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**Beneficios y críticas. ¿Deberíamos criticar o apoyar el uso de las rúbricas?  
Evidencias desde una revisión de literatura**

**~~Benefits and Criticism. Should we support or neglect using rubrics? Evidences  
from a literature review~~**

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**Abstract:**

Despite their numerous advantages, Rubrics have come under some criticism recently, some of it is reasonable, but much of it is not (Spandel, 2006). This article will spot the light on the rubrics as a formative assessment tool, starting with its definition, its benefits, and finally a debate between its supporters and opponents. In education, we need an ongoing conversation about assessment tools not just in our professional community, but in our classrooms, with students; that key piece of dialogue is all too often overlooked by all of those who extol the rubric's usefulness or who prophesy the doom it may bring (Gilmore ,2007) .

**Keywords:** Rubrics, formative assessment

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## 1. Introduction

Assessment culture is recently moving away from traditional assessment, which focuses on testing of knowledge, to a new assessment culture that focuses on assessing complex thinking, information processing, and effective communication (Nitko & Brookhart, 2011). Teachers' started to focus on performance-based assessment instead of traditional assessment methods such as multiple-choice tests (Kahl, 2008). Thus, performance assessment moved from being a fashionable innovation in education to a recognized element in teaching, learning and assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).

Formative assessment or assessment for learning can be used to facilitate learning by providing students with the opportunities to judge their own work and learning progress based on feedback to various kinds of teacher-made tests and performance tasks such as student portfolios. A shift in focus from rote learning and the memorization of the content of core subjects to the mastery of higher order thinking skills as well as self-direction skills such as learning how to learn is also driven by the need for 21st century skills, knowledge and competencies (Song & Koh, 2010).

Assessment become formative when it is used to meet all students' needs, and help them to reach the desired level, by trying to bridge the gap that exists by their current level and their desired level; in this way, student will be more motivated to learn and will not feel that they cannot because they do not have the ability (Black & William, 1998).

Good body of literature describes rubrics as alternative assessment tools for performance assessment (Wiggins, 1991; Hafner & Hafner, 2003; Popham, 1997; Luft, 1997; Stuhlmann et al. 1999). In addition, Montgomery (2000) claimed that rubrics could be considered as tools for authentic assessment. According to Shepard (2001) authentic assessment focuses on demanding tasks that involve creativity and critical thinking. In addition, authentic assessment should be integrated with teaching and should be continuous process. Moreover, learning goals and teacher's expectations should be clear to students at the

beginning of instruction, and students should involve in the process of assessment through either self or peer assessment.

Rubrics fulfil the requirements mentioned by Shepard (2001) First, rubrics are used to assess significant assignments, which are designed to measure types of higher order learning, such as complex thinking, information processing, and effective communication (Marzano et al, 1993). Second, rubric-referenced assessment is an ongoing process integrated with instruction. Teachers prepare rubrics before instruction to clarify learning goals and to spell out quality levels. Next, students use rubrics in conjugation with self and peer assessment in an ongoing reflection and evaluation process of their performance (Andrade, 2000; 2005; Andrade & Wang, 2008; Cooper & Gargan, 2009; Andrade, 1996). By this way, students become "thoughtful judges" (Andrade, 1996: 15).

## **2. Definition of rubric**

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The term rubric has been used in English since the 1400s, the English dictionary defined rubric as a heading of different sections of a book, (Cooper & Gargan, 2009). Educators today use rubrics to refer to a category of behavior that can be used to evaluate performance. Today's rubrics involve creating a standard and a descriptive statement that illustrates how the standard is to be achieved (Popham, 1997). Rubrics are simply tools where lists of standards used to score students' work (Bush & Leinwand, 2000; Andrade, 1996).

*A rubric is a scoring tool that offers information to students about the skills they are expected to reach. It is a set of standards, criteria or evidences that inform them about what they have to do to acquire those skills (Cebrian, 2009: 61).*

Dannelle Stevens and Antonia Levi ( 2005) defined rubric as "a scoring tool that lays out the specific expectations for an assignment, rubrics divided an assignment in to its component parts and provide detailed description of what constitutes acceptable or un acceptable level of performance for each of

these parts." Rubrics include four basic parts: (1) Task description. (2) Scale. (3) Dimensions, (4) Descriptions of the dimensions.

