

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF SIXTH GRADE STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES
ON THEIR EXPERIENCE USING A RUBRIC FOR
CRITERION-REFERENCED ASSESSMENT

by

Julie Ann Quast

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine sixth grade literacy students' perspectives of rubric-referenced assessment at an inner-city school in central Arkansas. The theories guiding this study were Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, as rubrics scaffold students learning (Reeves & Stanford, 2009) and social cognitive theory, as rubrics help students regulate their learning (Covill, 2012) and control their actions (Bandura, 1997). The sample size included 29 students completing a questionnaire, 12 students participating in a focus group session, and two students journaling their experience. The research questions focused on the experiences, perspectives, approach to assignments, and response to feedback from a rubric. Analysis of data was conducted using Moussakas' (1994) procedures to provide a full description of the phenomenon through coding and textual and structural descriptions, which helped create the "essence" of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Five themes were identified from the data analysis and described with support for each theme. The five themes included planning/expectations, feedback and grading, motivation, reflection, and limitations/restrictions. The implications from this study support teachers, administrators, and policy-makers in making instructional and assessment decisions to best meet students' needs.

Keywords: assessment, perceptions, rubric, self-efficacy

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List of Abbreviations

International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Middle Years Program (MYP)

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)

Self-regulated Learning (SRL)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

A rubric is a document including the qualifying criterion described for the expected outcomes of student work. Rubrics are used to assess products and performances in any subject ranging from physical education to math and literacy. The rubric is most commonly used for assessment purposes, but the literature shows the value of rubrics as learning tools (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Baker et al., 2013; Parker & Breyfogle, 2011). Using criterion-based rubrics allows students to demonstrate their learning and thinking. The purpose of this study is to examine sixth grade literacy students' perspectives of rubric-referenced assessment.

There is a lack of research on K-12 student perceptions and experiences using rubrics. To begin to fill this gap, this study used a phenomenological approach with participants from an ethnically diverse intermediate school in central Arkansas. The central question focused on the experiences of sixth grade literacy students' with a rubric using a phenomenological approach to the research. The sub-questions were designed to identify the sixth grade literacy students' perspectives about the tool, how having a rubric or not having a rubric changes the way they approach an assignment, and how the students respond to the rubric and feedback provided from the rubric. This chapter situates the background and significance of the study in the literature. The problem and purpose of the study are presented with a research plan to address filling these needs. Delimitations and limitations of the study are delineated, as well as key definitions for understanding the study.

Background

The current culture of assessment in American schools is one where "test scores are frequently used to make 'high stakes' decisions about school administrator and teacher

accountability and promotion of students” (Parkay, Hass, & Ancia, 2010, p. 361). Consequently, the focus on accountability has caused a “drive for more testing” (Parkay et al., 2010, p. 361). In the past, the traditional view of assessment involved paper-and-pencil tests that provided information about what the student had mastered and learned. The recent focus of assessment is on higher-level thinking skills, as opposed to the simple recall of facts that a traditional paper-and-pencil test would measure (VanTassel-Baska, 2014). “Assessment is a process of reasoning from evidence to evaluate specific claims about student capability” (Herman & Linn, 2013, p. 6).

In an effort to measure higher-level thinking skills, “high stakes” tests are using rubrics to evaluate constructed response questions. With the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), by 46 states, a consortium was created to develop a system of performance-based and summative assessments. The PARCC assessments claim to “better measure students’ critical-thinking and problem-solving skills and their ability to communicate” (“PARCC frequently asked questions,” 2013). Yet Dutro, Selland, and Bien (2013) contended that the test scores of students might be inaccurate due to the arbitrary nature of the criteria from the rubric.

An increased need for assessment of higher-level skills has led to a variety of methods for assessing student learning in the classroom, not just on “high stakes” paper-and-pencil tests or computer-based tests. To facilitate the objectivity and ease of assessment, teachers often turn to a criterion-referenced rubric (Diller & Phelps, 2008). The benefits of rubrics concerning grading procedures and speed of grading have been well documented (Dueck, 2014; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Reddy & Andrade, 2010), but the impact rubrics may have on students and their learning has not been fully studied, especially with K-12 students (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Andrade, Du, & Wang, 2008). Even with limited empirical evidence available to support the use of rubrics as a valid form of assessment, most teachers believe having a rubric is better than not

having one (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010).

Educators' use of criterion-referenced rubrics for assessment at all levels is greatly increasing (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Reddy & Andrade, 2010), yet no clear evidence exists on how students use the rubrics to support the learning process (He & Canty, 2012; Lee, 2013). Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) noted the increasing use of rubrics, while Lee (2013) discussed how rubrics are created "before learning takes place" and often "ignore" aspects of critical thinking and unforeseen aspects of the assessment process (p. 209). Creswell (2013) stated, "research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice" (p. 133); therefore, by gaining the perspective of the learner, classroom instruction and assessment decisions can be enhanced, supported, and improved.

The majority of research regarding the use of rubrics is in the field of higher education (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). The research available often refers to the reliability and validity of rubrics (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010) or the construction and use of a rubric in the classroom (Metin, 2013; Moskal & Leydens, 2000), instead of the impact rubrics have on student learning. Two specific studies addressed the students' perceptions of using a rubric, both of which study undergraduate students (Andrade & Du, 2005; Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013). These studies revealed that students appreciated the clear expectations of the rubric, but also noted the potential of the rubric limiting the outcomes of the work. Eshun and Osei-Poku (2013) discussed the possibility that students younger than college level may not be developmentally capable of the thinking required to use a rubric effectively. Further, in an explanation of seven and eight year old's thinking Lee (2013) stated, "The use of rubrics in assessment creates the tendency to be convergent and not take into consideration the emergent nature of learning that occurs in the classroom" (p. 221). My research with younger students in

the field of K-12 education extends the research of Andrade and Du (2005) and Eshun and Osei-Poku (2013), which focused on the perceptions of students' experiences with rubrics in higher-level education.

The use of a rubric can be supported by the theory of constructivism, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Bandura's social cognitive theory. Constructivism is the active construction of knowledge (Schwandt, 2007), which aligns with the research that suggests rubrics are intended to be a part of the learning process, not just a form of assessment (Lipnevich, McCallen, Miles, & Smith, 2014; Taylor, 2013). In this way, students are actively constructing their learning through the use of a rubric (Zane, 2009). Rubrics scaffold a student's learning to the criteria and expectations set out by the teacher (Reeves & Stanford, 2009), which supports Vygotsky's zone of proximal development concept. ZPD illustrates the gap in what a student can complete independently and what can be done with support (Henniger, 2009). Further, a student's ability to use a rubric could be affected by the ability to self-regulate learning (Andrade, Wang, Du, & Akawi, 2009; Covill, 2012), which relates to Bandura's social cognitive theory.

Situation to Self

My motivation for this study came from a student I had while teaching a college education course. In the class, I emphasized the importance of using the rubric to complete assignments. Upon receiving the rubric after grading, a student commented she felt like the rubric "put her in a box." This caused me to want to learn more about how students view and use rubrics for assessment.

I embrace a social constructivism interpretive framework and an ontological philosophical assumption. Social constructivism uses broad questions to allow participants to

construct their meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2013). By using broad questions, I interpret the meaning of the participants' experience. According to Creswell (2013), an ontological assumption is the reporting of the participants' different perspectives in the study. I bracketed my experiences with rubrics in order to report the varied perspectives of my participants.

Problem Statement

The study problem was the lack of literature examining the actual use of rubrics by students and their impact on students' learning (Andrade & Du, 2005; Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013; Howell, 2011). The research is plentiful on the reliability, construction, and types of rubrics available (Oakleaf, 2009; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010), but few studies have examined what impacts the rubrics have on student learning. Further, the vast amount of research conducted has been conducted in higher-level education. For example, Reddy and Andrade's (2010) review article revealed student perceptions of rubrics' uses and impacts on student learning, but recommended further research on the focus on learning and response to rubrics. The use of a rubric can be supported by Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Bandura's social cognitive theory. Panadero and Jonsson (2013) acknowledged that "we do not know how the use of rubrics may facilitate in improving student performance" (p. 130). Additionally, Andrade et al. (2008) stated that there is "limited empirical evidence to support" the use of rubrics (p. 3). The focus of my research was on sixth grade literacy students' experiences with a rubric.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine sixth grade literacy students' perspectives of rubric-referenced assessment at an inner city school in central Arkansas. Rubric referenced assessment is generally defined as the assessment of student work using a rubric with qualifying criterion described for the expected outcomes of student

work. The theories guiding this study were the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), as rubrics scaffold students' learning (Reeves & Stanford, 2009), and social cognitive theory, as rubrics help students regulate their own learning (Covill, 2012) and control of their own actions (Bandura, 1997).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is the contribution to the field of education. Better informed instructional and assessment decisions can be made based on the results of this study. Similar studies to mine (Andrade & Du, 2005; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010) regarding students' perceptions of rubric use have been conducted, but were conducted in higher education. By gaining the perspective of a different age group, this study contributes to the existing literature. The qualitative nature and purpose of transcendental phenomenology is to bring the experiences of the participants to life and help their voices be heard (Creswell, 2013); the identified gap in the literature reveals the need to have students' younger than the college level describe their experiences with a rubric.

Consideration needs to be given to how developmentally prepared elementary students are to use a rubric appropriately, since the findings from Reynolds-Keefer's (2010) study on teacher preparation suggested that rubrics may not be an acceptable form of assessment for all age levels. Piaget's stages of intellectual development were considered in the selection of sixth grade students for the participants of this study. In an effort to ensure the participants would have the metacognitive knowledge to explain their thinking, I purposefully selected sixth graders due to their developmental move to the formal operations stage of thinking (Henninger, 2009).

Panadero and Jonsson (2013) recommended future research to examine how students actually use a rubric for planning and reviewing their work. My research questions were

designed to elicit the experiences sixth grade literacy students have with rubrics, how they use the rubric to approach and complete assignments, and how they use the feedback gained from the rubric. My investigation of these questions through the description of sixth grade literacy students' seeks to contribute to the body of literature.

With a call for increased accountability in education today (Parkay et al., 2010; VanTassel-Baska, 2014), teachers must use the most effective assessment approaches with their students. The lack of research (Andrade & Du, 2005; Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013; Howell, 2011) concerning how students use and perceive a rubric limits our understanding of the impact the rubric has on student learning. Teachers need to be aware of how students use the rubric in order to effectively use this assessment approach in their classrooms (Reynolds-Keefer, 2010).

Research Questions

To improve instructional practice, one must first understand how students perceive a rubric. Grover (2004) discussed the importance of allowing children to describe their experiences; similarly, in a description of the purpose of classroom assessment, Brookhart (2003) explained the importance of the "student's point of view because of its effect on learning" (p. 6). Numerous books (Cheyney, 2010; Dueck, 2014; Lilburn & Ciurak, 2010) offer ready-made rubrics or detailed instructions for creating rubrics to save time and offer feedback to students, but what is unknown is how K-12 students use rubrics (Stevens & Levi, 2011). Research is available regarding the reliability and validity of the grading aspect of a rubric (Oakleaf, 2009; Reddy, 2011), but little research has been conducted to investigate students' perceptions (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). The research concerning students' perceptions and experience with a rubric is in higher education (Andrade & Du, 2005; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010).

Moustakas (1994) explained that research questions should be inspired by “excitement and curiosity” (p. 104) and should bring “the core of the problem into focus” (p. 104). This is what I sought to accomplish through my research questions. Creswell (2013) recommended using a central question followed by several sub-questions. The following research questions helped provide the essence of the sixth grade students’ experiences and perspectives regarding the use of a rubric:

Central Question: What are sixth grade literacy students’ experiences with rubrics?

This broad central question focused my study on the experience of the phenomenon of using a rubric. In a study similar to this one, Andrade and Du (2005) stated, “there is limited empirical evidence that students can and do use rubrics to their advantage” (p. 1). While two additional studies (Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010) have been completed since the Andrade and Du (2005) study, they both were conducted in higher education. Further, Lipnevich et al. (2014) described the experience of students using a rubric as being less effective than other methods for undergraduate students. My central question allowed for an examination of the experiences sixth grade literacy students had with a rubric. This examination was important for developing the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

Sub-questions:

1. What are sixth grade literacy students’ perspectives about the use of rubrics as an assessment tool?

This question was designed to explore how students perceive the rubric as a tool for assessment. Lipnevich et al. (2014) explained that students must understand the criteria and expectations for the assessment to facilitate learning. The Reynolds-Keefer (2010) study with undergraduate students found some students had positive perceptions about learning from the use

of rubrics, increased communication with the instructor, clarity of teacher expectations, and “general enthusiasm” (p. 3) towards future use of rubrics, while some students experienced greater anxiety for fear of having to create highly “specific” (p. 3) work. No information is available on how students younger than the college level perceive the use of a rubric, which could affect curriculum and assessment decisions. Further, there is some concern that younger students may not be developmentally ready to understand and use a rubric successfully (Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013), which highlights the importance of discovering how students perceive the rubric as an assessment tool.

2. How does having a rubric or not having one change the way sixth grade literacy students approach and complete an assignment?

Examining how students perceived if the rubric changed or did not change their approach to an assignment helped determine the impact the rubric had on the students’ thinking. Panadero and Jonsson (2013) stated that “there are indications of rubrics being used as tool for self-regulation, for instance by students planning and reviewing their work with the aid of rubrics” (p. 142). This question helped identify if students were using the rubric to self-regulate their learning, as they were encouraged to describe their experience when they have a rubric and when one is not available. Personally, I have become so accustomed to using a rubric that when I do not have one, I panic and am not sure how to approach the assignment. This question was designed to find out how attached sixth grade students become to the support and structure offered by a rubric.

3. How do sixth grade literacy students respond to feedback from rubric-referenced assessments?

Providing specific feedback is a frequent role and benefit of rubrics discussed in the literature (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Walser, 2011). Both Lipnevich et al. (2014) and Stevens and Levi (2011) noted the importance of students attending to the feedback received from the rubric, as well as how students often do not attend to the feedback provided. If students are not using the feedback from the rubric, then one of the greatest benefits of using a rubric is lost. Poulos and Mahony (2008) stated “how the student interprets and deals with feedback is critical” (p. 144), yet there are “few studies” (p. 144) regarding students’ views of feedback. This question was designed to gain a picture of how students’ respond to the feedback received from the rubric, which helped build upon the totality of the description of the students’ experience with a rubric.

Research Plan

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach. Research participants were sixth grade literacy students from an inner city intermediate school from two different teachers’ rosters. A questionnaire, focus group session, and journaling of sixth graders regarding their experience using rubric-referenced assessment provided insight into the phenomenon of rubric use. The sample size for the questionnaire was 29 sixth grade literacy students, with twelve students participating in the focus group, and two students in the journaling component. Quantitative methods of research would not provide a full picture of a student’s experience using a rubric; therefore, qualitative measures were used to discover the perspectives of the students, in order for practitioners to select methods of assessment to meet the needs of their students. Before the collection of data, I obtained approval from Liberty University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the research site followed by consent and assent forms from the participants

and their parents or guardians. My research was guided by the following seven steps Moustakas (1994) delineated for conducting human science research:

1. Discovering a topic with autobiographical and social meaning and significance
2. “Conducting a comprehensive review” of professional literature
3. “Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers”
4. Obtaining informed consent and insuring confidentiality
5. Developing questions for the interview process
6. Conducting interviews “on a bracketed topic and question”
7. “Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textual and structural descriptions, a composite textual description, a composite structural description, and a synthesis of textual and structural meanings and essences (pp. 103-104).

Delimitations and Limitations

A delimitation of this study was that the participants were limited to sixth graders from a single intermediate school. Examining a larger number of students’ perspectives from a variety of grade levels and/or schools was beyond the scope of this study. The students participating in my study experience the phenomenon of a rubric differently from other populations of students and other sites with different curriculum goals.

Sixth grade was purposefully chosen because sixth graders should be able to fully describe their experience of rubric use, unlike students from younger grades. Possible limitations included the limited size of the sample and the generalizability due to geographic location and the focus on a single grade level. Also, the participants’ previous use and exposure to rubrics could not be predicted or controlled. While this limitation of previous exposure could

not be controlled, the purpose of the study is to examine how sixth grade literacy students perceive the use of the rubric and begin to understand their experience with the rubric.

