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The Impact of a Flipped Lesson on Secondary Language Arts Students' Ability to Write a Cohesive Research Essay

An Action Research Report
By Nafeesah Muhammad

The Impacted of a Flipped Lesson on Secondary Language Arts Students' Ability to
Write a Cohesive Research Essay

By Nafeesah Muhammad

Submitted on December 4, 2014
in fulfillment of final requirements for the MAED degree
The College of St. Catherine
St. Paul, Minnesota

Advisor

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Date

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Abstract

In my study, I explored the question: what impact will a flipped lesson have on secondary Language Arts students' ability to write a cohesive research essay? Research shows that a flip classroom approach to instruction can be an effective strategy when teaching procedural skills in a content area (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Fulton, 2012). The data sources include student surveys, student rough draft writing sample, student reflection response, student final draft writing sample. It is difficult to conclude if the flipped lesson made a substantial impact on the students' ability to construct a coherent research essay due to lack of involvement in the student reflection responses that followed the Flipped Lesson. There are implications that Flipped Lessons can serve as an effective differentiation strategy for English Learners (EL) and struggling students. There are implications that flipped lessons can be used to inform differentiation for EL students and increase metacognition for all students alike.

Introduction

According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2010), the Minnesota Academic Standards: English Language Arts K-12 demands that students learn the writing process beginning in the third grade. This includes structuring the essay with both an introduction and conclusion. It is not, however, until students reach the sixth grade that they are expected to integrate claim, reason and evidence, have clear organization of different ideas and utilize appropriate transitions to connect these different ideas and concepts into their essays. According to the Minnesota Department of Education (2010), as students exit the ninth grade, they are expected to “write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content” (p. 62). As an English teacher candidate, teaching a ninth grade Pre-International Baccalaureate class in the spring semester of 2014, this was my area of interest.

The setting for this study was conducted at a Title 1 urban school in the Midwestern region of the United States during my student teaching assignment. The school has approximately 1970 students enrolled with most class sizes varying between 25 to 36 students. The school houses ninth through 12 grade in addition to offering Postsecondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) classes as well. The school is quite diverse ethnically and economically with 55.2% of its students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch. I began my assignment during the second half of the school in the spring of 2014. The 85 participants in this study were enrolled in an advanced English course called

Middle Years Program (MYP), a feeder class to future International Baccalaureate English courses. Although the course's expectation and rigor exceed that of a general English course, the participants in this program are not required to meet any academic qualifications.

The students struggled with structuring a well-organized research paper with clear cohesion between the relationships of complex ideas and concepts. I concluded that it would be best practice to reteach how to write an adequate introduction, body, and concluding paragraphs; writing topic and transitional sentences by way of a flipped lesson. Forsey, Low and Glance (2013) have defined the Flipped Classroom as “systemic combinations of co-present (face-to-face) interactions and technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers, and learning resources” (p.472). A flip classroom approach usually takes the form of a PowerPoint, a video, or online discussions posted to a classroom website which the students view outside of class. According to Carpenter and Pease (2012), a flipped lesson requires students to stop, rewind and review the lesson in order to gain a better grasp of the content. Maxwell, Meiser, McKnight (2011) claim, “Teaching improvement in sentence construction... is best done in short segments with reinforcement over an extended amount of time. (p. 126)”. When the lesson is formatted similar to that of a PowerPoint presentation, it can be broken up into segments, allowing the student to visit and revisit the areas they are most in need of improvement. A flipped lesson on organizing and constructing paragraphs in a research paper provides students with ample opportunities to reinforce these skills throughout the writing process. According to Marchisan and Alber (2001), “The writing process approach is a dynamic instructional technique in which the learner is taught to

focus as much attention on the writing process as on the product”(155). The writing process requires the teacher to constantly provide the students with numerous writing strategies and suggestions, building on their skills, to utilize during the revising stages of their drafts. (Allan and Miller, 2000, p. 254) A flipped lesson is an effective tool to deliver strategies and suggestions to improve student writing. Moreover, students are able to reference the suggestions at different points of revising their drafts.

Research shows that a flip classroom approach to instruction can be an effective strategy when teaching procedural skills in a content area (Bergmann & Sams, 2012; Fulton, 2012). The students are required to be interactive while viewing the online lesson, like note taking and reflections. The students then bring the notes or reflection to class and apply what they learned because “students learn more when they are asked to apply, transfer and reflect on content” (Carpenter & Pease, 2012, p. 36). All of the instruction takes place at home and the work is completed at school. With this approach, I hoped to ascertain how the use of a flipped lesson impacts my students’ ability to write a properly structured essay. The flipped classroom allows for differentiation of instruction, while students who are more advance can work at a fast pace and those who struggle are allowed additional time with the content. (Bergmann & Sams, 2012). Forsey, Low and Glance (2013) asserted that students generally are more successful in online learning environment than those in a face-to-face classroom setting. Yet, a flipped classroom’s success is contingent upon the face-to-face interactions and online instructions coincide with each other. The action research question that I explored is: what impact will a flipped lesson have on secondary Language Arts students’ ability to write a cohesive research essay.

