

CO-CONSTRUCTED RUBRICS: A SOCIAL JUSTICE METHOD FOR TEACHING WRITING

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As teachers and teacher educators, we must critically consider the methods for teaching writing we use in our classrooms and the impact those methods have upon student learning. In this article, we begin to develop a theory of writing instruction for social justice using student co-constructed rubrics as a method for breaking hierarchies, and a set of conditions to shift authority to the student writer through collaborative analysis, student articulation of critical language for evaluation, and student application of criteria to their own writing. We describe this method used in writing instruction as one way to deconstruct student notions of standardized rubrics and discuss the ways in which it fosters the teaching of writing for social justice.

Defining Social Justice Methods for Teaching Writing

Teaching for social justice, described as a collection of pedagogical foundations, including democratic teaching and ensuring learning for all students, leads teachers to create learning experiences that foster critical thinking toward critical observation of inequities and injustices (Dover). Sonia Nieto and Patty Bode describe social justice education as practices that provide “all students with the resources necessary to learn to their full potential,” classroom activity in which teachers elicit “talents and strengths that students bring to their education,” and a “learning environment that promotes critical thinking and supports agency for social change” (11). According to Toandeka Chapman et al., “Teachers who practice social justice education cultivate student voice through class activities, readings, assignments, and assessments that allow students to incorporate their personal stories within the

contexts of the school curriculum” (540). Likewise, Heather Hackman discusses social justice education as a kind of pedagogical lens that allows learners to work not only toward mastery of content, but also on critical thinking and self-reflection in a way that “encourages students to take an active role in their own education and supports teachers in creating empowering, democratic, and critical educational environments” (103). In this sense, social justice teaching manifests not just through the texts and materials employed by teachers but through their methods of instruction so that the learning principles are embedded in content as well as in classroom practices, creating conditions for collaborative learning, problem-solving, and community building. In our conception, teaching for social justice is constructivist classroom practice that helps orient students toward meaningful and justice-oriented action, through reflection, awareness of self and others, and response, for teachers and students as engaged learners and participants. As we will discuss, this instructional approach, co-construction of writing rubrics, is designed to develop a writer’s agency and critical voice. As writing teachers, we focus on an additional layer beyond reading content, including response and revision, allowing for multiple voices and perspectives to engage an audience of real readers, as the action orientation that is crucial to critical literacy embedded in social justice teaching.

Social justice teaching of *writing*, then, is work that “affirms students’ multiple identities, creates solidarity among peers, builds students’ abilities to respond to and embrace supportive criticism of their work, and targets authentic audiences for their finished products” (Chapman et al., 539). It is our contention that we must critically evaluate methods for teaching writing, considering their possibility for empowering student agency and voice. In this article, we argue that student co-construction of rubrics is an important method through which social justice as a set of practices, within a set of conditions, can be taught. The methods we describe here are central to our own understanding of the importance of the writing process over a focus on product or audience, as is often described in research on social justice literacy practices (Calkins; Graham and Perin; Nagin; Pritchard and Honeycutt). With this critical look at co-construction of rubrics as

one method for teaching writing toward social justice, we seek to focus on the emancipatory possibility of the writing process through collaborative methods that seek to counter student concepts of prescriptive rubrics, foster co-construction of goals for writing and reading, and engage students as critical audiences, and as agentive writers.

Defining the Conditions

We argue that conditions of teaching writing that support teaching for social justice exist—in concert with methods—when:

1. Teachers facilitate students' collaborative development of deep reading and critical analysis of texts in order to foster student ownership and articulation of ideas;
2. Teachers lead students' collaborative articulation and co-construction of critical language of those ideas to name, for themselves and their classmates, the goals of their writing;
3. Teachers design opportunities for students to craft texts applying co-constructed languages in order to foster students' authentic authorship.

Each of these conditions works within several process levels of reading, speaking/listening, and writing: evaluating and comparing models; appraising and deciding on shared principles; curating, critiquing, and constructing exemplars. These levels occur within classroom communities that value the recursive nature of these processes and see them as a vehicle for fostering students' own authorial voices. These process levels are imperative to critical re-conception and reconstruction of rubrics, and for classroom work to align with Nieto and Bode's framework, to describe methods of teaching writing for social justice, even when the topics and purposes for writing may not refer directly to social justice themes.