Definitions

1. *Assessment* – Assessment is a broad term with a variety of implications, but for the purposes of this study the definition refers to “the process of gathering information about a student’s performance” (J. D. Cooper, Kiger, Robinson, & Slansky, 2012, p. 435).
2. *Perceptions* – A person’s perception about something is how one thinks or feels about it; Poulos and Mahony (2008) described perceptions as how an individual interprets an experience and assigns meaning to it based on his interpretation.
3. *Rubric* – A rubric is “a set of guidelines or acceptable responses for the completion of a task” (J. D. Cooper et al., 2012, p. 438). Rubrics are in the form of a table with a description of the task and levels of achievement for each level of criteria (Dueck, 2014; Stevens & Levi, 2011).
4. *Self-efficacy* – Butler and Winne (1995) described self-efficacy as students’ “beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives” (p. 8).

Summary

The current culture of assessment in America has led to an increased use of rubrics, even with little research to support their effectiveness (Lee, 2013; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010).

Examining the experiences and perspectives of sixth grade literacy students with a rubric is a gap identified in the literature, and Creswell (2013) noted how research such as this can lead to improving practice. My interest in students’ experiences with rubrics was due a former student’s feedback, which caused me to reflect on my professional practice of using rubrics and

encouraged me to dig deeply into the literature. The literature revealed a paucity of information regarding how students actually use a rubric (Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013; Howell, 2011), with a dearth of information regarding K-12 students' uses of rubrics. Therefore, the purpose of this study, which was guided by the theories of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and Bandura's social cognitive theory, was to explore the phenomenon of sixth grade literacy students' perspectives and experiences of using a rubric.

This study is important because understanding the perspective of sixth grade literacy students' about rubrics helps inform instructional decisions and assessment practices to better meet the needs of students. The central research question focused on the sixth grade literacy students' experiences, with the sub-questions asking about the students perspectives of the rubric, how the rubric changes the way an assignment is approached, and how the students use the feedback from the rubric. Moustakas' (1994) approach to transcendental phenomenology was used to answer the research questions using a questionnaire, focus group session, and journaling to provide the data for analysis. Delimitations and limitations were described with limited generalizability and a focus on a single grade level being identified.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Identifying the pertinent research and professional literature prior to conducting an investigation is one way described by Moustakas (2004) to prepare for a phenomenological study. This literature review connects the research questions to the research related to rubric-referenced assessment. In reviewing the literature regarding rubrics, I explored how rubrics impact creativity and learning, the use of rubrics for self-assessment, and the perspectives held by students and teachers. Throughout the review, minimal empirical research was found regarding K-12 students and rubrics. Understanding this gap in the literature, my phenomenological study regarding the K-12 population adds to the body of literature and can help educators make informed decisions about how students are assessed.

The commentary about rubrics is controversial. As far back as 1997, Dr. James Popham wrote an article concerning what is right and wrong with rubrics. Popham (1997) ascertained that rubrics were used for special *demanding* performance tasks, as opposed to today's everyday usage in classrooms. Even kindergarteners and preschoolers are using rubrics daily for writing and then again during their math instruction. The use of rubrics for a variety of purposes in our schools is increasing, but this rise could be without substantial research in the K-12 arena.

A variety of methods were used to identify relevant literature and studies. First, EBSCOhost, ERIC, and Google Scholar were searched using the limitation to locate peer-reviewed journals. Database search terms included rubric, performance assessment, feedback, use of rubrics, education, self-regulated learning, and constructivism in various combinations. The abstracts of articles were scanned for relevance to educational settings. The focus was on research in the school context and both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were

considered. Upon collection of literature, I reviewed the reference lists to identify additional sources. The research began in 2011 and continues through 2016.

A recurring author in the body of research on rubrics is Andrade. In 2005, Andrade conducted a phenomenological study investigating 14 undergraduate education majors' perceptions of using a rubric. Andrade's research provided guidance to this study.

The definition of a rubric has been widely discussed. The basic definition of a rubric is "a set of guidelines or acceptable responses for the completion of a task," according to J. D. Cooper et al. (2012, p. 438). The word *rubric*, as presented by B. S. Cooper and Gargan (2009), was first used in the English language in the 1400s with the root of the word meaning *the color red*. The various definitions of the word rubric have been discussed, including its use as a title of a legal code (B. S. Cooper & Gargan, 2009).

The two types of rubrics are analytic and holistic, which causes some confusion. An analytic rubric is used to consider multiple criteria and aspects of the performance, whereas a holistic rubric is used to assess the overall quality of the performance (Howell, 2011). An analytic rubric is often considered "a more time-consuming task" for the teacher, but could produce a greater chance for student learning through more detailed feedback (Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013, p. 3). Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) described the holistic rubric as more product-oriented with the analytic rubric being more process-oriented.

Rubrics are commonly accepted as assessment tools, but much of the research has identified the true value as the role rubrics play in instruction (Estaji, 2010; Wolf & Stevens, 2007). Moreover, Reddy and Andrade (2010) stated, "When used by students as part of a formative assessment of their works in progress, rubrics can teach as well as evaluate" (p. 437).

This literature review connects the role of the rubric to assessment and learning through the theoretical frameworks of Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and social cognitive theory.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundations guiding this manuscript include Vygotsky's zone of proximal development and Bandura's social cognitive theory. The analysis of multiple theories accounts for the "existence of the phenomenon" of using a rubric (Moustakas, 1994, p. 112). As an instructional tool, a rubric can support the active construction of knowledge (McGury, Shallenberger, & Tolliver, 2008; Reddy & Andrade, 2010). Extending this idea of using a rubric as an instructional tool, Brookhart (2003) contended that "classroom assessment information must become an integral part of the learning process" (p. 6), in which students are actively using the assessment criteria to further their learning.

The basis of phenomenology is on the assumption that all of our experiences are the root of our knowledge and understanding of the world (Leavy, 2014, p. 92). Theorist Lev Vygotsky believed an individual's interactions with the environment influenced the development of the child (Henniger, 2009). A common teaching strategy supported by Vygotsky is project-based learning, which is related to performance assessment as it is often assessed using a rubric. "The mutual engagement of students in activities that allow them to construct meaning for themselves fosters negotiated meanings and thereby more effective understanding," (O'Donovan, Price, & Rust, 2008, p. 215). Rubrics are described by Reeves and Stanford (2009) as a tool for scaffolding learning, which connects to Vygotsky's zone of proximal development concept. Scaffolding is providing the support needed by the learner to be successful (J. D. Cooper et al., 2012); whereas, the zone of proximal development illustrates the gap of what the student is capable of doing independently and that which can be done with support (Henniger, 2009).

The use of a rubric permits teachers to support students as they complete an activity or assignment. By creating a rubric with students or providing a detailed rubric in conjunction with an assignment, teachers are supporting the learning process. A rubric offers detailed information about expectations for a specific assignment (Baker, Cooperman, & Storandt, 2013); therefore, the rubric can be seen as a scaffold or support for encouraging students to delve deeper into the content.

Piaget supported the constructivists' theory of children creating knowledge through the world around them (Henniger, 2009). Piaget's stages of intellectual development are important in understanding the reasoning for the selection of the participants for this study. Piaget contends that children develop knowledge of the world through stages. Henniger (2009) provided a brief illustration for each stage (a) sensorimotor intelligence including children from birth to age two who use sensory exploration and motoric activity to learn about the environment, (b) preoperational intelligence from about ages two to seven years, children are very literal and egocentric, (c) concrete operations which includes children from about seven to 12 years of age, who begin thinking logically and can begin seeing things from others perspectives, (d) formal operations from about age 11 through adulthood, children are able to think abstractly.

While Henniger (2009) provided a foundation for understanding Piaget's stages of intellectual development, Fox and Riconscente (2008) help frame the ideas for this study. When describing the concept of metacognition from the perspective of Piaget, Fox and Riconscente (2008) explained that when a child begins to move to the formal operations stage at age 11 or 12, the child is then capable of thinking about his own thinking. This idea of metacognition is an important one when studying a student's perceptions, because the student must be capable of

reflecting on one's own thoughts. Therefore, according to this understanding of development, students younger than 11 or 12 may have difficulty describing their thinking. The sixth grade students in my study fit the description of the formal operations stage of intellectual development.

The theory of self-regulated learning (SRL) and impact of feedback through the lens of constructivism and social learning theory were examined by Butler and Winne (1995). The authors discussed the role of feedback and its relation to SRL. Self-regulated learners are described as being “aware of qualities of their own knowledge, beliefs, motivation, and cognitive processing” (Butler & Winne, 1995, p. 1). This is an important factor in how students use or do not use a rubric. Further, the self-efficacy of a student was described as the “beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives” (Butler & Winne, 1995, p. 8).

According to Sha, Looi, Chen, and Zhang (2012), “self-regulated learners are able to: (a) personally improve their ability to learn through selective use of metacognitive and motivational strategies; (b) proactively select, organize, and even create advantageous learning environments; and (c) play a significant role in choosing the form and amount of instruction they need” (p. 719). Self-regulation and self-efficacy are important factors of motivation for continued learning. Both instructional and internal feedback affect the learner. The mediation of learners' knowledge and external feedback provides information on how knowledge is constructed.

Complimenting Butler and Winnie's (1995) examination is the more recent development presented by Efklides (2011), the metacognitive affective model of self-regulated learning (MASRL). This model theoretically integrates the research on motivation and metacognition. The role of metacognitive experiences at different levels, the person level, and the task/person

level illustrated the functioning of SRL. “Self-regulation involves more than metacognitive knowledge and skill, it involves an underlying sense of self-efficacy and personal agency and the motivational and behavioral processes to put these self beliefs into effect” (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 217).

Bandura’s social cognitive theory supports the ideas of self-regulation and feedback, both of which play an important role when a student uses a rubric. Purposeful action is guided by current motivators that help regulate behavior (Bandura, 1991). This control of one’s own actions is a guiding principle for Bandura’s theory.

Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in his ability to complete a task or reach a goal (Bandura, 1997). Therefore, if a student has a high degree of perceived self-efficacy, his achievement will be higher, which reflects the importance of this cognitive and motivating factor of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Andrade et al. (2009) and Covill (2012) recognized the possible connection between the use of a rubric and a student’s self-efficacy and motivation. Covill (2012) described the process of student goal setting and use of the given criteria to self-assess their work before submitting it.

Through analyzing the theoretical foundations, I am able to situate my literature in theory. Essentially, the rubric acts as a scaffold to support students’ successful completion of an assignment in their zone of proximal development. Henniger’s (2009) description of Piaget’s stages of intellectual development provided a foundation for the selection of the participants. Sixth graders are capable of metacognition, thinking about their thinking, in a way that potentially benefits the instructional practices of their teachers and researchers. Students’ ability to regulate their learning results in purposeful action (Bandura, 1991). How students’ use or do not use a rubric provides insight into students’ self-efficacy and motivation.

Related Literature

The following section focuses on the existing literature concerning rubrics and presents an argument for the significance of this study. The nature of assessment is analyzed, as well as the role of a rubric including both identified benefits and limitations. This is followed by a review of the literature regarding reliability and validity, perceptions and feedback, self-efficacy, metacognition, exemplars, and models. A section discussing the International Baccalaureate program and philosophy is included to provide literature regarding the curriculum used at the setting of this study. Finally, a summary that synthesizes the research and reiterates the gap in the literature concerning rubrics is provided.

Nature of Assessment

A traditional view of assessment determines what the child has already mastered or what has previously been learned, whereas performance assessment allows students to demonstrate their ability to perform a task. In a comparison of traditional versus performance-based assessment tasks, the learning outcome must be considered. An illustration provided by VanTassel-Baska (2014) compares traditional paper-pencil tests to a performance task by explaining that paper-and-pencil tests might be the best measurement for content mastery, while a performance-based task might measure higher-level thinking skills more successfully.

A shift in the practice of standardized testing is moving towards inclusion of performance assessments to require students to provide evidence of their thinking to demonstrate the solution (VanTassel-Baska, 2014). This higher-level thinking is expected on the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) test and similar assessments. These “Common Core-aligned assessments are anticipated to go deeper than before, from tests that predominantly rely on short-answer “bubble” items, to performance tasks that measure higher-

order thinking skills” (Baker et al., 2013, p. 46). Students are expected to compare two or more pieces of text or video using evidence from the pieces, which requires higher-level thinking and synthesizing of information. In a meta-analysis review of 75 articles, Jonsson and Svingby (2007) contended, “There is a strong conviction that the use of performance assessment in combination with rubrics will change students’ efforts and learning in a positive way” (p. 138). Increasing student motivation and impacting students’ learning were found to be common themes in the meta-analysis.

Further, J. D. Cooper et al. (2012) made the following distinction between assessment and evaluation: assessment was defined as “the process of gathering information about a student’s performance” (p. 435) and evaluation was “the process of making a judgment based on that information to determine how well the student is achieving” (p. 435). Similarly, Gardner (2012) contrasted *assessment of learning* with *assessment for learning*; the *assessment of learning* is clearly a process of identifying where a student needs “to go and how best to get there” (p. 3). Formative assessment practices, as “used to monitor student progress during instruction” (Van-Tassel-Baska, 2014, p. 43), with a rubric can lead to this “gathering of information” (J. D. Cooper et al., 2012, p. 435) that can drive a teacher’s instruction and help teachers make informed decisions to meet their students’ needs. According to Baker et al. (2013), “Well-designed and implemented assessments don’t just verify success — they help achieve it” (p. 46).

Classroom assessment, both formative and summative, described by Brookhart (2003) is dependent on the context of the classroom and relies on the complex nature of instruction. Formative assessment is defined by Sadler (1989) as using multiple criteria to form a qualitative appraisal of student outcomes. Parkay et al. (2010) described formative assessment as a way to

provide students with feedback and encourage their motivation and self-regulation. Some authors have related the term *formative assessment* to the phrase *assessment for learning* with the latter being preferred by Gardner (2012). Gardner claimed *assessment for learning* is less likely to be confused with the summative or final assessment. Panadero and Jonsson (2013) explained that “the unique features of rubrics do not only make them suitable instruments for enhancing the psychometric properties of performance assessments, but also for supporting in the process of formative assessments” (p. 130).

By using literature to discuss the traditional view of assessment versus performance assessment and distinguishing between assessment and evaluation, I have established the reasons educators began using rubrics. For example, traditional paper-pencil tests were found to measure mastery of content, while teachers sought to assess students’ thinking (VanTassel-Baska, 2014). The new age of assessment is designed to cause students to think at higher levels and synthesize information, not simply regurgitate facts. I then explored using a rubric as a tool for formative assessment in making instructional decisions on a routine basis. My research provides an understanding of how students are using the rubrics and how they perceive them, which can help teachers better meet the needs of their students.

Rubric Use

The role of a rubric is versatile. For example, Wolf and Stevens (2007) explained that the most impact on learning comes from using the rubric as a tool throughout the assessment process, rather than simply for grading. Rubrics help teachers clarify their expectations and teaching methods, while providing feedback for students (Weurlander, Soderberg, Scheja, Hult, & Wernerson, 2012; Wolf & Stevens, 2007). The idea that “rubrics can teach as well as evaluate” (Andrade et al., 2008, p. 3) is a common role for rubrics in the literature. Andrade et

al. (2008) specifically examined the role of using a rubric for self-assessment, which is a frequent use for rubrics. In the Andrade et al. (2008) study, third and fourth grade students showed significant score increases in the writing areas they self-assessed. The components of the rubric that were not formally self-assessed, did not show such increases.

The notion of rubrics as an instructional tool was further supported by Parker and Breyfogle (2011), who investigated third graders' explanations of mathematical thinking using a student-friendly rubric. Parker and Breyfogle (2011) found students who performed above average showed growth in their explanations from simply discussing the rubric. However, students who were average and below average benefited from "individual conferences with students to explicitly discuss their work using the rubric" (p. 96). Students' awareness of "the required level or performance standard" improved their performance (Weurlander et al., 2012, p. 749). Thereby, the role of the rubric as an instructional tool, not just for assessment, was shown to help students achieve higher scores on the performance tasks when scored using a rubric.

The use of a rubric to "streamline the grading process" is common, yet rubrics are also used to "encourage reflective practice on the part of both students and teachers" (Allen & Tanner, 2006, p. 203). In a review of literature, Reddy and Andrade (2010) reiterated the importance of stressing the instructional value of rubrics. Further, Wang (2014) stressed, "the use of an instructional rubric in assessment is not simply for the sake of grading an assignment, but to provide students with detailed feedback on their works" (p. 82). Baker et al. (2013) also acknowledged the use of a rubric to facilitate teachers' discussions about instruction and to help focus their expectations.