Description of Research Process

In my study, I decided to address what I perceived as problem areas in the structuring of a proper research essay in my ninth grade Middle Years Program (MYP) classes. I followed the standard writing process that included prewriting, interactive direct instruction on the procedure of constructing a cohesive essay, outlining, rough drafting, peer-reviewing, and final drafting (Marchisan & Alber, 2001, 155). The goal of this study was to teach my students how to write a cohesive research paper. This includes organizing and structuring the essay. My Cooperating Teacher previously communicated to me that he taught them how to properly structure an essay, and since I was not previously exposed to their writings, I assumed the students were close to meeting the MN state standard for this skill. A properly structured essay would include an introductory paragraph with a hook and thesis statement, body paragraphs with a topic sentence, claim, reason, evidence, a transitional sentence to the next paragraph, and a concluding paragraph. However, my observations proved my original assumptions wrong. During the interactive direct instruction phase, I observed confusion about how to write the essay. I thought this would be an opportunity to review outlining. The students were given a graphic organizer handout to follow while creating their outlines. Again, I noticed that they struggled with structuring the essay outline. At this point, the students had adequate notes and handouts to construct a rough draft. Before the students began the writing phase they were given a rubric (See Appendix A) outlining the criteria for a properly written essay. Allan and Miller (2000) assert, “ Most writers, especially students, consider their first drafts to be clear and complete (253)”. The students were instructed to write the rough draft as if it was their final. After reading the students’ rough

drafts, I used the rubric to score the rough drafts to assist me in my assessment. I concluded that I needed to take a different approach to teaching the specific writing skills. There were specific trends that I observed in the writing. Most of the students lacked the ability to construct a thesis statement, some of the writing was not interconnected through the usage of topic and transitional sentences in the body paragraphs, and the essays often exhibited poor organization.

The subjects were identified by April 05, 2014, with the flipped lesson and final draft written by May 01, 2014. I collected student surveys (see Appendix A), student rough draft writing sample, student reflection response (see Appendix B), student final draft writing sample.

My classes inhabited an economically diverse group of students. There was a great chance that some students lacked the technological resources needed to participate in the flipped lesson, like access to the Internet. Before I implemented the flipped lesson, I had the students take an online survey (see Appendix A) to guide my decision as to whether or not a flipped lesson would be feasible. The survey included questions: I have internet in my home, I have internet on my phone, I can use the internet at a family/friends/neighbor's home, and I have unlimited access to the internet. Most of the students had access to the Internet in some way.

I utilized the flipped classroom teaching strategy to address the writing issues I observed. I analyzed and compared the students' rough and final drafts within a four-week period, a month before school ended for the year. My goal was to help students reach the Minnesota English Language Arts standards for writing an informative/explanatory text by accurately structuring a research essay.

On the classroom website, the students viewed one online lesson I created on how to structure an essay. The online lesson was assigned to them for homework over the weekend to be completed by 5pm Sunday evening. The lesson was a screen casted PowerPoint presentation with my voice in voiceover. The lesson discussed how to write an introductory paragraph that included a hook and claim; body paragraphs with a topic and transitional sentences, evidence and reason; and a concluding paragraph. The students were instructed to divide a piece of notebook paper in half. On one side they were instructed to record anything that they were confused about prior to viewing the flipped lesson and on the other side, any information they learned or found helpful. Additionally, the students were instructed to bring the written reflection to class the next day.

When they completed the lesson, the students transcribed their reflections onto a student reflection response Google Form (see Appendix B) so I could review the data. The Google Form created a spreadsheet with all of the data organized by name and class period. Sunday evening, I used their reflections to help guide and inform my face-to-face lesson for Monday. Out of 96 students between all three of the 9th grade MYP English course, 63 students responded to the *Access to the Internet* student surveys (see Appendix A). Of those 63 students, everyone said they had access to the Internet. Arrangements were made so that the one student without Internet access could view the online lesson the Friday before the rest of the students were scheduled to view the flipped lesson later that weekend. Of the remaining 33 students who did not respond, one student said she had no access to the Internet and the others reported to me personally that they forgot to respond and would complete it eventually. The 32 students never completed the survey.

After returning the rough drafts, the students reviewed areas of improvement that I noted, and made the corresponding corrections in class. I circulated the classroom to clarify any confusions left after the online lesson. The students were then given a week to rewrite their essays. During this week, they were able continuously review the online lesson while we worked on revisions in the computer lab.

