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**"WHAT DO YOU MEAN MY FIRST DRAFT ISN'T PERFECT?" A STUDY OF THE  
IMPACT OF REFLECTION JOURNALING AND PEER REVIEW ON STUDENT  
WRITING**

A research paper submitted to the College of Education  
of the University of Mary Washington

Lindsey Holladay Aylor

May 2017

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Lindsey Aylor  
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05/03/17

“What do you mean my first draft isn’t perfect?” A Study of the Impact of Reflection Journaling  
and Peer Review on Student Writing

Lindsey Aylor

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6 December 2017

**Abstract**

Writing is an important component of disciplinary literacy in English classes. Professionals in the field of English write in a variety of styles and formats to express their beliefs and opinions on a variety of literary topics. The use of reflection journaling and peer revision, both highly researched subjects on their own, holds promise in helping students become more aware of how they write as individuals, and how they write for specific audiences. In this explanatory mixed methods action research study, I implemented prompted journal reflections and performed a guided release of peer review. This allowed students to gain an understanding of concepts and then progress independently after the first guided attempts. Furthermore, I compared students' reflections and peer reviews to their submitted final drafts, and looked for correlations between the different forms of data to determine what type of connection formed from these exercises.

### **Introduction**

Writing is an essential way for students to learn content knowledge, develop critical thinking skills about specific content (Gau, Hermanson, Logar, & Smerek, 2003), and perform other crucial functions in their everyday lives. Even though this is such a crucial skill, it is appalling how many students often lack the skills to be effective writers, which is evident by the results of the 2011 U.S. National Assessment of Educational Progress, where twenty percent of students tested below the basic level of writing for the given grade (Benedek-Wood, Mason, Wood, Hoffman, & McGuire. 2014). These results prove that educators need to devote more time and attention to writing instruction. However, these deficiencies in writing do not just apply to general learners. Students with disabilities also contribute to these low results. This is why, as students with disabilities continue to be included in general education classrooms, teachers must find new and different ways to engage all students and encourage them to think about their writing and how to notice mistakes in both their own writing and their peers' (Liuolienė & Metiūnienė, 2009).

To understand how students can improve their writing skills, a definition of reflection journaling, peer review is needed. Peer review is best defined as evaluation of an academic work by others in the same field, and reflection journaling is defined as a personal record of students' learning experiences (Gilman, 1989).

Being able to be aware of what you are thinking when you are writing, being able to write clearly, and being able to find mistakes in others' work as well as your own are some of the ways that teachers determine if students have a solid grasp of the content. For example, teachers often have students complete daily journal entries, which are usually about 10-20 minutes in length and are often used as a formative assessment where students can write everything they know, or

demonstrate a specific writing technique in the prompt (Andrade, Buff, Terry, Erano, & Paolino, 2009). If a student cannot clearly convey what the prompt is asking then the teacher will have a hard time determining if the student understands the material.

Writing will demand an array of metacognitive, and self-regulatory skills (Benedek-Wood et al., 2014), which help students in the writing process, especially planning and revising. However, these same skills are also what make writing difficult for students. Unfortunately, it is often difficult for teachers to create methods that can help students beyond the basic method of repetition and the focus on grammar and punctuation. Even though current classroom instruction can be ineffective, reflection journaling can help students become aware of how they write best, and if they are having reoccurring struggles with a specific aspect of writing. My students have had a difficult time understanding concepts about writing that I have tried to teach. They are often confused about how they can clarify their writing. I have found that through experimenting with different methods, the best way so far is to have students reflect on their writing with guiding questions and wean them off them throughout the semester. In addition to reflection journaling, peer revision is an important practice that allows students to recognize mistakes not only in their peers' papers, but also in their own. These aspects of writing are very sparsely studied in the academic world, which makes the combination of reflection journaling and peer review a perfect subject to focus on. This is why this research study asks the question, "What is the effect on student writing when implementing journaling and peer revision?"