Celia Reco (2011) defined rubric as a matrix to assess students work; rubrics provide students with criteria to help them evaluate their own work. Andrade (2008) argued that "*Rubrics can be a powerful self-assessment tool—if teachers disconnect them from grades and give students time and support to revise their work.*" A good rubric can orient learners to the concept of quality as defined by experts in a field, inform self- and peer assessment, and guide revision and improvement.

Although every rubric contain different level of details, they all nearly contain the same component, Allen and Tanner (2006) noted that rubrics contain three to five evaluation criteria that used to judge student responses, and each evaluation criteria must emphasize the skill being evaluated, and every criterion will guide the teacher to help his students to master that skill.

A rubric is a matrix that contains two dimensional checklists, one dimension presents the evaluation criteria and the other describes performance levels. The difference between rubrics and checklists is that rubrics have extensive descriptions of the criteria of each level of the task and emphasize on teacher's goal from evaluating students work. While check lists provide limited information that indicates only whether the criterion exist or not, and does not provide idea for potential (Flinders University Website, 2010).

Scoring rubrics could be either analytic or holistic. According to Nitko (2001), a holistic rubric obligates the teacher to score the overall performance as a whole, without judging the constituents separately. Analytical rubrics require the teacher to score every process or to separate parts of the performance and then to sum the scores of individual parts to obtain total score. In analytical rubrics specific, highly categorized and extensive descriptions of each level of quality of performance for each criterion are provided (Gatha and Darcy, 2010; Mertler, 2001; Nitko, 2001).

The decision regarding which variation of the scoring rubric should be

used in a given evaluation is dependent on many factors. First, the purpose of the evaluation. Second, the time and effort intended to be spent for evaluating certain performance. Third, the nature of the assignment itself and finally, the nature of observed performance standards (Brookhart, 1999; Mertler, 2001; Montgomery, 2001).

### **3. The benefits of using the rubric**

Besides being an effective tool for authentic assessment (Montgomery, 2002), Rubrics have the potential to enhance instruction and to promote learning (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007; Andrade, Du, and Wang .2008). Rubrics facilitate constructive and self-regulated learning (Hafner & Hafner, 2003; Sonia, 2010). They increase students' awareness of learning goals, clarify teacher's expectations, and explain the criteria needed to meet a quality performance. In addition, rubrics provide students with appropriate feedback about their strengths, weaknesses and their progress in achieving teacher's expectations, and direct them toward self-evaluation. The result is often marked improvements in the quality of student work and in learning. (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Andrade, 2005; Andrade et al, 2008; Cooper & Gargan, 2009; Andrade, 1996; knight, 2006; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001).

Rubric is valuable to both teacher and the student as a quick and clear summary of performance levels across a scoring scale, the top level of the rubric communicates what exemplary work should look like and involves the student in constructive learning and self-evaluation (Hafner & Hafner, 2003).

Rubrics provide opportunities for reflection for both teachers and students. Students reflect on their current learning, on their progress, and the requirements for achieving teacher's expectation, also students' involvement in the process of designing a rubric develops their understanding, their ability to become self-directed and help them develop insight into how they and others learn (Allen& Tanner, 2006; Andrade et al, 2008).

On the other hand, and during developing rubrics, teachers reflect on their values, their learning goals, the extent to which these goals are reflected in their instruction and their expectations for students' learning (Allen & Tanner, 2006; Cooper & Gargan, 2009). Rubrics can help teachers think carefully and critically about what they are teaching, what students need to learn, what problems face students in their learning and how to determine the level at which students have learned what's been taught. This reflection increases the potential for enhancing instruction (Cooper & Gargan, 2009; Cebrian, 2009; Moss, Gosnell, Brookhart & Haber, 2002).