While completing this research, I aimed to improve the way my students organized and structured a research essay, according to the Minnesota Academic Standards: English Language Arts K-12. Although these State Standards are difficult to quantify, the rubric provided the students with criteria for a cohesive essay. Additionally, the student response provided me with qualitative data to assess whether or not learning was achieved. The next section of this paper will discuss the effectiveness of the flipped lesson on teaching students how to organize and structure an essay.

Data Analysis

To answer the question, what impact will a flipped lesson have on secondary Language Arts students' ability to write a cohesive research essay? I obtained data from *Access to the Internet* student surveys (see Appendix A), student rough draft-writing sample, student reflection, and student final draft-writing sample.

As I aforementioned, out of 96 students between all three of the 9th grade MYP English course, 63 students responded to the Access to the Internet Student Surveys (see Appendix A). Of those 63 students, everyone said they had access to the Internet. Arrangements were made so that the one student without Internet access could view the online lesson the Friday before the rest of the students were scheduled to view the flipped

lesson later that weekend. Of the remaining 33 students who did not respond, one student said she had no access to the Internet and the others reported to me personally that they forgot to respond and would complete it eventually. The 32 students never completed the survey.

The student rough drafts were the reason for the onset of the intervention and therefore the first piece of data collected. The student reflection was next collected as a component of the flipped lesson to enhance learning. The final draft was the summative assessment and used as a measure of growth against the initial rough drafts. Both the rough draft and final drafts are measured quantitatively, while the student responses to the flipped lesson are measure qualitative and qualitatively to reach a conclusive result.

The rough drafts were used as a pre-written assessment as a baseline for progress as shown in Figure 1. The students were instructed to write the draft as if it were the final. They understood they were scored from the rubric (see Appendix C) associated with the assignment and should follow the criteria accordingly. The study focused its attention to the organization and paragraph construction criteria of the essay. Both the *Organization and Paragraph Construction* were scored on a scale from one to five; one being below satisfactory and five exceeds the standard. The students were scored on their ability to accurately organize the research paper in order from introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs. Additionally, the essay was required to be in chronological order. Furthermore, the essay required the students to maintain a clear sense of cohesion throughout the essay, with the appropriate usage of, an expository thesis, topic and transitional sentences. Immediately after the rough drafts were scored the students were

required to view the online flipped lesson at home. Student reflection concluded the lesson.

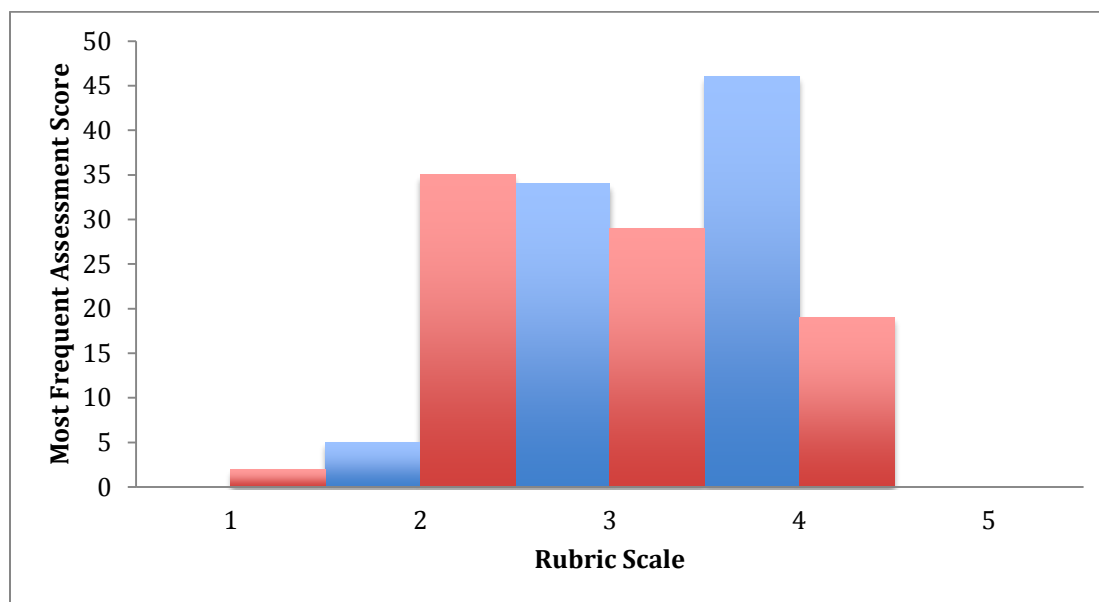


Figure 1. Pre-Assessment Score

All of my three classes were made up of approximately 96 students; only 85 pre-writing assessments were collected. Out of these assessments, students exhibited a need to receive additional instruction in both organization and paragraph construction. Out of 85 students, 54% students received a 4 in the category of Organization. The mode score indicates that most students did not exceed the standards in the skill of organization, but was fell in the middle between satisfactory (3-4). 41% of the students scored a 2 and 34% of the students scored a 3 in paragraph construction. The mode score indicates that most students were not proficient in the skill of paragraph construction, but scored an unsatisfactory (2-3). The students preformed better with organizing the essay than paragraph construction, however, both area required additional teaching.