The methods we describe come to us through a model for constructivist teaching; however, our aim here is to put forth a close description of these processes as a way of examining learning

experiences in which one teacher dismantles student reliance on standardized rubrics, which work counter to the tenets of teaching for social justice, and instead facilitates co-constructed rubrics. We see the methods we examine here as vital to articulating a vision for writing classrooms that meets several tenets defined by Nieto as teaching for social justice: “promot[ing] critical thinking and supporting agency for social change,” utilizing student resources brought to the classroom, and valuing students’ languages, cultures, and identities in classroom work (7). In addition to instructional content that points out systemic inequality and racism, these methods help us to define more fully the “how” of teaching writing for social justice. Our focus here is to more fully reveal methods in writing classrooms that support teaching for social justice by examining a process designed to provide students practice in developing critical literacy engagement.

It is within these conditions articulated above that we describe, one of our own classrooms, the goal of beginning to move more fully toward a naming of methods and tools that support teaching writing for social justice. As we outline these methods, we begin to articulate a framework for teaching writing for social justice within literacy teaching that can work to help teachers move to doing what Marilyn Cochran-Smith et al., “good and just teaching” (Cochran-Smith et al., 347). We engage in this work of examining practices for teaching writing through a social justice lens as both teachers of writing and teacher educators focused on preparing future teachers to enter classrooms with the dispositions, content knowledge, and pedagogical knowledge needed to teach for social justice. The methods we examine here may not be all that comes to mind when picturing social justice teaching, especially as we discuss them separated from content and from the more visible outcomes sought by teaching for social justice; however, as Rula Diab and Luma Balaa argue, students are “empowered and motivated to learn” through co-constructed rubric design, and in this way move toward being “responsible, independent, and reflective about their learning” (59). Here the methods we highlight and examine are focused on leading students through an inductive process of analysis of both published and student-authored

texts, immersing them in the work of becoming critical readers and agentive writers.

By focusing on teaching methods, which are often given less attention in definitions of teaching for social justice, we help to more fully outline a way forward for writing teachers to do the work of teaching for social justice using methods that value co-learning and critical thinking while remaking prescriptive tools in common use in the teaching and evaluating of student writing.

We choose the rubric as a testing ground here because of its persistent use, reductive stance, and prescriptivist origin, as we describe in the following section. We contend that a typical writing rubric is a contextually bound, authoritatively constructed product that, when used in a traditional way, further enforces a learning culture of standardization, which again runs counter to the tenets of teaching for social justice. However, when teachers begin with their students to remake rubrics, that formulation breaks, and student agency and authority grow. Students engage in critical reading of texts and move toward co-creating the tools for and measures of their own writing. Here, as we describe methods for teaching writing within a social justice framework, we also hope to bring the focus of teaching writing for social justice back to the writing process itself as a liberatory one, where students become “co-constructors of learning in classrooms that are inclusive, supportive, and constructively critical of students’ racial, cultural, and social contexts” (Chapman et al., 539).

Defining Standardized Rubrics as Restrictive

The use of standardized rubrics, developed outside classroom writing communities, has been widely critiqued by scholars like Alfie Kohn, Maja Wilson, and others. In their most restrictive forms, rubrics in writing instruction come with the goal of quantifying writing performance as they also “treat teachers as interchangeable parts” and writers as technicians (Cochran-Smith 4). *The Oxford English Dictionary* traces the word “rubric” back to liturgical directions for conducting church services, traditionally written in red ink. Later, it referred to prescriptive notes, descriptions, and red pigmentation for marking paper. The traces of this definition imply established sets of rules, with

a focus on errors, correction, and rigid enforcement of predetermined structures. Eric Turley and Chris Gallagher claim that modern classroom rubrics descend from the 1913 Hillegas Scale, a “scientific tool that could eliminate teacher subjectivity for an objective and exact numerical measurement for student writing” (88). Grounded in this sense, the rubric is an assessment tool, not a tool for teaching, thinking, or improving student writing. In addition, this restrictive sense of rubrics classifies good writing as defined by static parameters, not as a recursive transaction between reader and writer.