In addition, rubrics increase the ability of students to judge a quality performance (Cebrian & Accino, 2009; Goodrich, 1997). Rubrics help teachers to think critically and carefully about the purpose and aims of the assessment, they are carrying out. In addition, rubrics help teacher to decide on the criteria and the quality of assessment they are intending to complete. Moreover, rubrics give teachers detailed feedback about the level at which students have learned, what has been taught through providing teachers with a clear and quick summary of performance levels across scoring scales (Cooper & Gargan, 2009; Andrade, 1997; Hafnes & Hafner, 2003).

Rubric can be a powerful communication tool when shared among teachers, students, and parents. A rubric provides a mean for teachers and for their colleagues' to clarify their vision of excellence and convey that vision to students and parents (Cebrian & Accino, 2009, Perlman, 2003).

Rubrics make the assessment process more accurate and fair. Since the criteria is determined and shared with the students (Wolf & Stevens 2007).

*“Well-designed rubrics make the assessment process more valid and reliable; their real value lies in advancing the teaching and learning process. But having a rubric doesn't necessarily mean that the evaluation task is simple or clear-cut. The best rubrics allow evaluators and teachers to draw on their professional knowledge and to use that professional knowledge in ways that*

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*the rating process doesn't fall victim to personality variations or limitations of human information processing" (Wolf & Stevens, 2007:13).*

Rubrics support development of skills. A team work in Iowa (Iowa State University) conducted a research aimed to examine the use of rubrics in supporting the development of students' problem-solving skills. The results indicate that rubrics are helpful in assisting student understand course-specific learning outcomes. In addition, it is important to involve students in revising and finalizing the rubrics, with a discussion about the characteristics of the excellent work, and to engage students in the learning experiences they hope to achieve. Moreover the study revealed that Rubrics allow students to learn in new ways and can improve communication between teacher and students. And that rubric student had the opportunity to learn from one another, and that rubrics can help students form and adapt lifetime standards for assessing performance. Rubrics represent an effective assessment and feedback tool, having students assess their own work before submission with these benchmarks, helps students to identify ways to improve the quality of their efforts. Finally the study showed that rubrics were generally useful and favourable received by the students (Saunders, Glatz, Huba, Griffin, Mallapragad, Shanks, 2003).

Andrade & Du (2005) On their study that aim to understand student perspectives on rubric-referenced assessment, fourteen undergraduate students discussed the ways in which they used rubrics to plan an approach to an assignment, check their work, and guide or reflect on feedback from others. The students said that using rubrics helped them focus their efforts, produce work of higher quality, earn a better grade, and feel less anxious about an assignment. Their comments also revealed that most of the students tend not to read a rubric in its entirety, and that some may perceive a rubric as a tool for satisfying a particular teacher's demand, rather than as a representation of the criteria and standards of a discipline.

Orsmond, Merry & Reiling (2002) conducted a study that aims to investigate student-constructed marking criteria in the presence of exemplars. The findings demonstrate that (1) exemplars help students gain better understanding of the marking criteria or the subject standards; (2) exemplars help produce higher quality outcomes; (3) exemplars help produce meaningful formative feedback; (4) students can make more objective judgments through peer assessment than through self-assessment.

Keefer (2010) conducted a study that aimed to explore how rubrics impacted students learning, as well as whether using rubrics influenced the likelihood that they would use rubrics in the future as teachers. In this study, (45) undergraduate students enrolled in educational psychology were provided rubrics for each of the two writing assignments assigned during the semester. At the end of the semester, students were asked about their use of rubrics as well as the relationship between rubrics and performance. Student perceptions of rubric importance highlighted the importance of using rubrics as pre service teachers. Responses indicated that preservice teachers who used rubrics as students may be more likely to use rubrics in their own teaching.

Hafner and Hafner (2003) conducted a study that focused on the validity and reliability of the rubric as an assessment tool for student peer-group evaluation in an effort to further explore the use and effectiveness of the rubric. They provide statistical documentation of the validity and reliability of the rubric for student peer-group assessment; they conclude that the use of the rubric in combination with peer assessment provides an effective teaching and learning strategy, that the rubric is a useful assessment tool for peer-group (and self-) assessment by students.

