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## Enhancing Students' Understanding and Revision of Narrative Writing through Self-Assessment and Dialogue: A Qualitative Multi-Case Study

Stephanie Baxa

University of Sioux Falls, Stephanie.Baxa@k12.sd.us

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### Abstract

With students losing hope when faced with challenges in the classroom, daily student-involved formative assessment that contributes to a growth mindset is essential. Through self-assessment and dialogue, students can generate feedback used for improvement of their writing, and teachers can give feedback that fosters self-efficacy. The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to explore the growth of fifth-grade writers as they participated in self-assessment, writing conferences with their teacher, and story revision. Research questions focused on students' ability to explain learning targets and strengths and weaknesses of their writing and their ability to revise their writing. The participants, two male and one female, were randomly chosen from the teacher/researcher's fifth-grade classroom in a large public school in the Midwest. Data sources included audio-recorded interviews and writing conferences, student-written work and self-assessments, and teacher assessments and notes. Self-assessment and dialogue with the teacher served as tools for providing feedback to the student and the teacher. Throughout implementation of the instructional strategies, students were able to talk about the learning targets and the strengths and weaknesses of their writing and were motivated and able to revise their writing. Limitations of the study included the length of the study and diversity of participants. Suggestions for future research included exploring ways to elicit more student feedback and the impact of teacher language during writing conferences on the self-efficacy of students.

### Keywords

Case Study, Dialogue, Feedback, Formative Assessment, Growth Mindset, Qualitative Research, Self-Assessment, Writing, Writing Conferences

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## Enhancing Students' Understanding and Revision of Narrative Writing through Self-Assessment and Dialogue: A Qualitative Multi-Case Study

Stephanie Baxa

University of Sioux Falls, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, USA

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*With students losing hope when faced with challenges in the classroom, daily student-involved formative assessment that contributes to a growth mindset is essential. Through self-assessment and dialogue, students can generate feedback used for improvement of their writing, and teachers can give feedback that fosters self-efficacy. The purpose of this qualitative multi-case study was to explore the growth of fifth-grade writers as they participated in self-assessment, writing conferences with their teacher, and story revision. Research questions focused on students' ability to explain learning targets and strengths and weaknesses of their writing and their ability to revise their writing. The participants, two male and one female, were randomly chosen from the teacher/researcher's fifth-grade classroom in a large public school in the Midwest. Data sources included audio-recorded interviews and writing conferences, student-written work and self-assessments, and teacher assessments and notes. Self-assessment and dialogue with the teacher served as tools for providing feedback to the student and the teacher. Throughout implementation of the instructional strategies, students were able to talk about the learning targets and the strengths and weaknesses of their writing and were motivated and able to revise their writing. Limitations of the study included the length of the study and diversity of participants. Suggestions for future research included exploring ways to elicit more student feedback and the impact of teacher language during writing conferences on the self-efficacy of students.*

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A goal of one particular teacher has been to provide more feedback to her students about their reading and writing. Throughout the first months of the school year, she has worked hard to meet with each student for one-on-one reading and writing conferences. During the third month of school, at a parent-teacher conference, she and the parents of one of her students listen as the student, Noah, reads his personal narrative. Then the teacher shows the student and parents the rubric she used to score Noah's narrative. Noah leans forward to hear what his teacher has to say about his writing. The teacher realizes that, although she has given Noah feedback, it has not been enough. This is the first time Noah has seen and heard a thorough, specific description of how his writing shows the traits of quality narrative writing. This is the first time he has heard a thorough description of the strengths of his writing and of the areas he needs to improve. And now the narrative writing unit is done. The teacher thinks how powerful it would have been for Noah to hear this specific, descriptive feedback while he was working on the narrative draft. What if the teacher had provided the students with the rubric before they wrote their narratives? What if she had involved the students in creating the rubric? What if she had invited students to use the rubric to assess their drafts of writing and to set goals for improving their drafts?

Students need to feel ownership of learning goals (Hattie, 2009), and, according to the theory of constructivism, they must take an active role in the learning process (Tracey &

Morrow, 2006, p. 47). The teacher/researcher in the present study wondered how much more her students could learn about writing and wondered how much her students' writing might improve if she were to involve students in assessment and in provision of feedback throughout the learning process.

Too often, students do not receive enough feedback throughout the learning process. Teachers are setting goals for students and are failing to communicate clearly to students about these goals. They ask students to write stories, and the students do not know what constitutes a quality narrative. Furthermore, teachers ask students to revise their stories, and students simply copy their first drafts and call them final drafts, making few or no improvements.

The purpose of the present study was to explore whether the instructional practice of rubric-referenced self-assessment and dialogue with the teacher throughout the writing process enhanced feedback and promoted the ability of fifth grade students to explain the learning targets for writing, set goals, and revise their writing. The study examined the following questions: How will the instructional practice under investigation enhance fifth grade students' understanding of the learning targets for writing and the strengths and weaknesses of their writing in relation to the learning targets? How will the instructional practice under investigation enhance fifth grade students' ability to generate feedback with the teacher and set goals for improvement of their writing? How will the instructional practice under investigation promote fifth grade students' ability to revise and improve their writing? How will the researcher's perception of the instructional practice under investigation change? Prior to the study, the teacher/researcher believed rubric-referenced self-assessment and dialogue with the teacher would enhance the feedback process and promote fifth grade students' ability to explain learning targets, identify the strengths and weaknesses of their writing, set goals, and revise their writing.

While this study focused on the use of self-assessment with fifth-grade students, it may be of interest to teachers at all levels as self-assessment with a rubric may be used in elementary school, middle school, high school, undergraduate school, and graduate school. Students at all levels participate in the writing process, and teachers at all levels look for ways they can provide feedback and use formative assessment effectively.

At the time of this study, the teacher/researcher had taught 16 years, teaching fifth grade for the majority of those years. Throughout her teaching experience, she found one-on-one reading and writing conferences with students allowed for dialogue that helped students improve their work. When she noticed students reflecting on their reading and writing and working hard to improve it, the teacher/researcher started paying close attention to the teacher language she used during reading and writing conferences. She noticed, when she asked students to talk about their reading and writing, they had a lot to say, and she believed asking students to reflect and set goals helped them take ownership of their learning.

As part of a university's masters' program, the teacher/researcher had the opportunity to do qualitative research in her fifth-grade classroom. Throughout the masters' program, she read books in which authors discussed the impact of teacher language on students' expectations of themselves and the importance of feedback focused on students' effort (Brookhart, 2008; Dweck, 2006; Johnston, 2012). Then she learned, according to Hattie (2009), students' own expectations of themselves as learners are one of the greatest influences on student learning. Therefore, the teacher/researcher wondered how she might impact her students' own expectations of themselves in the classroom.

The teacher/researcher became interested in self-assessment of writing after her fifth grade students participated in self-assessment of oral reading fluency. In the fluency self-assessment used throughout a readers' theater unit, students listened to their own oral reading and used a rubric to assess their expression and volume, phrasing, smoothness, and pace (Rasinski, 2004). Students set goals for what they wanted to improve and continued working

on fluency while practicing their readers' theater scripts. They repeated this process a couple times. The researcher noticed the motivation of her students when they participated in this process and when they heard improvement in their reading fluency. She also noticed, at the end of the unit, students were more knowledgeable about the characteristics of fluent oral reading and how to improve their oral reading. The teacher/researcher wondered if self-assessment using a rubric could be used in the area of writing so that students might become more knowledgeable about how to improve their writing and more motivated to improve it.

When her students were asked to revise their drafts of writing during daily writing time, the researcher noticed students making only minor changes to their writing and heard students say they did not know how to revise their writing. Although the teacher/researcher showed students the rubric used for scoring narrative writing and read examples of quality writing that displayed the traits listed on the rubric, she wondered how well her students actually understood the traits of effective writing. She wondered how involving students in the assessment process might enhance students' understanding of the learning targets along with their understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their writing. In addition, she wondered how student involvement in assessment might provoke students to set goals and revise their writing.

