

Professional Analysis of Developmental Appropriateness

Kay Garbarino-Flowers

Seattle Pacific University

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As a teacher of half day kindergarteners, I am asked to assess my students formally within the Ideas/Content, Organization, and Applied Spelling areas of writing three times a year. These assessments address the following state and district standards: Students will demonstrate ability to use the writing process by using pictures and talk for thinking about and planning writing and by producing a draft of words, captions, and/or sentences. Students will demonstrate an ability to write in a variety of forms for different audiences and understand that writing has different purposes. Students will demonstrate traits of effective writing by analyzing ideas, selecting a topic, and adding detail. Students will demonstrate an understanding that writing is organized around one topic. Students will demonstrate an ability to use phonemes and letter knowledge in phonetic spelling. Students will demonstrate an ability to apply capitalization rules (Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction).

The three assessments utilize three different writing prompts for the recount/personal narrative genre of writing. The fall writing prompt asks the student, "Write about Kindergarten. Tell about something fun or special you have done at school." The winter prompt asks, "Think about something fun or special that you have done. Who were you with and what did you do?" The spring prompt asks, "Think about something you would like to do at home. What do you like to do and who do you like to do it with and why?" The prompts increase in difficulty as the year progresses with the fall asking a student to answer a question about *what*. The winter prompt asks students to answer *what* and *who* questions. The spring rubric asks students to answer *what*, *who*, and *why* questions. Each prompt has its own rubric. The rubrics, like the prompts, increase in difficulty as the year progresses. The writing prompts have administration windows of September-October, January, and May-June for fall, winter, and spring, respectively.

The writing prompts and rubrics were developed by the school district where I work. Both resources were created for assessment and scoring of kindergarten students' writing skills throughout the district. The rubrics developed for the scoring of the writing prompts address current district and state standards for the writing process, writing for different audiences, and traits of effective writing. The following explanation is provided by the district as the purpose supporting the common district summative assessments:

Because these performance assessments are in-class writing tasks, teachers and students get a clear picture of what students know and can do in writing. With this data, teachers know what students' learning needs are and what their next instructional steps will be. As students reflect on these writing products and set goals tied to standards, their achievement, involvement and motivation increase. In addition, these assessments provide predictive data about how students might perform on their own on an external assessment, such as the WASL or SAT or on a real-world writing task. Finally, district writing assessments help teachers/buildings have access to the grade level/periodic assessments they need for Continuous Improvement Plans in writing. These assessments would be important student work for teacher teams to review when sharing ideas and best practice with regard to next steps in instruction for students (Lake Washington School District, 2012, p. 2).

The rubrics can be found in Appendix A, B, and C for fall, winter, and spring administration windows, respectively.

Writing skills in kindergarten vary widely, depending upon prior writing and reading experience (Caulkins, 2003, p. 7). Scoring a kindergarten student's writing based upon the state and district standards requires that students think and plan their writing, demonstrate their

thought process with pictures and discussion with others, and develop a draft with words, captions, and/or sentences. Students are scored on whether they are able to write in a variety of forms and for different purposes. The seasonal writing prompts do not cover this portion of the rubric; therefore, I create opportunities for students to write for purposes other than recount/personal narrative. Students must also be able to select and organize their writing about one topic, write words with beginning and ending sounds, and apply basic mechanics of writing – capitalization rules, word spacing, and use of punctuation at the end of a sentence. Within a large section of my student population, the fall rubric criteria for at standard are easily met. There is a large jump in skill level between the fall and winter rubrics, causing some students to fall from reaching at standard criteria. I decided to analyze these rubrics for scoring of writing to better understand if the jump of skill level required from one level to the next is developmentally appropriate and how to better teach to a student's current developed academic level, enabling lower achieving students to meet at standard criteria.

Is it developmentally appropriate to apply one rubric to the whole class for the wide range of development found in kindergarten? According to Caulkins, when it comes to writing, or any other performance or skill based task, “the learner needs to do much of the work,” (2003, p. 8). Children bring their previous knowledge of letter-sound correspondence as they begin kindergarten. As teachers, we need to address each child's skills to develop their writing skills further (Caulkins, p. 9). If letter-sounds or letter formation are not yet an acquired skill, the teacher should model the writing process (Caulkins, p. 9; Routman, 2000, p. 212). Due to lack of skills or confidence, students may be unwilling to take the risk of writing (Routman, p. 212). Calkins has observed that if we teach to students best attempts at writing, scaffolding upon existing skills, student writing development can be pushed to the next level (p. 3).