Dibyendu Choudhury (2012) shared his experience of developing and applying rubrics to assess students' performance in a course taught using cases and development of conceptual framework. The results from his experience indicate that rubrics are not only an effective assessment tool but also provide a large amount of data that could be analyzed to provide appropriate

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feedback to students, moreover it would quantify the learning and academic outcome. Also, effective use of rubrics facilitates instructors and administrators to know about the quality of the program and the effectiveness of the course and its pedagogy.

Angela Leonhardt (2005) talked about using Rubrics as an assessment tool in music class; she said that with the consistent use of rubrics, her students have more opportunities for musical performances as they attain a deeper understanding of the subject area. Each performance can also increase students' Higher-Order Thinking as they are encouraged to discuss the performance using correct musical language.

A project study titled Formative and Peer-to-peer Evaluation Using a Rubric Tool. Cebrián de la Serna (2009) have proved positive results of the use of an e-rubric and peer-to peer evaluation, the most important advantages that they have encountered in this project:

- E-rubrics allow for a more interactive and dynamic communication between professors and students.
- Teachers can know immediately both, the scope of particular skill by all students, and the scope of all the skills of a particular student.
- Teachers know and can easily distinguish which skills are more/less problematically acquired by students.
- E-rubrics may be edited for a better understanding during the assessment process, and this can be done immediately.
- Students can readily have access to the evaluation of their skills; know which skills they have acquired and which are still to be developed.
- They found that e-rubrics were evidenced to be more successful in small groups with a Project-Based- Learning methodology, than in large groups.
- Students reflect upon evaluation and its reach. They analyse assessment criteria and standards further than they would do in a more traditional model. Then reflecting during the learning process and for the whole course influences positively on their final results.

- o Occasionally peer reviews are harder and more critical than teachers' assessment, particularly because of the wrong internalization and application of the criteria.

A group of researchers conducted a study in which their main concern was assessment for learning through assessment rubrics, they discovered that using the rubric as a tool of assessment was a source for providing feedback, it was used as a guide that helps the teacher to focus on students learning, they believed that using the rubric guides the students will achieve the teaching goals; in addition, using the rubric facilitates the communication and the elaboration between the teacher and the student that led an effective evaluation. Using the rubric with the students helps the student to realize that mistake is the way to learn, and to enhance their work, in this way student become more independent; they know what they choose and why. They conclude that "assessment becomes not only the measurer of impact, not just the index of change, but the change itself" (Escolar, Rico, Agudo, Pérez., 2010: 1).

Santero, Flores, Gordillo, (2010), developed a rubric for each of the practices that the students have to perform in the course. They provide the students with description of the required competencies and the grades for each section of the activity, and when developing the rubric they tried to help the students detect their mistakes and improve their performance in order to get the scores. They conclude that using the rubric was very useful to both teachers and students because it provides the students with the level of their learning, and also with criteria needed to meet teacher's expectation. Additionally, it helps them to better understand the content, and for the teachers it was useful in correcting every part of the practices.

Lee & Lee (2009) examined the effects of instructional rubrics on class engagement behaviors and the achievement of lesson objectives in the Korean language class by students with mild mental retardation and their typical peers. Found that Instructional rubrics also enhanced class engagement

behaviors of students with mild mental retardation drastically, instructional rubrics help students to be aware of the lesson objectives, and guide them to monitor their performance during the class. And also found that using rubric affect students achievement positively. And they suggest that "the utility of instructional rubrics not only as an inclusive class-wide assessment tool, but also as an instructional strategy that systematically assists students with disabilities to make meaningful progress in the general curriculum".

Rubrics through determining the goals, criteria, standards expected help to clarify what good performance is. So in order to achieve a performance target: first, there has to be an alignment between the task goal set by the student and the assignment goal set by the teacher. Second, examples of performance define an objective and valid standard against what student can compare their work. Finally, discussions that clarify the criteria and standards. In addition Peer discussions can be helpful in exposing students to alternative perspectives on problems and to alternative tactics and strategies (William, 2008).