The students were instructed at the beginning of the flipped lesson to create a T-Chart like structure on notebook paper. While they watched the lesson, on the right hand side of the chart they noted different aspects of essay organization or paragraph construction that they did not understand or was confused about. On the left hand side of the T-Chart, the students noted any new understanding that was achieved or found helpful. Upon completion of their viewing of the lesson the students completed an online response form (See Appendix B). The students were required to note one aspect of essay organization or paragraph construction that they did not understand or was confused about and one thing they learned or found helpful. As shown in Figure 2, the students identified as areas of confusion prior to viewing the lesson online. There were some students who felt that they could not identify any areas of confusion, therefore, had no issues with their prior understanding before viewing the lesson. Figure 2 shows where the students felt the flipped lesson made the greatest impact, if at all.

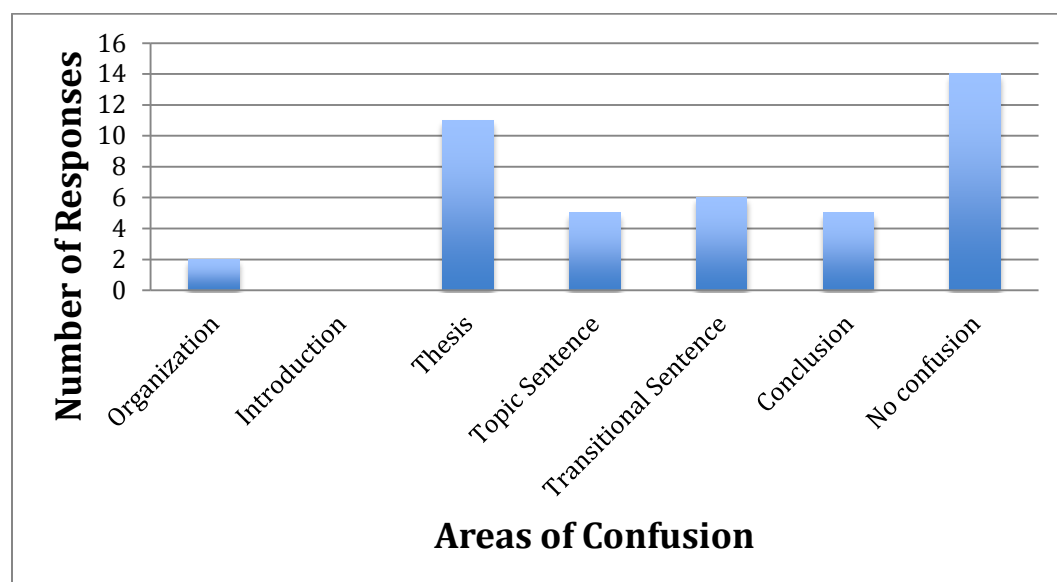


Figure 2. Confusing Areas of Writing Essay Prior to Flipped Lesson

There are numerous themes that appear from the student responses. The students were successfully able to identify personal areas they found confusing or had issues with while writing the essay. Furthermore, the students were able to then successfully explain how the flipped lesson helped to clear up the confusion. Paragraph construction scores were below satisfactory on the rough drafts and identified one of the largest problem areas. I included expository thesis, topic sentence, transitional sentence and concluding paragraphs, all mentioned on the student responses, under the umbrella of paragraph construction. These specific areas all contribute to properly structuring a cohesive research essay. Of the 43 respondents, 27 students needed additional understanding of constructing adequate paragraphs. Out of the 27 students who were confused about paragraph construction, 41% of the students were confused about writing an expository thesis. Although no students identified writing an introduction paragraph as confusing, they still had issues with writing a thesis statement which is included the introduction. One student stated, “didn't really know what an explanatory thesis statement was but then I learned it was a claim”. He was then able to explain his new understanding after viewing the lesson, “A claim is the main point you're trying to make.”

Writing a topic sentence, transitional sentence, concluding paragraph were all close to being equally confusing to the students. One student stated, “I struggled with the conclusion paragraph the most because I wasn't quite sure how to keep the reader interested and not go on and on. I knew that a conclusion paragraph was supposed to summarize what you said but I didn't know what I should leave out and what should be put in there”. After viewing the flipped lesson, she goes on to explain, “One thing I found helpful, was the in depth detail of what each paragraph should have. This video

especially helped with the conclusion paragraph, and how you should basically just paraphrase your main points.” Only two students identified organizing the research essay as confusing.