Piaget and Vygotsky theorized about how children learn. Piaget believed that children build their own learning within specific stages of cognitive development. Piaget believed that a child's learning was impacted by his interaction with others, in this case, a teacher (Crain, 2011, p. 241). Vygotsky believed that speech acquisition helped a child learn through interaction with others but also through the ability to "think with the help of words," (Crain, p. 229). Since writing has been observed to be predictive in development and is supported by scaffolding (Caulkins, 2003, p. 9), Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories are supported through the observations of exemplary writing educators. Piaget's preoperational stage between the ages of two to seven consists of children learning to think and demonstrating their thinking with symbols and internal images. Children's thinking at this stage is "unsystematic and illogical" (Crain, 2011, p. 120). Writing uses letters as symbols, which children use in growing ability as they learn the significance of letters in the ability to convey meaning (Caulkins, 2003, p. 9 & p. 13-14). Ray and Glover have observed that a young writer's writing is not representational; it cannot stand on its own to convey meaning (2008, p. 43). Piaget's Concrete Operations period between the ages of seven to eleven holds that children learn to think systematically when able to reference concrete objects and activities (Crain, p. 120). Writing a piece in sequential order requires a student to think systematically. Ray and Glover have observed children creating books with several pages. Younger children must tell the story as their writing is nonrepresentational. More developed writers recognize that each page is an extension of an idea or chronological events (2008, p. 30).

Writing educators believe that writing is a verbal activity. Students need to read their writing out loud to others (Caulkins; Kendrick & McKay; Ray & Glover; Routman). Vygotsky theorized that students learn through environmental stimuli and their own signs, especially

speech (Crain, 2011, p. 229). Speech within children develops with age. As children grow in their ability to communicate with others, they also grow in their ability to think to themselves with words (Crain, p. 229). Vygotsky theorized that writing and numbering systems were also sign systems that increased learning through the ability to pass on information. The ability to write is necessary to record information. The jump from thought to speech is more readily made than the jump from thought and/or speech to documenting thoughts (Crain, 2011, p. 229). In order to document thoughts, children need to be able to read and write.

Writing grows from squiggles to letters, then to letters that correspond to the sounds within a word a child is attempting to write (Caulkins, 2003, p. 13-14). Growth of writing development in this manner supports Piaget's cognitive development stages as well as Vygotsky's theory of speech impacting cognitive growth. As students grow in their ability to use signs to communicate, their ability to read and write grows, too. Writing may be a better way for students to learn letter sound correspondence compared to reading (Ray & Glover, 2008, p. 13). Ray and Glover have observed students write beyond what they can read. Students who discover sound letter correspondence as they take words apart sound by sound to write the word will begin to write with confidence. However, when these students attempt to read their writing, they often discover they cannot yet put the sounds back together to read the words. At this point, students will simplify their writing to be able to read their pieces (Ray & Glover, p. 49). Ray and Glover believe that writing is composition development. Writers need to think of a topic, organize ideas, write, revise, illustrate, and publish. Ray and Glover go so far as to say that developing the ability to write is developing a habit of mind (2008, p. 52). The previous findings are supported by Vygotsky's theory of the zone of proximal development. Students are supported by adults in developing sound letter correspondence, developing knowledge of an audience other

than self (Routman, 2000, p. 223), and developing the ability to write through scaffolding and feedback. This scaffolding and feedback meets students where they are and provides small pieces of outside assistance that enable students to move up to the next level of writing development (Crain, 2011, p. 245).

Piaget's theory of building knowledge from experience is supported by several writing educators who say children need daily practice in writing along with just the right amount of adult support so that children achieve their fullest potential for each developmental stage (Caulkins; Paterson, Henry, O'Quin, & Ceprano; Ray & Glover; Routman).

In support of using three progressively difficult scoring rubrics, research has shown that writing progresses in predictable ways (Caulkins, 2003, p. 9; Ray & Glover). The three rubrics used to evaluate student writing do increase in difficulty in a predictable manner. The Ideas/Content strand of the rubric for a score of three/meets standard progresses in the manner seen in Figure 1. The Organization strand of the rubric for a score of three/meets standard progresses in the manner seen in Figure 2. The Applied Spelling strand of the rubric for a score of three/meets standard progresses in the manner seen in Figure 3.