Instructors are encouraged to place an emphasis on training students to use rubrics as a tool and to implement measures like rubrics and model papers as a guide not as the "guiding

force” (Strunk, 2012, p. 102). Yet, according to Panadero and Jonsson (2013), the research has been inconsistent on the need for training students. For instance, in a study conducted by Andrade and Boulay (2003), no significant effect was found from training seventh and eighth grade students to use a rubric as opposed to simply handing out the rubric. In contrast, Panadero and Jonsson (2013) stressed the importance of younger students spending greater time working with the rubric and learning to use it effectively.

With an interest in the process of learning, not just outcomes, McGury et al. (2008) described how rubrics reflect the real world in their focus on effort and evaluation. Further, McGury et al. (2008) acknowledged the consistency in grading offered when using a rubric, which reduces the subjectivity of performance assessment. An increase in transparency of the teacher’s expectations is clearly provided through the literature, as reported by Panadero and Jonsson (2013). Some contradictions can be found in the commentary about rubrics, such as this statement made by Wilson (2007), “The standardized criteria didn’t capture the nuances of students’ writing” (p. 63).

While ease of grading is referenced as a reason to use a rubric, the clear expectations provided for improving students’ work is another role of the rubric (Lilburn & Ciurak, 2010). Parker and Breyfogle (2011) explained that students were “to check that they were meeting the teacher’s expectations” using an adapted rubric (p. 92). Parker and Breyfogle (2011) investigated if a rubric improved elementary students’ communication about their mathematical thinking; teachers and researchers used the rubric to evaluate and score the students’ writing. The findings indicated that students’ mathematical explanations improved when students were explicitly taught how to use the rubric (Parker & Breyfogle, 2011).

The role of a rubric in today's classroom is versatile and ranges from use in formative and summative assessments, self-assessments, and in standardized assessment situations. Students as young as preschool are using and being evaluated with rubrics. Several authors (e.g., Barker et al., 2013; Parker & Breyfogle, 2011; Wolf & Stevens, 2007) have suggested that a rubric can be a learning tool, can provide feedback, and can present the expectations for an assignment. Since a rubric provides the specific criteria for how an assignment is evaluated, students' performances improve (Weurlander, 2012). Most educators appreciate the ease of grading using a rubric (e.g., Allen & Turner, 2006), yet some educators are hesitant about the practice of using rubrics (e.g., Wilson, 2007).

Impact of Rubric Use

Studies illustrating the impact of using a rubric have been conducted as seen in the meta-analysis conducted by Panadero and Jonsson (2013). In a review of 21 studies, they specifically looked at how rubrics were used in formative assessment situations. Since "the research on the use of rubrics is not unanimous," the reviewers of research sought to identify the factors that influenced the effects of rubrics on student learning (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013, p. 131). Numerous factors that mediated and moderated the effects of rubrics were included in the review by Panadero and Jonsson (2013):

As suggested by the findings in this review, the use of rubrics may mediate improved performance through (a) providing transparency to the assessment, which in turn may (b) reduce student anxiety. The use of rubrics may also (c) aid the feedback process, (d) improve student self-efficacy, and (e) support student self-regulation; all of which may indirectly facilitate improved student performance. Consequently, there are a number of

different, but not unconnected, ways in which the use of rubrics may support student learning. (p. 140)

One of the moderating effects considered by Panadero and Jonsson (2013) was the education level and length of time the rubric was used. They concluded that students younger than college level need more exposure to the rubric for learning to benefit from the effect of using the rubric. Additionally, the range of topics explored in the research about rubrics has been diverse, and they concluded that the topic of the rubric did not appear to have an effect on its benefits (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013).

In a review of 20 empirical research articles, Reddy and Andrade (2010) reported that the results of the studies examined all “generally” suggested “higher achievement and deeper learning by students who have rubrics to guide their work” (p. 439). This general suggestion raises the question of how learning was measured. One specific study discussed in the review was conducted by Petkov and Petkova (2006) where the researchers sought to investigate the impact of the rubric on improving student performance. The implication was that urging students to use the rubric as a guide caused their grade to improve. The question then becomes does a grade truly measure learning? If the rubric caused the increased grade, does this grade represent increased learning or could the grade have increased due to the specific criteria or limiting of students’ thinking? Andrade and Du (2005) expressed concern about the quality of students work, and wondered if the students were truly “developing a concept” of quality or just conforming to the instructor’s explicit criteria and standards (p. 7). Additionally, Andrade et al. (2008) noted the opportunity to earn a better grade when using a rubric, and additional benefits such as higher quality of work, more focused efforts, and less anxiety.

Wilson (2006) articulated that the limitations for rubrics have not been fully explored when she wrote “to articulate and explore how rubrics may violate the complexities of the writing process so that we can begin our search for more promising practices” (p. xxiv). The first chapter of Wilson’s (2006) book began with a quote from Gorrell that represented the thinking throughout the book: “I collect rubrics. I love them. They are as dear to me as beanie babies, barbie dolls, mugs, key chains, NCTE memorabilia, and dust bunnies under my bed” (p. 1). This statement illustrates the frustration with the overuse of rubrics and “the struggle with the limitations of rubrics” (p. 31). Wilson specifically discussed rubrics in the writing process, and stated that “A rubric’s attempt to codify our reaction to text in number goes counter to every instinct we have about reading and response” (p. 29). She further explained that when teachers grade a student’s work with a rubric, the teacher is approaching the assignment with the purpose of defending a grade, where “in our search for mistakes, we often miss potential” (p. 30). Wilson identified several responsive ways to make assessment meaningful without using rubrics, and thus focuses on the process of writing in order to “strengthen the product” (p. 80).

Consistent with Wilson’s (2006) conclusions about rubrics are the findings from the Saddler, Saddler, Befoorhooz, and Cuccio-Slichko (2014) survey of primary teachers (first through sixth grade). The Saddler et al. (2014) survey found that the teachers perceived the “rubrics were not helpful” (p. 144) when they had predicted the rubric would support first through sixth graders revisions of their writing. Saddler et al. suggested a few possibilities for the teachers’ perceptions including 1) teachers may have been unable to effectively compare results of student work with and without a rubric, 2) the design of the rubric may not have been effective, and 3) the students may not have been trained to use the rubric effectively (Saddler et al., 2014).

Another potential limitation to the effectiveness of rubrics is the lack of training for teachers expected to use the rubric (Metin, 2013; Oakleaf, 2009; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). In a study of 15 elementary level teachers, Metin (2013) documented the difficulty teachers have preparing and implementing a rubric. Teachers were found to identify inappropriate topics and criteria that did not meet the developmental and academic needs of their students (Metin, 2013). Teachers were shown to have difficulty preparing a rubric (Metin, 2013), yet even the widespread availability of premade rubrics from textbooks and Internet sources has proven to be a potential limitation to a rubric's effectiveness (Lee, 2013; Metin, 2013). For example, pre-made rubrics may not meet the specific criteria and performance levels the teacher is attempting to assess, especially since "rubrics are constructed before the learning takes place," and they often ignore "aspects of task performance or thinking skills not foreseen or included in the rubrics" (Lee, 2013).

Identified benefits and limitations of using a rubric are evident from a review of the literature. The meta-analysis findings from Panadero and Jonsson (2013) highlighted the benefits of transparency, feedback, increased self-regulation, and improved self-efficacy. Reddy and Andrade (2010) found a general consensus of students' higher achievement with using a rubric. On the other hand, some research (Andrade & Du, 2005; Petkov & Petkova, 2006) questioned the quality of work and the focus on simply meeting the criteria and not extending students' thinking. Lack of training for teachers was a significant limiting factor in their use of rubrics (Metin, 2013; Oakleaf, 2009; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). An important note to my particular study, as discussed by Panadero and Jonsson (2013), was the need for younger students to have more opportunities to use a rubric to truly benefit from its use. My questionnaire asked students about their specific experience using a rubric, which shed light on

this issue. This study identified how a rubric impacts sixth grade literacy students from their point of view.

Reliability and Validity of Rubrics

Reliability describes the nature of getting the same results no matter when the test is given and who scores the test (Moskal & Leydens, 2000). Two types of reliability for rubrics are interrater reliability and intrarater reliability. Interrater reliability refers to the scores being consistent between multiple raters, while intrarater reliability refers to the same rater's consistency in scoring (Moskal & Leydens, 2000). Validity refers to the accuracy of the evidence that supports the phenomenon being studied (Schwandt, 2007). Moskal and Leydens (2000) made the point that a reliable rubric is not always valid and a valid assessment may not always be reliable.

A considerable amount of literature regarding the reliability and validity of rubrics exists. Specifically, Reddy (2011), Oakleaf (2009) and Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) examined reliability and validity of rubrics in their studies. Reddy (2011) discussed the lack of attention paid to the reliability and validity of rubrics, suggesting the need for authors of studies to report their procedures for establishing both reliability and validity. When reporting their reliability and validity methods, authors most frequently pilot and conduct reliability tests on the rubrics prior to their studies (Reddy, 2011).

In a qualitative phenomenological study conducted by Reddy (2011), the development of rubrics to ensure reliability and validity across courses in a business program were examined. Thirty-five business instructors formed multidisciplinary teams to create rubrics by identifying the criteria for proficient work and levels of performance. The rubrics were then pilot-tested and

the results were used to improve the rubrics. Expert opinions of the instructions provided determination of content and construct validity.

While the Reddy (2011) study illustrated the construction and testing of a rubric for program assessment, Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) used a quantitative correlational design to measure the effect the rubric has on the reliability and validity of writing scores. The participants, 326 graduate students, were divided into four groups to grade researcher-produced sample essays using a rubric. The groups consisted of two groups of education majors and two groups of business/marketing majors. The first of two experiments consisted of two groups (one education group and one business/marketing group) who scored a well-written essay that did not fully answer the prompt. The second essay, scored by two different groups, fully answered the writing prompt but had 20 mechanical errors (placed by the researchers). The findings revealed that the use of the rubric actually significantly increased the variance among the scores of the essays. In both experiments, grammar and mechanics had a strong influence and significantly affected the essay scores, even when only 10% of the rubric focused on grammar and mechanics.

The results of the Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) study were not expected and pointed to the importance of creating quality rubrics and using them effectively. There is a need to train teachers to create rubrics locally for specific purposes. Many teachers use a rubric because they believe having a rubric is better than not having one, but if the rubric has not been used appropriately, the reliability and validity of scores can suffer (Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010).

The findings from Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) study also raised awareness of the need for training teachers to use rubrics to ensure reliable assessment approaches. The quantitative causal comparative study conducted by Oakleaf (2009) further illuminated this importance. Oakleaf specifically examined the reliability of raters grading university tutorial writing prompts. The 25

raters consisted of five groups including three groups that were considered internal for being from the corresponding university. The internal raters were on-campus librarians, English 101 instructors, and English 101 students. The remaining ten raters were from within the Association of Research Libraries system and were referred to as external raters. The result revealed moderate levels of reliability measured for the internal rater groups, while the external librarian group was less than acceptable. English instructors produced the greatest reliability with the external group of librarians varying significantly. The external raters did not attend the six hour training and scoring session, which contributed to the greater differences in reliability from the internal raters.

Reviewing the above literature leads to the indication that training in rubric use is worth the time involved to increase the reliability of scores. Rezaei's and Lovorn's (2010) research indicated the need for teachers to consider the purpose of the assessment and how well the rubric matches the intended outcomes for the learning task. Anson (1989) warned that rubrics are "guised in the cloak of reliability and efficiency, such procedures are instructionally very attractive, and teachers adopt them rapidly, often in spite of their deepest convictions" (p. 2). Therefore, as Rezaei and Lovorn (2010) explained, for the benefits of rubrics to be realized, the "rubrics should be well-designed, topic-specific (contextual), analytic and complemented with exemplars" (p. 29).

Feedback and Perceptions

Rubrics provide specific feedback to students about performance on a task. Feedback has been described as being "one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement" (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Hattie and Timperley (2007) discussed the positive and negative impact feedback can have on learning. The most effective feedback is intertwined in the

instruction, not simply informing the student if the answer is right or wrong. The least effective, yet most used, is feedback about the person, like “good job” or “nice work.” This personal feedback, positive or negative, has “too little value to result in learning gains,” according to Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 96). Hattie and Timperley described three other types of feedback: (a) feedback about the task, (b) feedback about the processing of the task, and (c) feedback about self-regulation.

A problem with task specific feedback noted by Hattie and Timperley (2007) is that it does not often generalize to other tasks. Could this problem with not generalizing to future tasks be limiting the effectiveness of feedback from a rubric? Is the feedback from a rubric too specific or even too much feedback? Wilson (2007) cautioned about the use of a rubric, “No matter how elaborate or eloquent the phrases I was invited to circle, the feedback they offered to students was still generic because they weren’t uttered in reaction to the students’ actual work” (p. 63). Further, Hattie and Timperley (2007) explained that giving too much feedback may distract students from learning.

Feedback is an important instructional factor, but “if students do not successfully engage with the feedback that they receive, feedback will not enhance student learning” (Lipnevich, McCallen, Miles, & Smith, 2014, p. 541). On a similar note, Stevens and Levi (2011) acknowledged the research that encourages detailed feedback, but they discussed their experience with students not attending to the specific feedback provided to them, because they do not look past the grade on the rubric. Therefore, understanding how students interact and perceive the feedback they receive from a rubric is important. The importance of the student’s perceptions is highlighted by Brookhart (2003) when she stated, “the student’s point of view matters because of its effect on learning” (p. 6).

In a qualitative study using focus groups with undergraduate students, Poulos and Mahony (2008) examined students' perspectives and their use of feedback from instructors. Their findings revealed three themes: perceptions, impact, and credibility of feedback. The perceptions of students from this study reflected the multi-dimensional phenomenon of feedback. Impact of feedback dealt with timeliness, significance, and grade or education level of student. The sooner the feedback was provided the greater the impact it had on the student. Credibility of the feedback in this study dealt with the knowledge and experience of the professors. The conclusion was summarized by the following student's comment: "feedback needs to be provided to you so you can actually make a change...if you can't make a change from what's provided then it's useless" (Poulos & Mahony, 2008, p. 153). This student's statement confirms the literature about the variety of functions and importance of feedback.

Further, Lipnevich et al. (2014) explained that "comments that prompt students to meaningfully and thoughtfully approach revisions tend to result in the highest gains in performance" (p. 541). Understanding the importance and significance of feedback is vital, since rubrics offer students this specific feedback on the criteria being assessed (Leist, Woolwine, & Bays, 2012). Since my study specifically analyzed the experiences and perceptions of sixth grade literacy students' use of a rubric, it is important to examine the literature regarding perceptions regarding rubric use that have been conducted.

In this extensive literature search and review, four studies (Andrade & Du, 2005; Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010; Strunk, 2012), all of which were conducted in higher education, directly addressed the students' perceptions of using a rubric. Additionally, the Andrade et al. (2009) study, conducted with elementary third and fourth graders specifically addressed teachers' perceptions of how the rubric impacted learning, but not from the students'

perspective. A close examination of the studies identified as being similar to my plan is important to frame this concept in the literature.

Andrade and Du (2005) questioned how rubrics support the learning process and how students perceive the use of rubrics. Using Consensual Qualitative Research, they analyzed interview data of 14 undergraduate education majors (six female, eight male; all Caucasian). They conducted focus groups segregated by gender and their findings revealed a consistently positive view of rubrics. Students most commonly commented on the clear expectations provided by the rubric and helpfulness of feedback from the instructor. There was no evidence of gender differences from this sample. The rubric seemed to help students self-assess their work, be less anxious about their assignments, and improve the quality of their work with some students noting the limiting factors of the rubric (Andrade & Du, 2005). The limiting factors of rubric noted were the misconception of not needing to read the entire rubric and “the belief that a rubric represents a recipe or map to help them give a particular teacher what he or she wants” (Andrade & Du, 2005, p. 6).

Similarly, in an exploratory study, Reynolds-Keefer (2010) had 45 undergraduate education students complete an open-ended questionnaire regarding their process of rubric use, their perception of rubric use, and their prediction of future use of rubrics. Results indicated that students were more comfortable asking questions about the assignment, because the rubric “gave them the ability to conceptualize the specifics of the assignment” (p. 6). However, Reynolds-Keefer (2010) discussed the process of using a rubric and cautioned that it be used as a tool not a “map or laundry list,” as these uses may cause the student to “overlook key ideas, concepts, and goals critical in learning” (p. 6).