The study was concluded with the collecting of final rough draft scores. The final draft was used as a post writing assessment to measure growth. This was the final assessment to measure to student learning. The final draft was scored using the same rubric for the rough draft. Again, the students were scored on organization and paragraph construction. Both organization and paragraph construction were scored on a scale from 1-5. The students were scored on their ability to accurately organize the research paper in order from introductory, body, and concluding paragraphs. Additionally, the essay was required to have an expository thesis and in chronological order. Figure 3 shows where students’ scores fell at the end of the assessment.

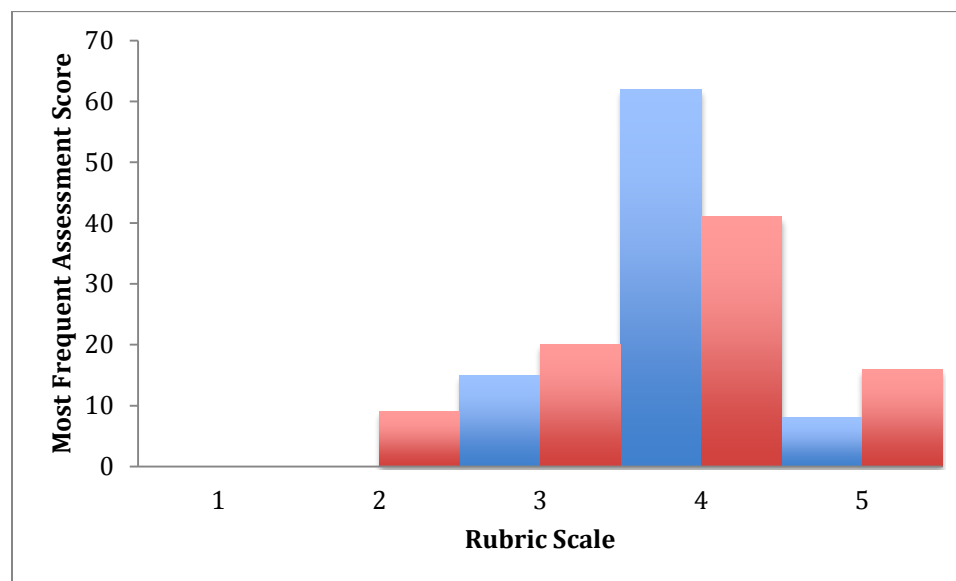


Figure 3. Post-Assessment Score

I was only able to collect 85 pre-writing assessments; I collected the 85 post-writing assessments that coincide with the pre-writing assessments. Out of these

assessments, students exhibited a growth in both organization and paragraph construction. 73% of the students scored a 4 on the post- assessment for organization. The mode score indicates that students scored satisfactory in the skill of organization, similar to the pre-assessment mode score for organization scores of 4. There was, however, a 19% increase in scores of 4 for organization skill in the post assessment. (see Figure 4)

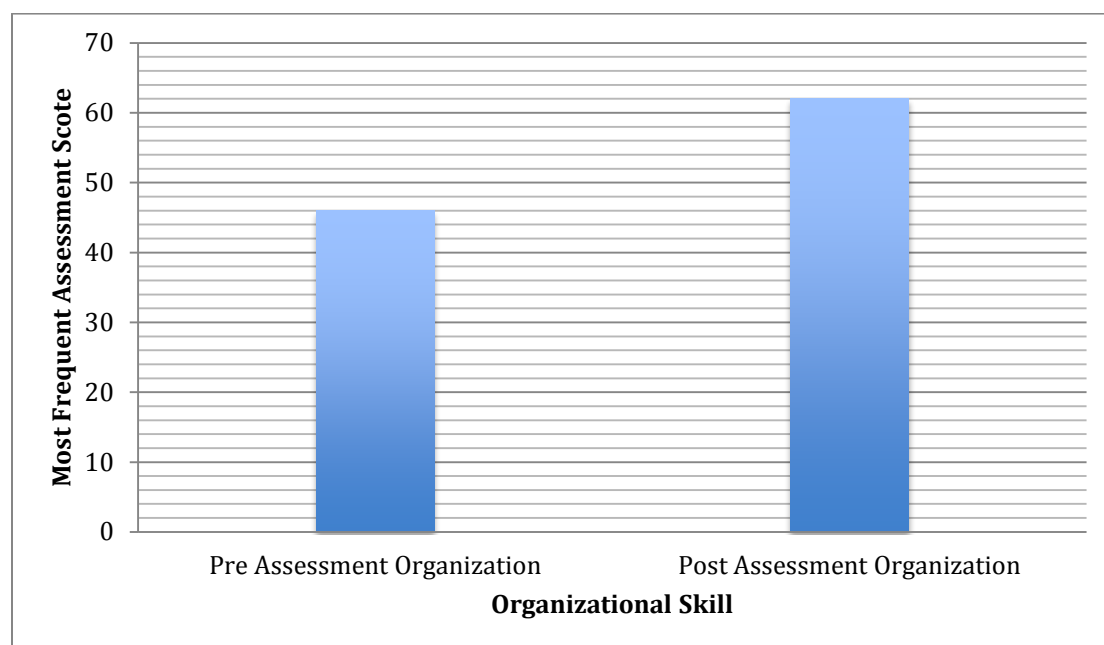


Figure 4. Pre and Post Organization Assessment Score

48% of the students scored a 4 on the post- assessment for paragraph construction. The mode score indicates that students were not proficient in the skill of paragraph construction, but fell in the middle between satisfactory (3-4) as compared to the 41% of students who scored 2 for paragraph construction in the pre-assessment. (See Figure 5), which was below satisfactory.

