display knowledge of a learning concept. This chapter examines the purpose of rubrics, as well as their design and development. It further explores attitudes of educator's towards the use of rubrics to grade writing assignments. Finally, a look at the importance of inter-rater reliability lends insight into rubric accuracy.

2.1 Purpose of Rubrics

Before I could understand whether teachers find consistency in grading with rubrics across the curriculum, first I had to consider the purpose of rubrics. Why do teachers use them? Do opinions differ as to their purpose? What is the optimum use of rubrics? According to Brualdi's (1998) definition, the primary purpose of this assessment tool is to measure how well a student knows the material being taught. Popham (1997) attributes a similar purpose to rubrics, indicating its purpose is to evaluate quality. In other words, good rubrics not only measure how

much the student knows, but also how well he or she demonstrates their knowledge. When good rubrics are used correctly, the quality and quantity of student learning receives feedback from the teacher and self-evaluation from the student (Broad, 2000).

According to Broad (2000), rubrics are supposed to take the guessing out of grading, providing students with clear and concise explanations for their evaluations. Subjectivity is a major concern among educators, therefore; rubrics are helpful in reducing the subjectivity of more traditional grading methods (Broad, 2000). According to Kist (Kist & Kent State Univ, 2001) evaluations in the past tended to be excessively subjective in distinguishing between what defined "excellent" and "satisfactory." This method of grading often left the student with the bewildering task of figuring out what his or her instructor meant by "excellent" (Kist & Kent State Univ, 2001). Not all teachers think the same; what may look like a "good response" to one teacher, may seem only mediocre to another. The purpose of a rubric is to eliminate these judgment calls by developing a predefined scheme for assessment that reduces the subjectivity involved when grading student writing (Moskal, Assessment, & Evaluation, 2000). Being subjective about evaluating writing can become problematic in the classroom, especially when dealing with students and parents that disagree with a teacher's evaluation. However, rubrics make assessing student work efficient and offer explanations and justification to parents and students about how their grades were assigned (Andrade, 2005).

Most of the literature on rubrics agrees that one main purpose rubrics serve is to provide feedback. Andrade (2007) states that the purpose of rubrics is to give students information about their assignments as formative feedback during the writing process, and to provide summative feedback once the assignment is completed. As pointed out by Kist (2001), often students are left guessing what their instructors mean in their vague evaluations that fail to clarify the differences

between excellent, good, and satisfactory. Andrade (2000) brings up a similar argument in that as educators, we expect students to just know what defines a good piece of writing. Yet, the reality is that most students have no idea how they are being evaluated. In the study conducted by Andrade (2000), a student reported to his/her father when questioned about receiving low marks on their report card, that he/she did not know what the grades were based upon. Andrade explains how rubrics provide students with more informative feedback that hone their strengths and weakness, as opposed to forms of assessment that only focus on the areas that need improvement. The quantity and quality of feedback play a major role in the effort students put into writing and revising their work (Saddler & Andrade, 2004). Specific feedback allows not only the teacher to offer suggestions for improvement, but encourages students to become self-assessors (Kist & Kent State Univ, 2001).

Andrade (2007) indicates that rubrics can be very effective self-assessment tools when used with the right feedback. She explains the difference between self-evaluation and self-assessment. From prior experience, she further states, teachers know better than to ask their students to evaluate or grade themselves; many of them will inflate their performance. However, she suggests, rubrics can serve another purpose in guiding students in self-assessment through on-going monitoring and finding opportunities for improvement.

So what is the purpose of rubrics? When used correctly, they assist in the purposes of learning, evaluation, and accountability (Andrade, 2000). According to Kist (2001), rubrics are supposed to keep evaluators honest. Rubrics clarify expectations. Rubrics eliminate subjectivity. Rubrics make the grading process quicker. Yet, the reality is, rubrics are created for many purposes in several different contexts, including classrooms, programs, institutions, and states (Turley & Gallagher, 2008).

2.2. **Design and Development of Rubrics**

Another major consideration concerning the school-wide use of a rubric was the development and design of the rubric.   In order for rubrics to be effective in any school, they must be chosen or developed carefully and designed for optimum effectiveness. "Without accurate measurement of what students have learned, neither school nor academic officials – nor parents and students—will know where they stand"(The College, 2004). While many instructors, especially at the college level, acknowledge that rubrics can be instructional tools (Stix, 1996), even experts in the field recognize that most rubrics are used just for scoring, not for instruction. Popham (1997) states that, "Although rubrics are receiving near-universal applause from educators, the vast majority of rubrics are instructionally fraudulent. They are masquerading as contributors to instruction when, in reality, they have no educational impact at all." Rubrics, then, as a measurement of actual student learning, are dependent upon their design and development to be effective indicators. Just as the purposes of rubrics change for various settings, so do the types, designs, and implementation.

2.2.1 Rubric Types

The rubric goes a step beyond merely a checklist to see that each task is completed; it also rates the quality of each task (Allen, 2006). Therefore, the design of the rubric must first start with a specific plan for its creation. Rubrics usually fit two basic types: holistic or analytical. To be used merely as a scoring guide, the holistic rubric design is usually teacher generated for ease of grading. However, it typically only offers, at best, minimum feedback on the assignment as a whole, and not on its separate parts (Mertler, 2001).   A more common type of rubric is the analytical rubric, which measures several levels against specific criteria (Soles,

2001). Either rubric is sufficient and serves its designated purpose if it assesses what the teacher wants the student to know and if it reflects that the student really learns what he/she was supposed to learn (Allen, 2006). Therein lies the challenge of designing and developing rubrics.

2.2.2 Designing

Though the length and content of rubrics can vary as much as types of lessons do, teachers typically follow a pattern in designing rubrics that measure learning, provide feedback, and have impact on the development of the student. According to Mertler (Mertler, 2001), the design of most rubrics usually follows this pattern:

1) Examine learning objectives.
2) Identify observable or measureable criteria to be assessed
3) Write narratives describing what excellent and poor work would be.
4) Describe what the intermediate levels between excellent and poor would constitute
5) Collect samples of work that represent each level (to help scoring in the future)
6) Revise the rubric as needed.

Mertler explains that the second task, identifying measureable criteria, is the step where most teachers become confused or dogmatic. Where some teachers value mechanics highly, others value voice and creativity. Some favor organization while others adherence to topic. Because the perfect one-size-fits-all rubric does not exist for every writing assignment, teachers must be creative in developing rubrics that most adequately assess the learned objective. More recent studies show that teachers often include students in the process of creating rubrics, since students would more clearly understand what is expected if they were part of the assessment guide (H. Andrade, 2007). Strong debate exists as to whether teachers should share the rubric with the students before and during the assignment (Soles, 2001) or let the student write freely then use the rubric only as a guide for self-assessment (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). Either way still demands that a quality rubric be in place, which requires commitment of time and resources of teachers.

2.2.3 Implementing

Teachers who are committed to the use of rubrics as an instructional tool do not need to feel overwhelmed with the time needed to create, develop, examine, and track rubric reliability (Luft, 1998), as many resources exist to aid teachers in their search for or creation of the ideal rubric for each assignment. Most teachers start with the resources provided to them with the course textbook. State educational departments are another excellent source as well as websites designated to specific subjects within the curriculum (Moskal et al., 2000). Often subject-specific departments meet at regular intervals to exchange ideas, best practices, and rubrics that have been proven successful (Soles, 2001). However, there is an obvious lack of evidence in the literature that teachers across the curriculum meet to discuss the use of rubrics, much less to help one another to design or create rubrics. Do teachers typically design their own rubrics, and even if the rubric they create is exemplary, are they willing to share it with others in their own subject area, and even beyond that, with teachers across the curriculum? More research clearly needs to be done in the area of teacher dialogue about rubrics across the curriculum. A few studies have been done, however, involving the inclusion of students' input in the creation of rubrics for specific assignments (Stix, 1997; Luft, 1998; Soles, 2001) all with beneficial results. This inclusion of student input agrees with a study done by Skillings and Ferrel (2000) which asserts that letting students help establish criteria is beneficial.

> "The repeated practice of working through the setting of criteria and the modeling done by the classroom teacher all contribute to the effectiveness of the process for all learners. Students have increased confidence in their ability to learn because they are in a classroom where they help develop the standards for work that demonstrates knowledge of the concepts" (p.4).