Further, in a larger mixed-method study, Eshun and Osei-Poku (2013) examined the perspectives of 108 college students' perceptions of assessment rubrics. They used a questionnaire to examine students' opinions on the impact of rubrics and assessment criteria. The results were positive with students remarking the rubric improved their problem-solving skills and understanding of the concepts being taught. Likewise, in a quantitative examination of Career College students' perceptions of rubrics, Strunk (2012) concluded the overall perceptions of rubrics from this study were positive, with students ranking critical thinking and correctness as the most helpful.

These findings (Andrade & Du, 2005; Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010; Strunk, 2012) revealed that students' perceptions were mostly positive with some caution about the possibly restrictive nature of the rubric, including Wilson's (2007) statement that "the feedback on a rubric was prepackaged and processed" (p. 63). Additionally, in a study investigating peer feedback using a rubric, a student expressed concern that "adherence to the rubric would confine our patterns of thinking" (Wang, 2014, p. 91). Nevertheless, for the most part, rubrics were deemed "very useful" by students and teachers alike according to the literature review completed by Panadero and Jonsson (2013, p. 138). However, the studies reviewed by Panadero and Jonsson (2013) and the studies (Andrade & Du, 2005; Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010; Strunk, 2012) were conducted in the field of higher education, not with younger K-12 students.

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy has been described as students' beliefs about their ability to achieve goals, and according to Andrade et al. (2009), "The assumption is that heightened self-efficacy is one of the mechanisms by which rubrics provide an advantage, yet no empirical evidence of a

relation between rubric use and self-efficacy exists” (p. 287). In fact, in the Panadero and Jonsson (2013) review, the authors noted that self-efficacy was only impacted by the use of rubrics in one of three studies. Further, metacognition was found to be more difficult to measure as researchers tend to use other instructional interventions in combination with rubrics (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). In this section, I analyze the literature regarding self-efficacy and metacognition to provide a foundation to build upon the theoretical framework and the findings from the students’ perceptions.

In an exploratory study, Walser (2011) reported that undergraduate and graduate level students made note of the impact rubric use had on their progress monitoring. Students’ exhibit metacognition when they monitor their progress, because they are thinking about their thinking. The use of rubrics may help students “review their work in the light of the goals and criteria” (Gardner, 2012, p. 20), and thereby begin “to develop meta-cognitive approaches to learning” (p. 20). Considering metacognition, Hartman (2001) explained that “many students are unaware of the concept of metacognition and do not reflect on their thinking and learning strategies and attitudes and how they may be improved” (p. 34), yet metacognition has been shown to be “essential to learning” (p. 33).

Researchers have also looked at how rubrics affect self-efficacy in relationship to gender. Andrade et al. (2009) conducted a study of elementary and middle school students’ self-assessment and self-efficacy using a rubric for writing. This quantitative study specifically examined the long- and short-term effects of a rubric and self-efficacy of students in their writing. The findings revealed a meaningful relationship between the girls’ self-efficacy and rubric use, but no relationship was identified for the boys’ self-efficacy and rubric use.

Andrade et al. (2009) suggested educators select other approaches if striving to increase the self-efficacy of boys.

The findings from Andrade et al. (2009) may not be too surprising considering the varied factors that affect one's perception of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) noted that "the same level of performance success may raise, leave unaffected, or lower perceived self-efficacy depending on how various personal and situational contributions are interpreted and weighted" (p. 81). The conditions and past experiences of the individual play a contributing role to one's overall self-efficacy, such that "personal cognition (e.g., motivation, affect) is reciprocally determined by behavioral (e.g., opening a webpage) and environmental (e.g., teacher's feedback, parental support) factors" (Sha et al., 2012, p. 719). The standard rubric format used in Walser's (2011) study was intended to "motivate student performance that went beyond what was expected" (p. 10) with the scoring rewarding work that was above the expectation. Usher and Pajares (2008), examined the role of self-efficacy in schools, and interestingly, the benefits of high self-efficacy parallel the benefits cited for using a rubric.

Students' beliefs about their abilities and their self-efficacy impact how they approach an assignment, and it is assumed that rubrics offer students an advantage for increased self-efficacy (Andrade et al., 2009). This assumption of an advantage was not fully confirmed, as only one of three studies revealed self-efficacy was impacted by the use of a rubric (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). Metacognition and self-efficacy are difficult to measure due to the various combinations of instructional interventions used when exploring rubric use (Panadero & Jonsson, 2013). It is important to consider the conditions and past experiences of students that contribute to one's self-efficacy and metacognition (Sha et al, 2012).

Exemplars and Models

The argument has been made that for rubrics to be effective, they need to be used in combination with exemplars or model papers (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Parker & Breyfogle, 2011). Much of the research on rubrics is used in combination with other strategies, like exemplars, which makes identifying the effectiveness of rubrics more difficult. For example, Andrade et al. (2008) examined the effect a model paper and rubric-referenced self-assessment had on elementary students' writing.

Using a quantitative correlational design, Andrade et al. (2008) used a convenience sample of 116 third and fourth graders (52 males, 64 females) in a public school and placed the students into a comparison group and a treatment group. Both groups were asked to complete an essay on a specific writing topic using the Writer's Workshop model of prewriting, first drafts with feedback, self-assessment, feedback, and writing of the final draft. Students in the treatment group used a model paper with a rubric before beginning their writing assignment and used a rubric during their self-assessment. Both groups listed qualities of effective essays before beginning prewriting activities. Andrade et al. (2008) found that classroom teachers can benefit from the use of model papers, and using rubrics for self-assessment can increase the quality of students writing.

Andrade et al. (2008) emphasized that the effectiveness of the rubric does not occur if rubrics are simply handed out; students need guidance in their use of rubrics and feedback throughout the writing process. Similarly, Parker and Breyfogle (2011), in their study of third graders' mathematical thinking, underscore the importance of explicitly identifying the criteria and vocabulary from the rubric "in their own work and in exemplary models" (p. 98).

However, the findings of the recent Lipnevich et al. (2014) study seem to contradict the argument that rubrics need to be supported by exemplars or models (Andrade et al., 2008; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007). Using a mixed-methods experimental design study, Lipnevich et al. (2014) studied 100 undergraduate, second year students in a child development course (17 male, 83 female). A rubric containing ten criteria and three examples of student work (weak, average, and excellent) were used in the study. Students participated in three sections of the child development course at three university campuses. There were three treatment groups in the study: rubric, exemplars, or rubric and exemplars. The students were expected to write a two to three page paper and then revise with the given treatment within five days. Following the debriefing of the research, students provided oral or written feedback about their experience. Students perceived the exemplars were more effective, but results from the analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) revealed a greater significance with use of only the rubric. It is important to note that all three treatment groups made significant growth between their second and final draft scores. The effect sizes ranged from 1.04 for the exemplars and rubric and exemplars group to 1.54 for the rubric only group. These findings suggested that “providing the rubric alone may have forced students to examine what they had done, and look to see how it met the requirements of the task, rather than trying to imitate the exemplar without checking their understanding of the task” (Lipnevich et al., 2014, p. 551).

Based on these contradictions, I plan to ask the sixth grade literacy students about their use of exemplars or models with rubrics to try to understand how they interpret their experience. The combined approach of rubrics is cited frequently in the literature making it difficult to conclude the impact a rubric may have on a student’s learning. Gaining the sixth grade literacy

students' perspectives of the rubric adds to the current evidence and understanding about rubric use.

International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme

In an effort to better understand the curriculum and program of the setting for this study, a brief review of the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme is important. Accreditation is required from the International Baccalaureate programme to be known as a World Class School (Organization, 2015). Below is the mission of the IB programme according to the International Baccalaureate Organization's (IBO) website:

The International Baccalaureate aims to develop inquiring, knowledgeable, and caring young people who help to create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect. To this end the organization works with schools, governments, and international organizations to develop challenging programmes of international education and rigorous assessment. These programmes encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate, and lifelong learners who understand that other people, with their differences, can also be right.

All IB schools operate as "a community of learners" (p. 10) using the learner profile as a guide and foundation of the IB's values. The learner profile consists of 10 words and is considered "the IB's mission in action" ("Middle years programme: From principles into practice," 2014, p. 9), International Baccalaureate students are to make every effort to portray the learner profile and become: (a) inquirers, (b) knowledgeable, (c) thinkers, (d) communicators, (e) principled, (f) open-minded, (g) caring, (h) risk-takers, (i) balanced, (j) reflective (p. 8).

The IB focuses on teaching and learning through an interactive cycle of inquiry, action, and reflection. The curriculum is very student centered and project based. Structured inquiry is

described as focusing on established knowledge and prior learning as “the basis for new learning...together with careful curriculum design” (Middle years programme, 2014, p. 11) to provide “learning that is engaging, relevant, challenging, and significant” (p. 11). Action is the doing part of the teaching and learning cycle. Reflection is a critical component that deepens students’ understanding and allows students to evaluate their work and ideas and the work and ideas of others (“Middle years programme: From principles into practice,” 2014).

The intermediate school for the study participates in the International Baccalaureate’s Middle Years Programme (MYP), developed in 1994 (Hill, 2012). The MYP programme “is designed to support the development of creativity, critical thinking, international-mindedness and values” (Hughes, 2014, p. 203). The model of the MYP (Figure 1) is centered on the learner, as are all of the IB models:



Figure 1: The MYP programme model represents the central focus on the learner (with close focus on pedagogy and the context of learning), outcomes of the programme, required curricula, and expectations within the programme. Image retrieved from <http://www.ibo.org/globalassets/digital-toolkit/logos-and-programme-models/myp-model-bw-en.jpg> and used with written permission from the IBO, which can be found in APPENDIX A: Permission to Use Image of MYP Model.

The MYP integrates the eight required subjects (language acquisition, language and literature, individuals and societies, mathematics, design, arts, sciences, and physical and health education) through integrated units of study. Throughout the units of studies, rubrics are incorporated for formative assessment purposes and for all summative assessment projects. The sixth grade literacy students use the Language A rubrics at the end of each unit for their

summative assessment and teacher created or occasionally teacher and student co-created rubrics for formative assessment activities throughout the units. The Language A rubric includes the following criteria: content, organization, style and mechanics.

The *Middle years programme: From principles into practice* guide describes the assessment in the programme as “ongoing, varied, and integral to the curriculum” (2014, p. 13). A recent analysis (Hughes, 2014) of the MYP’s assessment design highlights some areas of concern regarding the structure of the assessments used in the MYP. Specifically, Hughes (2014) argued that the IB Middle years programme; *From principles into practice* (2014) document does not fully describe the important assessment strategy of feedback with enough depth “to allow for deep understanding of its potential” (“Middle years programme: From principles into practice,” 2014, p. 1).

Feedback is important regarding my topic of rubrics. The *Middle years programme: From principles into practice* described the need to vary assessment strategies, but noted within each strategy to ensure “meaningful feedback” (2014, p. 79). This idea of providing meaningful feedback is nothing new, but as Hughes (2014) pointed out, for feedback to be meaningful it must be personally relevant to help motivate the student to improve (p. 209).

It is important to note that “the teacher, not the programme, determines a student’s classroom experience” (Pendergast, Dole, & Rentoule, 2014, p. 16). Therefore, while the programme of study is important, it is not the totality of a student’s education or school experience. The IB programme through the MYP provides a foundation for the curriculum that is offered at the setting of my study.

Summary

The research reviewed in this chapter informs the approach to beginning to understand sixth grade students' perspectives of using a rubric. The literature regarding rubrics tended to focus on the construction, reliability, and validity of rubrics (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Reddy & Andrade, 2010; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010). Another frequently explored area was the use of exemplars and models while using a rubric (Andrade et al., 2008; Lipnevich et al., 2014). A brief description of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme was provided in an effort to explain the setting for data collection and the fundamental foundation of the curriculum.

Three studies conducted with higher education students (Andrade & Du, 2005; Reynolds-Keefer, 2010; Strunk, 2012) focused specifically on the students' perspectives on the process of using a rubric. Some studies (Andrade et al., 2008; Taylor, 2013) did consider elementary students, but none discussed the students' experiences or perspectives of using a rubric. Therefore, the need exists to explore how students younger than college level perceive the use of a rubric. This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on sixth grade literacy students' perceptions of using a rubric.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to examine sixth grade literacy students' perspectives of rubric-referenced assessment at an inner city school in central Arkansas. By examining how students' perceive the use of rubric, educators can inform their instructional decisions and thereby impact student learning. The transcendental phenomenological approach helps to develop "a composite description of the essence of the experience" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76) of using a rubric, which consists of the "what" (p. 76) and "how" (p. 76) experienced by the participants provided through structural and textual descriptions. Moustakas (1994) described the process of bracketing as setting "aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon" (p. 22). Appendix C: Researcher Bracketing contains my bracketing.

This chapter seeks to explain how the research design, procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures support the research questions. Detailed information is provided about the participants and setting. Trustworthiness methods are described and include triangulation of data and a peer review of my description of the findings. My role as researcher and ethical considerations provide a context for understanding the study.

Design

This study of sixth grade literacy students' perspectives of using a rubric used a transcendental phenomenological approach to qualitative research. Schwandt (2007) described phenomenology as a "careful description of ordinary conscious experience of everyday life" (p. 225). This experience or phenomena includes perceptions and "all experiences of bodily action," according to Schwandt (2007, p. 225). Moustakas (1994) traced the root of the word

phenomenology to as early as 1765. The two main approaches to phenomenological research are hermeneutic phenomenology and transcendental phenomenology. According to Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell (2008), “These two approaches differ in their historical advocates (e.g., Heidegger or Husserl), methodological procedures (Lavery, 2003), and their current proponents (van Manen, 1990, for hermeneutic phenomenology and Moustakas, 1994, for transcendental phenomenology)” (p. 2). Hermeneutic phenomenology requires the researcher to make an interpretation of the meaning of the experience (Creswell, 2013), while transcendental phenomenology follows a more structured process for collecting and analyzing data so that the focus is on explicated the participants experiences rather than the researchers’ interpretation (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2008).

The transcendental phenomenological approach focuses less on the interpretation of meaning, and “more on a description of the experiences of participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 80). Thereby, the transcendental phenomenological approach allowed me to illustrate the essence of the experience of the sixth grade literacy students using a rubric, not my interpretations. Husserl explained that “the aim of phenomenology is the rigorous and unbiased study of things *as they appear*” (Dowling, 2007). This rigor was employed through the defined procedures for conducting a transcendental phenomenology in Moustakas (1994). By describing the common experience of how students’ perceive using a rubric, my study facilitates an understanding of how rubrics impact learning from the perspective of sixth grade literacy students, which connects to the purpose of my study.

Research Questions

Central Question: What are sixth grade literacy students' experiences with rubrics?

Sub-questions:

1. What are sixth grade literacy students' perspectives about the use of rubrics as an assessment tool?
2. How does having a rubric or not having one change the way sixth grade literacy students approach and complete an assignment?
3. How do sixth grade literacy students respond to feedback from rubric-referenced assessment?

Setting

An inner city intermediate school in central Arkansas was the site of this study.

According to the district's website, the student population consisted of 3,658 total students with 550 fifth and sixth grade students at the intermediate school, 270 males and 280 females, with a faculty of 65 certified teachers. According to the school's website, the district demographics are 44.9% white, 42.4% African American, 10.4% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian, and 0.7% Native American. The school is a high-poverty, Title 1 School that is classified as needs improvement based on the state benchmark scores in literacy and math. Selection of this site was based on the schools frequent use of rubrics to assess student learning and diversity among the schools' population. The school provides iPads for each student and is led by an executive principal, assistant principal, dean of students, and dean of academics.

Schwandt (2007) discussed the importance of ensuring "what is being observed is usual or customary, something that typically goes on there" (p. 270). Having previously worked in the school as the literacy coach, I know the students use rubrics as a regular part of their school day

in all academic courses and activity coursework. Therefore, no change to the setting or curriculum occurred for this study.

Participants

Participants for this study must have encountered the phenomenon of using a rubric; therefore, purposeful sampling was chosen. Creswell (2013) described purposeful sampling as selecting participants that “can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 156). More specifically, I used maximum variation sampling to narrow the group of sixth grade literacy students for my data collection procedures, as this approach “maximizes differences at the beginning of the study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). These sampling procedures were appropriate for my research, because the nature of a phenomenological study requires participants to meet the criteria of having experienced the phenomenon.