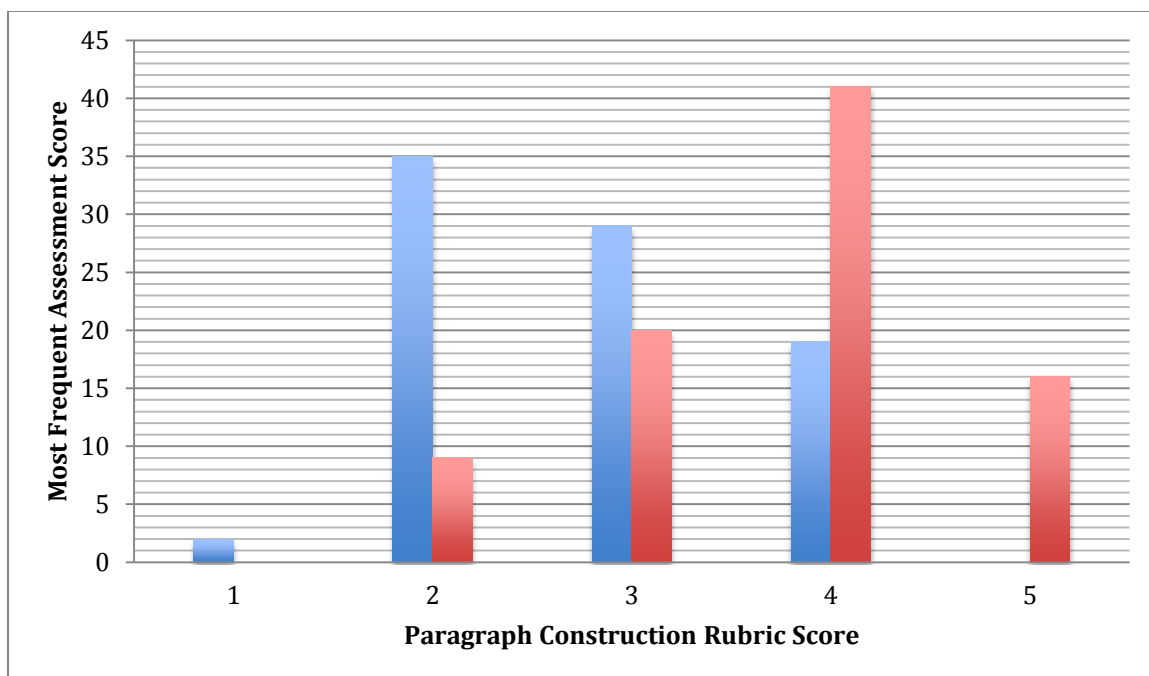


Figure 5. Pre and Post Assessment Score for Paragraph Construction

Both organization and paragraph construction was areas of growth.

It is difficult to conclude if the flipped lesson made a substantial impact on the students' ability to construct a coherent research essay due to lack of involvement in the student response that followed the flipped lesson. Students' inability to complete the student response on time or even at all makes the study inconclusive. There was an increase in both organization and paragraph construction scores for the post writing assessment, however, it is difficult to conclude whether or not the growth was attributed to the flipped lesson if only 43 of the 85 students in the student responded to the student response survey. Of those 43 respondents, 39 of them said they found the flipped lesson helpful. As shown in Figure 6, there was an overall growth in the Post Writing assessment score, but that could have been due to a variety of factors, that include my comments on the rough drafts. The flipped lesson was tailored to the general themes I noticed while correcting their rough drafts, however, additional specific

comments, strategies, and suggestions were made on their individual papers. The students also completed additional work inside the classroom, like peer-reviewing that could have contributed to the growth as well.