### **Literature Review**

There have been many studies on the importance of developing metacognitive skills in students of all ages. Metacognition is best defined by John Flavell as “the knowledge and regulation of one’s own thought process,” meaning each student will understand their own thinking process, which could in turn improve writing process (Flavell, 1976, p.7 ). However, there are very few articles on how to teach metacognitive skills, such as being aware of your own thought process, especially in self-reflection and self-revision on papers, and combined with writing at the secondary level. To overcome this, a well-rounded review of literature was conducted, in order to give the reader comprehensive background knowledge of the subject of reflective journaling and peer review with middle school students.

The process for article selection begins with a comprehensive search of the database ERIC using the key search words: metacognition, middle school, journaling, reflection, peer review, self-reflection, reflection journaling, 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and the writing process. A similar search was conducted on Google Scholar to find any missed results. After a comprehensive search of databases, sources were selected based on connection to the desired topic, which was limited. Sources were instead focused on aspects of the initial search to create an all-encompassing effect for the literature needed. The articles that created a well-rounded basis for the research were then organized and prioritized into a cohesive sequence for this literature review.

### **Journaling and Metacognition**

Metacognition is an important aspect of revision (Davis, 2009) because it allows students to think about mistakes in their own writing (Scheepers, 2013) and what they need to improve (Gau, Hermanson, Logar, & Smerek, 2003) on both in their current pieces and future writing pieces. This is why journaling often helps with writing and makes writers more aware of their

thoughts. Journaling allows a student to decompress their thoughts about writing, think about what they need to change or improve, as well as give them a place to write future topic ideas. Samantha Scheepers, author of *Re-thinking Metacognition*, says that when teaching metacognition, “teachers are encouraged to ‘think out loud’ and students are asked to question the way they think and read to help them become reflective, critical, and independent learners while developing higher level thinking skills” (Scheepers, 2011, p. 13).

When students have this journaling space to create, it generates more honest and authentic ideas and topics. Reflection journaling works through holding students accountable for their writing, and having them reflect on their writing encourages higher level thinking, which is crucial to understanding according to Bloom’s Taxonomy. Rivers (2001), as cited in Liouliene, Metiūnienė 2009, p. 9) states, “writing a journal encourages metacognition. It develops metacognitive skills which are generally divided into two types: self-assessment (the ability to assess one’s own cognition), and self-management (the ability to manage one’s further cognitive development);” this shows that with journaling students are making multiple types of connections and are becoming responsible for their own work.

Recent research links journaling and metacognition. In *Impact of Journaling on Students’ Self-Efficacy and Locus of Control* Friston talks about this connection saying, “in clinical studies, journaling is often used to promote self-introspections, reflections, and change in the client’s perceptions, behaviors and cognitions. Similarly, journaling is seen as a viable tool in academia to promote reflection on and articulation of students’ thinking and problem solving strategies” (Friston, 2008, p. 10). This connection is a vital one for students to make and once this connection forms, their writing should systematically improve with each writing assignment.

When students become metacognitive about themselves and their writing, they are able to



make better corrections to both their own and others' work. Friston lists the benefits of journaling in her research, "Journaling has been shown to improve clients' self-awareness, promote active reflection on clients' selves and make changes in clients' thoughts, perception, behaviors, and mood" (Friston, 2008, p. 5). This shows that there are many benefits to journaling and metacognitive practice for students, both in their writing process and beyond the classroom.

### **The Writing Process**

The standard way public schools teach writing to students is based on the idea that writing is a systematic process that can be taught to students through repetition and practice. The standard writing process usually includes the following steps: prewrite, rough draft, revision, editing, and final draft (Wiesendanger, 2011). While this can be a helpful guideline for students, the article *Suggest-Choose-Plan-Compose: A Strategy to Help Students Learn to Write* by Wiesendanger, Perry, and Braun (2011) explains that this is not how writing is taught at the post-secondary level, and therefore, seems useless when put into perspective. At the post-secondary level, students are encouraged to use the process that best fits their writing style, and to write with tone and voice to create richer stories and essays. A better process, at least for the first stage of writing, would be the Suggest-choose-plan-compose model discussed by Wiesendanger, "the objective is for the student to develop a process for creating the characters and setting of a narrative text" (Wiesendanger, et. all, 2011). This is an important difference in previous writing techniques because it allows the student to choose how they want to design their prewrite, so it can be in a format best suited for their writing style.

