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The Effects of Formative Feedback and Assessment Tools on Writing Proficiency and
Motivation in Elementary Classrooms

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in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree

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Abstract

This action research aimed to determine the effects formative feedback and rubrics play on student motivation and proficiency levels in writing. This four-week intervention took place in a suburban 1st-grade classroom and an urban 3rd-grade classroom through whole group and small group instruction, collaborative conversations, student reflections, and student attitude inventories. Data was collected through the use of pre-and post-intervention writing attitude surveys. In addition, a pre-intervention, rough draft, and final draft writing sample that the teacher and student graded was utilized. Finally, data were collected during small group, reflective conversations involving student understanding and application of rubrics alongside writing samples. An increase in student proficiency was demonstrated following the use of formative feedback alongside rubrics when crafting personal narratives. Additionally, an increase in motivation was demonstrated, yet not significant enough to say that formative feedback paired with the use of rubrics increases student motivation in writing. Research should continue to identify patterns in students' confidence or attitudes towards their writing and proficiency levels over time. Furthermore, a longitudinal study involving Kindergartners-3rd grade would be beneficial to measure proficiency and motivation rates in writing over an extended period to identify patterns. This research can support educators so that we may better understand rubrics, formative feedback, and their influence on proficiency and motivation levels over time. Moreover, we can utilize the information to best inform our instruction and support systems with elementary student writers.

Keywords: formative feedback, rubrics, motivation, proficiency, elementary writers

One of humanity's most prominent features is our ability to communicate. We communicate formally: to procure employment, to provide the required information for banking, taxes, or insurance, to share academic discoveries, to compliment or critique presentations, to draft a persuasive argument, or to showcase creative ideas. We communicate informally: to wish a loved one a happy birthday, to get to know new friends, to gossip and share secrets, to tell a funny story, to inform your spouse that you are out of milk and laundry detergent, or to let a distant relative know that you thought their photos from their Disneyland vacation looked "so cool! Invite me next time!" Between absorbing the news, browsing and posting on social media, writing emails to coworkers, honoring loved ones with obituaries and birth announcements, and asking your kids about their school day at the dinner table, we are nearly constantly flexing our communication muscles! Understanding the rules of communication- how to communicate accurately, effectively, and appropriately- is at the forefront of our society. Imagine a life in today's world where you didn't know the rules of communication. How would that impact your life?

In education, it is critical that educators foster 21st-century skills, which include communicating, in order to become successful global citizens (Friedman, 2007; Wagner, 2008, p.21). Aguilar-Torres (2010) lists written communication as the 3rd most identified 21st-century skill identified in an interview amongst educators involving Wagner's (2008) list of essential 21st-century skills. At the primary grade levels, the written communication journey begins by having students write about a personal experience, which is called a personal narrative. Students craft, refine, and publish a cohesive story with a copious amount of skills. While creating their story, they work on transferring their thoughts onto paper with illustrations and words in a

well-organized, sequential, and detailed manner. Ideally, they also apply the correct use of capital letters, finger spaces, and punctuation. Before the transfer of an idea from mind to paper can occur, the student must also utilize their phonics skills to put together words. As students progress through the primary grades, these goals are continually practiced at an even more complex level. For example, upper primary students learn more complex grammatical structures, add dialogue to their writing, construct more descriptive details, and increase the overall quantity of writing output. Hence, you can see the immense amount of work and brainpower a student must employ in order to craft a single story. In order to develop these skills, students require a great amount of time, modeling, and feedback.

In conversations and interactions with administrators, colleagues, and students, we have noticed that students' writing proficiency levels and motivation to write have greatly suffered, especially during the educational disruption of the pandemic (Skar et al., 2021). During distance learning, students have been greatly impacted by the amount and quality of writing instruction and practice. Additionally, young students are experiencing writing as a complex form of communication for the very first time. Students have had very little time and educational resources to build these crucial skills, and writing standards are rigorous. Students began exhibiting concerning behaviors during writing time, which include verbal frustration, work avoidance (behaviors whose function is to delay or avoid work altogether), or completing their work quickly without care or attention to proficiency. In our research in our own classrooms (a first-grade classroom in a suburban public school, and a 3rd-grade classroom in an urban charter school) we hope to identify ways to increase students' motivation for writing, as well as their proficiency in writing in order for students to achieve growth, success, and enjoyment in writing. While there is research on writing for older students, minimal research exists involving

primary-aged students and writing. This is concerning because students at the primary level are developing the crucial skills that support them later in personal, academic, and professional communication. We need to invest our time and knowledge into understanding and providing support for this critical skill. Through our action research, we hope to address the question, how can we improve students' motivation and proficiency in writing?

Theoretical Framework

Motivation can be observed as a students' ability to "commit time and effort" to "learn and utilize" skills presented, according to Wigfield et al. (2016). Proficiency in education can be described as what a student knows and is able to complete (Nevi, 1997). Additionally, proficiency is the "set performance level that students must reach on the exams" according to Peterson et al. (2016, p. 2). Educators often look to motivation to assist students in becoming more proficient in various areas. In our search to identify ways to improve motivation and thus proficiency, we have identified multiple educational theories that serve as a solid foundation in the development of our action research framework.

Lev Vygotsky plays a significant role in the grounding of our research. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development theory (ZPD) is defined as 'the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.' Furthermore, within the ZPD theory, he defines scaffolding as the support and or assistance a student receives from an educator in order to learn (Films Media Group, 2007). Additionally, Vygotsky's social constructivism theory enforces that learners learn best in groups, and when learning is a social activity.

The final theory that we have utilized to ground our research is the expectancy-value theory. The expectancy-value theory, according to Atkinson (1957), Eccles et al., (1983), Wigfield, (1994), and Wigfield & Eccles, (1992), (as cited in Wigfield and Eccles, 2000), explains that a student's "choice, persistence, and performance can be explained by their beliefs about how well they do on an activity and the extent to which they value the activity" (p. 68). In other words, a student's belief that they can do something combined with their belief that doing that thing is worthwhile go together to create motivation to do the task.

Writing is a complex and valuable skill that is introduced at a young age. Therefore, the combination of the theories discussed can be used by educators to establish a framework that aims to increase motivation and proficiency in writing. Vygotsky's ZPD theory allows educators to understand that ideally, our students should fall within a zone that allows them to continually learn rather than remain stagnant at one point during the learning process (Eun, 2019). Moreover, students, while in the ZPD, embark on a "continuous collective journey" in which they arrive at a "transformative understanding of the world" (Eun, 2019, p. 20) and in this case, the writing world. Identifying each student's ZPD allows educators to target each student's individual needs to help them make the most growth. While students are collecting and understanding information involving writing, educators can provide scaffolding, supporting students' learning while allowing them to traverse into an area that would otherwise be too difficult to work on their own, according to where the student falls on the learning continuum. This support, again, targets the specific needs of each student, giving them a personalized path to proficiency. Vygotsky's theory of social constructivism goes hand in hand with his ZPD. He finds that students benefit from working in social settings with the support of adults. Vygotsky, (as cited in Overall, 2007) believed the development of learning amongst students happens in

this setting. Since our research aims to identify ways to increase students' proficiency in writing, Vygotsky's ZPD framework and social constructivism support our goals to design a setting in which students will make the most growth, in order to approach and achieve proficiency.

In the context of writing, the expectancy-value theory tells us that in order for our students to be motivated, they will need to both believe that they are capable of writing, as well as find purpose and value in their writing task. Therefore, our study will need to be able to tackle both of these beliefs. Our goal to increase student motivation is related to our goal to increase proficiency. The expectancy-value theory, alongside Vygotsky's theoretical framework, is a strong theoretical foundation for our research because it tells us that increased confidence is a piece of the equation for increased motivation, and Vygotsky provides us with the other piece of the puzzle - providing the support that will increase confidence and progress toward proficiency. While we want students to be motivated for the sake of proficiency, we also want students to be motivated by writing for its own sake. The other half of the expectancy-value theory explains the importance of students finding relevance in their writing piece, thus fostering even more motivation to continually write with purpose, proficiency, and pleasure.

Review of Literature

When many people think about what is taught in schools, they think of the three Rs: Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. Unfortunately, writing instructional time has taken a huge hit in the United States. The 2002 legislation, No Child Left Behind [NCLB], put pressure on only two of those Rs, and as a consequence, writing has been left out of many school reform efforts in the United States (Cutler & Graham, 2008). However, writing is an essential skill for success in school and in life and, currently, elementary students are not meeting writing expectations on a national or a global level (McManus and Thuanwong, 2015; Koenig et al., 2016; Graham,

2019). In 2003, the National Commission on Writing issued a report that recommended increasing attention to writing instruction in schools (Cutler & Graham, 2008). However, research on writing in primary grades is limited. Yet, writing instruction is fundamental at that age (Cutler & Graham, 2008). Cutler and Graham (2008) said that efforts to address later literacy problems that stem from primary grades are not particularly effective. Without adequate attention in primary school, it can be too late to get students caught up later on. Therefore, it is essential that primary students receive quality writing instruction early. Strengthening student motivation and teaching students what proficient writing looks like are critical components to improving writing outcomes. This literature review examines how teachers can improve student motivation and proficiency in writing. It will explore writing processes, motivation, and formative assessment tools and processes to understand why writing is an essential skill to be taught in school, how we can increase students' motivation to write, and how we can improve students' writing proficiency.

The Imperative of Teaching Writing in Elementary Schools

Writing ability plays a vital role in personal, academic, and occupational success and is a skill that will follow students throughout their lives (Graham, 2019). Academically, writing is a foundational skill for improving students' school performance in many subjects (Graham, 2019). For example, students elaborate on their knowledge of math, science, and social studies when they write about them (Bangert-Drowns et al., 2004; Graham & Hebert, 2011; Graham & Perin, 2007 as cited in Graham, 2019) and writing correlates to improved reading performance (Shanahan, 2006). Furthermore, when students write about what they read, they can make connections, analyze texts, personalize, and manipulate the key ideas in a text (Graham & Hebert, 2011). Writing impacts students' personal lives as well. As students learn to write, they

develop communication skills that directly impact their social lives (Freedman et al., 2016 as cited in Graham 2019). Writing also affects students in their occupations later in life. Graham points out that employers use writing ability as an indicator for employment and job advancement in white-collar jobs, and additionally points out that 90% of blue-collar jobs require some form of writing (NCOW, 2004, 2005, as cited in Graham, 2019).

Students struggle with writing for a multitude of reasons. Liu (2016) notes that tasks such as handwriting, typing, and spelling are very demanding to young children. These tasks are not yet automatic, so they take a lot of mental energy, which takes away from the mental energy that we want students to be spending on other writing tasks, such as their ideas. Often, in the time it takes students to think about how to spell a word, they might lose their idea (Berninger, 1999, as cited in Graham et al., 2019). Daffern et al. (2017) noted that spelling is an indicator of success in writing and claimed that spelling is a more significant indicator of success than punctuation or grammar. Daffern et al.'s (2017) study found that across four cohorts, ranging from third grade to 6th grade, spelling, grammar, and punctuation accounted for between 24% and 43% in the variance of scores on a NAPLAN writing test, with spelling having the biggest impact in each cohort. Graham et al. (2019) also found that spelling and handwriting were a predictor of the quality of a student's writing and found that teaching spelling, handwriting, and typing explicitly helped to improve those skills and improve the overall quality of writing. Dobson and Stephenson (2019) hold a unique perspective that spelling, punctuation, and grammar may carry less weight than ideas and creativity when judging the quality of students' writing. However, Graham (2019) reinforces the importance of spelling, handwriting, and typing by noting that the value of teaching these skills explicitly helps students so that when students write, they are not in cognitive overload mode. We also know that writing is a skill that takes time and experience to

develop. According to Liu (2016), students become better writers and readers when we increase their time writing. With practice comes proficiency.