The participants were selected from the intermediate school’s class of sixth grade students enrolled in a daily 90 minute block of literacy instruction taught by two teachers, resulting in a total possible sample size of about 100 students. Two different teachers were chosen to allow for greater diversity in academic level and demographics. Gender was not considered in the selection of students. If consent and assent forms were completed, students completed the questionnaire. For the focus groups, a collective group of twelve students was chosen for the study, while two students were chosen to journal their thinking during the assessment process. Participants for the focus groups and journaling were selected using maximum variation sampling. The sixth grade students ranged in age from 11 to 13 and had prior experience using a rubric for assessment.

Procedures

The procedures for conducting this study began with applying for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Upon successful approval from the IRB, I solicited participants by contacting the school district administration and teachers involved. Upon receiving written consent from the school, I obtained consent and assent forms from the participants. All students who obtained a parental consent form and signed an assent form completed the online questionnaire. The information provided from the questionnaire helped purposefully select students to participate in the focus group interviews and journaling process. After conducting the focus group interview and the students journaled their experience, data was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) procedures, which include phenomenological reduction through bracketing, horizontalization, identification of structural and textual descriptions, and synthesis of the meanings of the phenomenon.

The Researcher's Role

I am a Liberty University doctoral candidate who works in the selected school district as an instructional facilitator for one of the four elementary schools in the district. Previously, I worked as the literacy coach at the study site for one year. As the human instrument for this qualitative study, I assumed that the setting would provide a diverse group of students, and that the rubrics used in the curriculum were being used correctly based on best practices. Professionally, I am a National Board Certified Teacher and hold state licensure in the following areas: Early Childhood Education P-4, English as a Second Language K-12, Building Level Administration P-8, and Reading Specialist P-8. At home, I am the mother of twin eight year-olds, who are in second grade, and a wife to a caring man, who is a real estate appraiser. I hold a Christian worldview and tend to believe the best about people in all circumstances. I strive to

remember the reason I chose to become an educator, which is to make a difference in the lives of children. Academics are important, but my philosophy of education involves educating and caring for the whole child. This includes the social, emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual needs of each child.

My role as a qualitative researcher was as the human instrument collecting and interpreting data, and then reporting a realistic picture of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Patton, 2001). Moustakas (1994) described the importance of the researcher being "completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience" (p. 22). I worked to accomplish this openness through the process of bracketing (setting aside my experience), which can be found in Appendix C: Researcher Bracketing.

Data Collection

The data collection methods chosen were completed by the sixth grade participants. Creswell (2013) described triangulation as using multiple methods of data collection to provide validation for the research. Three methods of data collection were used to ensure triangulation and information was gathered in the following sequence: a questionnaire, focus groups, and journaling. The sequence of data collection is important, as the questionnaire assisted the maximum variation sampling for the selection of participants for the focus group and journaling components of data collection. The questionnaire created was a Google Form. Participants completed the questionnaire using their school-issued iPad. For the focus group, audio recording assisted the transcription and analysis of the data. Appendix A: Focus Group Map of Participants is included to help with the replication of the experiences. The journaling

participants were not followed, but contact was made to ensure journaling occurred. Alignment of the data collection methods to the research questions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Data Collection Methods Aligned with Research Questions

	Central Question: What are sixth grade students' experiences with rubrics?	RQ1 What are sixth grade literacy students' perspectives about the use of rubrics as an assessment tool?	RQ2 How does having a rubric or not having one change the way sixth grade literacy students' approach and complete an assignment?	RQ3 How do sixth grade literacy students respond to feedback from rubric referenced assessment?
Questionnaire	X	X	X	X
Focus Groups	X	X		X
Journaling	X	X	X	X

Questionnaire. An electronic questionnaire provided structured data for analysis (Schwandt, 2007). Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) described questionnaires as a data collection method useful for collecting data about phenomenon that is not easily observable. The questionnaire allowed numerous students' experiences to be shared and analyzed. Purposeful sampling identified the classes chosen to represent the participants. All students with signed consent and assent forms completed the questionnaire using an online data collection tool, Google Form, and submit using the students' assigned iPad. The classroom teacher facilitated the instructions for completing the questionnaire. Both teachers emphasized the voluntary nature of the questionnaire and the option to opt out at any time. I was not with the students when the questionnaire was completed. The questionnaire questions were used with permission from the Reynolds-Keefer (2010) study, which sought to identify three main constructs: student process, student perceptions, and student predictions. The purpose of my study is different from the

Reynolds-Keefer study, therefore I did not use the questions identified as student prediction questions by Reynolds-Keefer.

1. How (if at all) do rubrics help you plan how to approach an assignment?
2. How (if at all) do you use a rubric in the process of completing an assignment?
3. How (if at all) do rubrics impact your ability to reflect on your work?
4. To what extent (if at all) do you think rubrics impact grading?
5. To what degree (if at all) do you think using rubrics affect the quality of your work? (Reynolds-Keefer, 2010, p. 2)

The questionnaire questions supported the central question about students' experiences with rubrics. Questions one and two addressed research question one that addressed the students' perspectives about using the tool, by understanding how (if at all) the rubric was used in the planning and process of completing an assignment. Questionnaire questions three, four, and five were designed to provide evidence to illustrate how students perceive their learning was impacted by the rubric, which provided evidence of my second research question regarding the impact a rubric has on the students' learning. Research question three was supported by questionnaire questions one, two, and three, as these questions answer how the students respond to feedback from the rubric.

Focus group. Krueger (2009) described focus groups as “a carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment” (p. 2). The focus group approach allowed me to be in a non-directive role and to facilitate discussion among the participants (Gall et al., 2007). Maximum variation sampling was used to identify the participants from two diverse sixth grade classes. From this sample, a focus group was formed with twelve sixth grade literacy students. The focus

group met one time for 22 minutes and was semi-structured using open-ended interview questions. As the facilitator, I asked pre-planned, peer-reviewed questions and prompted students as needed to keep the conversation moving. The focus group session was audio recorded for transcription. I noted who was talking, for reference during transcription, but I did not try to document the entire discussion until I listened to the audio recording. Two audio recording devices ensured I had a back-up in case of technical difficulty. The focus group was conducted at a convenient time for the participating school, teachers, and students. The focus group interview was held in the school's conference room during the participants lunch time, as to not interrupt instructional time. The students brought their lunches to the conference room and ate quietly as they participated in the interview.

These details were planned in cooperation with the participating site. The questions for the focus group interview follow:

1. What have you experienced in terms of the use of a rubric? (Adapted from Creswell, 2013, p. 81)
2. What context or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences with the use of a rubric? (Adapted from Creswell, 2013, p. 81)
3. What is a rubric for? What does it involve?
 - a. Did you use the rubric? If so, how?
 - b. Why did you or did you not use the rubric? Give me an example.
 - c. What, if anything, did you get out of using the rubric? (Adapted from Andrade, 2005, p. 11)
4. Did having a rubric change how you approached the assignment?

5. Rubric-referenced assessments seem to help some students but not others. Can you explain why? (Adapted from Andrade, 2005, p. 11)
6. Did you read all or part of the rubric? Which parts and why?
7. What are your experiences with using an example or model paper with rubrics? How, if at all, did this affect your experience?
8. How do you use the feedback on the rubric?
9. Does the feedback from the rubric change how you approach other learning tasks?

Questions 1 through 3 were designed to get a general picture of the experiences students have with a rubric. Lipnevich et al. (2014) stated, “in order for assessment to facilitate learning, students need to understand the level and nature of their current performance, the desired state of proficiency, and the discrepancy between the actual and the desired state” (p. 540). Having the students describe their experiences and understanding about the use of a rubric helped understand their perspective and use of the rubric as a learning tool. The statement that “there is limited empirical evidence that students can and do use rubrics to their advantage,” (Andrade & Du, 2005, p. 1) was concerning to me. Therefore, I planned questions 4 through 6 to cause the students to think deeper about specific aspects of using the rubric.

Contradicting research is available on the effect the role of exemplars and models has on rubric use (Andrade et al., 2008; Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Lipnevich et al., 2014). Question number 7 allowed the participants to describe their experience, if any, with the use of model papers. Questions 8 and 9 ask specifically about the feedback received from a rubric. These questions allowed students to describe how they use the feedback. Jonsson and Svingby (2007) stated that “the explicitness of criteria and standards are fundamental in providing the students with quality feedback, and rubrics can in this way promote student learning” (p. 132). If the

feedback is intended to promote future learning, students must be using it in this way. Howell (2011) emphasized that “learning and academic performance is positively enhanced when rubrics are used to evaluate student performance” (p. 33). I designed the questions for the focus group interview to understand if students perceive the academic benefit of using a rubric.

Journaling. According to Janesick (1999), journal writing in qualitative research is used to refine the researcher’s role by means of reflection, to improve the understanding of participants, and as an interactive tool between the researcher and participants. I used journal writing to better understand the experience of my participants throughout the process of using a rubric to complete an assignment. By completing a journal, my participants had the opportunity to have “an active voice” (Janesick, 1999, p. 522) in the research. I used maximum variation sampling to identify focus group participants, followed by criterion sampling to determine two participants to complete the journaling component of data collection. Two participants journaled daily from the time introduced to a performance assessment task to the final entry in the journal regarding the feedback from the rubric and how the feedback was used. The journal entries were kept in a Google Doc that was shared with the researcher. Students were guided by prompts similar to the questions from the questionnaire. The specific prompts for the students follow:

Day one:

You received an assignment with a rubric:

1. How will you approach this assignment?
2. What steps will you take to complete the assignment?
3. Will having a rubric change the way you approach this assignment?

Day two and three:

1. What progress are you making on the assignment?

2. Have you or have you not referred to your rubric? Why or why not?

Day four:

1. As you turn in your assignment today, how do you think the rubric will impact (if at all) your grade?

2. Did having the rubric change the way you completed the assignment?

Day five:

You received your assignment back today with a grade.

1. What did you do with the assignment?

2. To what degree (if at all) do you think having the rubric affected the quality of your work?

The journaling component of the data collection was aligned with the central question of what are the experiences of sixth grade literacy students, as students described their process of using a rubric. Their journal was personal and offered their perspective of the rubric as an assessment tool, thereby answering research question one. The impact of the rubric on the participants was inferred from their writing about the process and their reflections of having or using the rubric for the assignment, which aligned with research question two. The journal illustrated how the student responded to the rubric, which related to research question three.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) procedures for conducting phenomenological research. The first step was "epoche" (Creswell, 2013, p. 80) or bracketing of my experiences. Bracketing is a suspension of what is perceived about the everyday world and a setting aside of my assumptions (Schwandt, 2007). This process of bracketing my experiences with rubrics allowed me to better "understand *how*" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 24) the participants

experience their world giving others an understanding of my assumptions. My epoche or bracketing of my experience with rubrics can be found in Appendix C: Researcher Bracketing.

Subsequently, this study was framed within the literature as a way to set the stage for the study (Moustakas, 1994). The first data collected was from the questionnaire. This data was analyzed to identify 10 diverse participants for the focus group and four of these ten for the journaling of their experiences of using a rubric to complete an assignment. The journaling component of my research was dependent on the classroom teacher, so as not to interfere with the curriculum. Following the focus group and journaling components of data collection, phenomenological reduction began through the process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) described horizontalization as the process of highlighting “significant statements” (p. 82) that provide insight to the phenomenon being studied.

Using my research questions as a guide, I identified the significant statements found in my data creating this horizontalization to view the range of perspectives in the data (Moustakas, 1994). Following horizontalization, I began to identify clusters of meaning from the data and place these into themes (Creswell, 2013). The clusters identify the structural themes of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). Then, I used textual and structural descriptions to consider additional meanings. Textual descriptions are defined as the “individuals’ intuitive, prereflective perceptions of a phenomenon” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 656) or the description of “what” was experienced. Structural descriptions describe the “how” of the experience, more specifically “an account of the regularities of thought, judgment, imagination, and recollection that underlie the experience” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 654) and give meaning to it. Following these descriptions, the themes were synthesized, in order to “construct a composite description of the meanings and the essences of the experience” (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2008, p. 6). Moustakas (1994)

described this synthesis as “intuitively reflectively” (p. 181) integrating the composite textual and structural descriptions to develop the “essences of the phenomenon” (p. 181).

Trustworthiness

The quality of a qualitative study is referred to as trustworthiness, and four criteria are to be considered when determining the trustworthiness of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Schwandt, 2007). Credibility refers to the assurance that data collected and reported accurately represents the participants’ views (Schwandt, 2007).

Transferability concerns the generalization of the study; I worked to report the details in such depth that another researcher can transfer the findings to their case (Schwandt, 2007). Ensuring the process of the research was “logical, traceable, and documented” (p. 299) is known as dependability, according to Schwandt (2007). When conducting the research, I linked my assertions and interpretations to the data and had a peer/expert reviewer in order to reflect confirmability (Schwandt, 2007).

Triangulation. Data triangulation adds to the trustworthiness of the study, as data is corroborated by multiple methods of data collection (Gall et al., 2007). To provide credibility to the study, triangulation was accomplished through the use of multiple sources for data collection (Schwandt, 2007). Specifically, I used three different data collection methods: a questionnaire, focus group interview, and participant journaling. Triangulation of the data is an important step in corroborating evidence and developing the essence of the experience (Gall et al., 2007).

Rich, thick description. The foundation of a study, according to Patton (2001), is the thick, rich description that provides “rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions” (p. 438) of the participants in order for the reader to fully understand the phenomenon. Therefore, I described the participants and setting in detail by providing abundant, interconnected details (Creswell,

2013). This allows “readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether findings can be transferred” (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). In my description, I provided the five W’s (who, what, when, where, and why) about my phenomenon and participants.

Enumeration and memoing. Enumeration is “the process of quantifying data” (p. 528), which helps determine the frequency of themes or categories in the data (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). For my study, the responses for each theme were counted and displayed in a table to increase the dependability of the data. Johnson and Christensen (2010) defined memoing as a tool to record notes throughout the research project, which helped me reflect on my data and keep track of my ideas and insights throughout the course of the study. Memoing throughout the data collection and analysis process, allowed me to analyze my thoughts during coding and creating themes, which increased the dependability of the study (Creswell, 2013).

Peer/expert review. After my analysis of the data, I had a peer examine the data. This peer review helped ensure the confirmability of the results by cross-checking the results and revealing new insights and information (Johnson & Christensen, 2010). Engaging in this professional conversation with a peer caused me to answer difficult questions about my interpretations and research methods, as her role was to play “devil’s advocate” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251).

Ethical Considerations

Sensitivity to the participants was achieved by gaining consent to conduct the study in the school and assent forms from the students along with consent forms from their parents, which can be found in APPENDIX D: Assent Forms and APPENDIX E: Consent Forms. Participants were given adequate time to consider and complete consent/assent forms for participation in the study. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to ensure confidentiality of all materials.

Electronic data was password protected, and a lock and key were kept on paper data with student information. Further, student responses were held from the teachers. This prevented any knowledge gained from the study from affecting teachers' perceptions about these particular students and their habits regarding rubrics. While the information gained from this study seeks to inform instructional practices, I did not want any adverse effects for the study's participants.

Working with sixth graders, I remained aware of any power imbalance and influence my personal beliefs might have had on the students. To address this issue, I worked to ensure my questions did not lead students to an expected outcome, and I did not share my personal beliefs. I accomplished this by adhering to my interview protocol, which was approved by the IRB and my dissertation committee. The research site is not the school I work at daily, but is located within my school district. The fact I do not work for the school should decrease any power threats for both the teachers and students. The study was completely voluntary in nature, and students were instructed that they had the right to withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

Summary

This chapter explained the transcendental phenomenology research design, procedures, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures as they align with my research questions. Some background for Moustakas' (1994) structured process to transcendental phenomenology was shared to validate the rigor of this method. A description of the setting in central Arkansas provided a framework for understanding the study site. Purposeful and maximum variation sampling was used to identify the sixth grade literacy students to participate in the three data collection methods: a questionnaire, focus group sessions, and journaling. Triangulation was achieved by using these three methods of data collection. Procedures for conducting the study

were identified and began with IRB and site approval. Since I was the human research instrument, the importance of bracketing my experiences was discussed. The data analysis described follows Moustakas' (1994) procedures, which included bracketing, phenomenological reduction, and the synthesis of the structural and textual descriptions. Methods to ensure trustworthiness included the triangulation of data, providing a rich, thick description, enumeration and memoing, and peer/expert review; these are important to ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and most importantly the overall quality of the study (Schwandt, 2007). Ethical considerations ensured the participants provided consent and assent forms, the study was voluntary in nature, and all materials were kept confidential.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine sixth grade literacy students' perspectives of rubric-referenced assessment. A brief description of the participants is provided, with detailed information about each of the three data collection methods. Significant statements are then provided to illustrate the data analysis process that led to the identification of themes or meaning units from the data. The exact words of participants, including grammar and syntax errors, were used to ensure their authentic voices were heard. Five themes are presented with evidence statements from the data to support each. The themes include: planning/expectations, feedback and grading, motivation, reflection, and limitations/restrictions. The chapter concludes by aligning the data to the research questions.