#### **4. Debate on using rubrics**

Despite their numerous advantages, rubrics have come under some criticism recently, some of it is reasonable, but much of it is not (Spandel, 2006). Wilson. (2007) noted that rubrics "encourage conformity and an overly formal style. Cooper and Gargan (2009) argued that rubrics then "can become the overbearing framework that shapes student work, forcing everyone to look at problems and solutions in the same way, thus discouraging new ideas and approaches. Creative students--those thinking "outside the box" and beyond the rubric--will be penalized". Spandel (2006) defend that this can only happen if we use a language in our rubric that affirm the value of such thing, and added that rubrics are like a guide that provide students with direction to have the necessary skills, that doesn't put a ceiling on performance, and asserted that many students may exceed expectations.

Khon (2006) also criticized and dismiss rubric as a merely a list of expectation, a tool that promotes standardization, and encourage conformity, Wilson (2007) complains that rubrics, and their list of general comments, are clumsy in theory and in practice. They are tools of standardization that tear at the basis of the rhetorical heart of writing.

Spandel (2006) responds that it is unreasonable to imagine that we are somehow ruled by the rubrics we design. Rubrics cannot impede our understanding of writing. They document what we know at present, but they cannot prohibit exploration of new ideas. In fact, rubrics help us surmount randomness, flat-out bias and inconsistency. They do not, however, require teachers to desert individuality or stop responding on a personal level. Andrade (2005) asserted that although rubrics could be used as educative tools, they do not replace good instruction. Students still need models, feedback, and opportunity for dialogue.

Turley and Gallagher (2008) explicate that it is true that evaluative criteria are idiosyncratic to each piece of writing. But in high school and college classrooms, we also need to develop writing communities in which we acquire shared vocabulary for talking about and evaluating pieces of writing.

Khon (2006) argued that rubrics actually help to legitimate grades by offering a new way to derive them. They do nothing to address the terrible reality of students who have been led to focus on getting A's rather than on making sense of ideas. Spandel (2006) argued that if produced in adequate thought and used with discretion and understanding, they become among the best instructional tools available to instructors.

Spandel (2006) asserted that rubric like any instructional tool or method can be misused. She explains that rubrics are not all the same. Some are unclearly written and are more accusatory than helpful. Some emphasize a prescribed approach to writing or stress on mechanics at the expense of content. However, good rubrics always embrace what we most deeply value.

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Andrade (2005) agreed that rubrics that neglect important issues such as validity, reliability and equity are dysfunctional. Rubric should be aligned with reasonable and respectable standards and with the curriculum being taught. In addition, rubrics should be used several times by different people to check for reliability. Moreover, equity issues should be taken in consideration to be sure that the score received by a student has nothing to do with gender, race, ethnicity or socioeconomic status (Andrade, 2005).

Jonsson and Svingby (2007) argued that with regard to validity, research does not provide good evidence for rubrics as valid scoring tools. However, rubrics have consequential validity since research prove that rubric influence teaching and learning positively.

Jonsson and Svingby (2007, p. 136) added that Rubrics are "regulatory device[s] for scoring, it seems safe to say that scoring with a rubric is probably more reliable than scoring without one".(Johnson, Penny, & Gordon, 2001) agreed that analytical rubrics provide more reliable results than General rubrics. In addition, task-specific rubrics provide more generalizabel and reliable scoring (DeRemer, 1998; Marzano, 2002).

Moskal (2000) argued that rubrics provide reasonably objective assessment as they clarify schemes for evaluation ahead of time. Cooper & Gargan, (2009) asserted that assessment with rubrics is subjective especially when teachers try to convert the qualitative descriptions of a criterion into scores. Jhon Mora and Hector Ochoa (2010) added that Rubrics make the expectation of the school or department clear and specific, Rubrics also provide objectivity grades, facilitate grading, and enable students to have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. Spandel (2006) clarified that no teacher believe that rubrics makes us totally objectives, and added that subjectivity is not wrong or even harmful- unless we use it as an excuse not to make our scores or grades defensible.

Andrade (2005), Cooper and Gargan, (2009) agreed that Rubrics require time and effort in their construction and application, in addition, students need

much explanation and practice before using them, Brian Beatty (2008) also agreed that the main disadvantages relate to the time and precision required to develop a genuinely useful rubric, once constructed they can be reused over and over again but require continuous thoughtful review and revision.