Even beyond the barriers of spelling, handwriting, and time, we know that writing is not easy! According to Fayol, Alamargot, & Berninger (2012), writing is one of the most demanding language tasks taught in school. Bazerman et al. (2017) convey that writing development is variable, with no single path or endpoint. One reason that writing is so complex is that writing is a form of language. Students use their knowledge of phonological awareness, vocabulary, syntax, and pragmatics (Shanahan, 2006). Bazerman et al. (2017) explain that writing is not a single, unitary skill. Writers need to learn the purposes and features of different text genres, learn how to put their ideas to paper, construct written sentences, revise their texts, and communicate to various audiences (Bazerman et al., 2017).

Increasing Students' Motivation to Write

As the famous proverb, which originates from John Heywood, points out, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't force it to drink." One of the many vital roles we play as educators involves fostering student motivation to succeed in writing. De Caso and Garcia (2006) suggest that motivation is what is missing from writing interventions. Grunke (2019) found de Caso and Garcia's (2006) idea to be true through his case study, in which he found that motivational systems do promote student success. Additionally, Grunke (2019) refers to the positive outcomes involving motivation and student success through studies done by Duhon, House, Hastings, Poncy, and Solomon (2015), Grays, Rhymer, and Swartzmiller (2017), and Wells, Sheehey, and Sheehey (2017). Knudson (1995, as cited in Graham, 2019) also supports the idea that the quality of a students' written piece can depend on their motivation to write. Moreover, if you pair the demanding and challenging task of writing, as Fayol, Alamargot, & Berninger (2012)

mention, along with the data showing our students' inability to demonstrate proficiency in writing, (McManus and Thuanwong, 2015; Koenig et al., 2016; and Graham, 2019) motivating our students to write and work towards proficiency is critical.

McManus and Thiamwong's (2015) action research findings from a 1-year study, involving 28 4th grade students, support the idea that writers become motivated when purpose and choice are employed within instruction. In fact, Graham (2019) goes as far as to say that educators must prioritize a realistic and purposeful writing focus if writing instruction is to improve. Although utilizing student choice and creating authentic assignments to increase student motivation in writing is useful, students will reach a point in their writing experience that requires motivation to conquer new and complex writing skills, as described earlier in this review.

Although individualization and purpose in writing assignments may grasp student interest, they may only carry their motivation to write so far. Another methodology educators can implement in order to motivate student writers further involves using rubrics, or set writing criteria. According to Bradford et al. (2015), rubrics increase confidence in student writers and foster self-directed and independent learning. Furthermore, Dickinson and Adams (2017) explain that rubrics paint a clear picture of desired and quality writing in assignments. Thus, students identify clear goals and become motivated to reach them. Additionally, Becker (2016) and Bradford et al. (2015) note a correlation between involving students in creating the rubrics and students successfully applying set criteria in order to improve their writing. Bradford et al. (2015) explain that this is due to students having an in-depth understanding of the set writing criteria.

Another way educators can improve student motivation and take it to the next level involves formative feedback, according to Panadero and Romero (2017, as cited in Chan & Ho, 2019, and McMillan, 2014). McMillan (2014) acknowledges that feedback works cohesively with formative assessments to examine student work, provide feedback to students, and adjust instruction for students to succeed. As teachers provide specific and timely feedback, they are supporting the students as individual writers. Students can utilize this individualized feedback, engage in self-regulated learning, and become motivated to grow as a writer. However, Graham (2019) notes that this formative feedback and motivational process comes to fruition after a supportive learning environment is built. One may also wonder if it is possible in an elementary classroom to foster motivation based on formative feedback. Braund and DeLuca (2018) verify young students' ability to utilize metacognitive thinking to respond to feedback. Black & William (2009 as cited in Chambers Schuldt, 2019) validate Braund and DeLuca's (2018) idea that students become motivated to write and grow after individualized, meaningful, and timely feedback is given. McMillan (2014) builds upon this idea by recommending educators employ feedback that revolves around a goal that encompasses mastery or new learning, and in return, creates motivated students. McMillan's (2014) idea is grounded in Lev Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* theory, in which the student works within their capabilities yet are challenged to further their learning.

Utilizing various strategies to foster motivation is proven to lead to success for student writers. Yet, these motivation-based strategies are not enough on their own, and educators must capitalize on other helpful interventions to create proficient and successful writers.

Increasing Students' Writing Proficiency

Now that we have found a way to get our writers to the table and put their pencils on the paper, our goal is to grow students' skills and work towards proficiency in writing. Once again, rubrics are a helpful tool that educators can carefully and purposefully implement into writing instruction to grow students' writing skills and ability. Braund and DeLuca (2018) and Bradford et al. (2015) explain that success criteria, or rubrics, activate students' metacognitive skills, and in return, self-regulated learning happens. When students are in a metacognitive and self-regulated learning state, they can reflect on their knowledge or work, apply learned strategies, and adjust their goals and work accordingly (Wilson and Bai; Zimmerman; and Pandero and Romero (2014) as cited within Braund and DeLuca (2018)).

Rubrics serve as a formative assessment tool and have been proven to show an increase in student achievement (Hudesman et al. 2013; Ross 2006; William et al. 2004; as cited in Braund and DeLuca, 2018). Without success criteria or rubrics, writing is more challenging. Rubrics allow self-regulated writers to see what high achievement they are working towards (Allen and Tanner, 2006 as cited in Bradford et al., 2015). Students that utilize rubrics score significantly higher on post-tests, according to Bradford et al. (2015). Additionally, Dickinson and Adams (2017) reinforce the ideas that rubrics promote remarkable academic growth. Yet, Chan and Ho (2019) utilize Becker's (2016) findings to encourage educators to increase the efficacy of rubric use by students by adding teacher feedback.

Hattie (2012) paints a clear picture of what teacher feedback can accomplish, as he notes, "feedback aims to reduce the gap between where the student 'is' and where he or she is 'meant to be'" (p. 115). In a meta-analysis done by Graham et al. (2015), four types of feedback were measured and showed growth, with feedback from adults receiving the largest positive effect in the study. According to Chambers Schuldt's (2019) article, Graham (2018b) and Freedman

(1987) believe feedback should be individualized for each student to support their writing development. Additionally, Hattie (2012), Hattie & Eimperly (2007), and William (2011, as cited in Chambers Schuldt, 2019) emphasize the importance of the feedback encouraging writers to take progressive action steps to grow as writers. Braund and DeLuca (2018) suggest pairing feedback with success criteria or rubrics to benefit writers. Furthermore, Turley and Gallagher (2008) explain how rubrics can allow teachers' and students' formative feedback conversations to be on "autopilot" mode. Rubrics can serve as a tool to drive the critical formative feedback conversations evolving around the students' writing.

Moreover, the students are not the only participants who benefit from the feedback process. Various authors note that feedback interactions can provide a plethora of critical data and information for the teacher (Graham, 2018; Stiggins, 2002; as cited in Sekulich, 2020). Thus, driving teachers' future instruction so that their students can continue on the path to becoming successful writers. In summary, success criteria or rubrics paired with what Hattie (1996, p. 12 as cited in Sekulich, 2020) calls "dollops of feedback," allow student writers to participate in the cyclical process of motivation and success in writing.

Conclusion

Writing is a complex and essential skill for all students to learn. Nationally, students are not proficient in writing (McManus and Thiamwong, 2015), even though writing is critical for academic, occupational, and personal success (Graham, 2019). The literature has shown that we can increase students' motivation to write by giving them choice and agency in their writing (Braund et al., 2017) and providing students with authentic assignments (McManus and Thiamwong, 2015; Dobson and Stephenson, 2019). Because writing is a difficult task, we can also increase students' motivation to write by providing them with clear success criteria (Braund

and DeLuca, 2018), specifically in the form of a rubric (Bradford et al., 2015), as well as formative feedback (de Caso and Garcia, 2006). The use of rubrics and formative feedback shows an increase in students' proficiency in writing by providing students with guidance (Bradford et al., 2015) and providing opportunities for tailored teaching of skills (Chambers Schuldt, 2019).

Much of the literature surrounding writing is done with older elementary students (4th grade and up), middle school students, or high school students. There is less information about teaching writing in primary grades (kindergarten through 3rd grade), even though Cutler and Graham (2008) emphasized the importance of quality writing instruction in primary grades. The literature surrounding rubrics in writing suggests further research in other writing genres, including personal narratives, journaling, informative essays, and persuasive writing. There are also gaps in the literature surrounding how students of different demographics learn writing skills.

Knowing what we do about improving students' motivation for writing and writing proficiency, we would like to further the literature by applying intervention strategies that have been explored in the literature to primary students. Through this literature review, we discovered that formative assessment and formative feedback were common strategies for improving both student motivation and student proficiency in writing. Our next step is to study the effect of involving students in forming a formative assessment tool (rubrics) and engaging students in formative feedback to investigate if there is an increase in student motivation and writing proficiency.

Methodology

This action research used a combination of student writing attitude inventories (see Appendix A and B), rubric-based student and teacher scores involving students' writing samples (see Appendix C and D), and observations from small group discussions in order to triangulate our data. Students' attitudes towards writing were measured pre-intervention and post-intervention using an inventory that targeted confidence, motivation, perceived proficiency in writing, and perception of the efficacy in a rubric. Students' writing, in the form of a personal narrative, was formatively assessed at three different points in the study in order to provide students with goal-setting opportunities and to track their growth in proficiency. Students also worked in small groups to grade other student writing samples alongside the created rubric (see Appendix C and D). Their discussions were observed in order to determine if they understood how to use a rubric properly, in order for this assessment tool to be meaningful when applied to their own writing.

The subjects for this study came from two samples. One sample included 20 3rd grade students in a general education classroom in an urban charter school. This sample featured 12 girls and 8 boys. 7 of these students are ELL (English Language Learners), and 18 students speak a language other than English as their primary home language. The second sample included 20 1st grade students in a general education classroom enrolled in a public school in a suburb of a large metropolitan area. The sample featured 10 boys and 10 girls.

At the beginning of our action research project, we gave students a baseline writing attitude inventory (see Appendix A). Our initial student inventory provided us with baseline information involving students' enjoyment, motivation, and confidence in their writing. This inventory was 6 questions long, and questions were on a Likert scale, ranging from 1-3 points

that were represented by a frowning face, a neutral face, and a smiling face. At the end of the study, the same student writing attitude inventory (see Appendix B) was administered to measure any change in students' feelings involving enjoyment, motivation, and confidence in their writing. Four additional questions were added, allowing us to measure if students understood the purpose and value of a rubric as a writing tool. More specifically, students were asked if rubrics helped them start writing and if rubrics helped them know what to write. Furthermore, students were asked if they enjoyed using a rubric and why they use a rubric.

In order to measure student proficiency levels and potentially observe an increase in motivation, writing samples were collected at 3 various points throughout the project. A "cold write" activity, which involved students writing a personal narrative for the first time without assistance or instruction, allowed us to develop a baseline of student understanding and proficiency. Students were given a prompt for the initial cold write in which we conservatively described a personal narrative along with directions for the activity. Additionally, after instructional lessons, a rough draft and final draft were written by students.

Alongside the student writing samples, a rubric (see Appendix C and D) served as a tool for both students and teachers to measure various aspects. Students could use the rubric to reflect on their writing, understanding of writing expectations, and proficiency levels. Teachers could also use the rubric to identify a student's understanding of expectations and proficiency levels when writing a personal narrative in various categories. Moreover, the rubric scores recorded over time provided us as teachers with insight involving the possible level of the student's motivation.