Historically, for instruction and assessment of student writing, the researcher used a writing rubric that included a description of six traits of effective narrative writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions (Education Northwest, 2006). In whole-group mini-lessons, she taught students about these writing traits and how they could apply them, sometimes using models of student writing. When conferring with students and giving them feedback, she referred to these traits and sometimes showed students the rubric when they were at the revision stage of the writing process. After scoring students' final copies of their writing, she showed students their scores for each trait on the rubric. She noticed students showing interest in their writing scores and thought about how the information she was providing students would be more useful if students received it during the draft stage of the writing process and were taught specific ways to act upon the information. If the rubric were used to provide feedback as students were still working on a piece of writing, students would have the opportunity to use the feedback to improve their writing. Furthermore, they might develop a better understanding of the traits of effective writing if they used the rubric themselves throughout the writing process.

If teachers read this study and apply what they learn in their classrooms, many students may benefit from effective formative assessment and feedback. As students participate in creating a rubric, use the rubric to assess their writing, and engage in dialogue with their teacher, their understanding of the learning targets and of their own writing may be enhanced, and they may have opportunities to set goals during the draft stage of writing and improve their writing through revisions they make.

## **Review of Literature**

When students' work is assessed at the end of a unit or project, the assessment is summative. Assessment is formative when it is done while the student is working toward a learning goal and when it informs instruction. While summative assessments are valuable for teachers and parents, teachers must provide students with time for practice and learning along with feedback between summative assessments so students develop the mindset and self-efficacy that is so important for learning (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2012). It is through effective formative assessment and feedback that students can get the information they need so they can learn and improve.

A few decades ago, Bloom (1984) recommended mastery learning and explained that in mastery learning, "Formative tests... are given for purposes of feedback followed by

corrective procedures and by parallel formative tests” (p. 4). His summary of his research on mastery learning showed significantly higher student achievement when assessment was used to support learning not only to check understanding (Bloom, 1984). Twelve years later, Black and Wiliam (1998a) did an extensive research review, seeking evidence that improving formative assessment raises standards and evidence about how to improve formative assessment. After looking through many books and nine years’ issues of more than 160 journals and studying earlier research reviews, they collected over 500 articles to study. While their research was not a meta-analysis, they reviewed several studies based on meta-analyses. They found about 20 studies that conveyed learning gains associated with formative classroom assessment. After comparing the average improvement in test scores of students involved in formative assessment with the range of scores for typical groups of students, they reported gains of a half to a full standard deviation, with the low-achieving students showing the most significant gains (Black & Wiliam, 1998b). According to Stiggins (2007), assessments must be part of instruction, informing students about how they are doing and convincing students they can succeed if they keep working. When assessment and effective feedback are essential parts of day-to-day instruction, teachers can show students they can learn.

When teachers give feedback effectively, students can become more confident and motivated to work because they see themselves growing and learning. Students can see how their work impacts their growth. Through feedback from teachers and parents, students gain information about their progress and also develop their ideas about learning and success. After several decades of research, Dweck (2010, 2006) identified two basic mindsets that determine how a person views learning, effort, and risk-taking. Students with a fixed mindset believe a person’s intelligence is fixed. They value looking smart at all times and feel they are successful when they do not make mistakes. Therefore, when a task is challenging or they make mistakes, they doubt themselves (Dweck, 2006, 2010). These students feel they are not smart if they have to work hard (Dweck, 2010). On the other hand, students with a growth mindset believe intelligence can be developed. They believe they are successful if they are learning, so they strongly value effort and challenge (Dweck, 2006, 2010). A person who has a fixed mindset can develop a growth mindset; according to Dweck (2006), the messages teachers send through their words and actions have the power to impact the mindset of students and their measurable intelligence.

Feedback that focuses on the process, the effort, or the strategy a student used can help students develop a growth mindset (Dweck, 2010; Johnston, 2012). According to Hattie (2009), feedback must not threaten the student at the “self” level; instead, it must be related to the “task, processes, or regulation” (p. 178). When feedback is focused on the processing of a task, students learn about their approach and about how their actions relate to the task’s quality (Brookhart, 2008). Often teachers and parents give children praise such as, “You are so smart!” or “You are talented!” hoping to boost confidence and achievement (Dweck, 2006). However, praise, like criticism, is focused on the person and does not help students develop a growth mindset. Instead, it contributes to the development of a fixed mindset (Johnston, 2012). According to Cauley and McMillan (2010), when teachers attribute students’ achievement to the students’ efforts, students will take more control of their learning. They will be more motivated and will persevere longer when working on challenging tasks. Johnston (2012) suggested using causal statements about the process of a task in the format, “You did this... with this consequence...” to help build a sense of agency in students (p. 42). For example, a teacher might say, “When you added description to the beginning of your story, I could visualize the setting.” If we want students to view experiences through a dynamic-learning frame, we must help students focus on change and process (Johnston, 2012). Feedback focused on efforts involved in students’ achievement rather than person-oriented praise and criticism must be part of ongoing formative assessment in the classroom.

Effective feedback is descriptive, not judgmental, and informs students about how they can improve their work (Brookhart, 2008; Stiggins, 2007; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2012). In order for students to hear description not judgment, teachers need to provide a lot of opportunities for students to practice and get feedback without a grade being attached (Brookhart, 2008). Effective feedback is tied to the learning goals, and it informs students about where they are in relation to learning goals and what they need to do next (Brookhart, 2008; Hattie, 2009; Stiggins, 2007; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2012). Students need to hear feedback while they are still working toward a learning goal so they have an opportunity to use the feedback (Brookhart, 2008). If feedback is given effectively, teachers and students both learn about students' progress toward learning goals (Brookhart, 2008). As a result, they can work together and set goals for further progress.

Although teachers know the importance of formative assessment and feedback, students generally do not receive enough feedback about where they are in relation to learning targets (Hattie, 2009; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). Current assessment practices often focus on grading and levels of proficiency rather than on providing feedback to students about how to improve (Harlen, 2007). Hattie (2009) spent many hours in classrooms and noticed, despite teachers' claims and intentions, little feedback was given; of the feedback he observed, most was related to behavior or social situations. According to Carless (2006), challenges of the feedback process include "time, miscommunication and emotional barriers" (p. 220). What matters most about feedback is that students can understand it and take action as a result (Hattie, 2009). Students need to receive more feedback they can understand, and they need to receive it throughout the learning process so they have opportunities to use the feedback to set goals and improve their work.

Hattie (2009) began to understand feedback more fully when he noticed the most powerful feedback came from *the student*. He saw teaching and learning come together in a powerful way when teachers were receptive to feedback *from students*. This feedback was about what students understood, what they misunderstood, where they made mistakes, and engagement. Stiggins and Chappuis (2012) urged teachers to view students as users of assessment information and important decision-makers in the planning of instruction. In their analysis of the results of ten years of research, they found student-involved formative assessment, or self-assessment, helped students become confident as learners (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005). When teachers invite students to work as partners with them in using assessment for learning, the students quickly begin to see the strong connections between their effort and their achievement; this partnership encourages the students to take risks and work hard (Brookhart, 2008; Stiggins & Chappuis, 2012).

A type of formative assessment, assessment that directly informs instruction, through which students can provide feedback along with teachers is self-assessment. Hattie (2009) encouraged teachers to create a classroom atmosphere that invites students to participate in peer-assessment and self-assessment. Brookhart (2008) suggested teachers lead students in self-assessment activities, giving students opportunities to repeatedly reflect and plan for improvement. Andrade and Valcheva (2009) defined self-assessment as "a process of formative assessment during which students reflect on the quality of their work, judge the degree to which it reflects explicitly stated goals and criteria, and revise accordingly" (p. 13). They described self-assessment as a way for students to determine the strengths and weaknesses of their work so they can make changes and learn.

The teacher/researcher of the present study was interested in student self-efficacy and believed self-assessment might support the development of student self-efficacy in the area of writing. Andrade, Wang, Du, and Akawi (2009) sought to understand the relationship between the use of self-assessment with a rubric, gender, and middle school students' self-efficacy in the area of writing. They used a questionnaire to collect data about long-term use of rubrics,

and they studied short-term use of a rubric through implementation of a treatment involving students examining an exemplar and using a rubric for self-assessment. Results of the study showed an increase in all students' self-efficacy as students completed drafts of writing. The authors found a relationship between rubric use and self-efficacy for girls; however, data did not show a relationship between rubric use and self-efficacy for boys. Despite this finding, the teacher/researcher for the present study believed self-assessment combined with effective feedback and dialogue might enhance the self-efficacy of students of both genders. Through the use of self-assessments, students can see themselves improve and can see what they did to improve, becoming more confident along the way (Stiggins, 2007). They learn that success means improving over time and little by little (Stiggins & Chappuis, 2005).