The rubrics were created with a logical progression for learning. The fall rubric allows most students to achieve at standard criteria with instruction in topic definition, story sequence, drawing a picture to tell a story, and use of letter symbols for writing words. The winter rubric requires further instruction in labeling a picture, practice in story retell, directionality of print, knowledge of sentence structure, beginning sound-letter correspondence, and use of onset sound for minimum of word representation. The spring rubric requires a large jump in student ability. Students must include more letter sounds per word, understand every word contains at least one vowel, and learn correct capitalization conventions for writing names. As a teacher, I find this

<b>Figure 1. Ideas/Content</b>		
Fall	Winter	Spring
Content shows connection to topic/prompt	Content is connected to the prompt	A topic is easily selected and developed throughout the writing
Some details or description provided in picture and/or caption/label	Story is told by picture/captions/labels	Draws and writes to communicate with others
Can retell orally with prompting	Consistently retells story	Draws and writes to retell, inform, and entertain
	Dictation may be needed to interpret/understand student's ideas	Words/letters independently understood from picture; may have descriptive and correctly labeled pictures.
		Writes clear and simple sentences (noun and verb)
		Content is connected to the prompt

(Lake Washington School District, 2012)

<b>Figure 2. Organization</b>		
Fall	Winter	Spring
Writing is too short to demonstrate any logical sequence but words are in order (in retell)	Words are in order from left to right	Logical sequence from beginning to end of the writing
Demonstrates some control of left to right directionality in print	Pictures and words show a relationship to one another	Understands that writing is organized around one topic
	At least one sentence	Sentences may be incomplete, but logical progression

(Lake Washington School District, 2012)

jump motivating and intimidating. The requirements of the spring rubric are motivating in that these requirements focus my teaching of writing standards and give me permission to hand students writing paper, inviting them to write about topics that are of interest to them (Ray & Glover, 2008, p. 13; Routman, 2000, p. 223). With this invitation to write about their topics of interest, students usually begin to put something on the page or are willing to tell about their topic. As a method of scaffolding these students, teachers can express interest through



<b>Figure 3. Applied Spelling</b>		
Fall	Winter	Spring
Random strings of letters	Demonstrates sound-letter correspondence	Usually demonstrates beginning and ending sounds
	Uses beginning letter sounds	Attempts vowels, often not correct ones
	May write some CVC words correctly	Spells some high-frequency words correctly (i.e. a, the, can, at, I, am, me, we, see, I'm, like, is, in, it, an, and, to...)
		Uses classroom resources (i.e. word walls) to find and check known words
		Writes some CVC words correctly.
		Capitalizes first letter in first name and first letter in last name.
		Capitalizes pronoun "I"
		Identifies capital letters during shared reading and writing.

(Lake Washington School District, 2012)

questions and look at the unwritten page, showing at interest in the student's ability to write something upon the paper (Caulkins, 2003, p. 11).

A student's ability to write does not just happen; students need practice. A strength of the three increasingly difficult rubrics allows students to take small steps in writing and still be successful. These small steps can be taken by the teacher, too. Looking at end of year grade level expectations can be overwhelming. The three rubrics help teachers maintain an atmosphere of success for students, creating an environment where students understand it is safe to take risks in order to learn.

My concerns with the writing rubrics stem from my students developmental differences and the lack of instruction time within a half day kindergarten program. As said earlier,

kindergartners arrive in the classroom with varied backgrounds. Instruction in reading and writing aims to meet the students at their individual levels and increase their skills incrementally. When we score students on a rubric that is above the student's developmental ability, are we discouraging the students from taking risks in order to learn? In other words, will a poor score in writing based upon increasingly difficult rubrics cause students to lose interest in learning rather than motivate them to learn (O'Connor, 2009, p. 157)?

Again, in order to learn a skill, students need practice. Within our district it is estimated that we need 250 minutes a week teaching reading and 90 minutes a week teaching writing. Kindergartners are to have met the requirement of completing 8 units of reading curriculum by January and 20 units by June. In order to differentiate reading instruction and achieve the unit deadlines, each grade level team member where I teach currently and in the past, teach reading 375 minutes a week. Students write independently while their peers and teacher meet in reading instruction groups. This does not allow for feedback to students on where their writing skills are and how to increase those skills.

Another concern, student skills other than writing are measured by the writing assessment. Students that are English Language Learners (ELL) have a difficult time writing in English due to lack of vocabulary. When writing is written in a language other than English, unless the teacher speaks the student's language, accurate and objective scoring of the writing is difficult. Student drawings without text can convey a topic and meet standard level performance criteria for the fall assessment. Beyond the fall assessment, text needs to accompany a drawing for a student to be at standard for Organization. With short teaching time, I am concerned that we move students too quickly through the process of learning to write and read for their

developmental ability, especially when students are learning to speak the language in which they are attempting to write.