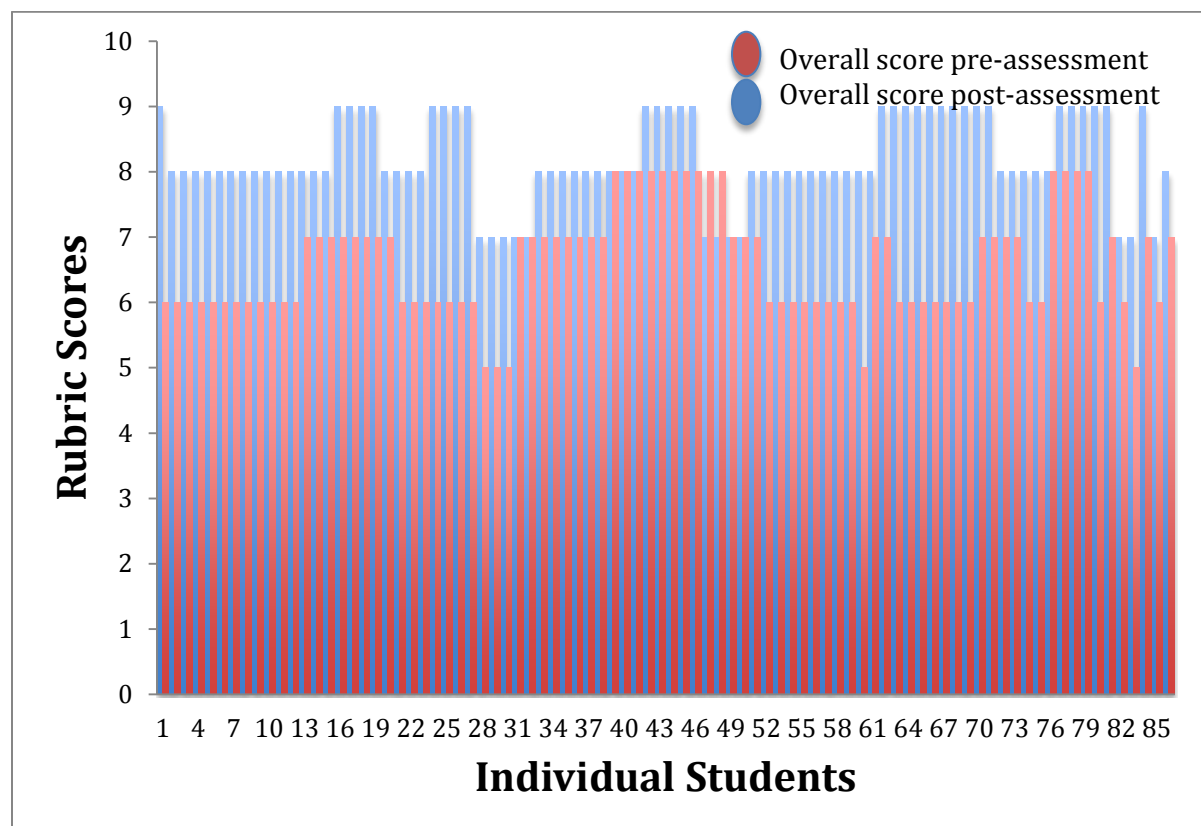


Figure 6. Overall Pre and Post Writing Assessment Scores

The student responses lead me to a couple of conclusions. There are numerous themes that appear from the data. Most students identify have issues with writing an expository thesis, transitional and topic sentences, and conclusion paragraphs, all that fall under the category of paragraph construction. Paragraph construction scores lagged behind organization in both the pre and post writing assessments. The students were aware of their trouble area without receiving the rough draft feedback. Student reflection after a flipped lesson may help with metacognition. Additionally, most of these students reported not having any confusion about how to organize or construct paragraphs for a

research essay, however, there were a great deal of these students who found the lesson still helpful. They identified areas where their understanding had increased. The next step in the data analysis is to create an action plan derived from my results.

Action Plan

I discovered that the flipped lessons work best when paired with face-to-face instruction. The flipped lesson proved to be an appropriate intervention for guiding struggling writers toward coherency. The scores on average moved toward an overall satisfactory score, which indicated growth. The students viewed the lesson before receiving my feedback, thus once feedback was received the students had a resource to help reinforce my comments and to inform how to make the proper corrections. Out of the available 85 pre-assessments, only 43 students responded to the flipped lesson student response; thus, it appears that only 43 students actually participated in the flipped lesson. I attribute the lack of respondents to the Student Response to the lack of incentive to complete the assignment. The assignment received a five-point homework grade, thus, it did not make a great impact on their grades whether they completed the assignment or not. Going further with implementing future flipped lessons, the lessons should hold a greater weight on the grading scale. The importance of viewing the lesson was not greatly communicated because it did not greatly impact the students' grades whether they viewed it or not. Students do not have a choice whether or not to take notes or participate in a direct instruction lesson; therefore, no choice should be given when viewing the flipped lesson. Both are essential to learning. A flipped lesson is suppose to take the place of direct instruction in the classroom so that classroom engagement can take the place of students doing the work at home.

