THE USE OF IB ASSESSMENT RUBRICS; TEACHER AND STUDENT VIEWS COMPARED

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the results of two surveys, one given to teachers, the other to students, at an international school in Suzhou, China. The surveys were designed to determine the perceptions of the usefulness and fairness of rubrics for assessment and feedback. The results show that around 50% of both groups believed that rubrics can be difficult to understand and fail to show students how to get a good grade. The article concludes that rubrics, which are commonly used in schools, fail to provide the quality feedback which face-to-face interaction and detailed written feedback offer.

INTRODUCTION

Authentic assessment is an alternative to standardized testing. Wiggins (1993) defines authentic assessment as tasks based on “engaging and worthy problems or questions of importance”. Authentic assessment is also referred to as “direct assessment” or “performance assessment” because students show what they can do, rather than what they can recall (Mueller, 2014). An authentic assessment is based on a product such as a research essay, physical creation, or performance (such as an oral presentation or a skill) and generally involves the use of a rubric (also referred to as a “band descriptor” or “rating scale”), a grid delineating levels of performance across a range of criteria representing the major aspects of the assignment. Brookhart (2013) suggests that clear expectations conveyed through rubrics will not only help students succeed by crystallizing the key concepts of the unit, but can also serve as tools for both formative, peer, and self-assessment. Additionally, rubrics are intended to clarify unit or course objectives in a way that is less time-consuming for both teachers and students.

The authors’ school, at which the research for this article was conducted, is a full International Baccalaureate (IB) school located in Suzhou, China. Students attending this school follow the Primary Years Program (PYP) in Grades 1-5 (ages 6-11), the Middle Years Program (MYP) in Grades 6-10 (ages 11-16), and the Diploma Program (DP) in Grades 11 and 12 (ages 16-18). Approximately 80% of the 1200 students enrolled speak English as a second language.

Assessment at the school follows IB guidelines, which for authentic summative assessments require the use of IB-standardized evaluation criteria and subject-specific rubrics. The IBMYP, which is the area of focus in this investigation, allows some latitude in the way each course is taught. Although details of the evaluation criteria and an assessment rubric must be included in all summative assessments, neither is mandated for formative assessments. Graded assessments are returned to the students and include feedback consisting of either a rubric only, a rubric with relevant sections highlighted, written comments, oral feedback, or a combination of these, depending on the task and teacher.

A typical MYP student at the authors’ school encounters approximately 120 summative assessment rubrics during one academic year. Students study eight subjects with each subject programme consisting of four to five units of study on different topics delivered over the academic year. These units are assessed summatively using IB rubrics based on IB criteria, typically four for each subject area. The school requirement is to assess each of these criteria twice per semester, or four times per academic year. As a result, these MYP students can be considered to be knowledgeable end-users of rubrics. Similarly, the teachers encounter a large number of rubrics each year and can also be considered “expert” users of rubrics.

This wealth of experience provided the initial spark for the investigation. The researchers were curious to know what the student and teacher views of IB assessments rubrics are. There were three main questions being considered:

1. Do the teachers and students share similar views about IB rubrics?
2. Are IB rubrics seen to be a fair way of grading assignments?
3. Do they provide valuable feedback?

Through this investigation, the researchers hoped to answer these questions and obtain any additional insights these rubric users could offer. They also believed that these answers and insights could be of interest to other rubric users at all levels of education.
review of articles addressing the degree to which rubrics assessed performance found that well-constructed analytic rubrics increased the reliability of assessment, but that rubrics used in isolation for performance assessment were not sufficiently valid tools.

Taking another perspective, Koh [2011] criticizes rubrics not on the basis of their shortcomings per se, but because they have been so widely adopted. In Koh’s view, when rubrics are given to students at the beginning of a unit to be used as guides, attention instantly shifts towards assessment at the expense of actual learning. In other words, students begin to self-consciously concentrate on what the teacher wants them to produce, rather than what they can independently discover.