Self-assessment should be used throughout the learning process on drafts of work (Andrade & Valcheva, 2009). If students use self-assessment to reflect on their drafts of writing, they can make improvements to their writing before the work is given a grade. In addition, the students may become more knowledgeable about the characteristics of effective writing as they participate in self-assessment activities. A study by Andrade and Du (2007) involved interviewing fourteen undergraduate students in a teacher education program and supports the view that the use of rubrics for self-assessment can support students' growth and classroom performance. Formal self-assessment using rubrics was part of each student's educational psychology course and practicum experience. The researchers implemented focus group interviews, and a team of researchers analyzed the data through open discussions and came to a consensus to determine the results. Students felt positive about using rubrics, appreciating the clear expectations the rubrics provided. They felt they knew what was important about the assignments and could identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work. The team found most of the students used the rubrics to plan their work, felt focused because of the rubric, and believed their work improved as a result of knowing what constituted high-quality work. Participants spoke of revising their work and using the rubric for feedback and reflection. The teacher/researcher believed self-assessment using a rubric could help students understand criteria for an assignment and how to take action to improve their work.

Along with self-assessment and rubric use, dialogue between students and their teacher can clarify expectations and learning goals for students. After collecting data from undergraduate students at a teacher education school in Hong Kong through interviews and an open-ended survey, Carless (2006) found differences in students' and staff members' perceptions of assessment and feedback. Statistically significant results indicated that tutors perceived feedback more positively than students did. Students found feedback on drafts much more useful than comments on final assignments, and they suggested meetings with staff for the purpose of feedback. Carless concluded that dialogue between students and teachers is a way for students to gain insight into the assessment process. In addition, he suggested teachers plan activities to support student understanding of assessment criteria. The teacher/researcher for the present study thought activities such as discussing samples of quality writing and leading students in creating a rubric for self-assessment could help students understand criteria for writing assignments.

As students use self-assessment to reflect and set goals, they may make changes to their writing and improve it. A quantitative study by Andrade, Du, and Wang (2008) focused on the effect of students examining a model piece of writing, creating a list of characteristics of the writing, and using a rubric to assess their own drafts of writing. Participants included 116 students in grades three and four. The students wrote either persuasive essays or stories about their families, and six researchers scored the essays using rubrics adapted from the rubrics used in the treatment classrooms. Students in the treatment group discussed a model story or essay, generated a list of characteristics of an effective story or essay, and used a rubric to self-assess their drafts. Students in the comparison group generated a list of characteristics of an effective



story or essay but did not discuss a model story or essay; nor did they self-assess their drafts. The authors found a main effect of treatment on total writing scores and on scores for the criteria on the rubric, including ideas and content, organization, paragraphs, voice, and word choice.

A study by Andrade, Du and Mycek (2010) provided additional evidence that rubric-referenced self-assessment enhances learning in the classroom. Results of the quantitative study showed a significant difference between the writing scores of middle school students using self-assessment and the scores of students not using self-assessment. The analysis of the writing of the 162 middle-school students suggested that using a model of writing, creating a list of criteria, and using a rubric for self-assessment was helpful for the production of effective persuasive essays.

When students participate in self-assessment or self-regulation, they take ownership of their learning. Zumbrunn and Bruning (2012) investigated the effects of implementation of self-regulation strategy instruction on first graders' writing and knowledge of writing. The lead author worked with students in groups of two on self-regulation, teaching them how to plan and write a story, monitor their writing, and set goals for their writing. During the baseline and post-instruction phases of the study, a research assistant conducted interviews with the students to qualitatively examine students' writing knowledge. The students wrote stories in response to picture prompts during all four phases: baseline, instruction, post-instruction, and maintenance. Assessment of the stories included examining quality, length, and completeness of the writing. Results showed that teaching first-grade students strategies for self-regulation benefited the first-grade writers. After implementation of self-regulation instruction, students' stories were of higher quality, were longer, and were more complete, containing more story elements. In addition, all students made gains in their knowledge about writing as shown by their more detailed and complete post-instruction interview responses. This study supported the teacher/researcher's view that student writing and knowledge of writing improves when students monitor their writing and set goals.

In a classroom where self-assessment is used effectively, students work to understand what it means to be reaching the learning targets (Stiggins, 2007). They learn to provide descriptive feedback to themselves and use assessments to set their next goals (Stiggins, 2007). Through self-assessment, combined with conferring or dialogue with the teacher, the students and teacher can work as a team to provide feedback and set goals.

One-on-one conferences and conversations with students are ideal opportunities for feedback and goal-setting. After giving effective feedback, a teacher needs to help students learn how to decide the next steps in their learning; one can elicit feedback from students by asking questions such as, "What are you noticing about this?" and "Does anything surprise you?" (Brookhart, 2008, p. 15). Johnston (2004) suggested questions such as, "How did you figure that out?" and "What problems did you come across today?" (pp. 31-32). If teachers are using a rubric for assessment, students can use the rubric as a guide to assess their own writing and set goals. When teachers hold conversations and writing conferences with students, feedback provided through discussion of self-assessments can be used to help students and teachers work together to set goals for the students' writing improvement. After reviewing the literature, it is clear there is a need for effective feedback throughout the writing process and for student involvement in the assessment process and in provision of feedback. There is a need for students to understand the criteria for writing assignments and to have opportunities to use a rubric and feedback as they are drafting and revising their writing.

In a few of the existing studies (Andrade et al., 2008; Andrade et al., 2009; Andrade et al., 2010), students were involved in creating a rubric for self-assessment of writing. Students examined an exemplar piece of writing, made a list of characteristics of the writing, and then used a rubric to assess their own writing. The researcher for the present study saw a need for

students to examine multiple pieces of quality writing and then create a rubric in their own words. She noticed, when her students examined multiple pieces of quality writing, they gave more detailed descriptions of the writing. Many rubrics are written in teachers' words, not the students' words. According to Carless (2006), students might not understand the academic language used by teachers. In addition, the teacher/researcher believed, if she required students to provide evidence of their thinking on the rubric, the students might reflect more on their writing. The student-written evidence might provide feedback for the student and the teacher, spurring conversation and goal-setting.

In reviewing the literature, the teacher/researcher saw a need for students to meet with the teacher for one-on-one writing conferences to set goals after using the rubric for self-assessment (Brookhart, 2008; Carless, 2006; Zumbunn & Bruning, 2012). The researcher wanted to study how self-assessment of writing combined with rubric development and dialogue with the teacher might promote students' understanding of learning targets and strengths and weaknesses of their own writing along with goal-setting and revision of writing.

In the study by Andrade and Du (2007), the participants who were undergraduate students felt that self-assessment with a rubric enhanced their understanding of criteria and the strengths and weaknesses of their work. They saw the rubric as a tool for reflection and feedback and spoke about revising their work after participating in self-assessment. The teacher/researcher wondered if results would be similar for fifth-grade students.

## **Methods**

According to Creswell (2009), a qualitative researcher explores a topic and asks broad questions so that participants can describe their thoughts. In a multi-case study, the researcher focuses on one topic and uses more than one case study to convey the topic (Creswell, 2009). The researcher/teacher participant in this study chose to use a multi-case study approach, studying three fifth-grade writers, to explore how student self-assessment of writing would enhance fifth grade students' understanding of learning targets and their ability to generate feedback, set goals, and revise their writing. She also aimed to explore how her own perception of student self-assessment would change throughout implementation of the instructional strategy.

Before beginning the study, the researcher obtained approval for the research from a university's Institutional Review Board and the school district in which the study took place. The study took place at an elementary school in a Midwestern city. The school serves 755 students in kindergarten through fifth grade and 54 students in the district's early childhood program. Three students were chosen from the researcher's fifth grade classroom to participate in the study. Because the study was conducted during the first semester of the school year, the researcher chose students randomly from her fifth grade classroom. Students who received special education services for written language were not included as potential participants because they were not present in the regular classroom during parts of the implementation of the instructional strategy under investigation. The students chosen were ten and eleven years old at the time of the study.