The application of standardized rubrics to assess student writing is tied to formulaic approaches to teaching and composing; rubrics are used persistently in classroom and testing interactions. Poorly designed rubrics with ineffective criteria, however, Madeline Marcotte claims, create a formula that stunts student voice, encourages formulaic, poor writing and shallow thinking; she explains, “Rubrics that are prescriptive rather than descriptive will promote thoughtless and perfunctory writing; such rubrics are as limiting to the development of rhetorical mastery as the five-paragraph essay.” Using Google to search for rubrics, as many novice teachers do, leads to a range of examples that exemplify rubrics’ problems, and which “stress low-level skills and knowledge” (Andrade 9). One example we found describes an “excellent” poem as one where the “student devoted a lot of time and effort to the writing process and worked hard to make the poem a good read. The poem has no errors” (Google search). What we see in readily available standardized rubrics is not that the educators who wrote them believe that “the qualities of good writing” are not able to “be captured in a rubric,” but that there has not yet been a shared language developed in the classroom for thinking through texts, to decipher the criteria for improving writing (Andrade 9). Kohn argues that rubrics legitimize measurement rather than thought, replace “high interrater reliability” with authenticity, create a sense of false objectivity in an inherently subjective practice of teaching, and standardize assessment and learning for teachers and students (12). According to Wilson, “by accepting the standardized responses inherent in rubrics, we undermine the power of the

experiences of reading and writing” and silence the conversation of assessment in the classroom (“Why I Won’t” 66).

As teachers of writing we must begin to align with the conceptual and pedagogical philosophies of teaching for social justice (McDonald and Zeichner), while we dismantle the idea that methods exist in a theoretical vacuum or just what teachers “do,” instead of actions stemming from socio-cultural understandings (Grossman at el.; Chaiklin and Lave). Therefore, the way to consider rubrics and remake them as learning tools is similar to most of the changes to our methods that must occur for teaching for social justice to happen. Like so much of social justice work, it is baked into the process to reveal underlying inequity, as student readers can begin to “pay attention to their critical, yet too frequently unconscious, responses to texts” (Wyngaard and Gehrke 69). Bradford at el. claim that “when teachers involve students in constructing a rubric for an assignment, they allow them to think through quality issues and criteria in-depth” (464). In this way, co-construction of rubrics allows student agency to come forward, values and utilizes students’ languages, and encourages critical thinking.

When we involve students in co-construction of a frequently unquestioned assessment, we forward constructivist principles that allow students to sense expectations, rely on their own knowledge and judgement, and move between levels of concrete and abstract awareness (Anson at el.). Teachers must lead students to become the authors of their own understanding, and rubrics co-constructed by students as interpretive tools become part of the process of teaching for social justice. Co-construction of rubrics affords students the opportunity to decide what is of value and to articulate those claims, furthering skills in argumentation, critical reading, and self-efficacy.

The Conditions in Action: Student Co-Constructed Rubrics in a Composition Classroom

In this section, we show how the conditions we have identified are manifest in methods when a teacher engages students in the collaborative co-construction of rubrics. We will explore these

conditions in one of our own classrooms, a second-course in composition and rhetoric at a large state university. We will focus on the conditions and pedagogical decision-making as the teacher, Dr. M, (co-author 1), engages students in the interpretive work of analyzing, authoring, and applying criteria for writing.

Context First: The Why for Teaching

For the conditions we discuss to be implemented, teachers must begin with a critical analysis of the context, considering the goals at the individual student and classroom levels. Dr. M's students come to her composition course from a range of majors with differing writing experiences and different attitudes toward what "good writing" is. Generally speaking, however, they are accustomed to being given guidelines that dictate the length, structure, and convention of their writing; they are used to being assessed with rubrics supplied by their teachers.

As part of the general education curriculum at the university, the course goals focus on developing analysis and use of rhetoric, research inquiry, and deep processes for reading and writing. The unit we detail here, on editorial argument, came at the end of a semester during which students practiced the pattern of rubric creation through four other major writing assignments and several smaller tasks, working with topics of their own choosing. The goal of the editorial unit was synthesis of research understandings from past projects to write an argument with authority for an informal audience. During the unit, Dr. M collected and analyzed de-identified written student reflections, excerpts from collaborative notes in Google docs made during rubric design, anonymized end-of-course evaluations, and her own teaching notes gathered while listening to student group discussions; these sources of conversation provide student voice in this research.