More studies need to be done to see if this practice is still effective and if teachers are sharing these successes with each other.

2.3 Attitudes Regarding Rubrics

In order to develop guiding questions for my survey of teachers regarding their opinions of rubrics, and to more fully understand attitudes different from my own, I thoroughly researched the attitudes of teachers, administrators, and academia toward rubrics. Turley and Gallagher (2008) in discussing the debate among users of rubrics, concluded, "Instead of declaring all rubrics 'good' or 'bad,' we need to examine what they do, why, and in whose interests"(92).

2.3.1 Positive Attitudes

The positive attitudes of teachers who use rubrics should be examined to determine whose interests the rubrics serve, what types of rubrics teachers use, and the reasons they use them. Heidi Andrade, an assistant professor at University at Albany, is a strong proponent of rubrics mainly because they "orient us to our goals as teachers"(27). She likes rubrics because they fit a wide range of student abilities, they offer feedback, and they keep her honest. Andrade admits, "I struggle with the temptation to assign grades based in part on irrelevant things, such as effort or fondness,"(29) so her dependence on the integrity of rubrics is high (H. G. Andrade, 2005).

Spandel (2006), author of several books on writing instruction, defends her support of rubrics. She indicates that all teachers grade writing with specific criteria in mind, even if they are never written down and the student never sees them. According to Spandel, rubrics make the grading process transparent. She explains that introducing the rubric to students before the assignment allows students to self-assess and revise according to the rubric during the writing process. Elbow (1997) agrees with this concept of letting the students know ahead of time.

> "When we spell out our criteria in public we are making our grades carry more information or meaning than they usually do, even if we give nothing but a minimal grade. All too often grading criteria are left tacit and mysterious. Also, when we spell out criteria in public, we usually grade more fairly. That is, when we lay out

our criteria, we are not so likely to be unduly swayed if one particular feature of the writing is terribly weak or strong." (p.137)

Two middle school English teachers (Fanning & Schmidt, 2007), share their negative-turned-positive experiences. Early in their teaching careers they both struggled with rubrics, and Molly admits that over time she just, "trudged on, hoping that no one would catch on that I wasn't sure of what I was doing when it came to assessment" (31). Brigid also describes her earlier grading system: "…if anyone looked too closely at my system, the lack of a system is what would be seen" (31). Both teachers, however, learned how to work collaboratively with one another and with their students in the creation of rubrics that worked (Fanning & Schmidt, 2007). They described their experiences with collaborative rubrics as successful, sharing their results with their school, their district, and even the national conference level. In conclusion of their study, they advise all teachers to "Open yourselves to your students, your classroom to your colleagues, your students to their world" (35).

A study published in *Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2010) compared teacher views of rubrics against certain variables. Their surveys of teachers with both positive and negative attitudes concluded that teachers with positive attitudes had greater overall knowledge of rubrics, used rubrics from a variety of sources rather than just the course book, and used them to give feedback to students and to monitor progress over time. Also, those with positive attitudes gave the rubric to students before assignments, as opposed to the negative attitudes who only used them for post-assignment grading (Kutlu, 2010). A study (Enos, 2010) was done to gauge the retention level proofreading and editing skills of technical college students relied heavily on the use of rubrics in pre and post assessment. The results show that "instructional interventions aimed at specific writing weaknesses can be successful especially when keyed to specific criteria such as those found on grading rubrics." (p. 278)

Fanning and Schmidt (2007) provide evidence that English teachers have had positive experiences with rubrics, and that some are even willing to let their students in on the creation of rubrics. Many of these English teachers are willing to share their success with other English teachers. But where is the feedback from teachers of other subjects? Surely, teachers of other subjects assign writing. How do their experiences with rubrics compare to those of English teachers? After an extensive search for rubric experiences of teachers outside of English, I found only two: one in science, the other in music. (Luft, 1998) (Leonhardt, 2005). Both of these were mostly positive experiences shared by the participants.

2.3.2 Negative Attitudes

While there are many positive attitudes regarding using rubrics, there are also many negative attitudes as well. Although Andrade (2000) defines rubrics as a tool that teachers use to clarify their expectations, she points out in a later study that rubrics are not entirely self-explanatory. All students are not familiar with rubrics, and as educators we must be careful in our assumptions. According to Andrade (2005), even a well-crafted rubric does not account for the fact that students need models, feedback, and opportunities to be inquisitive. Kist (2001) concluded that rubrics kept us fair. However, issues of validity, reliability, and fairness apply to rubrics as well (Andrade, 2005). Reliability and validity equate to the consistency and accuracy of the evaluations we give to students and their work. Andrade (2005) cautions that rubrics must pass a test of reliability, indicating that if another teacher uses the same rubric to grade the same paper, their results should have little variance.

Not only does using rubrics as a writing assessment raise issues of reliability, but also issues with creativity. Kohn (2006) argues that rubrics encourage students to think less deeply, avoid taking risks in their writing, and basically withdraw from learning itself. In a similar

argument, Wilson (2007) states that creating rubrics to include risk-taking was nearly impossible because not every paper requires taking a risk. Referring back to the purpose of rubrics, Andrade (2000) states that rubrics are supposed to offer feedback. However, according to Wilson (2007) the feedback rubrics offered her students tended to be generic and avoided interaction with what the student had to say. Wilson (2007) refers to rubrics as a menu of generic comments that are clumsy in practice and in theory. While some critics praise rubrics for their supposed elimination of subjectivity, others such as Alfie Kohn (2006) criticizes them for their attempts to deny the subjectivity of human judgment. By denying subjectivity among teachers, rubrics standardize the way they think when grading students' assignment (Kohn, 2006). This raises the questions, "do we want them writing for the rubric, or do we want them writing for themselves, for us, and for an audience that appreciates original thinking?" (Wilson, 2007) A problem that arises when students stop writing for a live audience, and start writing for a rubric, is that the student develops a dependence on the rubric. Kohn (2006) cites a teacher who realized her students had grown so attached to rubrics that they were unable to function unless every assignment was spelled out for them in a grid with assigned point value. This teacher arrived at the alarming conclusion that her students lacked confidence in their thinking and writing (Kohn, 2006). In other words, rubrics had spoiled them and in a sense crippled them as independent thinkers and writers.

Subjectivity and dependence are not the only challenges posed by rubrics. Some school districts are imposing rubrics on teachers and expecting teachers to make the best of them. However, state-imposed rubrics are often created and implemented to produce accountability numbers rather than improve student writing (Turley & Gallagher, 2008). Even though some teachers attempt to embrace these state-imposed rubrics, others understand the predetermined

criterion that lacks any teacher input, yields very low chances of improving student writing, and therefore render them useless (Turley & Gallagher 2008). State-imposed rubrics can often lead to a disconnect between what is being taught in class and what is required and expected on the rubric. Fanning and Schmidt (2007) express doubt about connections between the material they taught in class and the results they required students to produce in their work. At the least, a rubric must be aligned with logical standards, and most importantly, aligned with the curriculum being taught in order to be valid and yield results (Andrade, 2005).

Rubrics may function as a guide for students of what they need to get an "A," but sometimes they guide students away from learning independently and creatively. Studies have shown that too much attention to the quality of work causes the student to think superficially and lose interest in whatever he or she is doing (Kohn, 2006). Is this the outcome teachers want when we use rubrics? Kohn (2006) points out a study by Linda Mabry, which reports that compliance with rubrics produced higher scores in student work, but created "vacuous writing." After all, the purpose of writing is to generate a reaction to words in the reader's mind (Wilson, 2007). Such a reaction may never transpire if the writer is writing for a rubric, and not a reader. Therefore, while rubrics may offer a quicker, objective, alternative method for the monotonous assessment process we used in the past to grade writing, we must also remember that along with the good, comes the bad and the ugly sides of using rubrics (Andrade, 2005).