This multi-case study was conducted during a 10-week time period during daily writing instruction and practice time in the classroom. Data for the study was collected through semi-structured interviews, recorded one-on-one conference sessions, students' revised drafts of writing, and teacher reflections.

At the beginning of the study and at the conclusion of the study, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with each participant to determine if rubric development, self-assessment, and dialogue enhanced students' understanding of the learning targets for narrative writing and understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their writing

in relation to the learning targets. The researcher chose to use interviews because this type of data collection allows the researcher to use specific questions that will be helpful in exploring the topic under investigation (Creswell, 2009). The researcher recorded the interviews and transcribed them so she could use the student participants' views, thoughts, and exact words as a source of data. Interview questions included:

1. Think about really good stories you or other students have written. What do you think makes those stories really good?
2. What do you think writers who write really good stories *do* when they write?
3. How do you think your writing compares to a really good story?
4. What do you think you do best in your writing?
5. What do you think you need to improve in your writing?
6. In order to make your stories better, what do you think you need to do?

During writing time in the classroom, students wrote personal narratives. They examined exemplar pieces of narrative writing and listened to stories their classmates had written, discussing what they noticed about the writing. After examining and listening to examples of effective narrative writing, the students listed characteristics of the writing using the six writing traits as headings to organize the characteristics (Education Northwest, 2006). The teacher/researcher then transferred these characteristics generated by the students to a document the students could use to assess their writing. The teacher/researcher designed this document as a rubric with a section for each writing trait. In each section, the researcher listed the writing trait characteristics generated by the students and provided a place for students to circle "Outstanding," "Good," "Getting there," and "A lot of work to do" and a place for students to write their reasoning and evidence from their stories.

Before students assessed their own writing using the rubric, the students and teacher/researcher read an exemplar narrative, and the teacher/researcher modeled using the rubric to assess the writing. The researcher and students referred to the student-generated list of characteristics for each writing trait on the rubric and found evidence in the exemplar narrative to support the conclusions they made about the ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions of the writing.

Students chose one of their own narratives to assess using the rubric, and they spent 20-35 minutes rereading their narratives, deciding how they were doing applying the traits of effective narrative writing, and writing evidence for their decisions. During one-on-one writing conferences with the researcher, each student talked about his or her self-assessment, set a goal for improving his or her narrative writing, and decided how he or she would reach the goal. After each student revised his or her narrative, he or she wrote another personal narrative, used the rubric for self-assessment a second time, and met with the teacher to set a goal for improvement and to decide how to reach that goal. The researcher collected the student participants' narrative drafts of writing before and after the students made revisions so she could analyze the revisions students made in their writing after they participated in self-assessment. In addition, the researcher collected the rubrics on which the students recorded their thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of their writing and evidence of the traits along with goals they set and how they thought they would achieve those goals. These documents were used so the researcher could obtain thoughts of the participants and evidence of the participants' work.

The researcher recorded the conferences held with the student participants and transcribed the recordings so the students' words and thoughts could be analyzed. Observational notes were used as a data source because the researcher had the opportunity to see student learner behaviors and hear students' comments and questions during daily Writers'

Workshop throughout the duration of the study. Observations allow the researcher to have a “first-hand experience” with participants and to “record information as it occurs” (Creswell, 2009, p. 179).

In order to protect confidentiality of the participants, the researcher assigned each participant a number and kept one list aligning the student names with numbers on a password-protected computer. The researcher used these numbers as the only identifiers on all data collected and deleted the list aligning names with numbers at the conclusion of the study. The researcher further protected confidentiality of the participants by meeting with all students, both participants and non-participants, in four one-on-one writing conference sessions throughout the duration of the study. The writing conferences with participants and non-participants and the interviews with the participants took place at a table in the classroom that was used regularly for one-on-one conference sessions with all students for math, reading, and writing.

According to Creswell (2009), qualitative data analysis occurs at the same time as data collection as the researcher continually reflects on the data and asks questions. To analyze the data for this study, the researcher wrote memos during and after interviews and conferences with student participants, while transcribing the audio recordings, and after making observations of students’ learning behaviors and students’ work. In a journal, the researcher kept memos related to observations of each student. For example, after a conference with one student, the researcher wrote, “He looked at the specific words on the rubric (thoughts, action, dialogue, description) when he was describing how his writing showed the trait of ideas. He said, *I kind of have dialogue*, and gave an example from his writing.”

Data collected was open-ended as the researcher did not know what types of learning behaviors students would show. For example, the researcher did not expect to observe and take notes on student engagement and participation during discussions of writing or to record comments student participants made during other parts of the day.

During and after collection of multiple forms of data including reflective notes, the researcher analyzed the data by looking for themes. She read through all the data and followed Creswell’s (2009) suggestions of thinking about the general meaning of the data and writing notes to record her thinking. She then made a list of topics and coded the data according to these topics. After turning the topics into categories and organizing the data according to the categories, the researcher described in detail the student participants and the categories and themes that emerged.

To check for consistency, the researcher wrote memos about the meanings of the codes and constantly compared data with the codes (Creswell, 2009). To establish trustworthiness, she triangulated the data, examining information from the various data sources and establishing themes by putting together information from all the sources (Creswell, 2009). Each piece of data informed the other sources, and the convergence of information from the data sources increases trustworthiness. When describing the themes, the researcher used sufficient detail and included the student participants’ perspectives along with her own perspectives. After writing rich descriptions of the participants and themes, she read these descriptions to the student participants, asking if the participants felt the descriptions were accurate and asking if they had any comments. All participants felt the descriptions were accurate.

## Findings

The findings of this study are reported by the writing progress of three fifth-grade students. Pseudonyms are used in place of the participants’ names.

## Noah

Noah was 11 years old at the time of the study and lived with his parents and an older brother. He and his family were white and attended a Christian church. He enjoyed playing and watching football and going on vacations with his family. Noah's parents frequently attended school events such as classroom presentations and holiday parties. During classroom instruction, Noah listened attentively and often participated in discussions. He learned new concepts quickly and enjoyed talking with his peers and teachers. His standardized test scores showed above-average and advanced achievement. Noah always had a good book to read and seemed to enjoy writing; he usually started working right away during writing time, asked questions about his writing, and frequently volunteered to share his writing with the class. During the study, Noah wrote more stories than most students. He liked to share with the class about basketball tournaments in which he played and places his family visited such as a state fair and a professional basketball game.

At the beginning of the study, when asked about the characteristics of quality narrative writing, Noah stated that writers "write seed stories," "go back and remember what they did," stay on topic, and think of a lot of detail. At the end of the study, Noah told about the importance of planning stories with plot diagrams, using details including dialogue, writing a good beginning to hook readers, and writing a good ending. He said a good story has sentences that flow and has voice, defining voice as writing how one would talk.

When asked about the strengths of his own writing, at the beginning of the study, Noah said he used a lot of detail. For areas to improve, he believed he sometimes lost focus, needed to improve his knowledge of where to use punctuation, and possibly needed to make his stories more interesting and clearer to other people. At the end of the study, Noah said he uses some details that are "pretty good" and uses explanations. For areas he thought he could improve, he mentioned sentence fluency and conventions. He thought his writing sometimes sounded choppy because he sometimes did not vary his sentence beginnings. In addition, he said he needs to place end punctuation correctly.

**Self-Assessment and Writing Conferences.** At the beginning of the study, Noah wrote a personal narrative called "The River Raft" (See Table 1). On his self-assessment of this story, Noah rated his writing "good" on three writing traits: ideas, word choice, and conventions. He thought he stayed on topic, included action, used action words, and did "all right" using punctuation and capitalization. Noah thought his writing was "getting there" in the areas of organization, voice, and sentence fluency. He believed he needed to improve his lead and conclusion and needed to help the reader get to know him better. In addition, Noah wrote that his writing was "kind of choppy." He set a goal of making his story sound smoother and wrote that he could reach his goal by varying the ways he started his sentences.