In order to further develop our focus on the importance of contextual awareness, we discuss several aspects of planning for student created rubrics. First, classroom decisions are informed by the work done by students in the class to build on their cultural resources, interests, and existing knowledge while working to reach every student. As Turley and Gallagher assert, rubrics developed from

within the classroom are necessarily “messier” and more “context-specific,” a product of a particular community in a particular moment in time (90). Second, the work is focused within one genre of writing, with the teacher and students providing multiple models and opportunities for collaborative critical analysis of those models, so that the traits that students themselves read and identify become guidelines for student writing. These methods “critique a universalist view of knowledge” and align teaching practices consistent with social justice education (Cochran-Smith et al.). Further, social justice teaching is enacted when teachers work to move all students toward enhanced ownership of their ideas. The goals of the lessons we describe, and their trajectory toward student critical thinking, model and scaffold student critique of texts and develop student ideas about authorship of their own writing. By considering a specific teaching context with the clear articulation of goals toward student ownership and agency, Dr. M enacts a classroom practice that moves beyond “good teaching;” it is this knowledge and consideration of conditions, the goals of student literacy, and the understanding that student writing/learning processes must be foregrounded that allow us to focus on this as one specific method of teaching writing for social justice.

Condition 1: Students’ Articulation of Ideas

Teachers facilitate students’ collaborative development of deep reading and critical analysis of texts in order to foster student ownership and articulation of ideas.

Dr. M’s editorial unit began by asking students: “What do you already know about editorials?” and led to student creation of a list co-created in a Google document that housed student and teacher notes collected during discussion. That list included thoughts about purpose, such as “They [authors] express an opinion...” Discussion of context was also included, also: “They’re [editorials] often in newspapers.”

In a whole-group setting, the class compiled what they knew, including misconceptions about editorials, and what students acknowledged they did not know about editorials, though they discovered they knew more than they thought. For example, some students discovered they had read editorials often without identifying

them as such, reporting, “I read those on Buzzfeed all the time.” In a whole-group setting, the students articulated ideas about writers’ purposes: “to persuade—to change minds or ideas,” and about audience, whom students described as “everyday readers.” Students discussed readability, saying, “You can usually read them in one sitting, from start to finish.” These kinds of articulations about what students noticed shaped the rubric that was created from these initial notes and conversations over the course of the unit. The rubric evolved from these beginning discussions as students began to read exemplars of editorials provided by Dr. M and deepened as they found and read their own exemplars connected to specific research topics of their choosing.

As the class continued to develop the list of understandings they had about editorials, they looked at several high-quality examples, naming and identifying common characteristics. The first readings were as a whole group, with everyone reading closely the same one or two pieces, followed by class discussion to define purpose, audience, argument, and conventions. The class addressed the authors’ use of evidence, development of rhetorical claims, and structure of the writing. This process was repeated in small groups with examples Dr. M. chose, and then again with examples chosen by students, shared in a collaborative folder in Google Drive. At each stage of reading and analysis, the class returned to the initial list to talk about new observations. Dr. M carefully facilitated students’ collaborative development of deep reading and critical analysis of texts through critical questioning strategies, one-on-one conversation, and small group discussion, and she provided space for their deepening ideas, developed over time, in a shared collaborative document. In this way, the list of criteria was shaped into a co-constructed rubric in which the guidelines were generated and articulated by students.

Condition 2: Critical Student Language to Describe Student Ideas

Teachers lead students’ collaborative articulation and co-construction of

critical language of those ideas to name, for themselves and their classmates, the goals of their writing.

In Dr. M's classroom, students were already familiar with rubrics, but rather than co-constructing them, they were provided a template for successful writing by a teacher as well as examples provided by a teacher. As we have described, in this case, students' critical analysis of a range of successful texts moved the class into a shared articulation of the qualities of editorials, and these became the language of the rubric, which then shaped students' goals for their writing. Embedded within this practice is the heuristic use of student curated texts, editorials they choose and determine as effective, and topics of student choice for reading and writing. Relying on co-constructed knowledge and language in reading, responding, and evaluating these texts, students are able to use their voices to develop and apply criteria with the teacher as guide; these are elements fundamental to social justice pedagogy.