METHODOLOGY

Students and teachers were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the analytic rubrics they used. A questionnaire was chosen as the most practical way to collect data for the investigation. After piloting the questions on a single class, the questionnaire was administered to 555 MYP students (44% of whom responded) and 72 teachers (33% of whom responded) through the school’s 2.9-based Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which enabled the researchers to distribute the survey easily to both students and teachers. Both groups accessed the survey through the VLE and answered the questions online.

Although 80% of the students are non-native English speakers, English is the medium of instruction and approximately 90% of these second-language students are considered to be “intermediate” English language learners or higher. With more than 40 nationalities at the school, it was not feasible to translate the survey questions into all of the students’ mother tongues. Therefore, the survey questions were written in English and students were asked to respond in English, even though there was some concern that some questions may be misunderstood or misinterpreted in some way.

There were 11 statements based on our questions about rubrics given to both teachers and students and seven additional questions given to teachers. Respondents used a 1 to 5 scale (a.k.a. Likert scale), in response to a statement derived from the questions. Responses remained anonymous and confidential. Students were free to comment on rubric use in all school subjects and teachers answered according to their experience of using rubrics in their subject area. All respondents, both students and teachers, were asked to add their answers to supplement their concerns (Appendix A).

The questionnaire was atypical with few respondents (18%) explicitly disagreeing with the statements. However, the survey was atypical with 75% feeling that rubrics accurately measured student performance. The second major finding, reported by 47 students (20%) and seven teachers (53%), was a related one, namely that rubrics, whether used alone or in conjunction with other types of feedback, often failed to provide sufficient detail, either to adequately summarize student performance or to indicate paths toward improvement. Thus, rubrics failed many students due to a lack of actionable information.

On the other hand, 52 comments (22%) were positive. These comments were not very detailed, though some specifically mentioned that rubrics were indeed clear and easy to understand. Several positive comments were qualified, however. In fact, a few overlapped with the negative ones above. For example, three students liked the rubrics themselves but complained that some teachers did not interpret them as they were written.

RESULTS

STUDENT SURVEY

The Likert scale used for the survey was atypical with “strongly agree” requiring a response of “1” and “strongly disagree” a response of “5.” For all of the questions, respondents were asked to choose between option 2 (“agree”) or option 3 (“neither agree nor disagree”). More precisely, the averages fell between 2.5 and 2.9, generally indicating tepid support for rubrics overall. A closer look at the data revealed that between 25 and 35 percent of respondents selected option 3 for each question.

Teacher comments also reflected a much more qualified support of rubrics compared to the survey data. Teachers are certainly aware of the need for clarity on behalf of their second language students and several remarked that the IB MYP rubrics were not helpful in this regard. Others felt that the MYP rubrics were “narrow and rigid,” on the one hand, or “too broad” on the other.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This investigation started...
with three main questions. The first was whether teachers and students viewed rubrics in the same way. A side-by-side analysis of the results of the teacher and student surveys (see Figure 1) reveals some visible parallels on one hand and some notable discrepancies on the other. For example, the survey data suggest close agreement between teachers (55%) and students (51%) on the question of whether IB rubrics clearly told students how to get a good grade (Q2). However, there was a stark difference (teachers 84%, students 40%) over the question of whether students could use the rubrics to score their own work (Q5). These results show that teachers and students do not share the same views on all matters related to the use of rubrics.

The second research question concerned the fairness of grading with rubrics. The survey shows that students and teachers have strikingly different perspectives when it comes to the fairness of rubrics (Q4). While 84% of teachers felt that a rubric-derived score was fair, only 44% of students concurred. Teachers and students concurred, supporting Andrade (2005) and Popham’s (1997) findings that rubrics are often subjective. One student noted that “I think that some teachers give the same comment on (sic) rubric...even though our work is different.” Confirming the veracity of this comment is the fact that the scope of grading with rubrics was reduced from an interview with Dr. Andi Stix. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview/1464751036?accountid=14187


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REFERENCES


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