Writing Traits	Noah's Self-Assessment			Teacher/Researcher's Assessment		
	"Getting There"	"Good"	"Outstanding"	Approaching Proficiency	Proficient	Proficient with Distinction
Ideas		I didn't get off topic, and I had action when we went fast and hit the waves.			He described the sights and included action.	
Organization	I didn't really say,			Beginning: "When did	After revision, the	

	do, or realize something at the end. At the beginning, I didn't give a clue about the problem.			you figure out it was a roller coaster?" Ending: "Did you get to go again?"	lead and ending were improved.	
Voice	I need to improve so you get to know the person.			He included his thinking at the end; he needs to include more of his thoughts.		
Word Choice		I had some action words.			Action words: spinning, spraying, dropped. Describing words: soaked, dripping	
Sentence Fluency	My writing was kind of choppy.			Sentences starting with "So" and "And," choppiness, and run-on sentences		
Conventions		My punctuation and capitalization are all right.		Spelling is mostly correct. Some punctuation and grammar errors.		

Before meeting with me, Noah independently made some changes to his story in order to improve the sentence fluency. He took out "So" at the beginning of a couple sentences, and he replaced "And" with "Finally" at the beginning of a sentence. In addition, he added a couple more details to appeal to the reader's sense of sight such as, "...and the water would come in the cart," and "I was dripping." Although Noah's goal was to improve sentence fluency, we both noticed the beginning and ending of his story needed improvement. Therefore, I chose the area of organization for the focus of a writing conference with him.

In a writing conference, Noah read his story, "The River Raft," and we talked about how we enjoy water rides. I noticed he improved his sentence fluency and pointed out places where he revised his writing. I told him the details he added helped me picture what was happening. I shared with Noah a question I had when I read the beginning; I wondered exactly when he and his friends figured out the ride was not just bumper boats but was a roller coaster. He decided to add details to that part, writing, "Then we heard the rushing water and saw the big round raft." Next, we reread the ending of the story. Noah had written, "The rest of the day, we kept asking if we could go on it again," and I told him the reader might wonder whether he and his friends went on the ride again or what they did the rest of the day. He decided to

take out his last sentence, “And that is my story about the river raft,” and write about how he and his friends spent the remainder of the day.

Noah wrote another personal narrative after he was injured with a concussion while playing football. In his narrative called “The Story about My Concussion,” he started his story with action, used some dialogue, and chose action words well. The beginning of Noah’s story was, “Break! The offense was coming up to the line of scrimmage. I got down in my defensive stance. The quarterback got down and shouted out, *Down Set Hut!* I took off, but I didn’t have to go far. The play came right to me. The running back lowered his head, and I went in for the tackle. Crack!” The day after Noah wrote this story I asked for volunteers to share their stories, and Noah raised his hand right away.

I had a conference with Noah after he had written the story about his concussion. After he read his story, I commented, “This just seems so real. I kind of felt like I was playing football... like I was you,” pointing out specific descriptive words and phrases Noah used and explaining the effect these words had on me. For example, I said, “I could especially picture that part.” The next question in the conference was about strengths and weaknesses Noah saw in his writing. Noah expressed that he did a lot of describing at the beginning of the story but did not do enough describing toward the end. I agreed with him and asked, “How do you think you could make the second half of your story descriptive, too?” He replied, “I could put more detail and think back more to what exactly happened.”

A few days after this writing conference, students were asked to write a story with a predator/prey relationship for a science assignment. Noah started thinking and writing immediately. The following week, when students came up with story ideas during an author’s visit, Noah volunteered to share his story idea.

After Noah finished writing and revising his story about the concussion, he wrote a personal narrative he called “The Time I Was on KSFY.” After Noah drafted the story, we met for a writing conference. Noah said his goal was to make his story sound better and smoother, and, to accomplish his goal, he was trying to start sentences in various ways. Noah thought he used description well and showed me places in his story where he used description. Using the self-assessment form we created as a reference, I asked Noah if he thought he included any thoughts, action, or dialogue along with his description. He found a part of his story where he included some dialogue and a part where he included his thoughts. I told Noah, “When you tell what you’re thinking, that helps the voice in your story because the reader gets to know you.” Noah was concerned because he had two sentences starting with the word, “When.” I told him that his use of introductory clauses at the beginning of his sentences helped his writing sound more fluent. Since he had two long sentences in a row, we found a way he could break one of the sentences into two sentences.

Noah’s self-assessment for his story, “The Time I Was on KSFY,” showed he thought his writing had improved (See Table 2). He rated his writing “good” in four areas: ideas, organization, sentence fluency, and conventions and “outstanding” in two areas: voice and word choice. In the evidence section of this self-assessment, Noah wrote that he included dialogue, descriptive words, and action and that he appealed to the reader’s sense of taste. He wrote that in his story he showed how he felt so the readers could get to know him. According to Noah, he started sentences in various ways and used various sentence lengths. He set a goal of placing punctuation correctly in his story.

	Noah’s Self-Assessment			Teacher/Researcher’s Assessment		
Writing Traits	“Getting There”	“Good”	“Outstanding”	Approaching Proficiency	Proficient	Proficient with Distinction

Ideas		You could taste the candy, and I had dialogue.			He included description, thoughts, action, and dialogue.	
Organization		The order makes sense, and I didn't get off topic. I say something at the end.			The order made sense. His lead showed what was happening and where; his ending included him thinking and saying something.	
Voice			It showed how the characters felt, and you got to know me.		He included thoughts and feelings.	
Word Choice			I used descriptive words and action.		Specific nouns, verbs, and adjectives: laughing, recognized, texted, replied, mentioned, hope surprised, full-size Skittles, a "star"	
Sentence Fluency		I started sentences in different ways and had different lengths of sentences.		Close to proficiency: Variety of sentence lengths but a few run-on sentences.		
Conventions		My capitalization and spelling were correct.		Close to proficiency: Some capitalization and punctuation errors		

After Noah typed his KSFY story using his Chromebook, I met with him for another writing conference. He read the story and his self-assessment to me, and I commented on how fun it must have been to be on TV. Noah's story sounded smoother than "The River Raft" because he had used a variety of sentence lengths and sentence beginnings. When I asked Noah what he thought he did really well, he said "description" and pointed out some descriptive



words and phrases he used. When I asked him what he would like to improve, he said, “I have some really long sentences.” I, too, had noticed a few run-on sentences when Noah read his story, so I asked him to reread his story and find places where he needed end punctuation. He found the run-ons and said he wanted to fix them. He also noticed a place in the story where he wanted to take out the word “Then” because he had started the previous sentence with “Then.” Since I had noticed capitalization errors, I asked Noah to identify some words he needed to capitalize. I also helped him fix an error in grammar.

**Writing Progress.** Throughout the study, I saw improvement in Noah’s writing especially in the areas of organization and voice. In addition, I saw similarities when comparing my assessments and Noah’s self-assessments. In his story, “The River Raft,” Noah and I both thought ideas and word choice were areas of proficiency. We agreed that organization, voice, and sentence fluency were approaching proficiency. The only areas where my scores and Noah’s self-assessment did not match was the area of conventions; Noah thought his conventions were “good,” and I thought this area needed improvement. After Noah and I met and after he made revisions to his story, I found his writing showed proficiency in organization. For the story, “The Time I Was on KSFY,” Noah scored his writing slightly higher than I scored it. We both thought his writing was proficient in the areas of ideas and organization. While he believed it was outstanding in the areas of voice and word choice, I found it to be proficient in those areas. For sentence fluency and conventions, Noah thought his writing was good, and I found it to be close to proficient.

## Alex

Alex was 10 years old and white, the older of two boys in his Christian family. Alex’s parents showed interest in his academic progress, asking at the beginning of the year about his reading skills. His parents expected him to read regularly at home and helped him find appropriate books for independent reading. Although Alex was able to read at a slightly above-average level, he often chose books that were quite easy for him to read. His parents wanted him to read more challenging books. They wanted Alex to bring home word work and math work so he could practice those skills at home. Alex listened well during classroom instruction and often participated in discussions.

When interviewed at the beginning of the study, Alex described good stories as ones that include the following: punctuation, neatness, good words, and good sentences. He explained using good words by saying, “like the way you think you’d talk.” Alex said writers of really good stories brainstorm, write on scratch paper, and then add punctuation and check if they missed any words. In the concluding interview, Alex named several characteristics of quality narrative writing. He said the stories had correct punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. He said good stories sound fluent, not choppy, and events are all in order, not mixed up. In addition, he said the writing had good voice meaning it sounded like the writer was actually speaking, and he said the person reading the story could imagine what is happening in the story, hear the sounds, and smell the smells. Alex said the writer used his or her imagination and remembered what happened. After the writer wrote the story, he or she fixed mistakes.