2.4 Inter-Rater Reliability

In order for rubrics to be used as a trusted source of instruction and assessment, they must be reliable. In order for our faculty to implement a rubric effectively, we needed to know about the process of insuring the reliability of a rubric. Studies of inter-rater reliability have been done to see if consensus can be reached among scorers using the same rubrics. One in particular, done

by Megan Oakleaf at North Carolina State University, was a survey design method, which compared responses from students, teachers, and librarians. All three groups graded the same student writing samples using the same rubric. The conclusions, based on level of scoring agreement among the three groups, were as follows: librarians – moderate level of agreement, English 101 instructors-- substantially reliable agreement, and students – fair to moderate agreement (Oakleaf, 2009). Another study was done to assess the effectiveness of a rater training program. Writing samples were scored twice by the same rubric, once before training and again after training. The findings showed very little reliability between the two sets of scoring and recommended that the training be revised or that teacher attitudes toward training be examined and rectified (Elder, Barkhuizen, Knoch, & von Randow, 2007). A qualitative study done by Bob Broad (1997) followed a group of English instructors of entry-level college students as they tried to assess portfolios of student writing based on one rubric. Consensus was never reached, and the conclusion of the study was that there is a definite need for continued discussion of the valued criteria of the rubric, the attitudes and confidence levels of instructors, and of the writing process in general (Broad, 1997).

Even though past studies of rater training programs show very little correlation to the training and reliability, according to a recent study published in *Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Kutlu, 2010), teachers with insufficient knowledge and information on rubrics tend to fall short in evaluating their students' writing correctly. If teachers are not familiar with rubrics, their lack of knowledge may affect their judgment in choosing valid and reliable tools for assessment. Kutlu, Yildirim, and Bilican (2010) point out that accuracy and appropriate use of rubrics is highly related to the teacher's knowledge and experience. As humans, we tend to avoid using things with which we are not familiar. Not to mention, when we are not familiar with an object

or idea, our lack of knowledge affects our attitude towards that object or idea. Kutlu, Yildirim, and Bilican (2010) found a link between teacher's attitudes towards rubrics, concluding that attitudes function as psychological variables that guide their behaviors. Therefore, when considering reliability and validity of rubrics, we must also keep in mind how our attitude towards rubrics affects how effectively we use them.

Fanning and Schmidt (2007) indicate that ambivalence in their attitudes towards grading affected their validity when using rubrics. Molly Fanning (2007) states that she agonized over her set rubric and constantly second-guessed her decisions in grading. Fanning explains that she felt on several occasions that the grade was not accurate. If one teacher is experiencing these grading conflicts using her own judgment, she wondered, how do several teachers feel when given a rubric and are expected to yield the same results as their other colleagues. Fanning's confession relates back to the purpose of this study, which is examining how rubrics are used across the curriculum, listening to core subject teachers' experiences with rubrics, and to study the collaborative effort of a cross-curricular rubric design and implementation.

2.5 Conclusion

The initial intent of rubrics for grading writing was to ease the workload for overwhelmed teachers, and to give feedback to students based on specific criteria, but the use of rubrics as an effective writing assessment has not been fully determined. The literature confirms that educators often disagree about using rubrics to grade writing. Those who do support rubrics claim that they are less subjective; they communicate clear goals and criteria for student writing; and they provide unambiguous feedback to students. Proponents of rubrics do not all agree, however on the design or implementation of rubrics. Most users of rubrics do not use the same rubric for every assignment, electing to design their own or to find applicable ones on educator

websites and tweak them as needed. Obviously, there is disagreement as to the criteria and subsequent value placed upon the elements of rubrics.   However, even with all of the ambiguity, rubrics seem to be the preferred method of assessing writing assignments in most of the research.

Opponents of rubrics argue that rubrics stifle student creativity. They are also concerned that students could become so dependent on a rubric that they lose the sense of freedom and independence that should be inherent in writing. Rubrics, opponents say, are still subjective, and therefore not an effective tool for assessing student writing.   The research on inter-rater reliability seems to prove this out. Even though there are very few studies on this aspect of the use of rubrics, the evidence shows that different people grading the same essay with the same rubric, do not often agree.

Even though there are valid arguments on both sides of the rubric debate, especially among English educators, very little is found in the literature regarding the attitudes and opinions of teachers in other subjects regarding the use of rubrics to grade writing. Even less is heard from students about their teachers' use of rubrics to grade their writing. More studies must be done to bring their voices into the canon. Perhaps they could provide insight that could help all teachers find a common ground for effectively assessing student writing.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

The experiences and opinions of rubrics differ significantly among English teachers, even amongst high school English teachers who work at the same school. After significant research on the attitudes and experiences of teachers regarding rubrics, I recognize that the topic of rubrics is debated often among English teachers. What I failed to find in the research, though, were the voices of teachers of science, social studies, foreign languages, etc. regarding rubrics. I also did not find much research on teachers working collaboratively to discuss, define, or develop a plan for improving student writing. In this chapter, I discuss the design of the study, the site and participants included in the study, and the methodology of data collection.

3.1 Design

"Writing is, in short, essential to students' success in school, the workplace, and society at large"(Burke, 2009). Because the voices of all teachers and students should be valued, especially in the area of grading student writing, this study explores the attitudes of content area teachers toward rubrics in order to gain insight into the rationale for such attitudes. Adding the voices of content area teachers to the rubric research will help English teachers more fully understand how to improve the writing assessment of students across the curriculum through a broader sense of the various needs of different disciplines. I also feel that the voices of students should be heard in this debate, since they are ones who have been presupposed by our faculty to write more poorly for other teachers than they do for English teachers. What do they feel about this controversial topic? What do they see as good writing and the role of teachers other than their English teachers in grading their writing? In addition, I believe that a study of a cross curricular collaborative effort to develop, implement, and assess the effectiveness of a rubric will add significantly to the canon on rubrics and cross-curricular cooperation.

In order to accomplish the goals of this study, I decided to conduct a qualitative case study, drawing upon John Creswell's *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell, case studies, "explore a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case-bound themes." My research spanned three semesters of study, and was conducted across two campuses. It includes several sources of data collection in the form of surveys, both hard copy and online, interviews, samples of student work, and field notes. Descriptions of teacher experiences and themes derived from the research were critical to the overall findings. Therefore, the case study approach is the most applicable.

3. 2 Site and Participants

For convenience of accessibility of participants, I conducted the research at the school where I work, First Academy (FA), a private K-12 school in a suburban neighborhood. The K-8 grades (FA) of this school have been established for 20 years, but the high school (FAHS) addition is new, only three years old. Both schools value teacher collaboration, methods and techniques, which encourage student-led discussion, critical thinking, and research-based curriculum. The entire school currently has 512 students enrolled. The school includes 78% Caucasian students, 16% African American, 3% Hispanic, and 3% Asian or Pacific Islander. The school's gender makeup is 53% male and 47% female. There are two principals and 24 faculty members. The high school operates on a four-by-four schedule, meaning that students are enrolled in four classes in the fall semester, and take four different classes in the spring semester. Classes meet every day for 90 minutes. The elementary and middle schools follow a more traditional schedule of seven 50-minute periods daily throughout an entire school year.

After introducing the study to my colleagues, I narrowed down the participants to those content area teachers who specified on the initial survey that they used rubrics as an assessment tool at least once a month during the school year. For the first stage of this study, the perceptions of teachers concerning rubrics and collaborative assessment, six content area teachers were chosen from FAHS. These six teachers routinely use rubrics to grade writing and projects. I also wanted a variation between years of experience, so I chose participants whose teaching experience varied across the spectrum. I used years of experience as criteria because a veteran teacher and a newly apprenticed teacher may have very different outlooks on writing assessment. Gender was another determining factor used to choose the participants. Male and female educators may also have conflicting attitudes towards grading; therefore, I felt equally distributing the male and female voice would provide a more insightful point of view. All six of the participants were quite willing to have their voices heard.

In the second stage of the study, the teachers from the elementary school were chosen based on their interest in the study and their willingness to pursue a collaborative effort. The eight teachers, including myself, represent a cross section of all core subjects in grades two through seven. The combination of both groups includes five males and fourteen females. Years of teaching experience range from first year teachers to 40-year veterans. Students selected from the study were those of my students (sixth and seventh) who returned the parent consent form by the deadline allotted. These twenty-two students took the online survey, but only five were interviewed. These five were selected to represent a cross section of sixth and seventh, boy and girl, and a variety of skill level as identified by their writing grades.

The entire study was conducted within our school system over a two-year period with permission from the principal and superintendent. I submitted an application to the L.S.U.