Participants

Of the 37 students who completed both the consent and assent forms, 29 students completed the online questionnaire (13 boys, 16 girls). Twelve students were selected to participate in the focus group based on their responses to the questionnaire. The selection was based solely on the response, not the participant or gender. The responses were first classified by a positive, negative, or neutral view of rubrics. Four students' responses were very limited, giving answers of "yes," "sometimes," "no," or "I don't know" on all five questions. These students were not selected to participate in the focus group. Following is an example of what was considered a neutral response, "It doesn't effect me because it only matters if I think I did good." Of the twelve focus group participants, seven were girls and five were boys.

From the questionnaire and the focus group information, five students were selected to participate in the journaling component. Of these five students, three were girls and two were

boys, but only the two boys completed the journaling process. Again, the particular student and gender were not considered as a selection criteria, but the focus for selection was on striving to represent a range of perspectives regarding the use of a rubric.

Personal data about each participant was not part of this study, as the focus was solely on the experiences and perspectives of using a rubric. However, each focus group participant is introduced to guide the understanding of the data collected. An outspoken young lady, Kathryn, did not believe rubrics impact her work. She felt rubrics made grading easier for both the teacher and the students. She explained that she did use rubrics to plan or reflect on her work. When asked about using an exemplar paper, she did not believe in comparing her work to the exemplar as this was not “the best way to motivate you.” However, she did feel she could gain ideas about using “highly skilled words or like a really good story type” from an exemplar paper.

Max participated in all three data collection points. For him, a rubric that was specific helped him reflect on his work and to “see what I did wrong,” He felt rubrics, especially writing rubrics, restrict and limit students from thinking on their own. Further, he consistently proclaimed that rubrics have “some unfair advantages against a person’s weak spot.”

Like Max, Shelly agreed that the rubric restricts students’ writing and went further to explain that they put pressure on students. Shelly stated that the rubric “just shows me what the teacher wants.” She used the rubric very little, only occasionally to identify the criteria to “get a good grade” and to check her work. Her sense of self was evident from her statement that “it only matters if I think I did good.”

In agreement with Shelly, Ariana also felt the rubric put pressure on a student. She was sometimes confused by rubrics, but also felt they were very helpful. She used the rubric to know

when she made a mistake and to add more to assignments. The rubric helped her think about her work and to see what she was doing wrong.

Katelyn was a quiet student during the focus group. She shared that she does not “really like using rubrics,” but that is all she shared during the interview. From the questionnaire, she claimed not to use a rubric, except to look for the criteria to get the best grade possible. She does not use the rubric for planning and reflection and did not see value for grading.

Jacob relied on the support of the rubric to “get a good grade.” He used the rubric during the process of completing assignments and to reflect on the criteria from the highest scoring level to make changes as needed. When discussing feedback from the rubric, Jacob preferred direct feedback from the teacher as opposed to reading the feedback from the rubric.

All of Nancy’s responses were positive about using a rubric. She uses the rubric to plan and to score herself before turning in her work. She believes a rubric would be more helpful than having an exemplar paper, and that rubrics are beneficial to the grading process.

Similar to Nancy, Lane shared his positive experiences with using a rubric. He found the rubric to be beneficial in planning for an assignment and reflecting on his work. Lane appreciates knowing the points available for projects. In the focus group interview, Lane disagreed with students, like Shelly and Max, who felt the rubric limited them, as he explained some students do not use the rubric “the right way.” He also shared his positive experience using an exemplar paper in fifth grade. The explicit criteria from the rubric and the support from the exemplar papers were not confining to Lane.

Bailey described how she felt it is important to look at the entire rubric and not simply the highest scoring criteria. She thought the rubric helped with grading, because the rubric

helped her “write the way your teacher wants.” In the focus group interview, Bailey shared concern that all students might “not be familiar with rubrics.”

Like Bailey and Jacob, Michael relied on the rubric to reflect on assignments and to “get a good grade.” He shared a similar dislike for rubrics as Katelyn, and according to his questionnaire responses he did not use the rubric during the planning and process of completing an assignment. Michael was a quiet participant in the focus group only sharing that “I would have to use the rubric to see what I would need and I would do it.”

Unlike Bailey, Chloe did not look at the entire rubric, she chose to focus on the top criteria, because that is what the teacher expects. On her questionnaire, Chloe described that the rubric helped her writing by making it “less choppy and more exciting.” During the focus group interview, Chloe was very outspoken. She explained the rubric as “like a checklist, and helps you get better grades and become a better writer.” She agreed with Jacob that feedback from the teacher was more effective, but unlike Jacob, Chloe would read the feedback from the rubric and go back and check her work. In agreement with Nancy, Chloe said she would not use an exemplar if provided, and she shared that she felt using an exemplar would be cheating.

The only other student, besides Max, that completed all three data collection points was James. James believed having a rubric changed the way he approached assignments. Similar to Jacob, James did not look at the entire rubric. His reasoning was if you look at the lowest valued criteria, then you would not “get a good grade.” His perspective of a rubric was that it helped him plan and reflect and improved his quality of work.

In addition to the twelve focus group participants, introduction to nine students from the questionnaire responses is important, as they provided insight for analyzing the data. Whitt was a young man who felt the rubric made a big difference in his quality of work. He used rubrics

throughout his projects, because they helped him understand what he “can and cannot do.” The statement that set Whitt apart from other students was that he felt the rubric helped “know what is to be expected of me and to go above and beyond the rubric.”

Cassie’s responses across the five questions consistently answered that she used the rubric. She shared that she uses the rubric to “show me to do to get an A project.” To reflect on her work, Cassie checks the rubric to “make sure I have done all the things I need to.” Her quality of work is affected by the rubric, because she felt if she follows the rubric then her work would be “organized and neat.” From Cassie’s perspective, the rubric helps the teacher “make sure that the student did what they were supposed to do.”

Another student who used the rubric to get full credit on an assignment was Ashley. Ashley used the rubric while planning for the assignment, but did not return to the rubric until it was time to turn in the project. She felt rubrics were “really important” for showing students how they achieved their score. Rubrics helped Ashley’s quality of work, “because they push you to do better.”

Unlike Ashley, Mason did not feel like rubrics helped him, as he said, “Rubrics don’t help me much.” The rubric was seen by Mason as a “basic guideline” to reflect and grade work. He felt the quality of work might be enhanced “if you like having a certain way of writing.”

“Rubrics tell me what I need to have....to get a good grade,” Allie wrote. She uses the “rubric as a checklist to help me learn what to do.” The greater amount of details included on the rubric was addressed by Allie as the way it helps grading. Specific details were addressed again on the quality of work question, where Allie shared that the rubric provides information on how many paragraphs and information should be included in each.

Maggie expressed that rubrics help make her work “a bit better.” She used the rubric to reflect on her work and make improvements prior to turning in the project. The rubric guided her throughout the completion of the project. She commented that without a rubric her work “might not have one of the qualities that my work is expected to have.” In her opinion, grading was easier with a rubric, because it helped the teacher decide if students “did what they asked.”

From Mary’s perspective, the rubric assists her in approaching the assignment and letting her know what she needs to accomplish. She uses the rubric throughout the assignment to ensure she includes the expected criteria. According to Mary, rubrics help her reflect “by making you go back and forth with the rubric and your work to make sure you did it correctly.” She shared how the rubric impacts grading, because she can make sure her “score is good.” Like Maggie, Mary felt the rubric “affects me in a good way because my work seems much better with a rubric than without.”

In Ella’s questionnaire responses, she really focused on the expectations provided by the rubric. She felt the rubric helps her know how to reach the expectations set forth by the criteria on the rubric, and if she were not to meet the expectations, she would receive a bad grade. Ella uses the rubric to know what to take out or add to her paper. In her opinion, the rubric increases her quality of work “by showing me what I need to do.”

Bethany answered four of the five questionnaire questions. In her answers, Bethany expressed when she does not understand she uses the rubric to get help from the teacher. Like Mary and Ella, Bethany uses the rubric to go back to her work and ensure the criteria have been met. She felt rubrics impact her grades, because they require you to plan your writing.

Results

Questionnaire

The quantity of data collected by the questionnaire offered an opportunity to analyze each response and tabulate the similarities among the answers. The five questions on the questionnaire were categorized as planning, process, reflection, grading, and quality of work. This categorization helped identify the aim of the questions. The planning question asked how (if at all) students used the rubric to approach an assignment. Four students stated the rubric does not help them at all. Twenty students felt the rubric helped with the expectations of the assignment. Five commented on how the rubric helped them get a good grade, with four students giving limited answers of yes, I do not know, or sometimes. The majority of responses were based on the rubric helping define the expectations for the project, with comments such as, James', "It helps me plan because it tells me what I need," and Mary's, "Rubrics help you approach an assignment by telling you what you need to get done."

The process question was designed for students to describe how (if at all) they used the rubric in the process of completing an assignment. More students than in the planning stage stated they did not use the rubric at all with seven students or 23% of students stating they did not use the rubric at all during the assignment. Five students stated they use the rubric to check, review and remind: Lane, "I use it as a reminder" and Chloe, "I keep the things in mind so I won't have to edit that much." Twelve students used the rubric during the process to "understand what to do" as Bethany said, and Jacob's statement to "make sure I have all the things I need to have." Two students, Katelyn and Cassie, used the rubric to try to "get the best grade."

The reflection question asked students how (if at all) the rubric impacted their ability to reflect on their work. Thirteen of the students stated that the rubric helped them review their work or as Mary stated, “by making you go back and forth with the rubric and your work to make sure you did it correctly.” Expectations such as Shelly’s statement of “what the teacher wants” and Whitt’s, “what is expected” were provided, as well as three students, Allie, Chloe, and Mason, who used the rubric like a checklist when reflecting on their work. James felt the rubric would help him earn a better grade, while six students did not feel the rubric had any impact on their reflection.

The next question asked students how (if at all) the rubric impacts grading. Sixteen of the students discussed how the rubric helps them get better grades or how the rubric “makes grading easier.” Eight students discussed how the rubric provides the expectations with statements like Bailey’s about the rubric helps you do the assignment “the way your teacher wants,” and Maggie’s statement about using the rubric makes the assignment “easier for students to understand.” Five students felt like the rubric did not affect grading at all.

Finally, the quality of work question asked students to what degree (if at all) does the rubric affect their quality of work. Eight students stated that the rubric did not impact their quality of work. Six students felt the rubric helped their quality of work. Two examples include Ella who said, “by showing me what I need to do,” and Mary who said, “My work seems better with a rubric than without.” Five students discussed the grade with most discussing the rubric helping them to get a good grade. However, Max felt that rubrics “degrade work by a ton because of one thing that a person may or may not understand.” Ashley stated, “Rubrics affect the quality of your work, because they push you to do better.” This statement is the only statement that was really related to motivation.

Enumeration of data from the questionnaire is provided in Table 2. The graph provides the total number of similar responses for each question based on the question type (planning, process, reflection, quality of work, and grading).

Table 2: Questionnaire Data Response Frequency



Focus Group

The focus group session used pre-planned questions and allowed students an opportunity to discuss their perspectives of using a rubric. The interaction between the students was very polite, as students agreed with one another, shared different perspectives, and respectfully disagreed with one another. For example, when Shelly and Max were concurring that a rubric is

more of a burden than a help, Jacob stated, “I disagree, because sometimes like when like when I’m writing I need to know what I can do to get a good grade and the rubric tells me.”

The focus group began with a general question about the students’ experiences with rubrics. This led to an unexpected focus of the conversation on writing. The questions were not subject specific, but the beginning of the conversation focused mostly on using a rubric during writing. When asked, Kathryn, Max, Shelly, Ariana, and Michael collectively said they used rubrics in all subjects and even concluded that project rubrics were more beneficial than a writing rubric. The first student to share her experience, Kathryn, acknowledged that it is “fun” to just start writing, “but you need to know that the rubric helps you grade and then that’s what will give you a good grade.” She went on to say the rubric “helps...put together my story.” Max shared next that he felt “rubrics actually limit what you can actually do.” Shelly quickly agreed and began to describe the pressure the rubric places on a student and “it doesn’t allow them to express the way they write.”

While Shelly and Max agreed that the rubric pressured them, Ariana spoke up that “it helps me know what I’m doing.” Shelly explained that Dr. Seuss did not need a rubric and he “had some of the most successful, uh, children’s books.” Kathryn retorted that “a lot of people sort of need a rubric to like focus on what they want to do.” To Kathryn’s point, Katelyn added that she does not “really like using rubrics.” Max discussed the burden of a teacher having to use a rubric to grade with the “little details.” Ariana decided she was “in the middle” of Kathryn’s and Max’s points of needing the rubric or it being a burden.

The second question asked students about the purpose of a rubric. Lane began by saying the rubric tells you what you need, “so you can get it done efficiently.” Bailey felt it was the “structure of your story.” I questioned if they used rubrics in other subjects than writing.

Kathryn shared that yes they had “like maybe the scientific method.” I confirmed that they used rubrics in all of their subjects. Shelly explained that a rubric for a project is “a different story, because with projects I will use a rubric because that’s sort of thing you do need to do,” but with writing “when I have a rubric next to me, I think oh I can’t write that because it says I have to stay on this trail.”

The third question asked if the students use the rubric when it is available and how. Michael, Chloe, Kathryn, and Katelyn shared that the rubric is like a guide or checklist and all spoke to needing to use the rubric. Chloe added that she uses the rubric to “get better grades and become a better writer.” The fourth question asked how the rubric changes how they approach an assignment. James, Lane, Max, Ariana, Shelly, and Chloe spoke to the rubric changing how they approached the assignment depending on the criteria expected. James described how it helped him know what to start with, “like a main topic...like an opening idea to the story like a flashback.” While Lane, focused on how the rubric helped him “to use proper grammar...to get a good grade.” Shelly reflected on a time in second grade when she had to use a rubric for process writing about making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. She described how she tried to make the story her own even when using a rubric, and said, “I think it just like makes me so mad, because I can’t do a really good idea in my head.”

The next question asked which part of the rubric the students used. Bailey, Ariana, and Chloe described how they look at the top category for sure, while James and Jacob looked only at the top two categories. James explained why he does not look at the lower categories, “like if you look at the bottom of it you probably won’t get a good grade.” Bailey disagreed with Jacob, James, and Michael who adamantly did not look at the entire rubric. Bailey felt “you have to read all of it in order to know exactly how you are going to write it.”

Feedback was the focus of the next two questions, which asked students how they use or do not use the feedback from the rubric and if the feedback from the rubric changed how they approach their next assignment. Katelyn began by saying, “you can know what you did wrong,” but went on to say she felt only “sometimes” does the feedback apply to any other assignments. Shelly said, “I don’t really go through the rubric again...I just go off what my teacher says.” Jacob concurred with Shelly, while Kathryn described the rubric as “too much of I mean like pressure on the student.” Chloe felt like she would look back at her work and the rubric when she receives the feedback. Ariana then shared how she gets “confused with a rubric.”