At the beginning of the study, Alex said the strengths of his own story-writing were brainstorming and going back and checking punctuation and spelling. Alex thought he could improve his writing by using good handwriting, more punctuation, and a variety of punctuation. In the concluding interview, when Alex was asked about the strengths of his story-writing, he said people could hear the sounds, smell the smells, and see what happened and what he did. He said, “They (the readers) could imagine.” He thought his greatest strength as a writer was remembering what happened and remembering most of the details. Alex thought he could

improve his stories by imagining more, making his stories longer, and including more thoughts. He also said he needed to fix his stories by adding punctuation.

**Self-Assessment and Writing Conferences.** Before the start of the study, Alex had drafted two personal narratives, one about being at Hollywood Studios and one about a New Year’s Eve party. At the time the study began, Alex had drafted a third narrative called “The Time I Went Tubing.” He completed a self-assessment of this piece (See Table 3). He thought he did well in all areas, circling “Good” on the rubric for the traits of Ideas, Organization, and Conventions and circling “Outstanding” for the traits of Voice, Word Choice, and Sentence Fluency. For evidence, he wrote that he described the setting of the beach and described how he skipped over the water. He thought that writing, “It was a slow ride at first, but then it got faster, faster,” was evidence of outstanding voice and thought writing, “The lake spit me back out,” was evidence of outstanding word choice. He noted that some of his sentences were long and some short and said he used correct capitalization.

Writing Traits	Alex’s Self-Assessment			Teacher/Researcher Assessment		
	“Getting There”	“Good”	“Outstanding”	Approaching Proficiency	Proficient	Proficient with Distinction
Ideas		“I described the setting of the beach.”			He included a lot of details, describing the sights and sounds.	
Organization		“I described how it felt when I skipped over the water once.”		Details are in order. Ending partially connects to the main part of the story.	After he revised the ending, the organization was proficient.	
Voice			“When we started out slow and got faster and faster and the Jet Ski took off.”	He needs to reveal his thoughts and feelings.	Voice was proficient after he improved the ending.	
Word Choice			“I described how I felt like the lake spit me out.”		He used figurative language and active verbs: crashing, just-right, screaming at the top of our lungs.	
Sentence Fluency			“How some of my sentences were long and short.”	A lot of short sentences; writing sounds choppy in some places.		
Conventions		“I did not have		End punctuation		

		capitalization wrong.”		is missing in many places.		
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When I read Alex’s story, I noticed he included a lot of details and wrote those details in order. I could tell he thought back and remembered the experience and described the sights and sounds so the reader could experience the story. I noticed he did not reveal how he was feeling or what he was thinking, so I thought voice could be improved. His ending only partially connected to the main part of the story. The story was about him going tubing, and in the ending, he just said that he gave his life jacket to his other cousin who then went on the Jet Ski. I felt Alex needed to show why this story was important to him. I thought if I asked him to tell me about the importance of the story, he and I might be able to think of how he could improve the ending. In addition, I noticed many places where the end punctuation was missing, and at the beginning of the story, he had a lot of short sentences, so the writing sounded choppy.

When I met with Alex for a writing conference, first he read his story to me. I responded to his figurative language by laughing and saying, “Wow,” and asked if he had gone tubing recently. I told Alex he seemed to remember a lot of the details of the experience and told him I could picture it and felt like I was there. I asked him what he thought he did in his writing that caused me to feel like I was there, and he pointed out four descriptive phrases that he used. I pointed out the phrases “waves were crashing” and “We were screaming at the top of our lungs” and told him those phrases helped me hear what was happening. I also pointed out that he did something I have seen other authors do. He wrote, “... then it got faster, faster...” and I told him that the repetition of that word might help the reader experience the story, too. I asked Alex what he wanted to do next in his story and how he thought he could improve it. He said he wanted to spell more words correctly and told me a couple words he had spelled incorrectly. After acknowledging his goal, I asked him if he was happy with his ending because improving his ending would improve the organization and voice of his writing. After he said, “Not really,” I suggested he end his story by showing the reader why it was an important story to him. When I asked him what was important about his story, he said, “I was there with my family.” Alex decided to improve his story ending by showing the reader why this was an important story to him.

After the conference with Alex, I thought about how the other students, like Alex, might need more instruction in writing endings for their stories. In addition, I thought about how Alex probably would not have set the goal of improving the ending of his story if I had not talked with him about how his ending needed improvement.

The day after the writing conference, Alex volunteered to share his story with the class. A few days later, when an author visited our classroom, Alex raised his hand and asked the author whether he could use words or phrases another author used. He had used figurative language in his story after seeing figurative language in his book. When the author had the students think of story ideas and then asked if anyone wanted to share his or her idea, Alex volunteered to share his.

The next personal narrative Alex wrote was “The Basketball Championship Game” (See Table 4). According to Alex, the ideas, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions were “good” and the voice and organization “outstanding.” On his self-assessment, Alex explained that he wrote about the “beep” of the whistle and about shaking his head when he looked at the scoreboard. In the voice and organization sections of his self-assessment, Alex provided evidence of voice. For evidence of good word choice, Alex wrote, “I said, *The unspeakable happened.*” He thought his sentences were smooth and his spelling, capitalization, and punctuation correct. However, a goal Alex wrote before meeting with me was to improve the conventions of his writing.

<b>Table 4.</b> Alex's Self-Assessment and Teacher/Researcher's Assessment of "The Basketball Championship Game"						
	Alex's Self-Assessment			Teacher/Researcher Assessment		
Writing Traits	"Getting There"	"Good"	"Outstanding"	Approaching Proficiency	Proficient	Proficient with Distinction
Ideas		I wrote, "The beep of the whistle blew for the game to start."		I wonder why this story was important to him.	After he revised the ending, Ideas was proficient.	
Organization			I explained when I shook my head when I looked at the scoreboard.	Ending needs improvement.	After he revised the ending, Organization was proficient.	
Voice			I said how I felt when the game was over.		He wrote, "I looked at the scoreboard, and I shook my head."	
Word Choice		I said, "The unspeakable happened," and used descriptive words.			He wrote, "The unspeakable happened," and the words, "drives" and "possession."	
Sentence Fluency		My sentences were smooth.		He had some variety of sentence lengths and beginnings. He had some run-on sentences and several short sentences in a row.		
Conventions		My spelling, capitalization, and punctuation were correct.		Spelling is good. I found capitalization errors, and end punctuation is missing in many places.		

When I read Alex's draft, I noticed strong word choice and evidence of voice. Examples of strong word choice were, "The unspeakable happened" and the words, "drives" and "possession." Evidence of strong voice was, "I looked at the scoreboard, and I shook my head." Like his story about tubing, this story was missing some meaning; I wondered why the story was important to Alex. I thought Alex could improve the ideas, organization, and voice of his story by writing an ending that showed the importance of the story. In addition, I thought

he needed to improve sentence fluency and conventions by including punctuation and capitalization.

When I met with Alex for a writing conference, he read his story, “The Basketball Championship Game” aloud to me and explained his self-assessment. He thought he did well in the area of ideas because he remembered what he did and how the game happened and included action. To give an example, he read a part of his story that included action. During the conference, Alex told me more than what he wrote on the self-assessment form. He included few details in his explanation on the self-assessment; however, when asked to explain his reasoning, he did. I asked Alex a question because I was confused during one part of the story. Then I asked him how he thought he could improve his story ending. With some prompting from me, Alex decided to explain at the end of his story how he felt when the game was over. Finally, I asked Alex to reread part of his story that was missing some end punctuation. He was able to identify where he needed punctuation, so I told him to reread the whole story on his own and add punctuation. After the writing conference, Alex added a two-sentence conclusion that explained feelings he had about the game and added end punctuation in a few places.

**Writing Progress.** The writing trait of word choice was a strength in Alex’s writing, and the trait of voice improved throughout the study. When Alex made revisions to his story-endings after our writing conferences, his writing improved in the areas of ideas, organization, and voice because he included his thoughts, helped the reader see the significance of his stories, and revealed his personality.