Institutional Review Board, and received permission to conduct this case study. Before the study began, I obtained consent forms (Appendix A) from the teacher participants in the study, from the students, and from the students' parents. No one was forced to participate, and no student's responses or writing samples were obtained without their knowledge and consent. Classroom instruction time was not interrupted, as teachers and students were interviewed and surveyed on their own time. All actual names of teachers and students remain anonymous, and no participants were harmed in any way at any time during this study.

CHAPTER 4 METHOD

4.1 Overview

 After reviewing the literature on the topic of using rubrics to grade student writing, and deciding to conduct a qualitative case study method, I began to collect data from the participants. In two phases of the study I designed, distributed, and collected two separate surveys. In keeping with the constant comparative method of analysis (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994), as I reviewed the feedback from the surveys, regarding their attitudes towards rubrics and their responses to the surveys, I also interviewed participants: high school teachers in the first phase, elementary and middle school teachers, and middle school students in the second phase. To complete the triangulation of research (Creswell, 2007), I kept field notes and collected samples of student writing and the rubrics, which these teachers used to grade the writing. Participants gave me samples of student writing, to read and review. They also give me examples of rubrics they had used to grade these writing samples. In the second stage teachers gave me samples of student writing before we implemented the mechanics rubric and some of the same students' work after we began using the mechanics rubric. I kept a journal of field notes that chronicled my impressions and observations during the research process. Since this study spans two years, it is best to describe the methods used chronologically first at the high school, then at the elementary/middle school.

4.2 High School

 The first survey I created was designed to canvas teachers across subject areas at the high school level concerning their perceptions of student writing and their use of rubrics to grade writing (Appendix A). The questions on the surveys were open-ended questions concerning teachers' experience with the grading of writing and their perceptions of "good" writing. I also

asked questions about their frequency of use of rubrics to grade student writing, about how they obtain rubrics, and about their attitudes regarding the use of rubrics to grade student writing. During the spring semester of 2010, I distributed questionnaires to all ten teachers on staff at the high school. Six responded and returned the questionnaire to me. After reading the responses to the questionnaire, I chose five of the teachers to participate further in the study because they gave very insightful feedback, both positive and negative, concerning the use of rubrics to grade writing.

These five teachers interviewed represented a cross section of the subjects and grades in the high school. Interview questions (Appendix B) mirrored some of the questions on the original questionnaire, but probed deeper. For example, teachers were asked to elaborate on their questionnaire answers, such as why they valued certain elements on the rubric such as mechanics or organization higher than other elements such as elaboration or clarity. In addition to asking teachers to describe their perceptions of good writing and clarify their attitudes towards rubrics, I also wanted to know if they thought a school-wide rubric for assessing writing would be feasible at our school.

In conjunction with the surveys, from each of these five teachers, I collected at least one student writing sample that they had graded using the rubrics they had at their disposal. I looked for similar patterns, such as their choice of criteria included in the rubrics, point value assigned to certain criteria, and comments written in the margins of the graded paper. I also took notes in a journal concerning these patterns, and whether they agreed or conflicted with the teachers' survey and interview responses. The high school portion of the study was productive, but lacked depth due to the limited number of participants. Since I was fortunate enough to be able to transfer to the middle school section of our school, I decided to continue the study there. This

case study took place first in the high school over the course of three months in the spring semester of 2011, and then in the elementary and middle schools for seven months in the fall and spring of 2012.

4.3 Elementary/Middle School

In phase two of the research, which took place at the elementary/middle school, two new aspects were added to the case study: the mechanics rubric and student perceptions. Prompted by the pressing need to improve student writing at our elementary/middle school, the teachers decided to work together to that end. Dialogue at the elementary/middle faculty meetings and in department meetings agreed with the high school teachers' perception that a generic school-wide rubric to grade student writing could not work because there were too many variables across subject areas. Because the scope was too broad, we agreed to tackle only one aspect of writing and to create a rubric that would address that aspect. Because I was the only teacher on the faculty who had high school teaching experience, and because of the research, I had done on rubrics used to grade writing, I was appointed to lead the group of ten teachers toward the collaboration and creation of a rubric. Based on my research, I suggested following the steps suggested by Mertler (2001). These steps are listed on page 12 of this report. We chose to focus on a mechanics rubric because that was the one common element with which most teachers expressed frustration, as indicated in the surveys and meetings. Mechanics is one element of writing that the teachers felt was least subjective. As one fourth-grade science teacher stated, "I can really tell if there is a missing period or a misspelled word, but if you ask me to tell you if it's well organized or if it's clear, I'm not sure if I can tell you."

Through much more dialogue, again during structured meetings and informally in the halls, at lunch, through e-mails, etc., we narrowed the rubric (Appendix C) to five main criteria for

addressing mechanics: spelling, punctuation, capitalization, proper heading, and handwriting. We all agreed to hold students accountable to those elements that we were certain had been taught in previous years at our school. For example, all fourth grade teachers expected students to capitalize the first word in a sentence, put proper end marks at the end of sentences, spell sight words such as when, their, here, etc. correctly, and to write legibly. Each grade level teacher adjusted his/her expectations as needed during the grading. The point value, we decided, should not exceed ten percent of the total writing grade. Our purpose was to draw the attention of the student to careless errors rather than discourage them from writing. All teachers used the mechanics rubric for five months. After this implementation period, both teachers and students were canvassed for their perceptions of writing improvement.

I began the research in this phase by keeping field notes during pre-school faculty meetings, where writing was the topic of much discussion. I also collected faculty and department meeting minutes. I again sent a survey to the teachers across subject areas and grades, this time electronically (Appendix B). In the same manner as phase one, I used the information from the survey to develop interview questions for a group of teachers across subject areas. From the survey respondents, I chose six teachers who would represent a good cross-curricular group: 2nd grade ELA, 3rd grade math/science, 4th social studies/science, 5th ELA, 6/7th social studies, and 6/7th science. I interviewed these six teachers concerning their perceptions of good writing, their frustration with mechanics errors, their experiences in the development and creation of the rubric, and their impressions of its effectiveness. I collected writing at least one before and after writing samples from each of the grades and subjects represented, and took field notes.

Since their writing was being critically reviewed, I felt the need to include student perceptions of writing to the data already collected. We also were changing the grading procedure by using the new mechanics rubric across subject areas, and wanted students to express how they felt about every teacher grading their writing. I sent electronic surveys (Appendix B) to eighty 6th and 7th grade students, and 22 responded. Five of these 22 were chosen to interview. These five represented both 6th and 7th grade levels and genders, as well as a range of writing styles, as determined by my experience with them in the classroom. I also collected writing samples from these 22 students and kept notes about their comments concerning the new grading procedure.

4.4 Limitations and Generalizations

The first phase of the study was limited to the small number of participants, since our high school had only ten faculty members at that time. This first phase was also limited by the amount of time teachers were able to afford me for interviewing, since most of the high school teachers were also coaches and club sponsors with very little time to spare. The second phase of the study, and especially the creation of the mechanic rubric, was inspired by the teachers' desperate need for an answer, but at the same time limited by it. They were so cooperative, that I am not sure we fully covered all of the negative side of the creation and implementation of this rubric. The lack of much negative feedback may have been motivated by teachers' fear of being perceived as not being a team player, a quality stressed heavily by our principal. Once again, time to interview effectively was another obstacle encountered during the second phase, since the teachers' planning periods rarely coincided with mine, and their time after school was divided between tutoring, after-school child care, and other family demands. They generously provided me student samples at the elementary school, but I was not provided with samples of writing

from past years. A longitudinal evaluation of several students across grade levels could have given more insight into reasons for common errors in the writing.

      While this study cannot be generalized to the greater population, it does have significance. I acknowledge that the setting of the study, a small private suburban school, is atypical of most general population schools in our area. The study also did not address how our new rubric would affect those students with learning disabilities, nor did we discuss the process for modifying the rubric to meet different levels of learning. The need for a more longitudinal study of student writing across grade levels and subjects still exists. More input from students could also have enhanced this study. However, the study does reveal that teachers at our school can work toward common goals, and that they all want to be included in the discussion and process for improvement. In light of the implementation of Common Core State Standards, with its emphasis on literacy across subject areas, this study adds to the canon of teacher cooperation and collaboration across grades and subjects.