Piaget believed that it was necessary to discuss with students their misunderstandings in order to provide a constructionist support toward understanding (Powell & Kalina, 2009, p. 243). Vygotsky theorized that social interaction is an integral part of learning (Powell & Kalina, p. 243). Vygotsky theorized that children learn best when their learning begins with what they know, scaffolds with adult or peer help to the next level of the concept (Powell & Kalina, p. 244). This theory on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) utilized the discrepancy between a child's mental age and the level that child could attain through scaffolding support (Powell & Kalina, p. 247). Bandura promotes learning through modeling of an activity, although Bandura also believed that successful performance motivated future success more than modeling (Crain, 2011, p. 221). As teachers we can support each theory when teaching writing. We can discuss misunderstandings with students as they construct their learning through practice. This provides scaffolding for students to move to the next skill level. We can model appropriate writing processes and reinforce students' positive use of the writing process, increasing student positive cognition (Gredler, 2009, 5-8).

Considering the above, I recommend that the rubrics be looked upon as stages of learning. Thus, the writing process, including assessment, could be differentiated much in the same manner as reading instruction. Students may benefit from periods of writing instruction, practice, and feedback that are equivalent in time spent currently for reading instruction, practice, and feedback.

Appendix A

# Fall Writing Scoring Guide

Kindergarten

Name:

Date:

	Ideas/Content <small>GIF 1.2.1, 2.1.1, 2.2.1, 3.1.1</small>	Organization <small>GIF 3.1.2</small>	Applied Spelling <small>GIF 3.3.2, 3.3.3</small>		
<b>4</b> Exceeds Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content is clearly connected to the topic/prompt</li> <li>Includes details or limited description in pictures/captions/labels</li> <li>May be one or more sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pictures and words show a relationship to one another</li> <li>Words are in order</li> <li>Print shows top to bottom and left to right directionality</li> <li>Demonstrates some control of spaces between words</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually demonstrates sound-letter correspondence</li> <li>Uses invented or conventional spelling</li> </ul>		
<b>3</b> Meets Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content shows connection to topic/prompt</li> <li>Some details or description provided in picture and/or caption/label</li> <li>Can retell orally with some assistance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing is too short to demonstrate any logical sequence but words are in order (in retell)</li> <li>Demonstrates some control of left to right directionality in print</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Random strings of letters</li> </ul>		
<b>2</b> Approaches Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content relates to the topic/prompt</li> <li>Few or no details in picture/caption/label</li> <li>Can retell orally with prompting</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No logical sequence</li> <li>Pictures, scribbles and/or letters appear at random</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some attempt to add text with scribbles and attempts to form letters</li> </ul>		
<b>1</b> Not at Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content not related to the topic/prompt</li> <li>No detail evident in picture/captions/label</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No awareness of where content should be placed</li> <li>Pictures and/or scribbles are placed randomly throughout the paper</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No attempt at text</li> </ul>		
<b>Comments</b>		<b>Writing Process Evidence of the Following (check all boxes that apply):</b>			
		<input type="checkbox"/> Prewriting (Brainstorming and Planning) <input type="checkbox"/> Drafting <input type="checkbox"/> Revising <input type="checkbox"/> Editing <input type="checkbox"/> Publishing			
		<b>Skyward Reporting</b>			
		<b>Content</b>	<b>Strand</b>	<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Score</b>
		Writing	content	CDSA.Fall.Writing Assessment	1 2 3 4
		Writing	Organization	CDSA.Fall.Writing Assessment	1 2 3 4
Writing	Applied Spelling	CDSA.Fall.Writing Assessment	1 2 3 4		

(Lake Washington School District, 2012)

Appendix B

Winter Writing Rubric

Kindergarten

Date:

	Ideas/Content <small>GLE 1.2.1, 2.1.1, 2.2.1, 3.1.1</small>	Organization <small>GLE 3.1.2</small>	Applied Spelling <small>GLE 3.3.2, 3.3.3</small>
4 Exceeds Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content is clearly connected to the prompt</li> <li>Words/letters are independently understood from picture; have descriptive details and/or correctly labeled pictures</li> <li>A topic is easily selected and developed throughout student's writing</li> <li>Draws and writes for self, family, friends, and teacher</li> <li>Identifies the intended audience for a picture or written place</li> <li>Draws and writes to communicate with others (e.g., notes, cards, books)</li> <li>Draws and writes to retell, inform, and entertain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understands that writing is organized around one topic/prompt</li> <li>Uses multiple sentences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates beginning and ending sounds</li> <li>Attempts vowels, often not correct ones</li> <li>Spells many high-frequency words correctly (Scott Foresman or Read Well words, a, the, can, at, I, am, me, we, see, I'm, like, is, in, it, an, and, to)</li> <li>Uses classroom resources (e.g., word walls) to find and check known words</li> <li>Writes many CVC words correctly</li> <li>Capitalizes first letter in first name and first letter in last name</li> <li>Capitalizes pronoun "I"</li> <li>Identifies capital letters during shared reading and writing</li> </ul>
3 Meets Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content is connected to the prompt</li> <li>Story is told by picture/captions/labels</li> <li>Consistently retells story</li> <li>Dictation may be needed to interpret/understand student's ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Words are in order from left to right</li> <li>Pictures and words show a relationship to one another</li> <li>At least one sentence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates sound-letter correspondence</li> <li>Uses beginning letter sounds</li> <li>May write some CVC words correctly</li> </ul>
2 Approaches Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple "topics" or occasionally relates to the prompt</li> <li>Writing shows little or no development of topic with few or no details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing is too short to demonstrate any logical sequence of events but words are in order</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited or no sound-letter correspondence</li> <li>Few or no words are spelled correctly</li> </ul>
1 Not at Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content, including picture, not related to the prompt</li> <li>Cannot retell orally</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No logical sequence</li> <li>Pictures, scribbles, and/or words appear at random.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No attempt to sound out words independently</li> <li>Limited or no text</li> </ul>
Comments		Writing Process Evidence of the Following (check all boxes that apply):	

(Lake Washington School District, 2012)

Appendix C

**Kindergarten Spring Rubric**

Date:

	Ideas/Content <small>GLE 1.2.1, 2.1.1, 2.2.1, 3.1.1</small>	Organization <small>GLE 3.1.2</small>	Applied Spelling <small>GLE 3.3.2, 3.3.3</small>
<b>4</b> Exceeds Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Content and picture (labels) connects and elaborates upon the prompt.</li> <li>Content includes supportive details and phrases.</li> <li>Two or more complete sentences. (Starts with a capital, spaces between words and includes appropriate punctuation).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Logical sequence from beginning to end of their writing.</li> <li>Understands that writing is organized around one topic, expands ideas with one or more adverbs and adjectives.</li> <li>Sentences are complete and logical.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nearly always demonstrates sound-letter correspondence</li> <li>Many words are spelled correctly</li> <li>Many accurate vowels</li> <li>Nearly always uses multiple classroom resources (e.g., word walls, dictionaries) to find and check words</li> <li>Spells high-frequency words (beyond 3 letter words) correctly.</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> Meets Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A topic is easily selected and developed throughout the writing.</li> <li>Draws and writes to communicate with others (e.g., notes, cards, books).</li> <li>Draws and writes to retell, inform, and entertain.</li> <li>Words/letters independently understood from picture; may have descriptive and correctly labeled pictures.</li> <li>Writes clear and simple sentences (noun and a verb).</li> <li>Content is connected to the prompt.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Logical sequence from beginning to end of the writing.</li> <li>Understands that writing is organized around one topic</li> <li>Sentences may be incomplete, but logical progression</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Usually demonstrates beginning and ending sounds</li> <li>Attempts vowels, often not correct ones</li> <li>Spells some high-frequency words correctly: <b>Scott Foreman or Read Well words</b> (i.e. <b>a, the, can, at, I, am, me, we, see, I'm, like, is, in, it, an, and, to...</b>)</li> <li>Uses classroom resources (e.g., word walls) to find and check known words</li> <li>Writes some CVC words correctly.</li> <li>Capitalizes first letter in first name and first letter in last name.</li> <li>Capitalizes pronoun "I."</li> <li>Identifies capital letters during shared reading and writing.</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> Approaches Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Details are limited and may be extraneous or loosely related</li> <li>Multiple topics.</li> <li>Content is only partially connected to the prompt.</li> <li>Occasionally one sentence.</li> <li>Story is told by picture/captions/labels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing is too short to demonstrate any logical sequence of events but words are in order</li> <li>Pictures and words show relationship to one another</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Occasionally demonstrates sound-letter correspondence</li> <li>Occasionally words are spelled correctly</li> <li>Uses beginning letter sounds.</li> <li>Occasionally writes CVC words correctly.</li> </ul>
<b>1</b> Not at Standard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Writing shows little or no development of topic.</li> <li>No details.</li> <li>Picture and content not related to the topic.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No logical sequence</li> <li>Pictures, scribbles, and/or words appear at random.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited or no sound-letter correspondence</li> <li>Little or no words are spelled correctly</li> <li>Limited or no text</li> <li>No attempt to sound out words independently.</li> </ul>
<b>Comments</b>		<b>Writing Process Evidence of the following</b> ( <i>check all boxes that apply</i> ):	

(Lake Washington School District, 2012)

## Resources

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