In Alex’s first story, his writing was proficient in the areas of ideas and word choice and, after revisions, in the areas of organization and voice. Sentence fluency and conventions needed improvement because end punctuation was missing in many places. According to Alex, his writing was “good” in the areas of ideas, organization, and conventions and “outstanding” in the areas of voice, word choice, and sentence fluency.

After Alex revised his story about the basketball game, his writing showed proficiency in ideas, organization, voice, and word choice and again needed improvement in sentence fluency and conventions. Since Alex’s sentences varied in length and structure during parts of his stories, some parts could be read aloud easily. According to Alex, the ideas, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions were “good,” and the organization and voice were “outstanding.” The evidence Alex provided for “outstanding organization” was evidence of ideas and voice, not of organization. Although Alex set a goal of improving his conventions and could identify places that needed end punctuation, he did not include all the necessary end punctuation independently.

## **Megan**

Megan was 10 at the time of the study and lived with her parents. She was white and attended a Christian church. She did not have any siblings. Megan enjoyed school and was excited about participating in a girls’ fitness and self-esteem program, band, and the crossing guard program in fifth grade. On standardized test, Megan performed in the above-average and advanced ranges. She showed excitement about reading and writing, telling me about the fantasy series she was reading with her dad and about fantasy stories she liked to write.

At the beginning of the study, Megan described good stories as ones that are descriptive and create a picture in the reader’s mind. She said good stories make the reader think but do not confuse the reader. According to Megan, writers of personal narratives think back to the experience, try and recall every little detail, and write about it. At the end of the study, Megan said good stories have a lot of detail and appeal to the reader’s senses. She said people can picture the stories because of the detail and the way the author describes what something looks

like, where it is, and what is happening. She gave an example, telling me, “Instead of saying *I saw a wolf*, I might say, *I saw a white wolf with blue eyes standing at the top of a cliff. It looked down at me and looked as if it was shaking its head, and its fur was blowing in the wind.*” In addition, Megan said good stories sound fluent, not choppy. When asked what writers of personal narratives do, Megan replied that they think about what might happen in the story before they write it down.

When asked about strengths of her writing at the beginning of the study, Megan said she is really good at writing fiction but not as good at writing nonfiction. When asked about areas she thinks she needs to improve, she said she could make her writing more descriptive. She said, “Sometimes I can get a picture in my head, but I’m not sure about other people when they read it.” She thought she might need to think back more about the experience and also use neater handwriting. At the end of the study, Megan believed her writing strengths were giving really good details, describing really well, and using good voice. She said the readers get to know her. She thought she needed to improve sentence fluency by making some sentences short and others long.

**Self-Assessment and Writing Conferences.** One of the first personal narratives Megan wrote was about a time she was playing at a playground and her dog ran away from her. She called her story “The Chase” (See Table 5). When I read Megan’s story, I noticed details and description including thoughts, action, and some dialogue. Her organization needed some improvement as she elaborated on some insignificant events during the first part of her story. Her elaboration and word choice was very good in the most important part of the story, and her voice was strong. The words Megan used to describe her thoughts, feelings, and actions in the important part of the story revealed her personality and feelings about not wanting to disappoint her mom. Sentence fluency could be improved and word choice could be improved at the beginning of the story. Megan attempted using figurative language; however the choice of simile did not seem to fit where it was used.

Writing Traits	Megan’s Self-Assessment			Teacher/Researcher Assessment		
	“Getting There”	“Good”	“Outstanding”	Approaching Proficiency	Proficient	Proficient with Distinction
Ideas		I wrote, “Mom, I’m gonna play...” I described lots of things with detail, and I kept on topic.			Details and description, including thoughts, action, and dialogue	
Organization		I described how I felt in the lead of the story. I’m descriptive at the end: “I had to tackle him...”		Elaborated on insignificant events		
Voice			I’m describing how I feel: “I		Described her thoughts, feelings, and	

			was crying at the thought..."		actions, revealing her personality	
Word Choice		"I was running in boots..." "woosh"			Used active verbs descriptive words and phrases; attempted figurative language.	
Sentence Fluency	I put words that make sense in one sentence. I have variety. I try to make my sentences start in different ways.			Several sentences start with "And," and she has some run-on sentences.		
Conventions		Capital letters, punctuation good, and I try to spell correct.			Spelling generally correct; basic punctuation and capitalization correct	

In Megan's self-assessment, she felt good about the writing traits of ideas, organization, word choice, and conventions. She felt she did outstanding work in the area of voice and felt that her sentence fluency was close to being good. She noted the description she used, especially at the end of the story, and provided evidence that her writing revealed her feelings. In the evidence section of the self-assessment form, she wrote specific words and phrases that showed strong word choice and voice. She shared that she tried to make her sentences start in different ways and that her capitalization, punctuation, and spelling were good. For a goal, Megan wrote she wanted to try to start her sentences with a variety of words.

In a writing conference, Megan read me her story, "The Chase." After listening to her story, I told her, "I could tell how you felt!" and asked, "Why do you think I could tell how you felt?" Megan's response was, "Because I was really descriptive." I wanted to know if Megan could identify specific phrases that showed strong voice, so I asked, "Can you find a sentence that showed how you felt?" She identified one, and then I pointed out another one: "I started running after him in boots even though my mom says to only run in sneakers." When asked what she was working on at the time to improve her story, Megan said, "I've been revising." She said that at first she had just added an exclamation mark. Then, after looking at some examples of stories and participating in a class discussion about sentence fluency, she had started working on making her writing more fluent. She had taken out the word "So" at the beginning of some sentences. I asked Megan to reread her story so we could listen to the sentence fluency, and we decided on a couple more changes that would make the writing sound smoother. The day following our conference, Megan asked if she could share her story with the class.

About a week after Megan's writing conference about her story, "The Chase," the students had the opportunity to write a "Spooky Story" for a contest sponsored by the city

library. Megan chose to write a story for this contest and went to the library to read her story aloud.

The next story Megan wrote was about a scary experience she had—getting her teeth pulled at the dentist’s office (See Table 6). Megan’s story contained a lot of description and details including thoughts, action, and dialogue. She appealed to the reader’s senses by using specific nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs, and she used similes that seemed like they belonged in the story. Megan’s story was more organized than her other stories; in her introduction, she described the setting and gave the reader a clue about the main problem in the story, and she elaborated at the most important parts of the story. Although Megan included her personal feelings at the end of the story, I thought her ending could be improved. Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling were mostly correct, and her sentence fluency was very good compared to her other stories; she had varied her sentence beginnings and sentence lengths.

<b>Table 6.</b> Megan’s Self-Assessment and Teacher/Researcher’s Assessment of “When I Got My Teeth Pulled”						
Writing Traits	Megan’s Self-Assessment			Teacher/Researcher Assessment		
	“Getting There”	“Good”	“Outstanding”	Approaching Proficiency	Proficient	Proficient with Distinction
Ideas		I thought of every detail and put it in my story in a way that made sense			Much description and details including thoughts, action, and dialogue. Uses humor.	
Organization		I started my story by telling about my day at school. I ended my story by saying how I felt to have my teeth out.			Lead set the scene for the main problem. Elaboration in the most important part.	
Voice		I said how the laughing gas tasted and how I felt.			Reveals thoughts and personality through dialogue and description such as, “Why didn’t you tell me...”	
Word Choice		I described how I felt at the dentist and what it felt like to get the shots.			Used precise nouns and active verbs; effective use of figurative language.	
Sentence Fluency		I started some sentences in different ways and made some			The writing flows; variety of sentence lengths and beginnings.	



		short and some long.				
Conventions		I put the right punctuation marks where they need to go. I capitalized what I needed to capitalize.			Punctuation, capitalization, and spelling mostly correct	

When Megan completed the self-assessment, she felt her writing was between “good” and “outstanding” in the areas of ideas, organization, voice, and word choice and felt her sentence fluency and conventions were “good.” On the self-assessment form, she included evidence of the writing traits in her story. For example, she wrote, “I said how the laughing gas tasted and how I felt.” Megan thought she did well thinking of every detail, including her thoughts and feelings so the reader could hear her voice, and writing a beginning and ending for her story. For evidence of sentence fluency, Megan wrote that she started her sentences in different ways and made some sentences short and some long.