CHAPTER 5. DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Overview

During the early months of 2012, I began to examine the data that I had collected since the fall of 2010. I relied heavily on data analysis steps outlined by Maykut and Morehouse (1994). Organizing the questionnaires and surveys was a critical step in order to compare each teacher's response to those of the other respondents. These responses were grouped according to subject matter, then I compared the responses for common themes and created clusters of information. The next step was to include the results of the interviews with the survey data, and then group, compare, and cluster them accordingly. During this time period I also typed all field notes, transcribed all interviews, coded data pages for ease of identification, and photocopied all data. I reviewed the data answering the questions suggested by Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2009).   The data was organized into the following categories:

Teacher Perception of	Student Perception of
1) Writing/Grading of Writing	1) Writing/Grading of Writing
2) Mechanics	2) Mechanics
3) Use of New Rubric	3) Use of New Rubric

While I recognize that the data collected represents only a small group of teachers in a small school, and that this brief case study may not offer definitive answers that can be applied to all teachers, the data did reveal some interesting starting points.

5.1 Teacher Perceptions

This study opened the door for dialogue across the curriculum to find common ground concerning rubrics. The fourteen teachers in the study were very willing to give of their valuable time and share their opinions and experiences concerning the writing process and the use of rubrics. English teachers had never asked any of them about their use of writing. A few spoke with confidence and assurance in their use of writing assessments, while a few of them said they felt a

bit intimidated talking to an English teacher about writing. Either way, at least they were talking and we were finally listening. The study revealed a few areas that all content area teachers had in common. In this study, teachers across content areas and grades acknowledge that rubrics simplify the grading process, they give students a better idea of what to expect, and the student writing reflects that they understand the expectations. According to the surveys, there was also unanimous consensus among the teachers that rubrics give students a better idea of what to expect and that student writing reflects that they understand the expectations.

The dialogue with content area teachers revealed that they did not use the same rubric for all assignments, and when they needed a new rubric, they either created their own rubric or used one they found on a website and tweaked it to their specific assignment. Most teachers when asked to define good writing included mechanics as one defining criteria. When asked to isolate those mechanical errors that were most prevalent, teachers across grades and subjects identified spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and handwriting as the most obvious errors, and those that "keep on happening no matter what we do." This frustration with mechanical errors is what led to the second phase of the research. Teachers at the elementary and middle school worked on the collaboration and implementation of a common rubric to be used by all second through seventh grade teachers in all subjects (see Appendix C). The teachers who used this rubric indicate that they find it easy to use and they enjoyed the collaborative effort.

The main positive aspect of rubrics that all teachers agreed on was that rubrics let the students, and parents, know what is expected in order to get a good grade and that are no surprises about the grade on the finished product. Teachers agree they are more consistent in grading when they use a rubric. On the other hand, one high school teacher who teaches both science and social studies admitted that even with a rubric "if the first paper is really good, or

very creative, then I start to judge all of them by that first one," thus negating the benefits of using a rubric. The other high school social studies teacher does not take rubrics so seriously, and thinks of them mostly as "a road map, pointing students in the right direction." One high school English teacher, on the other hand, relies exclusively on the rubric as they "make it more black and white instead of shades of gray. If I ask for three sentences and they give me four, then obviously they haven't followed the rubric, so I think the good thing is that it does make things more black and white." One high school science teacher feels that a good thing about rubrics is that they "give students the ability to create within parameters and also allows them to have to develop and extrapolate information versus just memorizing data and repeating it out." Elementary and middle school teachers, many who had never used a rubric before the one implemented in this study, have positive reactions to the rubric because it, "holds students more accountable." One elementary science teacher also shared that she is, "now looking closer at the writing."

Creating a common rubric fostered interdisciplinary conversation and collaboration. The start of this dialogue with content area teachers opened up avenues of commonality, but also opened the doors to healthy disagreement. Content area teachers agree, for the most part, on the purpose and usage of rubrics, but they differed in their opinions of elements of the rubric and of good writing. While high school social studies and English teachers had no conflicts with rubrics, one science teacher reflected that, "It's hard for some students to follow a structured set of rules, but when you give them the freedom to just express themselves, they sometimes surprise you with how much they really understand,." She also brought up the fact that sometimes students do not understand the rubric terminology, or they could misinterpret the criteria, thus making a grade worse than if they had just been allowed to write creatively.

Not all of the teachers feel it was necessary or feasible to collaborate on a uniform school-wide rubric to assess student writing. A few of the high school teachers, however, were willing to give it a try for the purpose of consistency across the curriculum and for ease of application. In general, high school teachers feel that there are just too many variables to negotiate and that a uniform rubric could not be accomplished or implemented effectively. Elementary and middle school teachers, on the other hand, embraced the possibility of creating a school wide rubric. Healthy dialogue narrowed down the rubric to just mechanics, but at least we had reached consensus across grade and subject areas.

While the high school social studies teachers felt that the rubric does not usually allow enough flexibility for students to exhibit creativity, the science teacher felt that students would not feel challenged enough to be creative, opting instead to "shoot for the least they can do to get it done and still get a good grade." She feels that some students, once they have met the rubric criteria, will give up and not push beyond to think critically or creatively. Another high school science teacher includes creativity as one of the criteria in her rubrics, thus requiring that students think creatively. The high school English teacher, on the other hand, feels that, "there is a time and a place for creativity," and that her rubrics do not allow for that. She did, however, acknowledge her need to find a way to grade "some of the extra things they may do which may not be called for but they put in some extra effort or some extra time and the rubric doesn't really allow for that." Overall, the negatives of rubrics do not discourage any of them from using rubrics in the future. Instead, they all acknowledge that the rubrics they use could probably undergo more scrutiny and adjusting to address those negative aspects.

All high school teachers, when asked about the sources of their rubrics, first answered that they create their own. The English teacher has a separate rubric for every grading assignment

because "only I know exactly what I teach the students and much of what I teach them is in my head, not in a book, so I feel that it's only fair to assess them on what I taught them." The first resource that most of the teachers turn to when looking for help in creating rubrics is the Internet, either the website suggested by the textbook or other educational websites. One of the science teachers comments that she makes her own rubrics, but likes to collaborate with the English teacher to make sure that she "covers all the bases." This year she and another English teacher collaborated to team-teach the research paper based on a biology subject and formatted in APA style. She designed the content portion of the rubric, and the English teacher designed the organization and mechanics portion of the rubric. Both she and the English teacher were pleased with the results, and the students were glad that they only had one research paper to do, not one for science and one for English.

All six high school teachers said that they would like to see students improve in mechanics areas such as spelling, verb and pronoun usage, and punctuation, but the high school teachers in content areas outside of English do not feel that mechanics should be a critical part of the rubric grade. One social studies teacher summed up their sentiment in this way, "I know when I see a misspell or an incorrect verb tense that it's wrong, but I don't feel it's my place to teach them how to punctuate or spell. They should have learned that before they came to me." Most of the content area teachers are frustrated with the mechanics errors on writing assignments, but feel that if the students can still exhibit that they learned the concepts, then they have accomplished their goal, and that the English teachers need to work on the grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

When asked about collaboration on a school wide rubric for assessing writing, most high school content area teachers expressed that they would be willing to discuss the concept, but few really thought it could work. Most felt that there were just too many variables across subject

areas. One teacher said that a uniform rubric would be advantageous for new teachers. "Let's say you have a new faculty member fresh out of college, grading writing assignments could be very overwhelming position to be in, but if the school already has a rubric in place, that is used, it could really help." Another teacher suggested rather than one uniform rubric, a rubric "that would work probably better among subject areas, you know if you did one per science, one per English, like a department rubric, that would work better." Even though the teachers did not think a collaborative school-wide rubric would work, they were willing, at least, to enter into dialogue about it.

Teachers' views on the content of rubrics depended on their priorities for writing. Elementary and middle school teachers, when presented with the information from the high school teachers, accepted the challenge to create a school wide rubric to grade student writing across the curriculum. The data collected from the elementary and middle school teachers, however, revealed that their perception of good writing differed centered mainly around mechanics. Most agreed that if students, "just got the right answer" and made very few mechanical errors, then they had written effectively. One of the middle school social studies teachers expressed that, "I feel comfortable grading spelling and capitalization and stuff like that because I can recognize it easily, but if I have to grade things like coherence and organization, well, I'll probably need more training for that." The elementary and middle school teachers were pleased with the joint effort in creation of the mechanics rubric and were consistent in using it to grade student writing. Many responded that they used it at least once a week, and some more often than that. All of the elementary and middle school teachers were pleased with the improvement in student attention to their writing, especially in the area of mechanics.