In Dr. M's class, students read editorials closely in small groups, considered questions about rhetorical development, craft, structure, purpose, and audience, and worked with questions such as the following:

- What do you notice?
- How much of this piece is personal opinion?
- How much of this piece is grounded in research?
- What do you know about the author's credibility?
- Who is the intended audience?
- How is this piece organized?

Through various small group discussion strategies, students made context-specific and genre-specific observations about editorial writing. Then during whole class discussion, the class typed a list of qualities in a Google Doc, titled "Defining Editorials." The final list included language specific to this class's understandings; for instance, instead of specifying a page limit students decided editorials "could be read in one sitting," they were for an audience of "everyday readers," and that they "are not necessarily balanced" in terms of logic, emotion,

or credibility. This list became the co-constructed rubric (see Figure 1), which served to name and shape the goals of the writing, in students' own words, to be applied throughout the writing process.

Condition 3: Student Application of Co-Constructed Language

Teachers design opportunities for students to craft texts applying co-constructed language in order to foster student's authentic authorship.

As a former high school English teacher, Dr. M had experienced the work of guiding students through critical discussion toward the production of a collaborative rubric, though initially she felt those rubrics revealed that students simply could recall “facts” about genre, structure, and organization. Early iterations of this process lacked the necessary focus on inquiry and the requisite shift in power to co-construct understandings alongside students, elements that allow these methods to fit within a teaching for social justice descriptor. For example, in the past, Dr. M would have begun with a common text, read together with students, followed by a discussion of that text, in which she led the class toward defining features of the text's genre. Those features became the criteria for the rubric. In this way, Dr. M's control of the reading, discussion, and development of the rubric meant that the ideas were hers, too, as she led students to them. Over time, she practiced stepping back, allowing students to choose texts and lead and record conversations themselves.

In the case we focus on here, student talk and perception shaped the conversation and hence criteria listed in the rubric. Dr. M positioned herself as questioner and note-taker, rather than a discussion leader. These shifts cleared the way for discussion of what students learned, through reading, about writing. Students shared in the development of the rubric based on the types of editorials they identified as effective; they selected samples, analyzed the samples for common qualities individually and in small groups, and transferred those qualities to a list which became the rubric for evaluating their own papers. One student commented on this process in a written reflection:

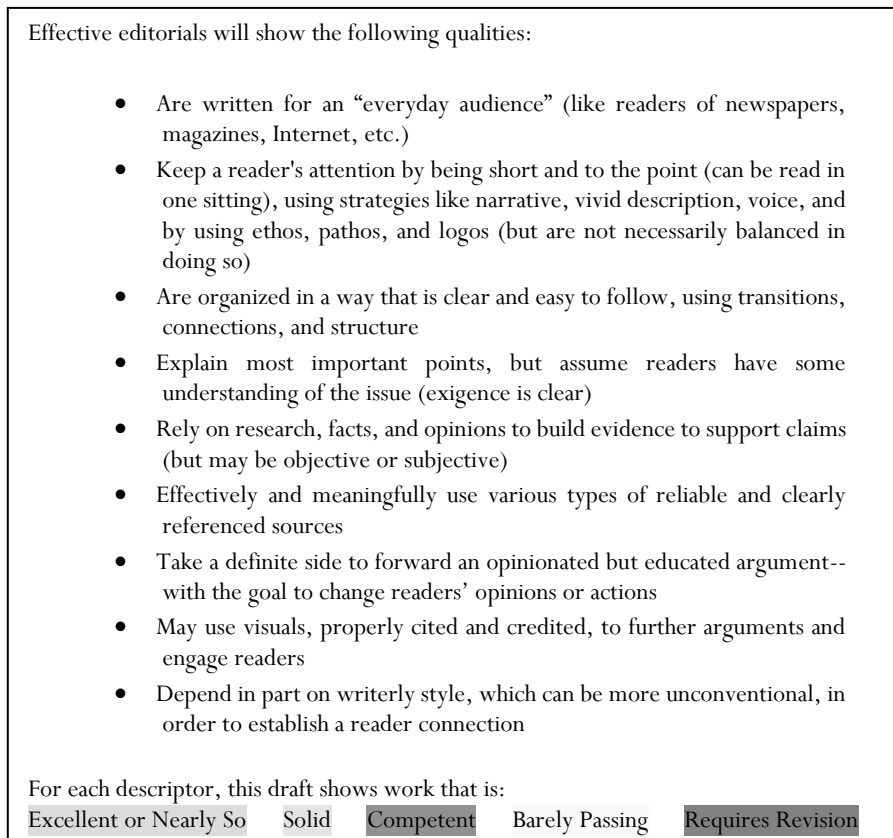


Figure 1: Co-Constructed Editorial Rubric

By reading I learned how papers should be set up and what they should ultimately end with and what point they should be making. This has influenced me as a writer because before I would look at a paper to see how they wrote but I never really looked at how they structured their argument and what point they made. Now when I have been stuck on an assignment I have looked at other papers and looked at how they make their argument instead of just what they say to make the argument.

This student recognized the underlying moves within the writing genre, deeply considering form as well as content. In this way, student

voices became more authoritative and authorial. For example, in the editorial unit, students commented that effective editorials “use ethos, pathos, and logos—but aren’t necessarily balanced” in doing so. While this criterion might not have been included in a rubric of Dr. M’s own design, it revealed students’ understanding of the complexity of persuasive argument and its effect on readers. Students put forth their own understanding that writing that changes our minds may do so by being unbalanced. This insight opened conversations about whether persuasion rooted in emotion is deceptive, ethical, or appropriate, and the ways in which that connects with purpose and audience. In this way, collaborative rubric design guided writing and evaluation of writing, but also yielded common classroom language to discuss reading and rhetoric.

In end-of-course reflections, students indicated that they found rubric development to be empowering and beneficial to their understanding of convention and genre. One student wrote:

I thought when we were able to make rubrics as a class it was very helpful to our learning. This is because we were able to create a structure for our work based off of our ideas and we were able to make a framework for our paper based off of what we all thought collectively would make our writing work and sound better. You [Dr. M] didn’t give us a strict guideline to follow and allowed us to create our own style and structure throughout our individual writing. Creating our own rubrics was my favorite aspect of this english (sic) class and I think you should keep doing it in the years to come.

This quote speaks to student authority and ownership of ideas grounded in their own reading and thinking, rather than in guidelines set by the teacher. However, a handful of students found discomfort in having a hand in co-constructing rubric criteria because they were used to a top-down process of guidelines being given to them rather than having to think deeply about genre and conventions to make critical decisions about their writing. For example, in an anonymous end-of-course survey, one student commented, “Just give me the rules, the criteria, and so on. I am just a stupid student, what do I

know?” This ability to dwell in discomfort to make authorial decisions is a first step toward efficacy, and it is not easy, particularly when students come to us without a sense of their own agency or process as writers and thinkers in school.

Developing common guidelines for looking closely at writing fosters a sense of inquiry and curiosity that is all too often absent when guidelines come from the teacher or even from outside of the room. For example, as students explored models of editorials posted on news websites, one group noticed that some articles drew more online reader comments than others, leading to discussion about audience engagement. Dr. M observed that students began to discuss in small groups the quality of the comments, and how different kinds of comments brought about different levels of discourse. As part of the rubric, then, students agreed that editorials should “forward an educated opinion,” rather than a divisive or provocative one. If the students’ goal for writing was to “change minds or actions,” seeking reasonable ground would be, they decided, more effective.

Co-construction of the rubric guided students’ understanding of the qualities of editorial writing, and it also affected how Dr. M responded to drafts of student work. Students claimed ownership not only of the criteria in the rubric, but also of the rubric’s form. In the rubric the class developed, students constructed something that looks like a one-point rubric with highlighted criteria for each descriptor at certain levels of achievement (see fig. 1). This format was new for Dr. M and evolved out of student ideas about what would be useful to them as writers. The class used the collaborative rubric to craft their own editorials throughout the writing process, and students used the language of the rubric in peer review. This same language was further used by students in draft cover memos, and again in end-of-course portfolio reflections. In this way, the rubric became not just a guide for drafting writing, but a touchstone for continued revision and reflection on writing, and on their learning/writing process. It became a shared language co-created within and for the context of the course.

Contextual, Critical, and Agentive—One Way Forward

Often critical literacy, including teaching writing for social justice, is described through its focus first on “resistant reading” or as students reading and writing to focus on products toward social justice goals (DeVoogd and McLaughlin). While the classroom work we describe here also led students to engage in writing to enact change in selecting their own topics for writing and composing their own editorial arguments, it is the methods employed, the learning process, that we put forward as important, that add to our shared understanding of what teaching for social justice can be. Research on the work of teaching literacy in social justice contexts often focuses on the product: the content or intended audience of a student’s or class’s written work. Our focus here on methods for writing instruction that lead students through critical dismantling of students’ prior experience with prescriptive rubrics, toward critical, contextual engagement with texts and their readers, comes from our understanding that social justice teaching must encompass methods for writing instruction that empower student voice and lead to agency for writers. What we have tried to express through illustration of the conditions and methods here, is a theory of enacted instructional practices that model learning to write through methods grounded in teaching for social justice. This approach, when combined with the teacher’s intention for student authorship, critical consideration of teaching contexts, and rejection of prescriptive definitions of “good writing,” expands our definition of teaching writing for social justice as it focuses on student writing process and development of student voice.

Pre-made rubrics inhibit students’ critical thinking about language and subvert student ownership of ideas, but they also formulate the rules for how writing exists in classrooms, stifling teacher and student agency. Like the five-paragraph formula, prescriptivist test-writing, and other restrictive modes for teaching, the standardized rubric disempowers the writer rather than empowers. When students use tools to question language through collaborative talk, and when they use personal, community negotiated insights about what they read to

guide their writing, student ownership of ideas increases, and agentive authorship for learners increases; students learn to “rely less on the instructor and more on their own intuition and research” (Kumar and Refai 72).

Part of what we hope to accomplish in presenting this theory and describing our own teacher work in co-constructed writing rubrics is a greater focus on methods for teaching writing for social justice in classrooms. Partially this stems from our own work as teacher educators and our understanding that our pre-service teachers must quickly learn to enact methods that undergird their commitment to teaching for social justice. Teachers can foster student voice and agency through authentic writing, forwarding the goals of writing for social justice. The conditions we describe can be enacted in the teaching of any genre of writing and rely on student reasoning, knowledge, and immersion in texts to guide learning. In an ideal setting, these conditions would be combined with rich, diverse texts and other tools for social justice pedagogy, but they may work alone to begin to disrupt the hierarchy in the writing classroom and in teaching practice. Teaching writing for social justice, if it is to connect consequentially to classroom practice, must engage classroom teachers and pre-service teachers in the critical reconstructing of tools that have been designed to automate the teaching and assessing of writing.

The methods we describe flip the power in the classroom from one that is imposed on students and teachers, to one that is developed with and by students. Immersion of students in thinking and talking about criteria and traits, where they use their own languages to name their thinking and collaborate with others to co-create the shared classroom discourse, is practice that runs parallel with the goals of culturally responsive teaching and teaching for social justice, while providing us methods that honor and hone writer’s process. In future research, we will continue to examine teachers’ practices, in a range of educational settings, with the goal of explicating the theory we have foregrounded here. We will look more closely at the ways in which co-constructed rubrics may shift the power in K-16 classrooms, and the ways in which these methods may be considered within the larger set of texts, principles, and practices of teaching for social justice.

If we are to teach writing for social justice, the ownership and creation of standards and assessments, like rubrics, must change hands altogether. Without the work of co-constructing criteria, writers may struggle a long time in uncertainty; just as detrimental are methods that deliver criteria pre-made to students, or methods where teachers use criteria based on the quantity of writing or easily seen structural elements. Consistent with a stance of inquiry, as Ray discusses, allowing students a deep engagement with writing and generating criteria for writing development, learners and teachers are empowered to deepen understandings and efficacy. The questions writers must ask in production of their own criteria for rubrics, are those that require them to question power and authority and those that begin to make them authors, while also constructing a language to describe this authorship. When students make the rubric, we empower them to choose how, and for whom, they write (Davies; Skillings and Ferrell; Spandel; Turley and Gallagher; Weimer). The conditions and methods here describe one way to help student writers, for whom rubrics are a constant in the classroom, strengthen both their writing and their critical thinking in order to engage critically with their reading, to question classroom contexts, and to begin to do what Freire called “reading the world” (178).

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