Model or exemplar papers were the focus of the next question, as students were asked how they affect their experience using a rubric. The consensus was they felt the rubric was more helpful than a model or exemplar paper. Lane described how he had used examples of students work in the previous year and “that gave us an idea of what we are trying to achieve.” Nancy agreed that it helps you know what to achieve and just the rubric is more helpful and helps “score myself.” Kathryn was adamant that we should not really compare papers, “because comparing isn’t really the best way to motivate you.” Chloe agreed with Kathryn and added that “you shouldn’t just like copy them, because that would be like cheating...if there was like a model paper in my classroom, I wouldn’t use it, cause that would get me confused instead.” Shelly agreed a little bit, because she also “wouldn’t pay any attention” to the model paper, “because I don’t want to write like them. I want to write like me.” The final question focused on why a rubric might help some students and not others. Jacob began, “Well, some people are different kinds of learners than others, so I think that affects it.” Ariana agreed with Jacob. Max added, “Well, I’m thinking that students are different, but also that rubrics restrict other students, so that they may not pay attention to them and they may not get a good grade because of them.” Lane

held a different perspective as he did not think students “use it to the full advantage...because they don’t think about it the right way.” Bailey took a more neutral stance, “I think a rubric, a rubric, can be good and bad for all people.” She went on to describe how some students “might not be familiar with rubrics as much.” Shelly spoke to the “different types of learners” and the exposure to different types of instruction. Chloe and Ariana agreed that different instruction from different schools affected the way students learn and use a rubric. The focus group concluded with thanks and appreciation for the participants’ time.

Journaling

Two students completed the journaling component. The students used a rubric provided by their teacher to complete a literacy assignment. The rubric was not the same for all participants and the time for completing the assignment varied. A description of each journaling experience is provided.

James. When James received his rubric, his plan to approach the assignment was to make a rough draft of the story and begin “by looking at the rubric and following each step to make a good story.” He believed the rubric would help him “make a better story” and help him “have a better grade for a writing assignment.

On day two, James looked at the rubric, because he made a mistake on his rough draft. The following day the teacher had the class peer edit, so he did not refer to the rubric. On day four, James felt the rubric would help him have “a better grade” because he “used a rubric to grade” himself, but he did not feel like having the rubric changed how he completed the assignment.

James began his assignment optimistic that the rubric was going to help him complete the assignment, but throughout the project he did not use the rubric to check his work. He received a

D on his assignment, and his reasoning was he did not “give the owner identity...I kept on having run on sentences.” When asked how the rubric affected his quality of work, James responded, “It barley helped me get a grade because I didn't look at the rubric when I was fixing my mistakes.”

Max. Max's approach to the assignment began with taking information from different sources. He planned to use the rubric as a “planner to help me get started then creatively use it to my advantage to publish my work.” When asked how the rubric would change the way he approached the assignment he said, “Not at all.”

On day two, Max had completed a paragraph and had not referred to the rubric, “because it's free writing with a slight shell.” By day three, Max was halfway finished with his writing and did not refer to the rubric, “because I will only use it to grade myself.” The next day, Max was asked how the rubric would impact his grade, and he said, “Very little at most because it mainly is of how hard I worked.” He also said that having a rubric changed the way he completed the assignment, because he “had to change some things to edit.” It was not until day four that Max used the rubric to edit, but the outcome of the assignment was not what he expected, as seen by his response to the final journaling question. When Max received his assignment back, he saved it and stated that the rubric “affected my work to a painful degree.”

Themes

Significant statements were selected as a way to view the horizons of the data. In the process of horizontalization, “every statement initially is treated as having equal value” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97). After repetitive, overlapping statements were omitted, forty-three statements were selected. The forty-three significant statements were then clustered into themes.

Five themes emerged from the significant statements. The themes included planning/expectations, grading and feedback, motivation, reflection, and limitations/restrictions.

Planning/ Expectations. From all data collection points, most students saw the rubric as a guide for completing their work. Allie, Mason, Michael, Chloe, Kathryn, and Katelyn referred to it as a checklist or guideline. Lane explained that “a rubric is for telling you what you need to do, so you can get it done efficiently.” The students agreed that they look at the rubric prior to the assignment, but tend to look only at the highest ranked category (a 3 or a 4). One exception was Bailey who explained that she prefers to look at all the criteria and categories on the rubric. Three students, Katelyn, Max, and Jacob, were particularly adamant that they did not use the rubric to plan. These students explained that they had a plan in their mind or they made it up as they go along.

Participants discussed the expectations offered by the rubric throughout all data collection points. No matter when during the process of completing an assignment, the students discussed what was expected of them based on the rubric. Students explained that the expectations/criteria on the rubric helped them plan. Whitt said, “They help me understand what I can and cannot do.” Kathryn explained how she uses the rubric to know what will be graded and “what sort of things that should be involved” in her work. During the focus group interview, Ariana shared that she is sometimes confused by the rubric. This confusion was echoed by Bethany in the questionnaire, as she shared that she asks the teacher to help her “understand what to do with the rubric.”

Grading and Feedback. The data gathered regarding grading was very diverse. Ashley felt that “Rubrics are really important. It shows why you got the score you got.” While Chloe, Frances, James, Kathryn, Maggie, and Nancy felt the rubric made grading easier and helped

them get better grades, because as Ella said the rubric helps you know “their expectations.” Chloe felt that the rubric helps her become a better writer and said, “I think they help you get better grades. If you were writing a tone for the story and it was supposed to be happy, you wouldn't write it was dark and scary.” Kathryn explained that the rubric “makes it easier to grade for teachers, and it’s easier for students to understand.”

While Kathryn saw the benefits of a rubric, Max explained how he felt rubrics “have some unfair advantages against a person’s weak spot.” He further described how rubrics “degrade work by a ton because of one thing that a person may or may not understand.” He goes further to explain that having awful handwriting, but “amazing story skills” that his work would go from a five on the rubric to a two. Similarly, Katelyn did not think the rubric impacted grading very much. Shelly expressed that rubrics did not impact grading “that greatly” and said, “I think when kids look at a rubric they feel bad about themselves because their work isn't a 4. Everyone has a different style of writing, and I think rubrics are telling kids that their writing has to look like this or it’s not any good.”

When discussing the role of feedback from the rubric, Jacob and Shelly discussed how the specific feedback from the teacher made an impact on their work rather than the rubric. Jacob said, “I don’t really go back and look at the rubric, because they told me, they told me what I did wrong, so I don’t really need to go back and look at it.” Shelly concurred with Jacob, because she said, “I don’t really go through the rubric again because I don’t really like rubrics,” and “my teacher always tells me what I do wrong on my writing.” Kathryn followed up by stating, “It’s just you have, you have requirements sometimes, and then to help with the feedback it’s kind of like if you get back a test and you see what you missed and you have the test again you would study over it and redo it.”

Motivation. While students did not specifically discuss the topic of motivation, the significant statements led to this cluster of meaning. One student, Ashley, stated, “They push you to do better.” This statement of rubrics pushing a student to do better led to the cluster of meaning of extrinsic motivation. An outside factor, the rubric, caused the student to do better. Similarly, Whitt expressed that the rubric helped him “know what is to be expected of me and to go above and beyond the rubric.” He was motivated to do more than the rubric expected. The motivation to do the work correctly was discussed by Cassie, Mary, Max, Michael, and Shelly. This expectation of doing “what the teacher wants,” as Shelly said, was prominent throughout the findings and supports this external push or motivation to do well. However, Shelly was particularly passionate about not being too concerned with the rubric, as she said, “it only matters if I think I did a good job.” For Shelly, the rubric did not extrinsically motivate her, yet Chloe, Frances, Maggie, Mary, James, and Nancy all described the rubric as way to make better grades, which is an extrinsic factor for motivation.

Reflection. From the perspective of the participants, overall rubrics were useful for reflection. There were two students, Shelly and Katelyn, who generalized their reflections to future activities, yet most referred to the time of reflection as being prior to turning in the assignment. For example, eleven students, Allie, Bethany, Cassie, Chloe, Ella, Jacob, James, Kathryn, Maggie, Mary, and Michael, referred to going back to the assignment to ensure the criteria on the rubric had been met before turning in the assignment. Michael explained on the questionnaire that the rubric “says to go back and look over it,” so this helps him reflect on his work. Jacob said, “so I can go back and make changes if needed,” and Mary said, “Rubrics impact your ability to reflect on your work by making you go back and forth with the rubric and your work to make sure you did it correctly.” The rubric helped Ashley know what she needed

“to improve on.” During the journaling component, James and Max had very different experiences. James stated that the rubric “affected my work to a painful degree.” While Max said the rubric “barley helped me get a grade because I didn’t look at the rubric when I was fixing my mistakes.”

Limitations or restrictions. Three students, Mason, Max, and Shelly, described how they felt the rubric limited or restricted their thinking and writing. The limiting and restricting nature of rubrics were discussed in all data collection points. Mason hinted at the limiting nature of the rubric in his questionnaire response where he said, “You might be a free writer and that could affect you in your writing. If you have a certain way of writing...” Max and Shelly specifically discussed the limiting or restrictive nature of rubrics. Shelly stated, “But think of like Dr. Seuss, he didn’t need a rubric to express the way in his creative writing and he had some of the most successful uh children’s books and I don’t think that he needed a rubric,” and “that’s why I don’t like the rubrics, because I feel like it’s doing that same thing with kids, like they have to do it a certain way and not do it the way they were taught or the way they feel is right for them.” Across the data points, Shelly felt the rubric limited her ability to express herself and wanted to go beyond the rubric. Shelly was a self-described creative writer and said, “I think rubrics are telling kids that their writing has to look like this or it’s not any good.”

Max discussed not only the limiting nature for himself as a student, but questioned being a teacher and having to look at all of the information. He felt the rubric was “more of a burden” than a support. Controversially, Whitt stated that the rubric let him know “what is expected of me and to go above and beyond the rubric.” Whitt took a different approach that instead of being limited by the rubric, he aimed to go beyond and do greater than the rubric expected.

However, Whitt's motivation for excellence was not the common experience of the participants represented.

Research Questions

The central question for this study focused on the experiences of sixth grade literacy students' with rubrics. The five themes identified revealed what and how the sixth graders experience while using a rubric. Their experiences with planning and the expectations for an assignment, the feedback received and the grading process, their motivation, and their reflections, and the limitations or restrictions of the rubric offered the essence of their experience with a rubric. Twenty of the twenty-nine students acknowledged the need to review the rubric especially during the planning stages and reflection stage of a project. Three students, Mason, Max, and Shelly shared frustrations with the limitations or restrictions of the rubric, while others, like Lane, shared their experience of relying heavily on the rubric to achieve a good grade. Ashley and Whitt were motivated by the rubric, and several others appreciated the clear expectations it offered. The purpose of the rubric varied the students' reliance on using the rubric; students were less reliant on the rubric if it was for a writing assignment and more reliant on the rubric for a project.

The first research sub-question was "What are sixth grade literacy students' perspectives about the use of rubrics as an assessment tool?" The participants' responses to all data points, the questionnaire, focus group, and journaling, offer their perspectives of using a rubric. Their perspectives were varied with some students, like Chloe, Frances, Maggie, Mary, James, and Nancy, relying heavily on the rubric to obtain a good grade and others, like Shelly, Max, and Ariana, feeling the rubric "pressured" and limited their ability to work.

The second research sub-question asked, “How does having a rubric or not having one change the way sixth grade literacy students approach and complete an assignment?” Twenty of the twenty-nine students described how the rubric impacts their planning and reflection. With several students, Ashley, Bailey, Cassie, Chloe, Ella, James, Maggie, and Mary, expressing their work is better with a rubric than without. James, Lane, Max, Ariana, and Chloe explained that some students rely on the rubric more than others, and some did not use the rubric at all. Lane explained that some students benefit from the rubric more than others, because some students do not “think about it the right way.”

The final research sub-question was “How do sixth grade literacy students respond to feedback from rubric-referenced assessment?” Two students, Jacob and Shelly, described using the oral feedback from their teacher more than looking back at the rubric. Eleven students, Allie, Bethany, Cassie, Chloe, Ella, Jacob, James, Kathryn, Maggie, Mary, and Michael, described using the rubric to look back through their work, but this was not the common experience of the participants. While most students did not take the time to look at the rubric for additional feedback, Kathryn found it important to use the rubric and reflect on her work.

Summary

This chapter began with an introduction to the participants from the study. A description of each data collection point followed to provide a detailed account of the questionnaire, focus group, and journaling results. Significant statements were identified using the process of horizontalization, which led to the identification of five themes. These themes were described and then related directly to the research questions.

The central question of this study focused on the sixth grade literacy students’ experiences using a rubric. Each of the five identified themes, planning/expectations, feedback

and grading, motivation, reflections, and limitations and restrictions, addressed this central question. The students' experiences using a rubric varied. The participants had an unintended focus on using a writing rubric, but when prompted shared experiences using rubrics for a variety of purposes. When discussing a writing rubric, some students felt limited by not being able to write about a self-selected topic. Most students felt a project rubric was more beneficial than a rubric for writing.

The first research sub-question addressed the students' perspectives on using a rubric. This sub-question was also addressed by the five identified themes. The students shared how the rubric helped them know what was expected of them, but also shared some frustration with the restrictive nature of some rubrics. The second research sub-question focused on how having a rubric changed or did not change how students approach an assignment. This sub-question addressed the themes of planning/expectations and feedback and grading, and reflection. Some students felt their work was better using a rubric than without one, but others claimed not to use the rubric at all. Most students used the rubric to identify what was needed to earn a good grade. The final research sub-question focused on using the feedback from a rubric, which directly related to the theme of feedback and grading. The students' responses again varied, but only one student shared that she would use what she learned from the feedback in future projects. Other students shared that they did not look at the feedback or preferred direct feedback from the teacher rather than on the rubric.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to gain insight into sixth grade literacy students' perspectives of rubric-referenced assessment. This chapter provides a summary of the results from the study followed by an interpretation of the findings using the theoretical framework and the literature from chapter two. Methodological and practical implications from the data are addressed. Finally, the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are shared.

Summary of Findings

Chapter four includes a detailed presentation of the results of this study where five themes were identified from the perceptions of 29 sixth grade literacy students regarding their use of rubrics. The five themes included: planning/expectations, feedback and grading, motivation, reflections, and limitations and restrictions. Each of the five themes related to the broad central question of the study, which focused on students' experiences with a rubric, and were related to the first research sub-question that asked about students' perspectives. Students' experiences and perspectives of using a rubric were diverse. Some students felt strongly there was a right way to use the rubric, while others felt the rubric added a lot of pressure to them for completing the assignment.

The themes of planning/expectations, feedback and grading, and reflection revolved around the second research sub-question, which addressed how having a rubric changed or did not change how students approached an assignment. The students' responses varied from not using the rubric at all to relying heavily on the rubric for clear expectations and receiving a good

grade. The theme of feedback and grading emerged with the final research sub-question, which focused specifically on using the feedback from a rubric.

Discussion

The theoretical foundations of this study were based on Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (ZPD) and Bandura's social cognitive theory. In theory, the rubric acts as a scaffold for the students' successful completion of an assignment in their ZPD. For some students in this study, the rubric did scaffold their learning. However, some students felt frustrated and/or pressured by the rubric, which could mean the assignment was above what they were capable of accomplishing even with the support of the explicit criteria.

Bandura's social cognitive theory is guided by motivators that help regulate behaviors. A lack of self-regulation could be the cause of the students' frustrations with rubric use, as Bandura (1991) explained that a student's ability to regulate their learning results in purposeful action. It could mean the students were not motivated to be successful on the assignment or that the students did not have the sense of responsibility to complete the assignment correctly. The students who journaled their use of the rubric did not refer back to the rubric and make necessary changes prior to turning in the assignment, even though when they began the project they expected the rubric would help them be successful. One might question if this was a lack of self-efficacy, motivation, or the assignment was too difficult for the level of the student.

Further supported by Bandura's theory is feedback. Jacob and Shelly stated that the feedback from their teacher was more important than the rubric. The generic circles we make on a rubric are far less impactful than the teacher conferencing and offering feedback in person, which is supported by Wilson (2006). This contradicts Panadero and Jonsson's (2013) review that suggested the rubric aids the feedback process.

When looking at the individual question answers from the questionnaire, the amount of students who did not use the rubric ranges from five to eight students per question with the most students not using the rubric on the quality of work and process category questions. However, viewing the totality of responses per each student provided greater insight. For example, Katelyn answered all five questions with a similar response that she does not use the rubric, as such it does not impact her quality of work or process of completing the assignment. However, of all 29 participants' responses only two students, Katelyn and one other, stated they did not use the rubric or it did not impact them on all five questions. This brings the conclusion that all except two of 29 students that participated in this study found the rubric to be helpful or useful in some way.

When asked why some students are successful with rubrics and others are not, Lane stated that students who are not successful using a rubric “don't think about it the right way.” The “right way” and doing what “the teacher wants” were frequent responses. This aligns with the Andrade and Du (2005) concern that a rubric might cause students to just conform to the instructor's explicit criteria and standards. In a later study by Andrade et al. (2008), higher quality of work was found when using a rubric, which was noted by several participants in this study.