5.3 Student Perceptions

Even though student perception was not originally part of the plan for this study, I'm glad I included their voice in the research. These sixth and seventh grade students provided insight into the writing and grading processes. The majority of the students acknowledged that they do write in several classes other than the English class, but that they admittedly did not apply the same effort to writing in those other classes. One male student told me that, "the other teachers don't care if I misspell anything or miss a comma, and all they want is the right answer." Most students agreed that teachers are not really looking for anything other than the answer. As one female student responds, "If they had a problem with they way I write, they should at least circle it or mark it up or something, to let me know they don't like the way I write, instead of just fussing at the whole class about being more careful with our writing."

Most of the sixth and seventh graders did not consider themselves good writers. One reason they gave was that teachers never give them a writing test or a writing grade. Even in English classes, one acknowledges that they do, "mostly grammar or read in ELA." Many could not identify an assignment dedicated to the writing process. When asked if all teachers grade their writing in the same way, all said no. One sixth-grader said that some teachers, "just put a check if they like the answer, but the language teachers will make us do it over if they can't read it or it has a bunch of mistakes." Mixed responses on the survey indicated that most students were confused by the question asking them if they feel that teachers of all subjects should grade their writing. During the interviews, when asked this question again, one seventh-grade male student responded, "No one ever asked me what I think about what teachers do. I don't think it matters what I say, they are going to do what they decide to do anyway." When prodded further, this same students admitted that he would be worried if teachers of other

subjects all graded the same because, "they might not know everything the language teacher knows." Student responses were mixed in answer to the question, "If all teachers graded writing as the ELA teacher does, could overall student writing improve?" Those who commented on the question responded that for lazy students or those who "just don't care" they did not expect the writing to improve.

Five months later, after implementation of the mechanics rubric across subject areas, student responses were somewhat more positive. Students say at least now they know what they have to be careful about, and almost all admitted that they do pay more attention to the mechanics of their writing. The overall impression, according to the surveys, is that students believe that writing is improving. None wrote or spoke about negative experiences with teachers across the curriculum grading their mechanics. Some commented that, "it's not fair," because now they have to be careful in every class, and one frustrated seventh grader commented, "My grades in science have gone down just because I don't put a capital letter or a period. Science should be about science, not about periods or spelling." This student, even though obviously frustrated, admitted that he does proofread his work more than he used to.

CHAPTER 6.   FINDINGS

6.1 Discovery

I saw a common thread of desire with the teachers across grade levels and subject areas, a desire to be heard, taken seriously, to help students, and a desire to improve and move forward. The data also revealed frustration, helplessness (though not hopelessness), honesty and concern about writing and grading inadequacies.   The frankness of both teachers and students was refreshing. Teachers in this study were examining student writing in a critical light, not just as another assessment. They were attempting to pinpoint reasons for student errors, while students were examining their own writing for deficiencies.   Another revelation found in the compiled data is the evidence that teachers were working together to assign writing, use the rubric, and improve the one aspect of writing that they feel need the most improvement. Writing samples revealed that students are proofreading more carefully and are applying the same effort in all subjects that require writing.

The data shows that the teachers in the study believed that progress could be made and were willing to be part of the solution, rather than just complain about the problem. This cooperative collaboration was more prevalent in the elementary and middle school than it was in the high school, where teachers did not hold out much hope that the problem could be fixed. The students were honest about their writing weaknesses, but did not share the enthusiasm for improvement that the teachers did. They knew that they had to pay more attention to the writing because all teachers were grading the mechanics, but they did it rather begrudgingly.

Mechanics is the greatest concern, but the aspects of mechanics differ from teacher to teacher (ex. spelling more important than commas). Few lower-grade teachers used a rubric before the implementation of our school-wide mechanics rubrics whereas upper grades depend

highly on rubrics. All lower-grade teachers of all subjects want improvement and are willing to work for it. Teachers and students perceive writing differently. Teacher perception of student weaknesses mostly agrees with student answers. Teachers want change, but students are happy with status quo. Many students don't see long-term benefits of mechanics correction, but teachers do.

6.2 Teacher Evaluation of Student Writing

How are teachers in contents areas other than English evaluating student writing? The evidence clearly shows that teachers at both high school and elementary/middle school levels value writing as an effective assessment of student learning. Teachers in all subject areas, especially history and science, routinely assign writing, but they differ in their perceptions of what constitutes good writing. At the high school level, teachers across the content area communicate that content and expression of ideas is important, but they are also frustrated with mechanical errors in student writing. Elementary and middle school teachers, however, tend to characterize good writing by its mechanical level. There are different level of rigor in assessment of writing between high school and elementary teachers. Whereas high school teachers grade writing using rubrics with specific criteria, elementary and middle rarely used any rubric or systematic means of assessing writing. There obviously was no consistency in the grading of writing across the curriculum. Without consistency, how can students know what to expect from one teacher to another? If we teachers do not know what each other is expecting from students, how can we reinforce or even encourage consistency in skills?

High school teachers use rubrics to assess student writing, but vary greatly in the criteria used within the rubrics and the point value assigned to each category. The high school teachers could not see the feasibility of a common rubric, stating that there were "just too many

variables." They did, however, express a need for holding students accountable for common mechanical errors. The elementary and middle school teachers were not using rubrics routinely to assess student writing. The writing, mostly in non-ELA classes, was evaluated mainly for "right answers" and not the process of writing. These lower level teachers were also frustrated by the common mechanical errors of students. They were willing to work together, and the process of creating the rubric drew all of us closer. The process of working together for a common goal, communicating our concerns, and offering sound suggestions, bonded us together. Because they had created the rubric, they were more willing to use it in the classroom. They took pride in being part of the team, and were optimistic that we would see improvement. The biggest difference in teacher perspective was the individualism of the high school versus the team effort of the elementary and middle school teachers.

6.3 Student Perception of Teacher Grading

How do students perceive the role of evaluation of their writing when completed by non-ELA teachers? High school students did not participate in the first phase of this study, which was devoted to high school teacher perceptions of student writing, but middle school students did participate in the second phase of the research, which focused on the perceptions of elementary and middle school teachers and students regarding rubrics to grade writing. The majority of these middle school students felt that only the English teacher should grade their writing because "they are the ones who teach it." They did mostly agree that writing was necessary in every subject, but did not want to be graded as stringently on every aspect of the writing. Many expressed that it would "slow me down" to be so careful, and that sometimes they don't have enough time at the end of a test to go back over and check for errors. Some felt that just having the right answer should be good enough.

Even though they were not eager to have every teacher grade their writing, after five months they grudgingly admitted that the new rubric made them look more closely at their writing. Teachers were encouraged that holding students accountable, at least to mechanics, with the new rubric improved writing.

6.4 Common Rubric across the Curriculum

Can the use of a common rubric across the curriculum for grading the mechanics of student writing improve student writing in subjects other than ELA? Teachers at the high school level expressed that the process of fixing mechanical errors had to start at the elementary level and that it would be difficult to hold students accountable to mechanics that they may not have been taught adequately. Elementary and middle school teachers were eager to develop a mechanics rubric that would hold students accountable, mainly because they knew that the students had been taught basic spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and handwriting, but other factors were responsible for the repeated errors.

Implementation in grades 2-7 of the mechanic rubrics, containing five criteria, and counting for only 10% of the total writing grade, was mostly successful. Teachers across content areas and grade levels report that students are more attentive to their writing and they are more prone to look over work before it is turned in. The rubric will remain a part of the continuous improvement plan at our school. We will introduce the rubric to the high school next year. While students are not enthusiastic about the mechanics rubric implementation, they agree that it does make them more attentive to their writing. Some still feel that while teachers should use the rubric to remind the student of the errors, that only English teachers should actually take points off.