Rubrics were divided into 3 categories, text structure, text development, and conventions of writing (see Appendix C and D). Within those 3 categories, subset skills were listed with

specific guidelines showcasing the various proficiency levels. For example, students in the 1st-grade classroom could observe through the rubric the three levels of proficiency involving “providing detail within their story”, which fell under the text development category. The rubric showcased that a student would earn a 1 or be considered as needing support if they wrote minimal sentences describing their story without illustrations or minimal illustrations without sentences describing their story. A student would earn a 2 or be viewed as developing if they wrote minimal sentences and drew minimal pictures describing their story. Finally, a student would earn a 3 or be considered proficient in providing detail if their story consisted of detailed sentences and pictures in which the reader could imagine exactly what happened in the student’s story. Our rubrics varied in skill level according to grade-level standards. The 3rd-grade rubric was based on a 4 point scale, with 4 being considered as exceeding grade-level expectations in the subset skills, while the 1st-grade rubric was based on a 3 point scale and followed the description listed above.

In order for the use of rubrics amongst students to be considered successful, it was necessary to measure and track whether a student understood the components of a rubric, its purpose, and how to properly use it. Therefore, we employed 2 small group activities, during weeks 1 and 3, in which students graded another student's personal narrative writing sample from a curriculum resource. In order to observe student understanding of rubrics and their use of a rubric, we used a scripted prompt to formatively check for understanding and application of a rubric when identifying writing proficiency levels and setting goals. We recorded if they could identify a rubric itself, whether they could identify the tools’ purpose along with its components, their ability to grade the writing sample correctly, and finally whether they could identify a goal for the student of the writing sample to work towards.

With our triangulated data sources in place, our research began as we introduced our students to our action research project. We discussed with participants what we would be studying, how the research process would be carried out, and the purpose of the study. We wanted our participants to know that we were conducting research to learn and grow as educators in order to better serve students, especially in writing as it is an important skill.

The first lesson began with an engaging activity in which students were asked to evaluate ice cream sundaes according to their ingredients, organization, and presentation. Students were led through a series of pictures showcasing the ice cream sundaes put together in various ways. Some sundaes lacked ingredients, some sundaes were put together poorly, and some were made with all of the key sundae components and well put together. Students would discuss with partners how they would grade each sundae within each of the three categories. Through this activity, students were able to identify and practice how to use a rubric in order to identify areas of success and areas requiring improvement according to set criteria. In the closing portion of the lesson, we discussed with students the formal terms involving rubrics, how to properly use the rubric, and the role they would play in our research and personal narrative unit.

Following the introductory lesson on rubrics, our students were given a baseline writing attitude inventory (see Appendix A). For each question, students were able to select one of three choices, with the choices being a smiley face, a straight face, and a sad face. The students circled the face that represented their feeling for each question. We passed out the attitude inventories along with privacy offices to promote student honesty. The inventory was also projected and read by the teacher so the students would be successful. Once the attitude inventory was completed, the data was entered into a Google Sheets data tracking tool by the teacher.

Next, our students completed a “cold write” activity, in which students wrote a personal narrative independently without academic support from the teacher. The “cold write” personal narratives of each student were collected by the teacher.

After the “cold write” activity, both classes began learning about a personal narrative, its features, and its purpose. As students developed an understanding of a personal narrative and all it entailed, students collaboratively worked with the teacher to create a rubric (see Appendices C and D), which featured specific levels of proficiency within the personal narrative writing skills, which were determined by us as teachers. The categories that students worked to identify and describe proficiency requirements included skills within the categories of text structure, text development, and writing conventions.

In the next lesson, students’ “cold write” personal narratives were handed back. The rubric created collaboratively between students and ourselves was projected (see Appendices C and D). We guided students through using the rubric to grade their “cold write” personal narrative piece, one skill or category at a time. Not only were students able to grade their “cold write” personal narrative, but they were also able to deepen their understanding of a rubric by using it. Finally, students had the opportunity to look through their rubric and personal narrative to set a goal for future drafts of personal narratives. Student scores within each of the 3 personal narrative categories were recorded within the writing sample score sheet. Additionally, we recorded whether the student identified a goal. We also graded the students’ “cold write” piece to determine proficiency levels with each of the 3 personal narrative categories and recorded those scores on the writing sample score sheet. We scored the writing after the students set goals in order to avoid influencing the students when giving themselves a grade.

Next, we met with students to carry out formative feedback conversations. In these conversations, students reflected on the proficiency levels that were identified by both themselves and by their teacher. We also discussed with students the goal that they identified while guiding them through reflective conversations. Noticings from these conversations with students were also noted within the writing sample score sheet.

Over the course of the next week, we began more in-depth lessons on personal narratives. During weeks 1 and 3 of instruction and crafting of personal narratives, we met with small groups once again to allow students to practice using a rubric and verify their understanding of using a rubric. In these discussions, students practiced using a rubric (see Appendices C and D) to grade a 1st grade or 3rd-grade personal narrative writing sample. Students would also explain whether they identified a goal for the writer to work on. The conversations between ourselves and students were grounded in formative feedback questioning techniques. Following the small group meetings, we recorded if each student correctly scored the student writing sample and if they were able to identify a goal for the writer. Notes were taken involving the analysis of the conversations that took place.

During the end of week 2 personal narrative instruction, the students' personal narrative rough draft was complete. At this time, students were provided with a blank copy of the rubric created at the beginning of the research project (see Appendices C and D). The 1st-grade rubric was adapted by adding pictures or visuals to each skill that was being evaluated in order for students to easily identify their proficiency level. For both classes, the rubric was projected and the teacher read each skill to be evaluated while students graded their personal narrative accordingly. When they were finished grading their personal narrative, they were given the opportunity to identify a goal in hopes of improving their personal narrative before completing

the final draft. After students graded their rough drafts, we as teachers graded the rough drafts as well. Student scores, their ability to identify a goal, our teacher scores, and any notes were recorded in the paper and Google Sheet rough draft, writing sample score sheet.

Week 4 of instruction brought with it a great amount of reflection and closure. Students were able to receive another copy of the rubric and grade their final personal narrative (see Appendices C and D). We projected the rubric and read through each component once again while students identified their level of proficiency for each skill. Each student's rubric and personal narrative were collected for analysis and so that we could also grade each story. Student scores, student goals, and teacher scores were recorded in the paper copy and Google Sheet final draft, writing sample score sheet.

Following the completion of students' personal narratives, students were given a post-intervention writing attitude inventory (see Appendix B). Students were asked the same 6 questions provided in the pre-intervention writing attitude inventory. However, they were also provided with an additional 4 questions that measured their understanding and opinion of rubrics as a writing tool. Scores were recorded into the attitude scale Google Sheet database by the teacher. We were able to analyze student viewpoints and understanding of writing personal narratives and rubrics as tools.

Analysis of Data

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the use of formative feedback alongside a formative assessment tool (rubric) would foster proficiency as well as motivation in elementary writers when crafting a personal narrative. This action research project involved 20 1st-grade students from a suburban school and 20 3rd-grade students from an urban school. Each classroom completed the intervention in the fall of 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic,

students' opportunity to build foundational writing skills was significantly impacted during the previous two school years, thus creating an immense need for support in writing. Therefore, the timing of the intervention was desirable as we hoped to set students up with success by implementing practices and tools that would build and foster proficiency and motivation in student writers. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to be ever-present into the 2021-2022 school year as some students during the intervention missed school due to quarantine time, thus missing portions of the intervention.

The intervention was introduced at the beginning of the writing unit for students to have the opportunity to learn about rubrics, the formative feedback process, and the roles that both tools play in assisting students in developing motivation and proficiency in writing. Data was first collected to measure students' motivation to write through six questions on a writing attitude inventory (see Appendix A). The inventory was projected while the teacher read through each question. The students selected their feeling involving each question. The teacher collected and entered the inventories and data in a Google Sheet and analyzed them to determine students' feelings, confidence, and writing motivational levels.

Next, data were collected to measure students' proficiency levels when crafting an initial personal narrative, known as a "cold write". A script was read by teachers, and students crafted an initial personal narrative with minimal assistance. Next, students, with the support of a teacher, graded their personal narrative using the rubric created in collaboration with the teacher previously (see Appendices C and D). The teacher read each sub-skill that fell under the three writing categories on the rubric: text structure, text development, and writing conventions. Students would circle the level of proficiency they believed they accomplished in each sub-skill. Following the grading of their personal narrative, students circled a sub-skill that they would like

to grow in and identified a goal about that skill. After students completed this grading and goal-setting activity, the teacher collected the student-graded rubric and scored the level of proficiency they believed the student attained on the student's rubric for the subset skills. After the student and teacher gave the scores, the teacher recorded the student and teacher scores and goals listed by the students in a Google Sheet document. Finally, reflective and formative feedback conversations occurred to provide students and teachers with the opportunity to reflect and identify future steps for each student in the personal narrative writing process.

Teachers employed small group rubric activities in the following data collection step. Educators recorded on an observational log whether students identified a rubric, its components, purpose, and their ability to correctly grade and set goals for a personal narrative writing sample writer. Teachers also recorded short observational notes on each individual's experience during these small group meetings. Following the small group meetings, teachers coded information in a Google Sheet. During weeks one and three, the small group rubric checks were utilized to verify if students would correctly assess their work in weeks two and four. Additionally, the rubric checks allowed students to receive support and guidance with their use and understanding of rubrics.

During weeks two and four, students once again utilized the rubric they collaboratively created with the teacher to assess, grade, and set goals to improve their narrative rough draft and final draft (see Appendix C and D). Teachers projected the rubric and read each sub-skill while students circled the level of proficiency shown in their personal narrative for each sub-skill. After grading the rough draft, students identified and circled a sub-skill to work on and hopefully grow in. After students graded and set goals for their rough and final drafts, teachers collected the students' rubrics and recorded the level of proficiency they felt the student had attained in

each of the sub-skills on the rubric. Teachers recorded both student and teacher sub-skill scores and the area needing growth as identified by the student in a Google Sheet document.

Finally, a student writing attitude inventory was given to measure the students' level of motivation following the intervention (see Appendix B). The inventory included the same questions as the first attitude inventory, along with four new questions involving their understanding and level of appreciation of a rubric as a tool to improve proficiency and motivation in writing. Teachers projected the survey and read the questions while students circled the level portraying their feeling. Inventories were collected, and student responses were recorded in a Google Sheet document.

Findings

The purpose of our study was to identify ways to increase motivation and proficiency in students' writing. The research utilized formative assessments, rubrics and feedback to guide students' writing, inventories to gauge students' attitudes towards writing, and observations of student discussions to indicate student understanding and application of how to use a rubric in general education, elementary classrooms.

Concept of Proficiency in Writing

The first portion of the research question addressed in our study set out to determine if formative feedback and assessment tools, such as rubrics increase proficiency in student writers. In order to identify whether formative feedback and assessment tools increased proficiency in writers, the researchers taught students about rubrics, their components, and how to utilize them as a tool. Furthermore, the researchers collaboratively built a rubric with the students. Following the creation of the rubric, students used the rubric to grade what they felt was their level of proficiency in sub-skills that fell under three writing categories, which included text structure,

text development, and conventions of writing. Next, the teacher graded the students' proficiency level for each sub-skill. The recording of proficiency levels given by students and teachers allowed students and teachers to track proficiency levels within various writing skills when crafting a personal narrative over time with students. Thus, students and teachers witnessed whether the writer regressed, remained stationary, or grew in their writing skills.

To understand students' writing proficiency throughout the action research, teachers and students used the collaboratively created rubric to grade three writing samples: pre-intervention, first draft, and final draft. The rubrics had three main categories: text structure (TS), development (D), and conventions (C). Since rubrics were created collaboratively with students, and since we are analyzing data from two different classes, schools, and grade levels, we normed our data from raw numbers to percentages of the total possible score on each rubric. In both schools, a score of 80% or higher is considered to be proficient.

In the pre-intervention writing, students averaged a score of 38.30% on TS, 38.75% on D, and 49.06% on C. On the first draft of student writing, students averaged a score of 70.38% in TS, 68.75% on D, and 64.69% on C. Finally, students final drafts averaged a score of 81.01% on TS, 83.13% on D, and 74.69% on C (see Figure 1). Overall proficiency scores averaged a score of 42.65% for the pre-intervention writing, 68.12% for the first draft, and 79.82% for the final draft. In the pre-intervention writing, 1 student (2.5%) was already showing proficiency, in the first draft 13 students (32.5%) were showing proficiency, and in the final draft, 25 students (60%) showed proficiency (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1

Categorical Proficiency Over Time

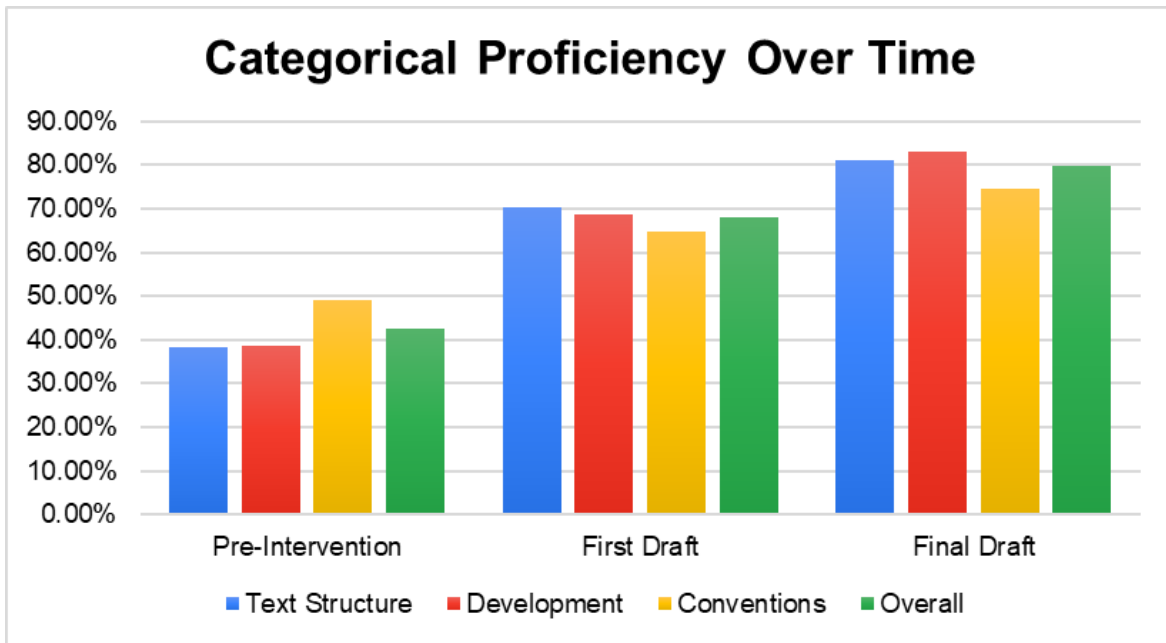
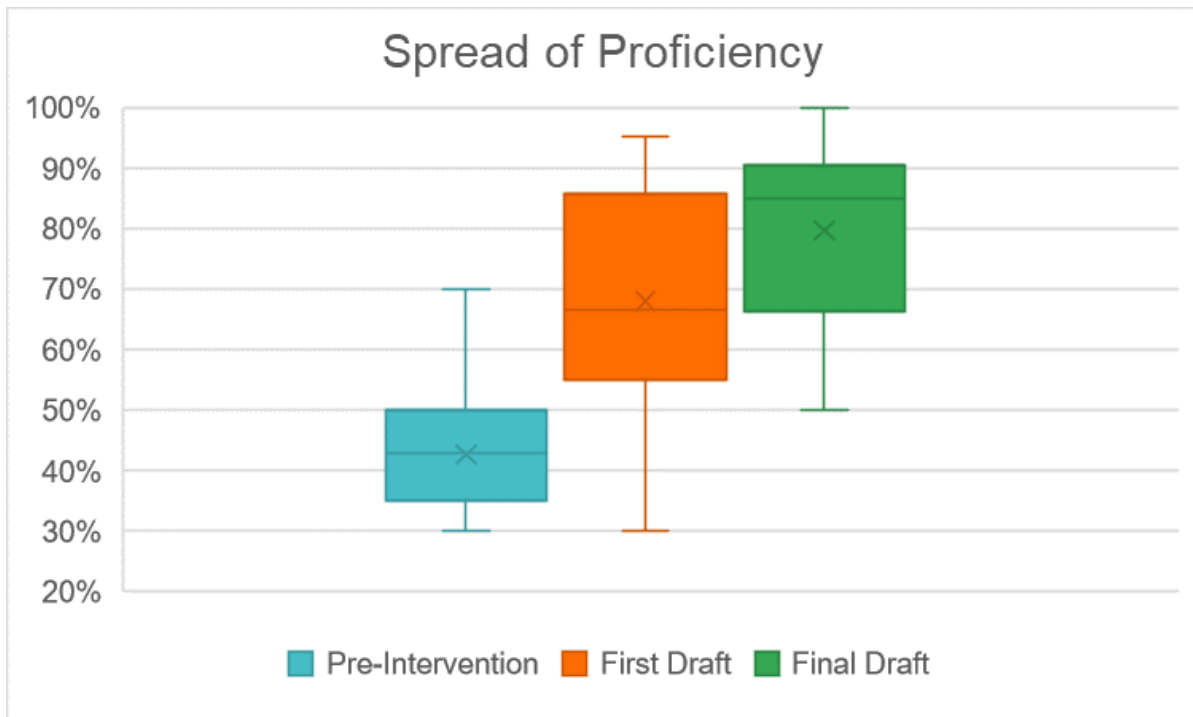


Figure 2

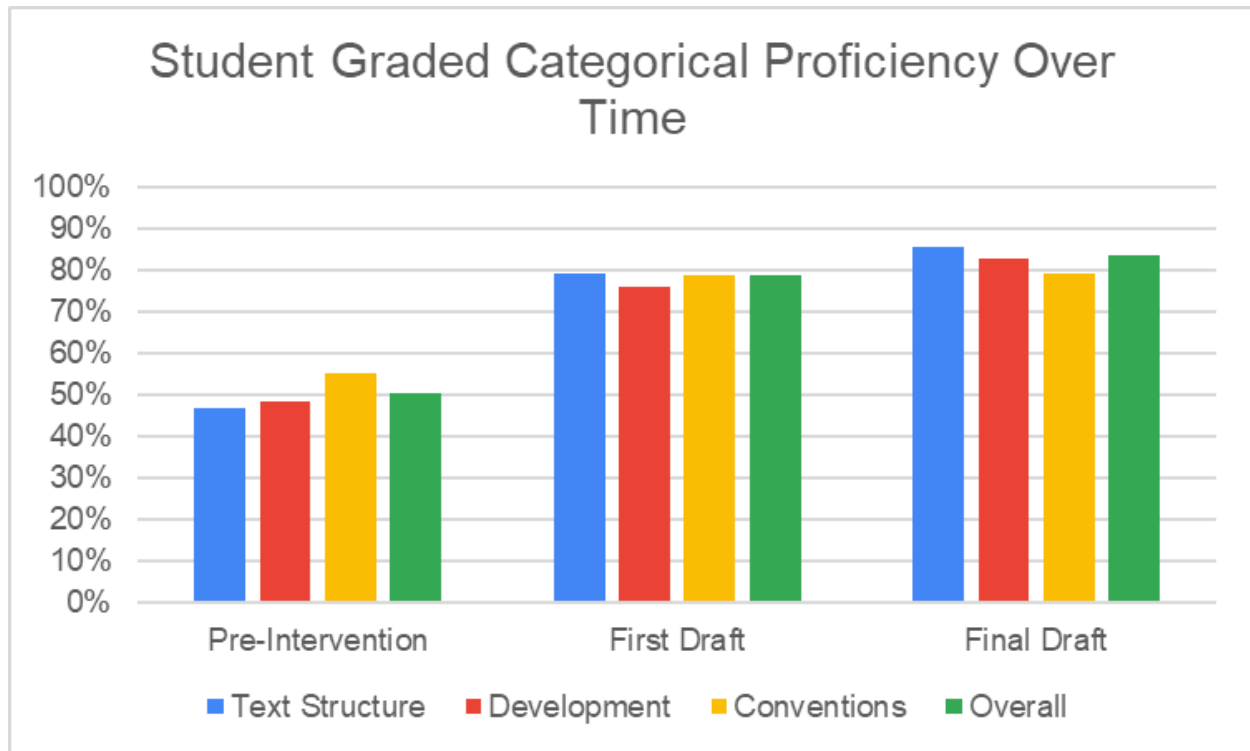
Spread of Proficiency



Additionally, students tracked their own progress through the use of rubrics (see Figure 3). Student perceived scores appear to follow a similar pattern to teacher graded scores, with the greatest increase in proficiency occurring between the pre-intervention writing and the first draft of the personal narrative.

In our data analysis, we also wanted to consider the fact that students started our writing unit at different levels of proficiency. Students who started at a low level of proficiency would have had to make much larger levels of growth to reach 80% proficiency (proficient) than students who started at a higher level of proficiency. Since our research's goal was to understand how to *increase* student proficiency in writing, we understood that looking at final proficiency scores is not sufficient. We primarily need to consider student growth.

Our data shows that all 40 students in the study made growth in their level of proficiency between their pre-intervention writing and their final draft. Three students were unable to complete the pre-intervention writing sample due to absences, so in the interest of understanding student proficiency growth as accurately as possible, those three students were omitted from calculations of difference that used the pre-intervention writing sample as a data point. Overall, student scores increased an average of 34.35% (37/40 students). A series of paired sample t-tests between each set of drafts (pre-intervention-first draft, first draft-final draft, pre-intervention-final draft) shows that the increase in proficiency made between each set was statistically significant at an $\alpha=0.05$. There was a greater change of proficiency scores between the pre-intervention writing and the first draft, an average change of 22.36% (37/40 students), than between the first draft and final draft, an average of 11.7% (40/40 students).

Figure 3*Student Graded Categorical Proficiency Over Time*

In order to understand how our intervention impacted different populations of students, we disaggregated our data by sex, age, ELL status, and race. We identified if there was a significant difference between categories in both final proficiency score as well as by growth in proficiency. Our sample featured 7 students who were federally identified as ELL. When looking at final proficiency scores of ELL students ($M = 0.693$, $SD = 0.109$) and the final proficiency scores of Non-ELL students ($M = 0.821$, $SD = 0.141$), ELL students were found to have lower proficiency $t(38) = 2.24$, $p = .015$ (see Figure 4). However, the growth that ELL students made ($M = 0.293$, $SD = 0.199$) compared to the growth that non-ELL students made ($M = 0.388$, $SD = 0.151$) was not a statistically significant difference $t(38) = 1.44$, $p = 0.079$ (see Figure 4). We also believed that it would be important to disaggregate by age. Beth teaches a 1st grade class whose students are 6 and 7 years old. Amy teaches a 3rd grade class whose students

are 8 and 9 years old. When we found that when we compared 1st grade students' proficiency ($M = 0.874$, $SD = 0.096$) to 3rd grade students' proficiency ($M = 0.722$, $SD = 0.146$), 1st grade students were more proficient $t(33) = 3.89$, $p < 0.001$ (see Figure 4). Additionally, 1st grade students ($M = 0.436$, $SD = 0.159$) had higher rates of growth compared to 3rd grade students ($M = 0.308$, $SD = 0.141$), $t(38) = 2.698$, $p = 0.005$ (see Figure 5). When disaggregating for age, we discovered that there was not a significant difference between the proficiency of female ($M = 0.819$, $SD = 0.137$) and male ($M = 0.773$, $SD = 0.151$) students $t(38)$, $p = 0.323$ (see Figure 4), nor the growth made between female ($M = 0.361$, $SD = 0.15$) and male ($M = 0.384$, $SD = 0.179$) students $t(38)$, $p = 0.671$ (see Figure 5).

To disaggregate by race, we identified three groups. White students (18), Asian students (19), and a group of "other" (3) students whose sample was too small to conduct a two sample t-test alone. Two of these students identified as two or more races, and the third identified as hispanic. White students ($M = 0.868$, $SD = 0.096$) outperformed Asian students ($M = 0.792$, $SD = 0.144$) on measures of proficiency $t(32) = 3.407$, $p = 0.002$ (see Figure 4), as well as on measures of growth (Asian students ($M = 0.31$, $SD = 0.144$), White students ($M = 0.439$, $SD = 0.166$), $t(34) = 2.510$, $p = 0.016$) (see Figure 5) however it should be noted that all White students in our sample are also 1st graders, and all Asian students in our sample are also 3rd graders. There was not however a significant difference between White students ($M = 0.868$, $SD = 0.096$) and Other students ($M = 0.802$, $SD = 0.229$) in proficiency $t(2) = 0.485$, $p = 0.675$ (see Figure 4), or in growth (White students ($M = 0.431$, $SD = 0.166$), Other students ($M = 0.353$, $SD = 0.114$) $t(4) = 1.008$, $p = 0.371$) (see Figure 5). Nor was there a significant difference between Asian students ($M = 0.792$, $SD = 0.144$) and Other students ($M = 0.802$, $SD = 0.229$) in proficiency $t(2) =$

-0.518, $p = 0.656$ (see Figure 4), or in growth (Asian students ($M = 0.311$, $SD = 0.144$), Other students ($M = 0.353$, $SD = 0.114$), $t(3) = -0.578$, $p = 0.604$ (See Figure 5).

Figure 4

Disaggregated Proficiency

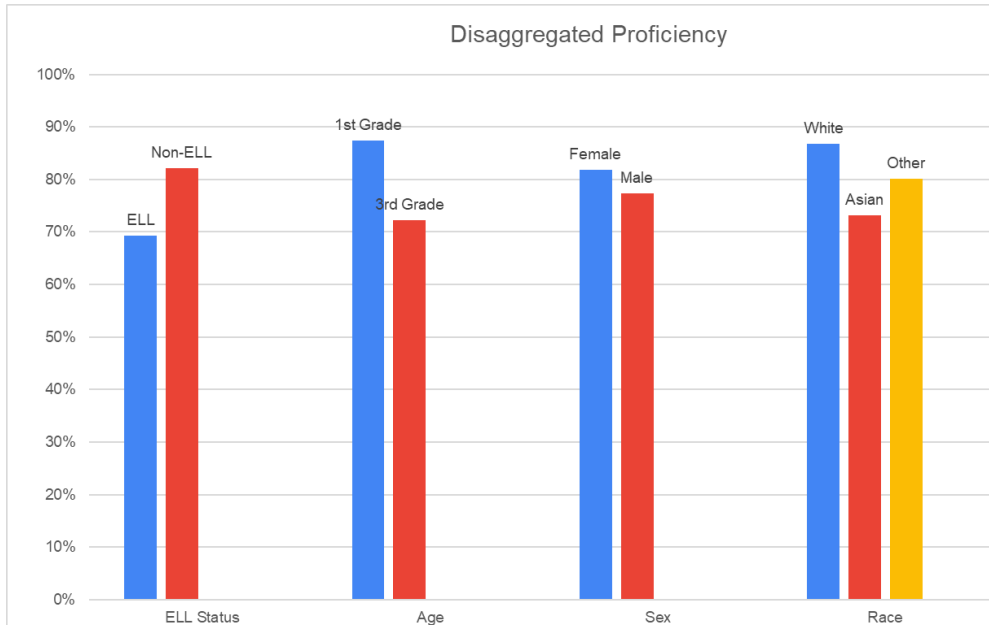
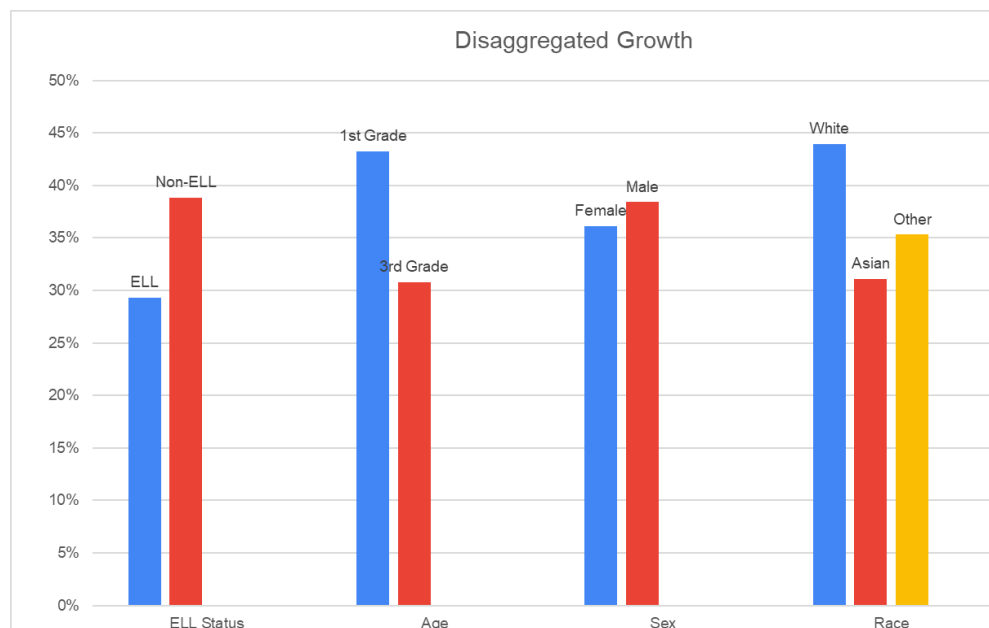


Figure 5

Disaggregated Growth



As students became more familiar with using rubrics as a formative assessment tool, we anticipated that students self scores would begin to correlate more strongly with teacher scores as each draft was written and scored. To determine if this occurred, we correlated student scores in each rubric category with teacher scores in each rubric category, and compared those correlations to determine if teachers and students ideas align more as the study went on. We found that the pre-intervention scores for TS were strongly positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.69, p < 0.001$, as were first draft scores for TS, $r(38) = 0.59, p < 0.001$. However, final draft scores for TS were only moderately positively correlated $r(38) = 0.39, p = 0.01$ (see Figure 6). Development scores followed a slightly different trend. Pre-intervention scores were strongly positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.69, p < 0.001$, but first draft scores were only moderately positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.33, p = 0.03$. Final draft scores were once again strongly positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.52, p = 0.004$ (see Figure 7). Conventions scores began as strongly positively correlated in the pre-intervention writing, $r(38) = 0.65, p < 0.001$, and became less strongly correlated as time went on. The first draft of writing was moderately positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.36, p = 0.02$, and the final draft of writing scores were weakly positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.10, p = 0.52$ (see Figure 8). Overall scores, contrary to our expectations, also became less strongly correlated as time went on. The pre-intervention writing samples were strongly positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.84, p < 0.001$, first drafts were strongly positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.63, p < 0.001$, and final drafts were moderately positively correlated, $r(38) = 0.46, p = 0.002$ (see Figure 9).

Figure 6

Text Structure Score Correlation

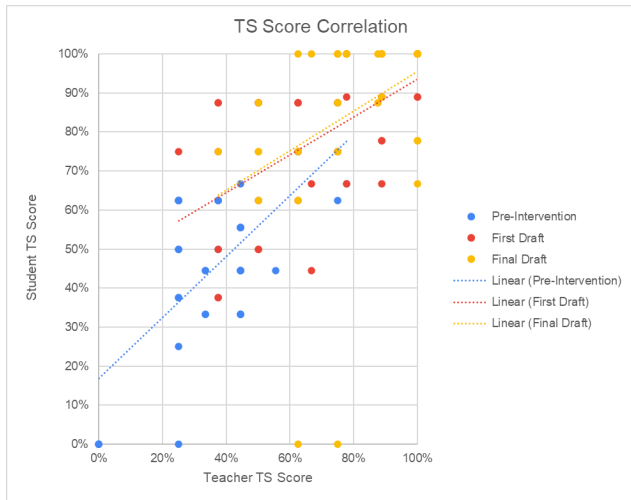


Figure 7

Development Score Correlation

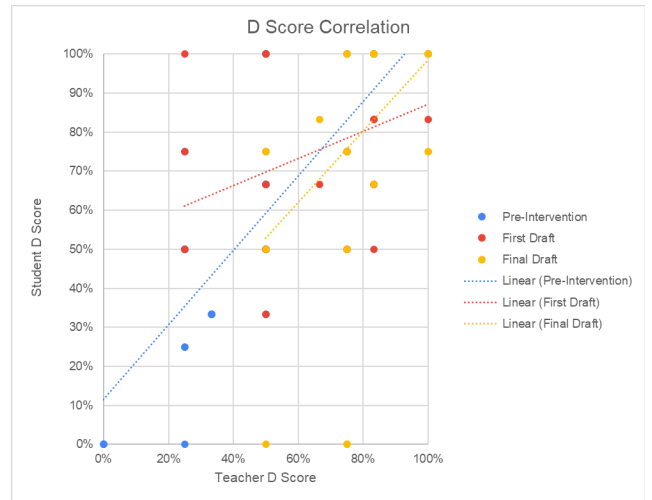


Figure 8

Conventions Score Correlation

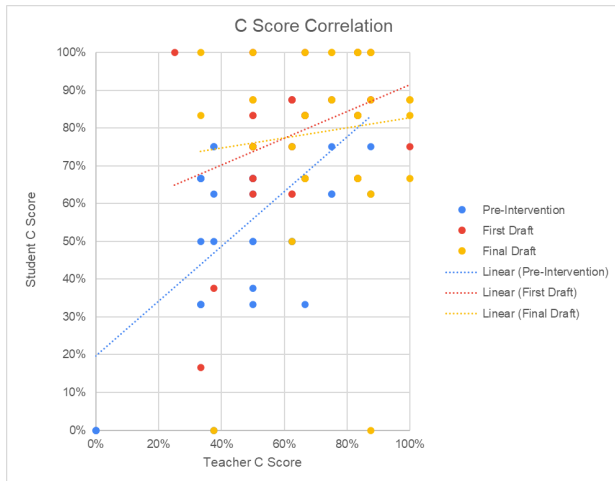
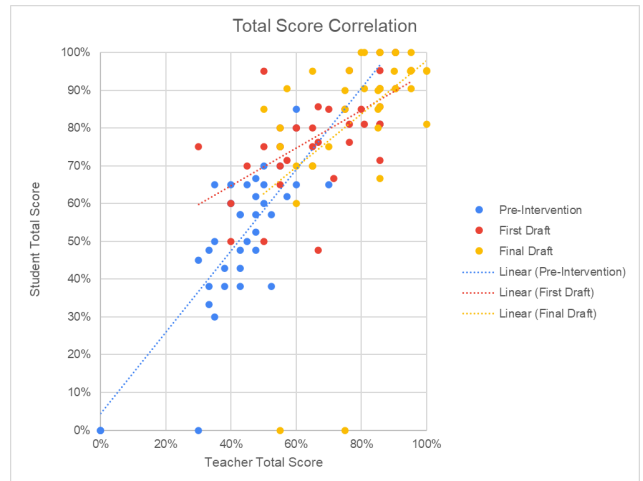


Figure 9

Total Score Correlation



Finally, students identified a growth goal on their rubrics or while discussing their writing with their teacher in a formative feedback meeting. If a student identified a goal, that goal was coded into one of the following three categories: Text Structure (TS), Development (D), or Conventions (C). Goal setting is related to motivation, so we analyzed the data to see if there was

a significant difference between growth in categories that students set goals for compared to categories that students did not set goals for. In each category, we looked at the overall change in score from the pre-intervention writing sample to the final draft comparing that category against the other categories.

There were 16 students that identified TS as a writing goal. 100% of these students showed growth between their pre-intervention draft and their final draft. Additionally, 100% of these students made growth in their goal area. These students made an average growth of 39.72% overall, 48.06% in TS, 44.44% in D, and 25% in C. We analyzed this data with a t-test to determine if the growth made in TS for this group was significantly different from growth made in the other goal areas. The t-test determined that there was not a significant difference between the growth made in TS ($M = 0.485$, $SD = 0.123$) compared to the growth made in D ($M = 0.437$, $SD = 0.159$), $t(30) = 0.947$, $p = 0.351$, however, the difference between TS ($M = 0.485$, $SD = 0.123$) and C ($M = 0.255$, $SD = 0.214$) was statistically significant $t(24) = 3.725$, $p = 0.001$.

Similarly, there were 17 students who identified D as a goal. 100% of those students made growth in their overall scores, at an average of 38.35% growth. 93% of these students made growth in their goal area. These students made an average of 44.27% growth in TS, 42.18% growth in D, and 27.60% growth in C. When comparing the growth made in these categories, students who identified D as a goal did not show significantly different growth between D ($M = 0.441$, $SD = 0.0.169$) and TS ($M = 0.446$, $SD = 0.177$), $t(32) = -0.083$, $p = 0.935$, however, there was a significant difference between D ($M = 0.441$, $SD = 0.169$) and C ($M = 0.275$, $SD = 0.1.157$), $t(32) = 2.986$, $p = 0.005$.

Finally, there were 16 students that identified C as a goal area. Of these students, 100% made growth between their pre-intervention draft and their final draft. This group of students

made an overall growth of 33.05%. 75% of these students made growth in their goal area. For these students, we identified that the growth they made in C ($M = 0.188$, $SD = 0.216$) was significantly less than both TS ($M = 0.406$, $SD = 0.231$), $t(30) = -2.764$, $p = 0.004$ and D ($M = 0.411$, $SD = 0.212$), $t(30) = -2.959$, $p = 0.003$.

Concept of Motivation in Writing

The second portion of the research question addressed in our study aimed to determine whether formative feedback and assessment tools increased motivation in writers. We decided to measure motivation in hopes that it would contribute to the growth of student writing proficiency. In order to measure motivation, before the intervention took place, we utilized an attitude inventory to determine the level of enjoyment and motivation in students when writing. Questions were asked, such as "I like to write.", "I start writing right away." and "I am excited for writing time." The scores were collected and recorded by the teacher. Initial scores showcased students' initial feelings about writing. By giving an attitude inventory before implementing the intervention, and once again at the end of the study, teachers could observe a sense of decreased, stabilized, or increased motivation when writing.

Furthermore, we wanted to measure whether the use of a rubric itself impacted student motivation to write. Therefore, an additional set of questions was given on the intervention's attitude inventory. The questions involved the students' viewpoint on the purpose of the rubric, how it may or may not assist a writer, and the students' personal preference of using a rubric as a tool to improve writing. The last portion of the inventory was collected and recorded following the intervention. We as educators could observe whether the student's motivation to write and grow as a writer increased because they had a writing tool to assist them in this writing process. The scores to these questions were collected and recorded following the inventory.

Our attitude inventory consisted of questions that were coded into motivation questions and proficiency questions. The motivation questions measured students' desire and enjoyment of writing, while the proficiency questions measured students' perceived proficiency in writing. These questions were measured using a Likert scale that ranged from a frowny face emoji (1 point) to a smiling emoji (3 points). Two students were unable to complete the post-intervention attitude inventory, so the data involving attitudes represents 38/40 of our original sample. When analyzed, there was significant evidence that there was an increase in attitudes between the pre-intervention attitude inventory ($M = 2.346$, $SD = 0.275$) and the post-intervention inventory ($M = 2.491$, $SD = 0.263$), $t(37) = -2.509$, $p = 0.008$. When separating these questions to look for the difference in just perceived proficiency, we found that there was still a significant difference that showed growth in attitude between the pre-intervention inventory ($M = 2.25$, $SD = 0.461$) and the post-intervention inventory ($M = 2.526$, $SD = 0.519$), $t(37) = -2.297$, $p = 0.014$. However, there was not a significant difference between the pre-intervention inventory ($M = 2.394$, $SD = 0.337$) and the post-intervention inventory ($M = 2.474$, $SD = 0.295$), $t(37) = -1.138$, $p = 0.131$ when looking at questions that targeted motivation.

Certain questions on the inventory were of interest. In the pre-intervention attitude inventory, 2 students circled the frowny face emoji (1 point) for the statement "I like to write". In the post-intervention inventory, no students circled the frowny face emoji, and the number of students who circled the smiley face emoji (3 points) increased from 19 to 22 (see Figure 10). Another question of note was "I know what I am supposed to write". This question was of interest because of the large shift in attitude from the pre-intervention inventory to the post intervention inventory. Students who ranked themselves as frowny faces decreased from 5 students to 1 student, and students who ranked themselves as smiley faces increased from 11 to

30 (see Figure 11). Finally, the third question of note was “I can identify ways to improve my writing”. This question was noteworthy because students showed through proficiency data that they were able to significantly improve, however, students did not show much change between the pre-intervention inventory and post-intervention inventory on this question (see Figure 12).

Figure 10

“I Like to Write” Comparison

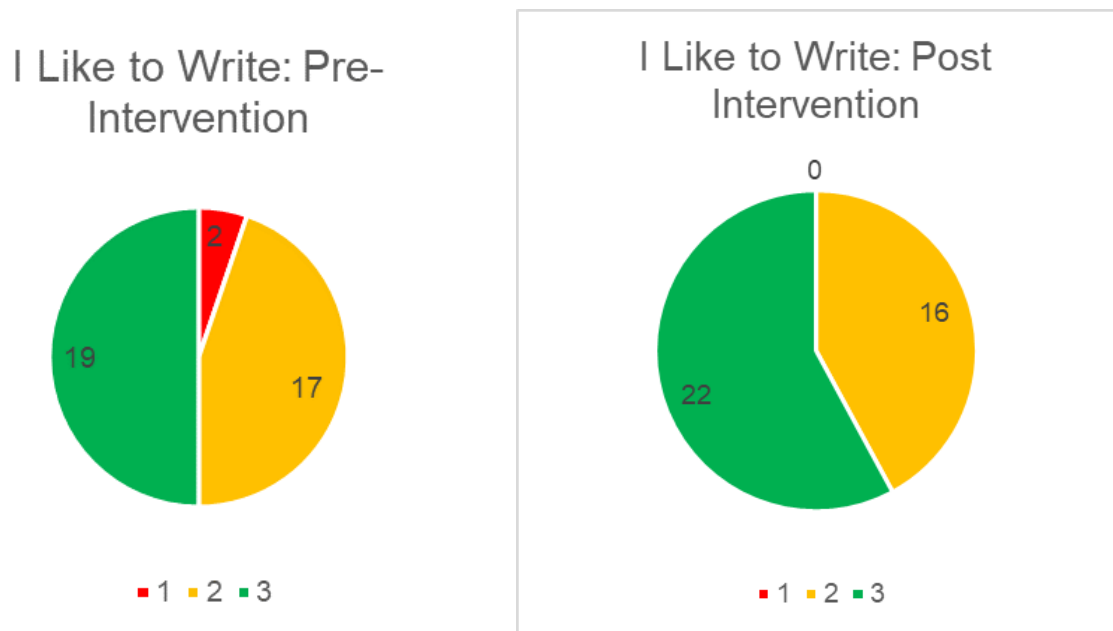


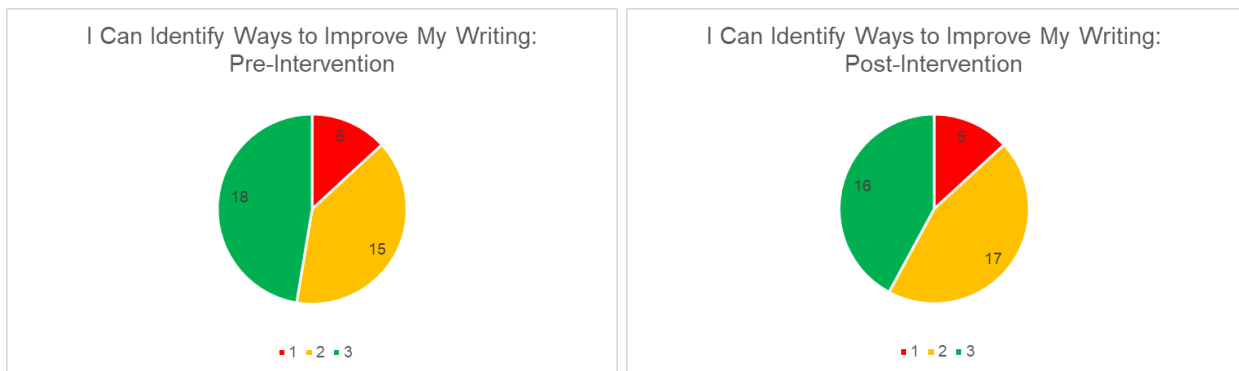
Figure 11

“I Know What I am Supposed to Write” Comparison



Figure 12

“I Can Identify Ways to Improve my Writing” Comparison



After understanding how attitudes changed, we wanted to see if more positive attitudes would correlate with higher proficiency, and further if growth in attitudes would correlate with growth in proficiency. When comparing post-intervention attitudes to final draft proficiency, we found that there is a weak positive correlation, but that the correlation is not statistically significant $r(36) = 0.197, p = 0.236$ (see Figure 13). Additionally, we found that there was a

weak positive correlation between growth (change) in attitudes and growth (change) in proficiency $r(36) = 0.201, p = 0.226$ (see Figure 14).

Figure 13

Post Intervention Attitude and Proficiency Correlation

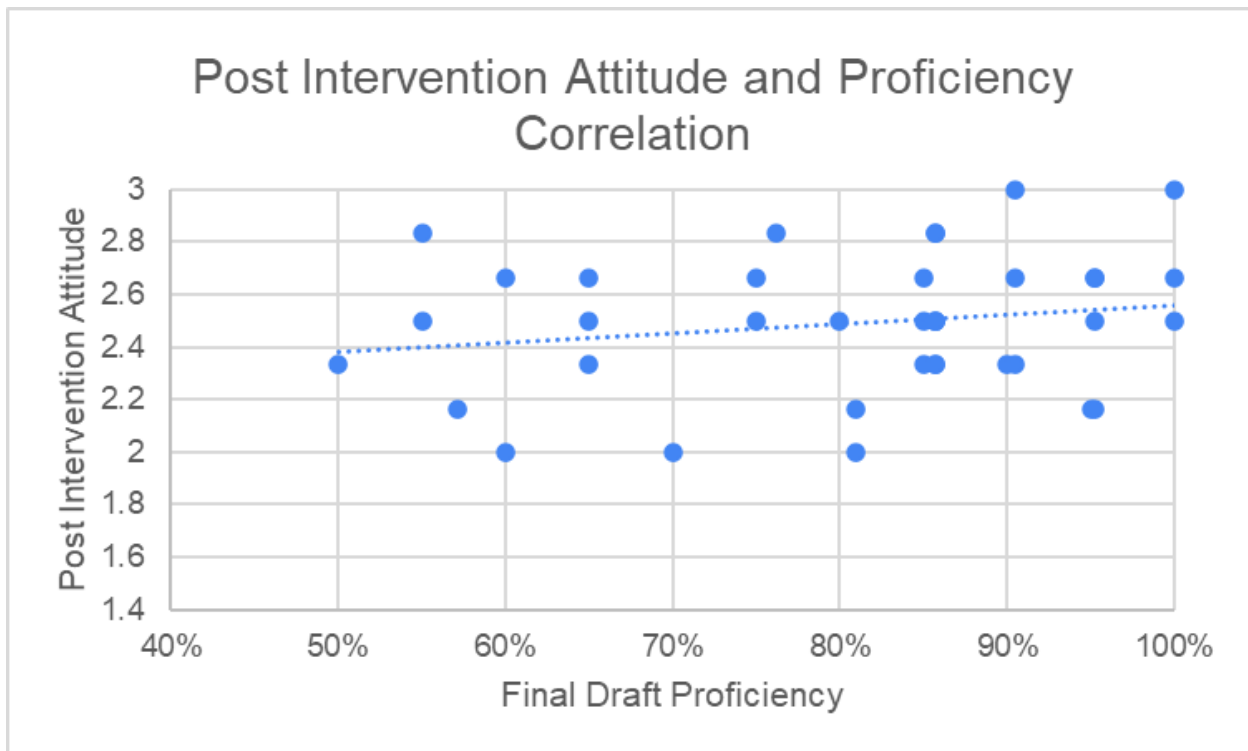
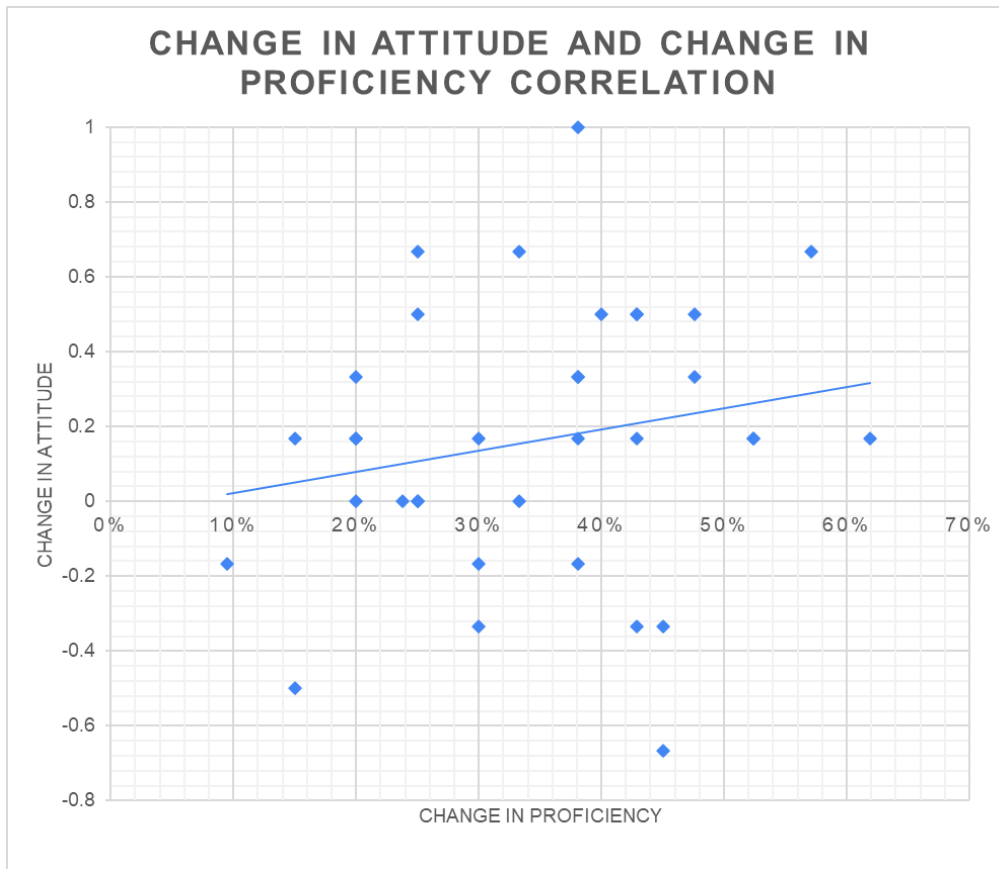


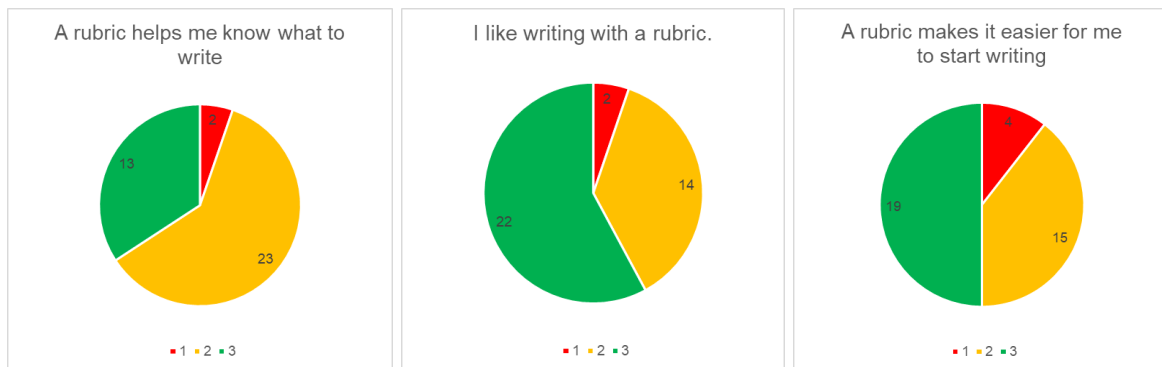
Figure 14*Change in Attitude and Change in Proficiency Correlation*

In order to understand students' perceptions of the usefulness of rubrics in writing as well as their understanding of how to use them, we asked 4 efficacy questions in our post-intervention inventory. For these questions, we used the same Likert scale that was used for the other questions on the inventory, with the exception of the final question, which was multiple choice but was still coded to align with the Likert scale. When analyzing this data, we found the average score of the efficacy questions to be 2.51. The final question, "I use a rubric because..." had the highest mean score, 2.82, indicating a high level of understanding for the purpose of using a rubric (see Figure 15). Additionally, we found that 22 out of 38 students liked using a rubric at a smiley face level, and 19 out of 38 students found that a rubric helped them to write at a smiley

face level. "A rubric helps me know what to write" was met with indifferent attitudes for the majority of students, with an average score of 2.29 (see Figure 15).

Figure 15

Measures of Rubric Efficacy



In order to identify students' levels of motivation through the use of a rubric, we also carried out small group rubric use activities. The small group activities aligned rubric use and student motivation with the expectancy-value theory. The expectancy-value theory notes (Atkinson 1957; Eccles et al., 1983; Wigfield, 1994; and Wigfield & Eccles, 1992, as cited in Wigfield and Eccles, 2000) that students' "their belief determines choice, persistence, and performance on a task in their ability to complete a task's expectancies alongside the value they place in the task." Students were asked to identify a rubric, its components, and its purpose in the activity. Additionally, students graded a writing sample and set goals for the writer. Each students' definition of a rubric's purpose helped support our understanding of whether a student found value in a rubric in supporting writing. Furthermore, we hoped that their ability to score a writing sample and identify goals for the writer during these activities would foster a "can do" mindset involving the use of rubrics to grade writing and identify areas needing attention.

Observational notes were recorded in individual student observation logs. Furthermore, observational notes were placed into categories and coded in a Google Sheet. We had hoped the recordings from the observational logs, and coded student verbal responses involving a rubric's purpose would show their belief in themselves when using a rubric and the value placed on the tool, thus motivating them to use the tool to grow as writers.

As students identified the purpose of using a rubric, we coded their responses into the following categories: Education, Developing Specific Rubric Categories, Increasing Proficiency, Practical Usage, and Score Oriented (see Table 1). Students' ability to make these identifications shows that they see value in the use of a rubric. Additionally, students were able to independently identify four areas in which the writer of the writing sample they scored could make improvements and grow as a writer (see Table 2). As students were able to identify growth areas, we could see that they have the confidence in the use of the rubric to assist writers, which aligns with the expectancy-value theory, as well as the value they place in utilizing a rubric to help a writer grow.

Overall, our research findings indicate positive influences that rubrics and formative feedback can have on student writing. However, there are also discrepancies amongst some of the data points. Therefore, further research on writing, rubrics, and formative feedback is recommended, especially at the elementary level.

Table 1
Student Responses for Identifying the Purpose of a Rubric

Code/ Category	Summary of Common Responses	Number of Responses
Education	Helps you learn Shows what you understand	10
Developing specific rubric categories	Organization of paper & spelling	3
Increase Proficiency	Improve writing or become a better writer	14
Practical Usage	Supports students during independent writing	8
Score Oriented	Displays students current achievement level	7

Table 2
Types of Goals Identified During Small Group Discussions

Goal	Summary of Common Responses	Number of responses
TS Goal	Story focus and structure	3
D Goal	Details, illustration	22
C Goal	Spelling, punctuation, finger spacing	31
Other Goal	Handwriting, Quantity of writing	4

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this action research was to determine whether the use of rubrics alongside formative feedback supported and increased student motivation and proficiency in writing within elementary classrooms. In order to measure our goal of fostering motivated and proficient writers, we employed a mixed variety of data collecting processes, most of which were quantitative and one being qualitative. Data was collected as students completed a pre and

post-intervention writing attitude inventory, practiced utilizing rubrics with peers and the teacher, produced three writing samples, which were graded with a rubric by the student and teacher, and participated in formative feedback conversations. Our study sought to identify whether involving students in creating and utilizing a rubric alongside participation in formative feedback conversations increased their proficiency and motivation in writing.

The action research, paired with the literature review findings, demonstrated the importance of implementing rubrics alongside formative feedback in primary elementary classrooms, specifically in writing. We found that proficiency levels when looking at students' overall writing scores grew over time using a rubric as a tool utilized by students in the writing process. First of all, students were immersed in finding clarity in the expectations within each required writing skill, thus providing a greater understanding of the task and its purpose when they were involved in creating the writing rubric. Children were also able to identify how to move from one level of proficiency to another concerning the required skills by using a rubric as a tool when crafting their personal narrative. Despite growth amongst students' overall writing scores, there were indicated gaps amongst specific populations of students, such as EL students and students who identify as other races compared to white, primarily English-speaking students. Further research can be conducted to study ways to improve writing proficiency within these populations, who work hard to understand and apply the complex and challenging concept of writing. It is critical to find ways to support these learners to become successful in a crucial academic area.

Moreover, data collected also showed a correlation between student and teacher scores awarded, thus allowing us to see that students could identify how to utilize the rubric accurately and purposefully. However, towards the end of the unit, students' scores varied somewhat from

the teacher's scores. Therefore, additional research involving students' self-reflection while utilizing a rubric could be used to understand various concepts, such as patterns in students' confidence or attitudes towards their work and proficiency levels over time.

Finally, data from the student attitude inventories indicated the value students found in rubric use. In the post-intervention attitude inventory, we asked questions to help us understand students' perception of the efficacy of using rubrics. The data indicated that students generally believed that rubrics helped them to be better writers, and that students liked using rubrics as a tool in their writing. However, in this same set of questions, students appeared to be lukewarm towards their confidence that a rubric helps them know what to write. This is an intriguing piece of data, because students showed significant improvement in their self score of "I know what I am supposed to write". This lack of confidence in the rubrics' role in their knowledge of what to write may be attributed to having a large scope of understanding of what purpose a rubric can serve. As seen in the observational data, students were able to identify a large variety of purposes that one might use a rubric, including for educational purposes, to increase proficiency, to increase a score or grade, or to decrease stress while writing. This large scope of reasons may have contributed to students' positive attitudes towards using a rubric, even though they may not have been confident in applying the rubric to their writing.

In addition to understanding rubrics and their impact on student writing, it was also found that small group, formative feedback conversations contributed to the growth of proficiency amongst students. The formative feedback conversations allowed students to reflect on their work, identify their proficiency level, identify areas of success and areas that required growth, and provide opportunities for students to ask questions or receive personalized modeling of proficiency in personal narrative sub-skills. The attitude scales indicated that students had a more

positive attitude towards writing at the end of the intervention, and when that data was broken down, it became clear that students had more confidence in their ability to write. Data from the attitude survey showed students building confidence in writing ability. Therefore, educators can value infusing formative feedback alongside rubrics to have conversations that build student confidence when writing. This study validates the expectancy-value theory, which notes that when students believe they can accomplish and find value in a task, they become *motivated* to learn, grow, and achieve a task successfully.

Finally, we need to consider the results of our data and its' implications on students' motivation to write. In our attitude inventory, we found, as noted above, that student attitudes towards writing increased between the initial attitude inventory and the post intervention attitude inventory. Again, as indicated above, we found that the questions specifically targeting students' perception of proficiency had significant growth. However, we found that the questions that specifically targeted students' motivation had a positive but not statistically significant amount of growth. This information brings up a couple of thoughts. First, it is possible that students did not have a big change in their drive and desire to write between the beginning and end of this study. However, as teachers in the classroom, this information didn't sit well with our perceptions of what occurred. We believe that this provides an opportunity for further research. We would like to see a longitudinal study that targets students' motivation to write over the course of a year so that we can see patterns that arise. Students may have also started with a high perception of their motivation for writing and not left much room for themselves to grow.

Our observation data collected through small group discussions and collaborative grading gave us more insight into students' motivation to write. The data showed that students were able to identify areas of growth for a writer and identify a purpose for using a rubric as a writer. These

observations showed us that students both believed in their ability to use the rubric as a formative assessment tool as well as see value in its use. The expectancy-value theory tells us that when these two things are present (belief in their ability and value in its use) that motivation increases. We can then assume that student motivation for writing is increased while using a rubric, using this data to support that belief. Seeing as though our data from these observations was contrary to the student inventory data, we have concluded that more data must be collected to measure the rubrics' effectiveness in promoting motivation.

There were various limitations throughout the study. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, student attendance presented significant challenges in full intervention and support as some students were out for multiple days or weeks. Writing is a very sequential skill; therefore, students cannot just come back and join the instruction without challenges. Furthermore, writing is a complex skill and requires a great deal of support, and when students miss school, they miss a great deal of support and collaborative learning opportunities.

An additional limitation that we found in our study is that since writing is a complex skill, creating a rubric alongside students was more difficult than we expected. We found that the timing between teaching skills that students need for writing and creating a rubric together prevented students from being able to use the rubric right away to assess their initial writing samples, and therefore set goals for themselves. Additionally, we wanted to make sure that students were very involved in the creation of the rubric, but found that since we hadn't taught all skills yet, students were unaware of what an exemplar piece of writing would look like, and the creation of the rubric landed a lot more on the teachers shoulders than we expected. Additionally, we did not take measures to assess if the students' participation in the creation of

the rubric had an impact on its effectiveness in their writing. The impact of the collaborative nature of a rubric may need to be addressed in a separate study.

We also faced some limitations when analyzing the data. We found that the classrooms we taught were fairly racially homogenous within themselves. This makes it difficult to make assumptions or generalizations when analyzing the data. It is difficult to say that the use of rubrics was less effective for Asian students than for White students because, in those groups, there were several other variables. The 3rd grade classroom had all of the ELL students in the study, as well as all of the Asian students. The 1st grade classroom had all of the White students. Due to the lack of overlap across several demographic areas, it is difficult to determine which variable is the determining factor in the differences between groups.

Finally, the varying grade levels of the classrooms presented limitations. We could not make generalizations to all populations of students as varying degrees of experience in writing, standards, and the depth of skills required in different grade level writing pieces may influence the degree to which students performed or were motivated. Furthermore, students of various age groups may need differentiation in presentation or usage of the rubric. For example, younger students may benefit from creating one section of the rubric at a time versus creating all of the sections in one lesson. Additionally, when utilizing the rubric to grade work, using a rubric that is broken up into sections and then subsections, versus using a rubric with all of the components on one page may be more manageable.

Due to the findings and limitations, we recommend continued research on the use of rubrics, paired with formative feedback in writing across all primary grade levels, beginning with kindergarten and moving through 3rd grade. Thus, educators may better understand rubrics, formative feedback, and their influence on proficiency and motivation levels over time. Hence,

educators could also better understand proficiency and motivational growth across grade levels, thus informing their approach to providing writing instruction and support.

The conclusions and recommendations of this study can significantly impact students' writing and their future. As noted in the literature review, writing is a critical and foundational academic skill that will improve students' school performance in various content areas (Graham, 2019). Students' lives are significantly impacted when educational experiences are positive and successful. Furthermore, writing is a critical and complex skill that plays a significant role in students' personal, academic, and occupational success (Graham, 2019). As educators, it is our responsibility to pave the way for success in all of our students' future endeavors.

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Appendix A
Baseline Student Writing Attitude Inventory: Pre-Intervention

Student Writing Attitudes Pre/Post Survey

Name: _____

1) I like to write.



2) I start writing right away.



3) I know what I am supposed to write.



4) I am excited for writing time.



5) I can identify ways to improve my writing.



6) I feel confident when it is time for writing.



Appendix B
Student Writing Attitude Inventory: Post-Intervention

Student Writing Attitudes Pre/Post Survey

Name: _____

1) I like to write.



2) I start writing right away.



3) I know what I am supposed to write.



4) I am excited for writing time.



5) I can identify ways to improve my writing.



6) I feel confident when it is time for writing.



Post Survey Only

7) A rubric makes it easier for me to start writing.



8) A rubric helps me know what to write.



9) I like writing with a rubric.



10) I use a rubric because...

a) It helps me see ways to improve my writing.




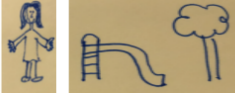
b) My teacher told me to use it.

c) It's important to have lots of papers when I'm writing.

Appendix C
1st Grade Rubric



I can write a story about something that happened to me!

1	2	3
<p>I write a story about someone or something else. OR I write a story about me that isn't true.</p>  <p>Examples: -Sam went to the park. -Dinosaurs are so cool!</p>  <p>-I saw a dinosaur and I slept on its' back.</p> 	<p>I can tell something true that happened to me. but... I didn't tell enough about what happened. I did not draw a picture.</p> <p>Example: I went to the park. I like the park.</p>	<p>I can write a <u>true story</u> about something that happened to me with <u>words, pictures and details!</u></p> <p>*Other people can be in this story!</p>  <p>Example: I went to the park. First, I played on the swing. Next, I played on the monkey bars. Finally, I played basketball. It was fun!</p>





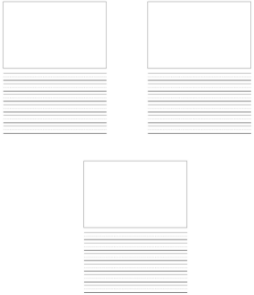
My story has a beginning, middle and end.

My story goes in order! (1,2,3)

1	2	3
<p>I can write a story with 1 part.</p> <p>Example: I went to Bentleyville!</p>	<p>I can write a story with 2 parts! (Example: Beginning and End)</p> <p>Example: I went to Bentleyville. Finally we had hot cocoa.</p>	<p>I can write a story with a beginning, middle and end. My story is in the right order!</p> <p>*If it is not in order, you get a 2!</p> <p>Example: I went to Bentleyville. First we went through a tunnel of lights. Next we saw a huge spiderman light! Finally we had hot cocoa.</p>


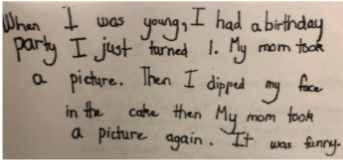
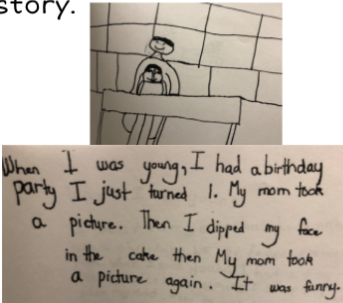


My story is written across three or more pages!

1	2	3
<p>I wrote <u>1 page or less</u>.</p> 	<p>I can write <u>2 pages</u>!</p> 	<p>I can write my story across <u>3 or more pages</u>!</p> 

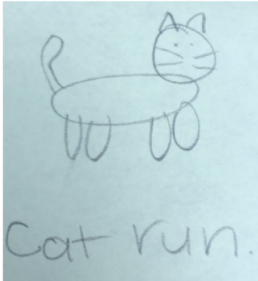




- ❑ I can put the picture from my mind onto my paper with words and pictures.

1	2	3
<p>I drew a picture of my story and we don't know what it means.</p> 	<p>I have words to describe my story.</p> 	<p>I can create pictures and words to describe my story.</p> 



- ❑ I can use details in my pictures and words.
 - ❑ Details could also include labels in pictures.

1	2	3
<p>I am missing details in my <u>pictures and words</u>.</p>  <p>Example: I drew a picture with a pencil and have a few words on my paper.</p>	<p>I can put details into <u>one</u> of my story parts.</p>  <p>Example: You have a detailed picture but not a detailed story.</p>	<p>I can put specific details in my <u>words and pictures</u>.</p> 





- I can use my phonics, heggerty, and sight word knowledge to spell words!

1	2	3
<p>I write letters or some phonics words.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: if <u>lslkfj</u> sap</p> <p>OR</p> <p>I w to t pk.</p>	<p>I can spell SOME of my phonics and sight words correctly.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: I went to the <u>prk</u>. It wuz fn!</p>	<p>I can spell my phonics and sight words correctly.</p> <p>EXAMPLE: I went to the park. It was fun!</p>



- I can write sentences.

- I can use punctuation. . ! ?
- I can use finger spaces.
- I can use capital letters for the beginning of my sentence and for names of people and places. My dog Max is brown.

1	2	3
<p>I show <u>1</u> of the writing conventions in my story.</p>	<p>I show <u>2</u> writing conventions in my story.</p>	<p>I show <u>ALL 3</u> conventions in my story.</p>

Appendix D
3rd Grade Rubric

Personal Narrative				
	4 <i>4 Points</i>	3 <i>3 Points</i>	2 <i>2 Points</i>	1 <i>1 Points</i>
Content	Watermelon seed story. One event told very well with a lot of meaningful detail. (Meaningful details are details that further flesh out the events, characters, or world of the story)	Approaching a watermelon seed story. One event told with some meaningful detail.	Telling a watermelon slice story. More focused narrative, still broad. Some meaningful detail.	Telling a watermelon story (a large scale picture, unfocused, little meaningful detail).
Organization	The story has a beginning, middle and end. The events of the story are in order. The beginning tells who is in the story, where the story takes place, and what is happening. The end is a satisfying conclusion to the story.	Has a beginning, middle, and end. The events of the story are in order.	Events of the story are in order, but either the beginning, middle, or end are missing from the story.	The story is out of order. There is no clear beginning or ending.
Craft	The author uses dialogue, 5 senses, and details to tell the heart of the story. The author brings the story to life.	The author uses some dialogue, 5 senses, and details, but doesn't use all three.	The author adds details to their story, but does not use 5 senses or dialogue.	The author tells the events of the story without dialogue, 5 senses, or details.

<p>Punctuation and Capitalization</p>	<p>The author uses interesting punctuation (exclamation marks, question marks) where it is appropriate. The author always ends the sentence with punctuation.</p> <p>All sentences begin with a capital letter. All proper nouns are capitalized.</p>	<p>The author always uses a period to end their sentences.</p> <p>Most sentences begin with a capital letter. Most proper nouns are capitalized.</p>	<p>The author usually uses punctuation to end a sentence, but is missing several.</p> <p>Most sentences begin with a capital letter. Some proper nouns begin with a capital letter.</p>	<p>The author never or rarely uses punctuation.</p> <p>The author is missing capital letters at the beginnings of sentences, and proper nouns are not capitalized.</p>
<p>Spelling</p>	<p>Words are properly spaced.</p> <p>The author uses phonics to help them spell. (open syllable, closed syllable, silent e, inflected endings).</p>	<p>Words are properly spaced. The author uses phonics to help them spell. (open syllable, closed syllable, silent e)</p>	<p>Words are properly spaced. Author uses their best guesses in spelling.</p>	<p>Words are not spaced apart. Author randomly guesses sounds.</p>