An increase in motivation was a common benefit of rubrics in the Jonsson and Svingby (2007) meta-analysis. Walser (2011) found using a rubric that rewarded students for exceeding the criteria motivated students to think creatively and perform beyond the explicit criteria. In this study, Whitt expressed that the rubric helped him “know what is to be expected of me and to go above and beyond the rubric.” Ashely said the rubric pushed her to do better, but Shelly was motivated less by the rubric and more by her own intrinsic factors. It appears some students are

motivated to achieve beyond the rubric, while others feel limited by it or are more intrinsically motivated.

Consistent with the literature reviewed (Lilburn & Ciurak, 2010; Parker & Breyfogle, 2011; Weurlander, Soderberg, Scheja, Hult, & Wernerson, 2012; Wolf & Stevens, 2007), some of the sixth grade participants in this study found the rubric as a resource for clear expectations. The clear expectations were described by Panadero and Jonsson (2013) to reduce student anxiety. However, a few participants, like Ariana, Max, and Shelly, contradicted this reduction of anxiety by describing how the rubric put pressure on them.

Further, Weurlander et al. (2012) found that students being aware of the criteria on the rubric improved their performance, yet this was not the case for the participants of the journaling component, Max and James. The experience of Max and James during the journaling component, both having high hopes of using the rubric to achieve a good grade, relates to the Andrade et al. (2009) study, which found no relationship between self-efficacy of boys and the use of a rubric. Both boys began believing they would do well and had a high level of self-efficacy, yet in their reflections they reveal that the rubric was actually detrimental to their success.

In chapter four a description of Max's perceptions of a rubric revealed that he felt rubrics had "unfair advantages against a person's weak spot" and that rubrics "degrade work by a ton because of one thing that a person may or may not understand." Max's statements illustrated the importance of choosing the appropriate skills and criteria for the rubric. Metin (2013) discussed the difficulty teachers have preparing appropriate rubrics with criteria that meet the academic needs of students. Max's struggle could be a result of poor rubric selection caused by a lack of

teacher training, which is supported by the literature (Metin, 2013; Oakleaf, 2009; Rezaei & Lovorn, 2010).

Based on the perceptions of this group of sixth grade students, exemplar papers were not helpful and a rubric was preferred. This is consistent with the findings from Lipnevich et al. (2014), but not Andrade et al. (2008) and Jonsson and Svingby (2007), who suggested the use of exemplar papers to support the use of a rubric. Some of the participants felt using an exemplar paper was “like cheating” and did not perceive the exemplar paper as helpful.

Implications

The implications of this study include the purpose of a rubric, the importance of selecting appropriate criteria, the importance of instruction, and personal feedback. Due to the age level of students, classroom teachers and administrators may benefit from the information gleaned from this study. Policy makers at a higher level may benefit from understanding how sixth graders respond to rubric-referenced assessment when creating or selecting rubrics for high stakes testing needs.

The selection of how to assess students both formatively and summatively is vital to students' success. An implication from this study is to not use a rubric just for the sake of using a rubric. A teacher needs to ask, “Does the rubric meet the requirements and level of rigor I want for my students?” and “Does the rubric limit my students' thinking or cause them to have only one correct response?” The frustrations experienced by the participants were due to their feeling limited or restricted by the rubric. Some students were able to overcome these feelings and were able to strive to go above and beyond the expectations and criteria of the rubric, but others were not. Teachers and administrators need to ensure they are using a variety of assessment options to meet the needs of all of their students.

When a project or assignment calls for a rubric, educators need to be selective on which rubric and criteria is chosen. Many pre-made rubrics are readily available, but these may not match the expectations for the diverse needs of classrooms. Therefore, educators need to ensure the selection of the criteria on a rubric matches the intended outcome.

Three students, Chloe, Ariana, and Shelly, spoke about the instruction at the school they attended before their current intermediate school. This instructional implication is important to ensure schools in the same district are preparing students in a similar way. A consideration would be the training teachers receive and ensuring the curriculum is being implemented in a similar way. The frustration expressed by the three girls was that they felt one school had really prepared them for success, and upon entering the intermediate school (a different building and curriculum), they felt less of this impact. Transitions between schools present a number of opportunities and challenges for students, and based on the experiences shared there may need to be further investigation into providing students a smooth transition between buildings.

An implication from this study would be to ensure teachers offer opportunities for students to write without the restrictions/expectations of a rubric. Most of the frustration expressed in this study was during writing assignments. Writing rubrics can be helpful, but allowing students to freewrite and write for authentic purposes is an important factor in becoming a good writer. Similarly, focusing on the process of writing rather than just the end product is an implication that is evident from the students' comments. Through the process of writing, students are able to apply and develop their skills as writers.

An additional implication for students when using a rubric is to read and interact with the rubric. The criteria provided are meant to help students be successful. Unless students interact with the criteria and use it throughout the process of completing an assignment, the final grade

will be a disappointment. Parents can support their students by helping them understand what the criteria mean and ensuring they review the criteria prior to submitting their assignment. Attention to the details on the rubric can prevent the disappointment Max felt when his work was affected “to a painful degree,” because he did not attend to the criteria on the rubric.

A final implication from this study is the need for less cookie cutter feedback and more personal feedback from teachers. The personal and specific feedback from teachers was perceived by the participants to generalize to future projects and learning better than simply circling the criteria on a rubric. According to the sixth graders in this study, just reading the feedback from a rubric was less effective than conferring with the teacher.

Limitations

As previously discussed in chapter one, there were delimitations and limitations identified for this study. A delimitation of this study was that the participants were selected from sixth graders at a single intermediate school. Additionally, these sixth graders may experience the use of a rubric differently from other populations of participants and other sites. Another delimitation of the study was the focus specifically on literacy. Students told about their experiences with rubrics from the perspective of the literacy classroom with most experiences shared concerning rubrics used for assessing writing.

The selection of sixth grade students was intentional, as it was expected the students would be able to fully describe their experience with a rubric. Other limitations include the generalizability of the results due to the limited sample size, focus on a single grade level, and geographic location. Students’ previous exposure to using a rubric could not be controlled, but knowledge of the school’s curriculum ensured students had at least some experience using a rubric. All data collected used volunteers and self-reported data. The study participants needed

parental consent, which was gained during open house at the beginning of the school year in the literacy classrooms. This condition might have limited the sample size. The journaling component of data collection was an additional limitation, as it was difficult for the students to journal during this time. The population of students for this study was from general education classes and did not represent the special education population; however, some participants identified as gifted and talented were a part of the study. This identification of gifted and talented was not considered in the selection of participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

When considering the findings, limitations, and the delimitations placed on this study, there are several recommendations for future research. As this study focused solely on a small group of sixth grade students' perspectives, future research could incorporate the teachers' practice with the students' perspectives. For example, how does the teacher encourage or discourage the students' focus on the rubric? Additionally, investigating the students' role in the process of creating rubrics or in self-evaluating using a rubric would be beneficial.

Since this study focused on the use of rubric in the context of literacy, a future study focused on a different subject or discipline would be enlightening. The sixth graders in this study eluded to project-based rubrics being more beneficial than a rubric for writing, which leads to an interesting question: How does the discipline or type of rubric effect the students' perspectives of using a rubric? Or said another way, do students' perspectives of using a rubric change across subject areas?

A recommendation for replication of this study would be to include more face-to-face meetings with the participants, as opposed to the journaling component. Due to the nature of the journaling not being part of a class assignment, and was in addition to their existing work, it was

difficult for the students to journal. Additional face-to-face interviews would provide more insight into the students' experiences and perspectives. Further to improve upon the current study, inclusion of the special education population would be important for future research.

As suggested by Panadero and Jonsson's (2013) review, rubrics are helpful in providing feedback for learners. Yet, the findings from this study were inconsistent regarding how students used feedback from the rubric. Most students either did not look at the feedback from the rubric or preferred direct feedback from the teacher. A focus for future research could compare students' reactions and perceptions to feedback from a rubric to more personal feedback from teachers.

Finally, the literature (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; Panadero & Jonsson, 2013; Strunk, 2012) was inconsistent regarding the effects of training students to use a rubric. The need for training students to use rubrics was not addressed by this study. Therefore, future research that investigates the training provided for students and how it affects the students' perspectives of a rubric would be meaningful.

Summary

With the demand for increased accountability in education today (Parkay et al., 2010; VanTassel-Baska, 2014), teachers must select the most effective assessment approaches to use with their students. A reliance on the use of rubrics for ease of grading and clear expectations has caused teachers to believe having a rubric is better than not having one, as described by Rezaei and Lovorn (2010). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of sixth grade literacy students' use of a rubric. The data collected from a questionnaire, a focus group interview, and a journaling component provided the essence of the participants' experience. The 29 participants represented a broad spectrum of perspectives about using a

rubric. Some students relied heavily on the rubric, while others felt the rubric limited their thinking.

Five themes were identified, described, and aligned with the research questions, which included planning/expectations, feedback and grading, motivation, reflection, and limitations/restrictions. Most students described using the rubric to plan and guide their work by looking at the criteria that would earn the most points. The expectations provided by the rubric was discussed most frequently and favorably, which aligned to Lipnevich et al. (2014) who explained that students must understand the criteria and expectations for the assessment to facilitate learning.

The findings from this study were consistent with previous research in higher-education (Andrade & Du, 2005; Eshun & Osei-Poku, 2013), which found that students appreciated the clear expectations of the rubric, but also noted the potential of the rubric limiting the outcomes of their work. Moreover, Lee's (2013) statement about seven and eight year old's thinking coincides with the conclusions from this study, "The use of rubrics in assessment creates the tendency to be convergent and not take into consideration the emergent nature of learning that occurs in the classroom" (p. 221). An additional finding was regarding feedback from the rubric. The participants in this study favored the direct feedback from their teacher over the feedback from the rubric. Some students believed they would use the rubric to review their work and analyze their errors, but for the most part they did not believe this feedback would improve future assignments.

In conclusion, relying too heavily on a rubric can be a detriment to students' success and creativity. Teachers must know their learners and use rubrics with the understanding that some students feel limited and restricted by the rubric. Rubrics can be meaningful to an assignment or

project, but too many details or criteria can limit students' thinking on their own. Students might create a greater variety of work without the use of a rubric. Educators must ensure that rubric selection focuses on what is important for the assignment or project, as not to tell students exactly what to do, but to support their learning. Shelly summarized it by saying, "When I look at a rubric it just shows me what the teacher wants. I barely use them, because it only matters if I think I did a good job." The end result and ultimate goal of assessment is if the student is learning through the process.

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APPENDIX A: Permission to Use Image of MYP Model

ibid@ibo.org
to Julie Quast

Tue, Jan 20 5:46 AM

[Attn: Rome \[Incident: 150119-000149\]](#)

**Subject**

Attn: Rome

Discussion Thread

Response Via Email (Administrator)

01/20/2015 07.45 PM

Dear Ms. Quast,

Thank you for reaching out to the IB with this inquiry. Per your request, the IB will permit you to use, for educational purposes, an image of its IB Middle Years Programme Model within your dissertation. However, the image may not be used within your dissertation if the paper is used for any commercial purpose. For example, if the dissertation is published in a book/compilation that is sold to the general public, the IB Middle Years Programme Model must be removed from the dissertation.

Please feel free to contact us with any additional questions regarding the scope of the IB's permission.

Best of luck in your future endeavours.

The IB Copyright Team

Response Via Email (Rome Seda)

01/19/2015 02.17 PM

APPENDIX B: Researcher Bracketing

Clearing my mind through the epoche process will allow me to reflect on my own experiences using a rubric, thereby setting my experiences aside so I can fully focus on the experiences of my participants. When I reflect on my experiences of using a rubric, I first recall hearing about rubrics in my graduate work. I was completing my first leadership class for my administrative license, and I used the rubric as a checklist to ensure I made a “good” grade. My next experience using a rubric was as a kindergarten teacher. I was required to grade the students’ writing prompts with a detailed, analytic rubric. I did not use the rubric during instruction, like I would currently do if I were in the classroom. My final vivid memory of my experiences using a rubric is actually when I took a doctoral course that did not have a rubric for a few of the assignments. I was in a panic without the rubric. I questioned what the criteria and expectations for the assignment were. I felt dependent upon the rubric and quite lost without it. Had my years of using a rubric caused me to lose the ability to think through the process of completing an assignment?

As a teacher, I value the use of a rubric due to the ease of grading and the feeling of being objective. However, the concern becomes if we are “boxing” in our students thinking and ability to critically think about the details of an assignment without having to “spoon feed” them. Having experienced the feeling of helplessness when I did not have a rubric has caused me to question the limitations of rubrics even more. As a researcher, I must set aside and disconnect myself from these thoughts and experiences, so I am able to fully focus on my participants’ experiences.

APPENDIX C: Focus Group Map of Participants

Jacob	Shelly Chloe Kathryn Bailey	Lane
Ariana		James
Nancy		Max
Michael		Katelyn

APPENDIX D: Assent Forms

The Liberty University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
document for use from
7/10/15 to 7/9/16

Protocol # 2247.071015

ASSENT OF CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?**

Julie Quast is doing the study A Phenomenology of Sixth Grade Students' Perspectives on Their Experience Using a Rubric for Criterion-Referenced Assessment

Why are we doing this study?

We are interested in studying this to find out more about how students use a rubric.

Why are we asking you to be in this study?

You are being asked to be in this research study because how you view a rubric as a sixth grader can help teachers make better choices for your learning.

If you agree, what will happen?

If you are in this study, you will answer some questions, which should not take more than 10 minutes. You may be asked to talk with a group of other students to answer questions asked by the researcher in a focus group interview, which will take less than 30 minutes, or you may journal your experience of using a rubric for assessment, which will take less than 20 minutes.

Do you have to be in this study?

No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher.

If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

Do you have any questions?

You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

Signature of Child

Date

Julie Quast, 501-520-1615, jquast@liberty.edu
Liberty University Institutional Review Board,
1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or
email at irb@liberty.edu

APPENDIX E: Consent Forms

The Liberty University Institutional
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Protocol # 2247.071015

CONSENT FORM

A Phenomenology of Sixth Grade Students' Perspectives on Their Experience
Using a Rubric for Criterion-Referenced Assessment

Julie Quast
Liberty University
School of Education

Your child is invited to be in a research study of how sixth grade students respond to a rubric used for assessment. A rubric provides the criteria and point totals that the teacher uses to grade some of your child's assignments. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he/she has used rubrics in the classroom for instruction and assessment. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to allow your child to be in the study.

Julie Quast, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of sixth grade literacy students' experiences and responses to using a rubric.

Procedures:

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I would ask him/her to do the following things:

- Complete and submit a questionnaire with five open-ended questions using their school iPad. The questionnaire will take approximately 10 minutes or less.

- Some participants will participate in a focus group interview, which will be audio recorded and last less than 30 minutes.
- About four students will be selected to keep a writing journal to document their experience of using a rubric. The time for journaling will be about 20 total minutes over a span of five days.

Risks and Benefits:

The risks of this study are no more than your child would encounter in everyday life

Participants will not receive any direct benefit for participation. However, his/her participation will contribute to the field of education, as having an understanding of how students experience and respond to a rubric may provide valuable information for planning future instruction and making assessment decisions.

Compensation:

Participants will not receive payment for participating in the study.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be

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2247.071015 stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. Pseudonyms will be used to protect participant's names. All electronic data will be password protected and destroyed after three years, including the audio files. For participants in the focus group, I cannot assure other participants will maintain a participant's confidentiality and privacy.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or your child's school. If you decide to allow your child to participate, he or she is free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw:

If a participant chooses to withdraw or end their participation in the study, they should tell their literacy teacher or the researcher. No reason is required to withdraw, simply stating they no longer wish to participate will remove them from the study. If any data has been collected from the student prior to withdrawing, the data will be omitted from the final research report. If the student participated in the focus group interview, the researcher will use the transcription data to identify the student responses that need to be omitted. However, the audio file will remain for the other participants' responses to be analyzed.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Julie Quast. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at jquast@liberty.edu or 501-6235661. The researcher's chair is Dr. Randall Dunn, Associate Professor and Director of Educational Technology, Liberty University, and he can be contacted at rdunn@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to allow my child to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

The researcher has my permission to audio-record my child as part of his or her participation in this study.

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____