CHAPTER 7   CONCLUSION

7.1 Implications for Practice

Even though the literature and some teacher responses reveal the negatives of rubrics to grade student writing, I am confident that the use of rubrics across the curriculum is still a valuable practice.   While teaching writing has traditionally been the sole responsibility of the7English teacher, I now feel that it cannot be done in isolation. For students to become better writers, teachers across the curriculum should give students many opportunities to write, communicate the importance of writing well, and hold them accountable to those skills and process that have been taught in previous grades. Our working cooperatively as teachers will convey to students that all of their teachers care about every aspect of their education. It will also open the door to teacher communication concerning other cross-curricular needs and student accountability.

I have learned that I do too much in isolation or even as a member of the English department. The frustration I feel is sometimes felt by others, and working together to analyze the frustration and working though it is far better than just complaining about it or blaming other teachers. I also learned a little more about the students I teach. When challenged to look closely at the way they think about a topic or to examine a need for change, students will usually offer honest evaluations. Just recognizing the problem may not be impetus enough for change. I have learned that students like to be asked, and will offer some sound suggestions for change. We teachers, however, still have to push and to hold them accountable before they will actually embrace the change.

Communication with teachers of other content areas opens avenues of mutual respect and camaraderie as well as offering new ideas for content and cross-curricular opportunities. I am

eager to work with this incredible group of teachers on future projects, and to help them work though tough areas in their subjects, such as reading graphs, doing research, giving oral presentations, using technology, etc. If we all work together and do some of the same things in every class, students could recognize that we value these skills across the curriculum, and will know that they will be held to the same level of accountability across the curriculum.

What we failed to take into account, I fear, is that changes we have implemented will not last unless students see the value in becoming better writers. Yes, they look more closely at mechanics, and even proofread their work, but they do not want to any more now that they did before we implemented the rubric. In retrospect, we probably should have included the students in the creation of the rubric, rather than just getting their opinion. I fear they will fall back into bad habits because all we are doing is affecting the grade, not the attitude toward writing.

I intend to find the time to plan cross-curricular lessons that reinforce the standards across subject areas. I had never even looked at any other teacher's GLE's until this project, and did not realize that we share many of the same ones. What a valuable way to assist one another, to be creative, and to lighten the burden of lesson planning and assessment.

7.2 Implications for Further Research

During this process, I often wondered why elementary and middle school teachers were so willing to work on a common rubric, whereas the high school teachers did not think it could work. Is it because high school teachers have been focused only on one subject and elementary teachers have been trained to teach across subject fields? Are elementary teachers as a whole more amenable to collaboration and cooperation? Are high school teachers too specialized to work with teachers across the curriculum? Do high school teachers value the subject they teach over the learning process as a whole?

I also was amazed that teachers in every grade and subject identified spelling as the main mechanics error in student writing. I wonder why spelling is still such an issue even at the high school level? Should we be teaching spelling rules rather than lists of words? Do we rush through spelling in the early grades, and how do we help those who cannot master the words and get left behind? How do we as a school address the spelling problem?

Our elementary school has the capability of tracking students throughout their K-7th years. Further longitudinal study needs to be done to track student progress through several stages of learning, especially in the area of writing, before we can fully attempt to understand where some of the common writing errors originate. I am challenged to begin such a study, and have already begun to plan a strategy to begin this study at the start of the new school year.

7.3 Conclusion

Giving content area teachers a voice in the rubrics debate was very enlightening to me. I was pleased to note that teachers across the curriculum in this study value writing and use writing to assess students' learning of concepts. The content area teachers have some of the same positive feelings about rubrics that English teachers do. They feel that rubrics give students clear expectations of what to expect from writing assignments, and that with rubrics students are not left wondering why they received the grade they received. They also feel that rubrics simplify the grading process, though some acknowledge that creativity may be limited by the rigidity of the rubrics. One observation that I had not considered about rubrics is that they limit students to only the bare minimum requirements, rather than pushing them to greater rigor or creativity.

All of the high school teachers in this study create their own rubrics for the same reason: they know what they taught and what they want to assess. Usually when they do not start from scratch, they use resources from websites. Almost all of the teachers who use rubrics make

adjustments to fit the assignment more closely. Most collaborated with teachers in their subject area on rubrics, and a few even collaborated with the English teachers for help with rubrics.

While most high school teachers at our school value mechanics and do look for mechanical errors in writing, they also value elaboration and the use of support and proof. Elementary and middle school teachers in this study value mechanics as the main criteria in the writing process. High school teachers feel it is not their place to judge mechanics heavily, but expect English teachers to teach the basic grammar, spelling, and punctuation and to have students ready to write with very few mechanical errors. Elementary and middle were willing to share the responsibility for student weaknesses in writing and to work toward a solution. I have been invited to work with the high school teachers to begin the dialogue concerning common frustrations with student writing. Very recently, I presented to them the process and short term results of the collaborative effort of the elementary and middle school teachers, and they are willing to work toward the same end. I embrace the opportunity to once become a teacher researcher and plan to add this study to the canon concerning student writing and teacher collaboration.

While I recognize that this is a very small sampling of teachers in one school, I learned that teachers across the curriculum want to be asked their opinions about topics that matter to them and to their students. Teachers across the curriculum value writing, they work hard to assess the writing effectively, even though they value some aspects more than other teachers do, and they are willing to work collaboratively to find the best method of assessing student writing.

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APPENDIX A   INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND CONSENT FORMS

Interview Protocol with Teachers
Thank you for agreeing to interview with me as part of this study. On the consent form, I indicated that any personal information you may reveal about yourself will be kept confidential unless its release is legally compelled. This interview will be tape-recorded and you can choose to end this interview at any time without penalty or loss of any benefit to which you might otherwise be entitled.

Teachers' Consent Form
Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to study the experiences of content area teachers who use rubrics to grade student writing, to study students' perceptions of their writing expectations in non-ELA classes, and to implement a school wide mechanics rubric and assess its effectiveness in improving student writing in all classes.

Inclusion Criteria: High School, Elementary, and Middle School teachers and Middle School students at our school.
.
Description of the Study: Over a period of two-three months, the investigator will distribute questionnaires with multiple choice and open ended questions to the study group (5-6 teachers) to assess their use of rubrics and their concerns about student writing. Students will also be surveyed (about 80 students) and five or six will be interviewed concerning their perceptions of writing in non-ELA classes. These interviews will be audio-taped. Lastly, teachers will be asked to work collaboratively to develop and implement a writing mechanics rubric and to show evidence of its use to assess student writing.

Benefits**:** The results of this study will be shared with other teachers throughout the school in all subject areas and will be implemented in the school.
Risk**s**: There are no known risks other than those encountered in a normal school day.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary, and at any time, you may withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which you might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms that will represent the subjects in discussion of research results. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

Signature**:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Teacher's Signature:_____ Date:_____

Interview Protocol with Students

Thank you for volunteering to interview with me as part of this study and for returning your parent's consent form. On that form I let your parents know, and I want you to know, that any personal information you may reveal about yourself will be kept confidential. This interview will be tape-recorded and you can choose to end this interview at any time if you choose to.

Student Assent Form for Participants

I, _____ (print your name), agree to be in a study about using rubrics to assess writing to find ways to improve education. I agree to have a researcher take notes of my activities in class and look at my assignments during this unit on writing. Some of these discussions will be audio-taped. The researcher may also ask me some questions about my opinions on this unit. I can decide not to have my responses included in the study at any time.

_____   _____   _____
Your signature   Age   Date

_____   _____
Witness   Date

Parental Consent Form

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research project is to study the experiences of content area teachers who use rubrics to grade student writing, to study students' perceptions of their writing expectations in non-ELA classes, and to implement a school wide mechanics rubric and assess its effectiveness in improving student writing in all classes.
Inclusion Criteria: 6th and 7th grade students in the following classes: English, History, Science, and Math.

Description of the Study: Over a period of two-three months, the investigator will distribute questionnaires with multiple choice and open ended questions to the study group (5-6 teachers) to assess their use of rubrics and their concerns about student writing. Students will also be surveyed (about 80 students) and five or six will be interviewed concerning their perceptions of writing in non-ELA classes. These interviews will be audio taped. Lastly, teachers will be asked to work collaboratively to develop and implement a writing mechanics rubric and to show evidence of its use to assess student writing. Her research will not interfere with the teachers' day to day activities or the students' learning environment.

Benefits**:** The results of this study will be shared with other teachers interested in designing rubrics that assess the mechanics of writing in order to support and improve student writing.
Risks: There are no known risks.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary, and a child will become part of the study only if both child and parent agree to the child's participation. At any time, either the student may withdraw from the study or the student's parent may withdraw the subject from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

Privacy: Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Student identity will be protected through the use of pseudonyms that will represent the students in discussion of research results. Student identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.
.

Signatures**:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Parent's Signature:_____ Date:_____

The parent/guardian has indicated to me that he/she is unable to read. I certify that I have read this consent from to the parent/guardian and explained that by completing the signature line above he/she has given permission for the child to participate in the study.

Signature of Reader:_____ Date:_____

APPENDIX B SURVEYS AND INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Questions for teachers in this study:
1. How do you define "good writing"? Explain
2. What do you see as the most common mechanical errors in student writing?
3. What do you feel are some of the reasons for these errors?
4. What should ELA teachers do to better prepare students for writing in non-ELA classes?
5. Do you think students typically write more poorly in non-ELA classes? If yes, why?
6. Do you use a rubric when grading student writing? If yes, explain and give an example.
7. Can a common mechanics rubric be developed that all teachers in our school in all subjects and grades can use to assess student writing? Would you be willing to collaborate on the creation of this rubric?
8. What would be the advantages of using a common rubric?
9. What would some disadvantages be?

Questions for students in this study: Middle School Students

1. Would you consider yourself a good writer? Why or why not?
2. Do all of your teachers grade your writing in the same way? If not, what are the differences in what teachers of non-ELA subjects expect from your writing as compared to your ELA teacher?
3. Do you feel that the ELA teacher is the only one who should grade your writing? Why or why not?
4. If all teachers graded writing as the ELA teacher does, could overall student writing improve? Explain.

Rubrics Across the Curriculum

Please take a moment to help us gain insight into how teachers across the curriculum use rubrics to evaluate writing.

Background Information

What subject(s) do you teach?

_____

How many years experience?_____

Gender: _____ Male _____ Female

Area of Certification

_____

Any Formal Training in grading of writing? Classes, Workshops, etc._____

Purpose of Rubrics

Q1: Explain your experience with rubrics?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Q3: Do you feel that rubrics give your students a better idea of what you expect from their writing?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Q2: Do you believe that rubrics simplify the grading process? Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Q4: Does their writing reflect that they understand your expectations?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Use of Rubrics

Q5: Do you use the same rubric for every writing assignment? Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q7: For what types of writing assignment do you use rubrics?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Q6: Do you use websites or other teacher resources to create rubrics or do you create them yourself?

_____
_____
_____
_____

Q8: Have you ever felt conflicted about a writing assignment when using a rubric? Explain.

_____
_____
_____
_____

Rubric Criteria

Q9**:** What elements of writing do you value most? Why?

_____
_____
_____

Q10: How do you define "good writing"? Explain

_____
_____
_____

Q11: Have you and your colleagues ever collaborated or shared rubrics?

_____
_____

Q12: Do you think that rubrics limit student's voice and creativity? Explain.

_____
_____
_____

Q13: Do you think teachers could create a uniform rubric for writing that could be used across the curriculum?
      a. What do you think teachers would value most on this rubric?
      b. What do you think teachers would value least?

Student Survey through Survey Monkey

1. In which of the following classes do your teachers expect you to write? Writing consists of at least 2-3 complete sentences such as notes, journals, reports, test answers, paragraphs, essays, research, etc.

☐ Bible

☐ English

☐ History

☐ Math

☐ Science

2. Do all of your teachers grade your writing in the same way?

○ Yes

○ No

3. How do you know what your teacher expects from your writing?
Check as many as you need to.

☐ The instructions state what the writing should be

☐ The teacher assumes you know how to write what is expected

☐ A rubric is provided that sets the writing requirements

☐ The teacher gives instructions orally before the assignment

☐ The past writing grade showed me what the teacher expects

☐ I don't usually know what my teacher expects in my writing

☐ Other (how else do you know what to expect)

4. Think about the writing you do in your ELA class then compare that to the writing you do in your other classes.
How do you think the teachers grade your writing?

○ Other subject teachers grade the same as the ELA teacher

○ Other subject teachers grade my writing harder than ELA

○ Other subject teachers are easier on my writing than ELA

○ Some teachers grade strictly and others are easy

5. Do you feel that the ELA teacher the only one who should grade your writing? Why or Why not?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Please explain your answer

[text box]

6. If all teachers graded in the same way that the ELA teacher does, could overall student writing improve?

○ Yes

○ No

○ Please explain your answer

Teacher On-Line Survey through Survey Monkey

1. What subject(s) do you teach? Check as many as apply.

☐ English

☐ Math

☐ Science

☐ History

☐ Bible

☐ Other

2. What types of writing do you assign? Check as many as apply.

☐ Complete Sentence Response to Questions

☐ Journal Writing

☐ Paragraph Writing

☐ Letter Writing

☐ Essay or Research Paper

☐ Creative Writing

☐ Lab Reports

3. How often do your students write in your class? For the sake of this question, writing consists of two or more complete sentences on any topic or anything longer than that.

○ Daily

○ Two to three times a week

○ At least once a week

○ A few times a month

○ About once a month

4. How do you define "good" writing?

[text box]

5. What do you see as the most common mechanical errors in student writing? (check all that apply)

☐ Misspelling of commonly used words

☐ Not capitalizing proper nouns

☐ Not capitalizing first word in the sentence

☐ Misuse of end marks

☐ Misuse of other punctuation: commas, quotation marks, etc.

☐ Following directions

☐ Handwriting

☐ Other (please specify)

[text box]

6. What do you see as the reason for common mechanical errors? (check all that apply)

☐ Gaps in past instruction(just don't know correct way)

☐ Failure to proofread effectively

☐ Eagerness to finish before others

☐ Laziness (failure to correct because it's too much trouble)

☐ Mechanics not a priority (just want to get the right answer)

Other (please specify)

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7. Do you think students typically write more poorly in non-ELA classes than they do in ELA classes? If yes, why?

○ No

○ Yes

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Why?

8. Do you use a rubric when grading student writing?

○ No

○ Yes

9. What would be the benefit of having a school-wide rubric for assessing mechanics?

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10. What would be some disadvantages of a school-wide rubric to assess the mechanics of writing?

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APPENDIX C   MECHANICS RUBRIC

This type of rubric allows us to put minus points in the blank up to a total of 10. It can be made into a stamp or copied onto your assignment so that students can have a checklist.

Mechanics _____ /10 pts.
_____Heading on Paper—MLA heading
_____Capitalization – 1st word sentence, proper names/places
_____Punctuation—End marks, commas, apostrophes
_____Spelling - Homophones, careless errors
_____ Legible Handwriting

This is just another look at the same information, but it can be posted to Renweb for parents and students to reference and then we can just add a mechanics grade to each assignment.

Mechanics Rubric (for all assignments turned in for a grade)

9-10 points Excellent	8-6 points Good	5-3 points Fair	2-0 points Poor
Uses Proper Heading Capitalizes first words in sentences and all proper names and places All sentences properly punctuated with end marks, commas, and apostrophes All commonly used words spelled correctly Handwriting is neat and legible	Most of the Heading is accurate Only a few errors in capitalization A few, but not many, errors in punctuation Only a few commonly used words misspelled Handwriting is legible, but too small, large, or "creative"	Most of the heading is inaccurate Several capitalization errors Several punctuation errors Several commonly used words misspelled Many words are illegible or take an excessive effort to read	No heading on paper Many capitalization errors (most common capitalization rules not applied) Many punctuation errors (common rules not applied) Cannot read handwriting

VITA

Jeanette Faye Martin Miller was born in Jennings, Louisiana. After graduating from Lake Arthur High School, Lake Arthur, Louisiana, she entered the world of work for five years. She then attended Louisiana State University from 1977 to 1981, without obtaining her degree. She traveled extensively throughout the United States with her husband and two daughters for several years. In 1994, she returned to Louisiana State University. She obtained her Bachelor of Science in Secondary English Education in May 1995. During the following years, she was employed by Parkview Baptist School, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Ascension Christian High, Gonzales, Louisiana, and she currently works at Faith Academy Middle School. She entered the Graduate School at Louisiana State University in June, 2010.