After Megan wrote her story and completed the self-assessment, she said to me, “I want to read my story to you!” In a writing conference, she said she was working on sentence fluency by starting sentences in a variety of ways, and she read her story to me. I responded to her story by saying, “That was so fun to listen to! I could see the story in my head, and I felt like I could feel what you were feeling!” When I asked Megan what she thought she did really well, she said she was really descriptive especially in certain parts of the story and included how she thought and felt. Together, we found specific words and phrases she used that helped create a picture and found places where she included her thoughts and feelings. Megan was not sure what she could improve besides sentence fluency, and I suggested working on her ending. She had written a good ending by telling how she felt after having her teeth pulled out. Since she had started her story with, “It was a normal day at school (or so I thought),” I suggested she end her story by telling what she was thinking about this experience the next day at school. She liked that idea and added a five-sentence ending that included the thoughts she had the next day at school and a question she would like to ask her mom since her mom had taken her out of school to get her teeth pulled.

**Writing Progress.** In Megan’s story, “The Chase,” I found ideas, voice, word choice, and conventions to be proficient. Similarly, Megan called her ideas, word choice, and conventions “good” and her voice “outstanding.” She thought her organization was “good,” while I found it to be approaching proficiency. We both saw that sentence fluency needed improvement.

Megan’s sentence fluency improved when she revised “The Chase.” She made some revisions independently and some with help, finding various ways to begin sentences, split sentences, and combine sentences to make the sentences flow.

When I determined a score for Megan’s story, “When I Got My Teeth Pulled,” I found her writing showed proficiency in all six traits. Megan also believed all the writing traits were strong in her story as she gave her writing a “good/outstanding” rating for the traits of ideas, organization, voice, and word choice and a “good” rating for sentence fluency and conventions. From the beginning to the end of the study, Megan’s writing improved from “approaching proficiency” to “proficient” in organization and sentence fluency.

## Discussion and Limitations

Results of the study have implications for enhancing the feedback process in the classroom. Self-assessment and dialogue served as tools for providing feedback for the student and teacher to use for the improvement of writing. Feedback generated through the self-assessment process enhanced students' ability to talk about the traits of effective writing and the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing. In addition, the feedback enhanced students' ability to revise their stories.

At the conclusion of the study, students talked in-depth about the characteristics of effective stories, naming and describing several specific characteristics. When the students described quality narratives, they used words they had seen on the rubric for self-assessment and words the teacher/researcher had used in dialogue with them. Students' detailed descriptions of effective writing at the end of the study showed understanding of the learning targets for fifth-grade narrative writing.

The self-assessment process gave students multiple opportunities throughout the writing process to read their writing, to use the rubric to give their writing a score for each trait, and to provide evidence for their scores. As students practiced identifying the strengths and weaknesses of their writing and supporting their thoughts with evidence, they became more aware of the strengths of their writing and areas they needed to improve. For each student, the teacher/researcher noticed similarities between her assessments and the student's assessments both before and after the dialogue during writing conferences.

Students' knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of their writing was enhanced as the teacher/researcher gave students feedback during writing conferences, referring to the completed rubric and sharing her thoughts about the students' writing. The weaknesses students identified at the end of the study were weaknesses the teacher/researcher had identified and areas the students had worked on improving.

The self-assessment process served as a tool for generating feedback *from* students as well. The fifth-grade students generated feedback as they completed the self-assessment form and as they responded to questions the teacher/researcher asked during writing conferences. Because students had analyzed their writing and had found strengths and areas of need prior to the writing conference, they were ready to answer questions the teacher/researcher asked them about their writing and were able to set goals for revising their writing. In order to set goals, students referred to the information on their completed rubrics, including the strengths and weaknesses they had found and the description of each writing trait.

After using the student-created rubric to assess their own writing, students realized areas they needed to improve and worked independently to make revisions. Students showed motivation to make revisions to drafts of writing and to listen to their teacher's thoughts and suggestions.

Although students found ways to improve their writing, teacher feedback remained important. Students did not always recognize areas they needed to improve. Dialogue during the writing conference and feedback from the teacher was an essential part of the assessment and growth process.

During writing conferences, the types of questions asked and specific teacher language used gave students further opportunities to generate feedback and set goals. The teacher/researcher asked students to name specific ways they could improve their stories. As students generated feedback, the teacher expanded on the student-generated feedback by using causal statements, letting students know the positive results of actions they took when writing. Writing conferences served as opportunities for the teacher to use language to encourage self-efficacy and a growth mindset in students. During the conferences, the feedback the teacher/researcher gave helped the students notice their efforts and changes in their writing.

The teacher/researcher found dialogue was even more important than she expected. While self-assessment provided a way for students to reflect, at times students needed feedback and guidance from the teacher to improve their writing. For example, the teacher asked questions and gave suggestions to one student to help the student decide how to begin and end his story. The same student included little detail on his first self-assessment form; however, when the teacher asked him to share and explain his thoughts, he reflected on his work and the traits of effective writing. At times, students had misconceptions about the meaning of particular writing traits. Through dialogue, the teacher helped students understand the traits. She pointed out examples in the student's writing that showed particular traits, and she showed students areas that needed to improve according to the rubric. At the end of the study, the teacher/researcher believed strongly in combining self-assessment and dialogue for student growth in the area of writing. Students took control of their learning, and the teacher used the students' reflections as starting points for discussions and improvement.

The rubric or self-assessment form brought focus to conversations throughout the learning process. The teacher used the student's completed self-assessment form to decide what questions to ask the student. The rubric gave the teacher and student a reference point for goal-setting and for deciding specific actions the student might take to improve his writing.

Examining each student's completed self-assessment before meeting with the student helped the teacher/researcher give helpful feedback. Reading the goal written by the student helped the teacher/researcher focus her instruction on an area of need identified by the student, placing the student in control of the learning.

Reading models of quality narrative writing and creating the rubric with the teacher was an important part of the process prior to student reflection/self-assessment. Students were familiar with the rubric and felt ownership of it when they used it; the rubric was meaningful to them. Similar to the findings in some existing studies (Andrade et al., 2008 and Andrade et al., 2010), student involvement in examining exemplar writing, creating a rubric, and assessing drafts of writing was beneficial for the composition of effective writing and the improvement of writing.

Limitations of this study included the length of the study and the diversity of participants. If the study would have taken place during an entire school year, more themes may have emerged. During a greater length of time, students' writing and knowledge of writing might show more improvement. In addition, the teacher/researcher could collect more evidence of students revising their writing and of student motivation to improve their writing. Creswell (2009) recommends three to five participants for case study research, which was supported by the research methodology. While this study included three participants, they were of similar racial and religious backgrounds and similar academic ability. If the teacher/researcher had chosen participants from diverse backgrounds, readers might have been able to generalize the findings to a greater extent.

A consideration for future research may be to explore the mindset and self-efficacy of students who use self-assessment. Exploring the impact of teacher language during writing conferences on the mindset and self-efficacy of students may bring interesting results. Another suggestion for future studies is to explore ways to elicit a greater amount of feedback *from students* throughout the learning process.

In order for students to be highly self-efficacious in school and feel in control of their learning, they must realize how their efforts are tied to their growth. Assessment must be formative, must be part of daily instruction, and must involve students. Teachers can involve students in the formative assessment process by asking students to examine and describe exemplar narratives and by giving students opportunities to assess their own writing with a rubric created by the students themselves. Furthermore, frequent writing conferences can provide opportunities for teachers to inform students about their writing and to show students

how effort contributes to growth. The reflective process of self-assessment can help students learn more about the traits of effective writing and about their own writing. It can put students in control of their learning, helping them set goals and improve their work. Through self-assessment and dialogue, students can discover the impact of their efforts and can decide to continue learning and growing.

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### **Author Note**

Stephanie Baxa currently teaches fifth grade in a large school district in the Midwestern United States. She has taught 17 years, and her teaching experience includes fifth grade, sixth grade, and seventh grade. Stephanie received a Bachelor of Arts degree in elementary education and special education with middle school endorsements from Dakota Wesleyan University in 1998 and a Masters' degree in Leadership in Reading from the University of Sioux Falls in 2015. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Stephanie Baxa at [Stephanie.Baxa@k12.sd.us](mailto:Stephanie.Baxa@k12.sd.us).

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