Andrade (2000) asserted that "rubrics make assessing student work quick and efficient, and they help teachers to justify to parents and others the grades that they assign to students." Kohn (2006) criticized using the rubric as self-justification strategy for the grades they put to students. Spandel (2006) argued that we need to offer reasons for our reactions and to show that those reasons are based on sound criteria" rubrics make us accountable for scores and grades that affect human lives".

Gilmore (2007) argued that we also don't want to condemn a practice simply because it also helps parents navigate the complexities of assessments that are often quite different from any they experienced themselves in school. Rubrics are likewise commended for their ability to make sure different teachers in different classrooms are scoring in the same way, but educators are right to mistrust such a demand for conformity, it's not bad in and of itself that two or more teachers might respond to the same paper in the same way, but again, such uniformity should be a possible by-product, not a goal.

Spandel (2006) pointed that the real problem with existing writing assessment does not lie with rubrics but with what we value. Rubrics are not pushing us to value low-level skills. Instead, it is our own discourage and our reluctance to embrace the complication of truly good quality writing. We do not frequently credit design or voice or thinking because these things can practically never be assessed in a quick, assessment-at-a-glance manner. Thus, the recognition of such qualities requires time and shrewd perceptive reading. It demands a belief that such qualities are just as important as spelling. Once we fully believe in that, our rubrics will endorse our beliefs.

Gilmore (2007) also offered the following six guidelines that extend the conversation about the ways rubrics work or do not work. First, rubrics should be

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tools that focus teacher commentary, and not substitute it. Second, rubrics should be used according to a certain pedagogy that has not yet been fully investigated. Many teachers have used rubrics as assessment tools, not as teaching tools. We have to explore the pedagogical value of rubrics incorporation into classrooms through, for example, discussion groups, metacognitive writing, or think-pair-share activities. Gilmore Asserted that Rubrics make excellent springboards for class discussions about writing. Along with model essays and good prompts, they provide students and teachers the ability to deconstruct writing and explore aspects of, say, voice or syntax through the same good practices we use to discuss literature itself.

Third, students should be involved in creating the rubrics. Fourth, rubrics should be varied and flexible in order to adjust to the needs of the students. Turley and Gallagher (2008) declare that any educational tool becomes less instructionally helpful and more potentially harmful to educational integrity if it is not developed within the classroom context. Hence, a rubric that is created in this manner does not substitute engaged response. Rather, it is a tool for rendering more of it. While the language of the rubric corresponds to a consensus of the values of a certain group of writers, it also launches conversation. It is a place to start, and certainly not a place to end. Fifth, rubrics should encourage and reward the writing process as well as the final product. Finally, the positive effects of using rubrics should not be ignored, and also they should not be used as justifications that validate the tool's existence.

Turley and Gallagher (2008) believe that the debate on the uses of rubrics has been structured in limited ways. It makes little sense to reject or accept a tool without careful attention to how, why, by whom, and in what contexts it is utilized. They propose a set of questions that can aid us to assess the value of rubrics or any instructional tool. The questions are: (1) what is the tool used for? (2) In what context is it utilized? (3) Who makes decisions? (4) What ideological agenda guides those decisions? .The authors believe that

these questions provide an approach for making judgments about the uses of rubrics.

Kohn. (2006) argued that neither we nor our assessment strategies can be simultaneously devoted to helping all students improve and to sorting them into winners and losers. That's why we have to do more than reconsider rubrics. We have to reassess the whole enterprise of assessment; the goal being to make sure it's consistent with the reason we decided to go into teaching in the first place. Spandel (2006) Called that we should not abandon rubrics, and we should make them better by ensuring that they embrace what we really value. Let's also create them in ways that leave space for thinking and opportunities for reflection. Gilmore (2007) asserted that in education, we need an ongoing conversation about assessment tools not just in our professional community, but in our classrooms, with students; that key piece of dialogue is all too often overlooked by all of those who extol the rubric's usefulness or who prophesy the doom it may bring.

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