In concluding the study, there are numerous interventions that may be utilized to inform my practice. This process has informed the way in which I reflect about student learning. I was able to identify an issue among the general population of my students and sought alternative strategies to increase student learning. Flipped lessons and blended classrooms are an emerging trend in education that offers numerous possibilities. It can be utilized to reinforce content that was previously taught in the classroom setting or used as a tool for differentiation. While I realize that technology may be a hindrance for students who lack technological resources, these students were able to view the online lesson in class during independent work. It all so provided me with the opportunity for additional differentiation for students who needed immediate clarification with the flipped lesson.

I would like to further study the impact that flipped lessons have on English Learners (EL) over a longer period of time. This is one area of the study that I think would yield more substantial results. Throughout my study I observed most of my English Learners (EL) students exhibit the most substantial growth. Although there were only about five of them, their essays showed significant improvement, especially in the paragraph construction areas. At the end of student teaching assignment, all of my students wrote good-bye letters to me. One of my EL students stated, "Thank you Ms. Muhammad for the classroom website. It made me a better writer." The flipped lesson was posted to the classroom website. If EL were given the numerous opportunities to either view the lesson prior and after class, learning could be introduced or reinforced, allowing the students more time with the material; time that a traditional classroom may not afford them.

As I aforementioned in the concluding paragraphs of my data analysis, flipped lessons pair with student responses is an option for increasing metacognition. This is another area of the study that could use further exploration. I believe that flipped lessons may also serve to increase metacognition for all students alike, but especially the EL students, but also among the higher achievers. Students were able to identify areas that they needed to improve upon, while at the same time recognizing additional information that may be of some use to them. I believe it has the potential to increase classroom engagement because the students will be prepared with questions they were required to reflect upon in the student response portion of the flipped lesson.

Furthermore, going forward in my practice I would like to continue to investigate the usage of flipped lessons on increasing writing skills, in particular the student response portion. The student responses gave me data that inform lesson planning and additional formative assessments. Reflections can be useful to provide students with their own personal data as a means of improvement. I can print responses and add them to a student portfolio to be utilized at a later student/teacher conference date. It would be interesting to see how student-writing portfolios, when paired with flipped lessons, enhance the students' ability to increase their writing abilities.

Although this study was inconclusive there are specific areas of the study that can be expanded upon. Flipped Lessons are more most effective when the students comprehend the importance of completing the lesson. This can be achieved by allowing students enough time to become acclimated to this new form of learning. Students will understand it is importance by participating in numerous flipped lessons throughout time, instead of simply utilizing one lesson. Flipped lessons, if implemented correctly, have

great potential in the way teachers and future educators differentiate their lessons and as a result increase greater opportunities for more students to learn.

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Appendix A

Access to Internet

Please make at least one selection from the following list

* Required

Access to the Internet *

Please select at least one option

- I have internet in my home
- I have internet on my phone
- I can use the internet at a family/friends/neighbor's home
- I have no access to the internet

Frequency of Internet Access *

Please select at least one option

This is a required question

Student Information *

What is your full name and class period?

Submit

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

100%: You made it.

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9/27/2014

Organizing Your Essay and Constructing Paragraphs

Appendix B

[Edit this form](#)

Organizing Your Essay and Constructing Paragraphs

* Required

Prior Understanding *

Prior to watching this lesson, what was one aspect of essay organization or paragraph construction that you did not understand or confused about?

New Understanding *

After watching this lesson, what is one thing you learned or found helpful?

Student Information *

Please enter your full name and class period

Never submit passwords through Google Forms.

100%: You made it.

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Appendix C

English 9 Accelerated Biographical Essay Rubric

For the past week we have been examining expository text. The biography is one of them. We learned to extract significant details from credible sources, we learned to identify important events, how to research, how to construct source entry note cards to interpreting research, how to outline and compose a biography. You will now write the rough draft of your biography, written as though it is the final draft. This means that you will complete an outline and follow the rubric criteria for the rough draft. The criteria include organization, paragraph construction and source citations. Please refer to the following when composing your rough draft:

CATEGORY	5-4	4-3	3-2	2-1
Organization	Information is very organized with well-constructed paragraphs. Paragraphs are in chronological order, examines one significant event per paragraph	Information is organized with well-constructed paragraphs. Paragraphs are in chronological order, examines one significant event per paragraph.	Information is organized, but paragraphs are not well-constructed. Paragraphs are not in chronological order, briefly examines less than two significant events throughout essay.	The information appears to be disorganized. 8)
Paragraph Construction	All body paragraphs include topic sentence, explanations or details, in-text citations, and transitional sentence.	Most body paragraphs include topic sentence, explanations or details, in-text citations, transitional sentence.	Paragraphs included related information but were typically not constructed well.	Paragraphing structure was not clear and sentences were not typically related within the paragraphs.
Sources	First page and all sources and are accurately cited in MLA format.	First page and all sources are accurately cited, but a few are not in the MLA format.	All sources are accurately cited, but first page or many are not in MLA format.	Some sources are not accurately documented.

Due Date: Monday, April 21, 2014

Comments: