

### **Lesson Study, Cycle 1: Literature Synthesis**

*How do we grade with an equity mindset for our diverse group of students, meeting students where they are at and encouraging academic risk?*

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From my experience as a high school student, writing was never particularly my favorite nor strongest subject. I often encountered challenges when attempting to articulate my thoughts effectively. While I don't recall the specific grades I received from my teachers, I vividly remember the positive influence of my sophomore English teacher. She consistently emphasized the significance of our written work by genuinely acknowledging and providing detailed feedback on every aspect. The grade itself was not as impactful as the effort invested. This profound memory still resonates with me, as it motivated me to strive for improvement, knowing that my words were being acknowledged and appreciated. The fact that my teacher dedicated time to support me in enhancing my writing skills left a lasting impression. This experience has shaped my aspiration to become a better educator, equipped with the tools to empower students in their writing abilities, devoid of the need to tie their intelligence to grades.

Within my team, we share a common belief in fostering an environment that encourages students to take intellectual risks without worrying about grades hindering their motivation. Through two cycles of the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) framework and a research lesson, we recognized the significance of utilizing writing rubrics as a support tool to enhance student engagement. Based on my research on equitable grading practices and meeting students where they are, three key themes have emerged:

1. Scaffolding the use of a writing rubric to promote student self-efficacy in writing
2. Providing a safe environment for students to succeed
3. Incorporating student voice into the learning

#### **Scaffolding the Use of a Writing Rubric to Promote Student Self-Efficacy in Writing**

Having this takeaway from our lesson study experience was anticipated, although it was not fully expected for all students to strengthen their self-efficacy. For students to develop their self-efficacy, there needs to be scaffolding strategies in place from the educator. Students of all grade levels can benefit from instructional methods that break down the writing process into smaller, manageable steps. The students in our lesson study were sophomores, and just like my third-grade students, they appreciated having the content broken down to fully understand the expectations and writing objectives. Starting with the scaffolding and enhancement in their self-confidence is a stepping stool to then be able to provide them with equitable and appropriate feedback. In chapter 2 of *Teaching Practices from America's Best Urban Schools*, Johnson states "In order to reach those students who are not good swimmers, you are going to have to jump in the pool with them" (Johnson, 2019, p.58). We found that scaffolding the writing content and utilizing helpful tools allowed students to improve their self-confidence and avoid them from

“drowning”. My mentor, Claire Morrow, also emphasized the importance of structuring lessons to include opportunities for students to take the lead and comprehend the task at hand (2024). This involved having students read sample pieces, make observations, and ask questions to instill a sense of pride in their writing and encourage them to seek feedback. We developed a lesson that incorporated the main findings, allowing for the inclusion of sample student work. Students were provided with a writing rubric and asked to assess and discuss other peers' performances in small groups. The purpose of this exercise was to enhance their comprehension of the learning objective and boost their confidence when generating ideas for their own writing pieces.

### **Providing A Safe Environment For Students To Succeed**

We learned that a key finding in our readings and the lesson was that creating a safe space for students to try, supports equitable grading and success in their efforts of learning. Alex (2022) and Berns (2020) both make the connection that to have equitable grading building relationships with students and including them in the discussion needs to take place first. Every student has different learning needs and recognizing that will already put us at an advantage to best support their growth mindset in their work. Students who find a writing piece difficult should not be penalized for their efforts in trying; “it really should not matter that students do not “get it” the first time so long as they demonstrate the capability to try and comprehend it at the end of the course” (Alex, 2022, p.4). The more opportunities we give students to succeed without having a letter grade attached to their efforts, the more they will be willing to master the skill (Feldman, 2017). During our research lesson, the use of writing rubrics served as a tool to assist students in excelling in their writing and producing their best work. The rubric also incorporated a section where students could set goals or outline criteria they wanted to focus on, allowing the teacher to provide further support and review more comprehensively. Taking the time to review areas in which students require additional assistance and reflecting together on the rubric cultivates a sense of connection, and with “trust in us, they are more likely to own their work” (Alex, 2022).

### **Incorporating Student Voice Into The Learning**

This theme connects to the ‘why’ it is important to incorporate your students into the learning. Many times minority students have additional hurdles to jump in order to achieve a successful grade. Because of this, students' grades are altered and the motivation of continuing can be affected. Resulting in the punishment of a failing grade which is unfortunate because most of the time it is due to an “inaccurate measure of student academic capability” (Berns, 2020,p.3). That is why as an educator who aims to provide equitable grading for all their students, thinking through where students are is crucial. Working in “collaboration offers great promise of connecting with students” (Johnson, 2019, p.59) and allows students to feel more comfortable in having their voice heard. Our team worked diligently to design a lesson that encouraged students to express their thoughts and ideas. We conducted group and small group discussions where students provided feedback on the rubric and suggested improvements to better support their final personal statement. Additionally, we facilitated peer editing sessions for three different

styles of writing, guiding students in selecting the most suitable piece for their college personal statement. By including their voices in these discussions, we empower students to take academic risks and continue in their learning progress.

### **Conclusion**

Completing this lesson study cycle was a valuable experience that provided me with numerous valuable lessons that will form the foundation of my teaching practice. Moving forward, I plan to integrate additional writing rubrics, both created by myself and my students, to enhance our writing skills. This will establish a solid framework for well-structured writing pieces. Since I work with elementary students, I am wondering whether the incorporation of rubrics in creative writing assignments may create undue pressure related to grading. Also, I am considering the best timing to introduce rubrics, as I want to allow time to build strong connections with my students first, fostering their comfort and willingness to collaborate on creating the rubrics. Nonetheless, I am committed to identifying areas for professional growth and recognizing the impact that fair grading practices can have on the academic progress of students.

References

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