According to Wiesendanger, Perry, & Braun (2011), there is a process to writing, but it does not have to follow the conventional format. What is important is that students have a prewriting system, in which they can get their ideas out onto the paper with no thought to

grammar, spelling, or punctuation. Once prewrite is finished, a student should look back and select the best ideas from prewrite to develop into a more organized draft.

In a rough draft, students are simply focusing on the key elements of their paper, whether that is character and plot or strategic points. After these are established, a student should look to plot and decide how they want their character to move through this story, or how they want to organize their points for a formal essay. Wiesendanger, Perry, and Braun (2011) say that, “the objective of the third stage (of writing) is to have students plan the plot of their story” (2011, p. 3). This is an important moment for students’ writing because once again, the writing process is becoming flexible and allowing students to create their own process and maintain their voice. After a rough draft is revised at a more structured level, students will need to have a system for reflection on their writing. Reflection can be a hard concept to tackle at the middle school level especially since the part of the student’s brain responsible for metacognition is starting to develop (Gau, et. al, 2003). A great way to begin introducing reflection to students is through journaling.

### **Journaling and Writing Process**

Journaling is an effective tool in the writing process. It encourages students to explore their ideas, expand upon their initial topic, and develop a more in depth story or essay. In *Improving Student Motivation in the Secondary Classroom*, Vojonovich explains how “journals allow a safe, pressure free outlet for students to explore their feelings, ideas, and thought processes which in turn encourages their ability to problem solve,” (Vojonovich, 1997, p. 13) meaning that daily journaling encourages the healthy habit of writing and gives daily practice and expression. It also gives teachers the opportunity to practice teaching writing and encouraging students to expand their writing potential. Daily writing will also give teachers

multiple formative assessments to monitor student progress. This is essential to improving writing skills.

A formative conception of assessment honors the crucial role of feedback in the development of understanding and skill building. This perspective on assessment is common in sports and in the arts, where students expect and receive frequent comments from coaches and directors about their performance. (White, 1998, p. 2)

Even though there is research that says that feedback is important for learning and achievement, many students get little informative feedback about their work. When students receive sufficient feedback about their writing and how they are processing information, they gain greater insight into how they are growing, as well as highlighting their areas of needed growth. This is why with journaling, students are creating a plethora of opportunities for reflection and assessment of their writing process, which will only lead to stronger writing (Andrade et al. 2009).

Providing a variety of prompts gives numerous opportunities for feedback, which encourages students to grow their writing in different styles such as cause and effect, persuasive, and creative. In giving a variety of prompts, the teacher is highlighting the importance of being able to write for a wide variety of topics. When students have different writing topics it encourages them to focus on their writing process and plan their writing, even if it is just to focus on the prewrite and get ideas down on to paper. In the prewrite or drafting stage, students can develop organizational skills because they can learn to organize their writing in a manner that is effective for them. This awareness of their thought process can make it easier for students to organize their papers for specific styles of writing. Development of awareness is also a key aspect for students to grasp the concept of peer revision and begin to become aware of higher-level revisions that can be made in both their peers' papers and their own.

### **Peer Review and Reflection**

With peer review, students are at a higher functioning level of thinking than they would normally be if they were simply trying to assess their own papers. Because they are able to communicate with a peer and have to explain their suggestions or opinions, they must evaluate their answers and back them up with notes and examples from class. It is important in peer review to “be conscious of one’s own thinking process and reflectively turning around their own thought and actions and analyzing how and why their thinking achieved certain ends or failed to achieve others” (Scheepers, 2009, p. 29). Being metacognitive about their thinking and writing forces students to rely on prior knowledge and build their knowledge base, as well as develop higher level thinking, which is critical in Bloom’s taxonomy (Davis, 2009). By being able to support their claims about their peers’ papers with evidence, students will begin applying the same strategy to their own papers. By doing this, students increase their own awareness and become better writers as they are able to catch more mistakes each time. Andrade and colleagues’ interviewed several teachers over the course of the study and one in particular stated, “By the end of the year, students’ writing and their ability to self-assess had dramatically improved,” which supports the coach method and shows how students can be adaptive when given a guideline to assist (Andrade et al. 2009, p. 8).

Peer review increases students’ writing skills in addition to their metacognitive function. This is because students are making connections to prior knowledge as they write. Andrade et al. talk about peer assessment saying that, “peer and self-assessment are key elements in formative assessment, because they involve students in thinking about the quality of their own and each other’s work, rather than relying on their teachers as the sole source of evaluative judgement;”

showing that peer review is a better method to encourage student growth and independence (Andrade et al. 2009, p. 2).

### **Importance of Peer Review**

Peer revision takes place after the rough draft stage when writers are reaching the end of their solo revision and need further insight into their writing from other authors. Peer review creates collaboration between students and encourages them to discuss their writing and rise to a higher level of awareness than is possible when doing individual revision (Scheepers, 2009). Reviewing writing with others teaches students the importance of constructive feedback, and encourages them to look deeper into writing because they are reviewing a classmate's paper. It is often easier to revise a paper that is not the student's own because they can be more objective about another student's paper than they can be about their own.

Being able to find mistakes in other student's papers allows the student to be more reflective on their own paper and search for similar mistakes in their own writing. By having this reflection, students are reaching higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy, thus creating higher-level thinking (Liuolienė, & Metiūnienė, 2009). Even with this higher cognitive function, students still need help in creating thoughtful feedback for their peers.

Teaching students to give meaningful feedback to peers can be a difficult challenge. That is why it is best to have a method to guide students and give them a framework to use. The COACH method stands for commend (offer praise to writer), observe (note ways that their own writing is similar to what they are editing), ask (ask the writer questions about what they meant or intended), consider (always be considerate of the writer's feelings), help (offer help in a useful way) (Andrade et al. 2009). This method gives students the guidance they need when they are learning their revision process. In *Assessment-Driven Improvements in Middle School Students'*

*Writing*, he the authors conducted a study and reported that, “students responded well to feedback generated with this process,” showing that when students have a routine to follow when it comes to peer revision; they are more likely to succeed because they have a structure to follow (Andrade et al. 2009, p. 15).

The process of teaching students proper feedback techniques can be a lengthy process because often students lack exposure to this type of revision. Teachers should have students focus on a revision process, and have plenty of check sheets and lists to accompany revision. These checklists allow students to have sentence starters and reminders so that they are giving full evaluation feedback before moving on to teacher writing conferences. The COACH method talks about offering help in a useful way. As a result, teachers need to constantly be encouraging students during peer review and advocate for thoughtful and constructive comments for other students’ papers. One teacher interviewed by Andrade et al. talks about her positive results with the COACH method, “students seem more interested in each other’s comments than in mine. They were surprisingly willing to revise” (Andrade et al. 2009, p. 10). It is interesting to see how positive the results are when applying this simple method to the revision process. With COACH, students are able to talk about revision peer to peer instead of by themselves or exclusively with the teacher. It allows them to develop peer relationships and improve their writing through this peer communication, which in turns grows their skills in self-reflection.

### **Self-Reflection**

While the primary focus of this paper is journaling and peer review in the hopes of developing metacognitive skills, it is also important to look closely at self-reflection by students at the secondary level. When students are aware of their thought process, they are more likely to recognize their own mistakes because they have been having repetitive practice with writing

essays, peer revision, and teacher models. Self-reflection should begin before the revision process and be added to throughout the improvement of the student's draft. Andrade et al. focused on self-assessment stating that, "we concerned ourselves with the matter of engaging students in carefully considering the strengths and weaknesses of their works in progress, according to the standards set in the rubrics," meaning that students will apply the most meaningful reflections on their writing when they have a guideline to assist them (Andrade et al. 2009, p. 3). Self-reflection is an ongoing process that encourages growth in the minds of students and can create a more aware thinker, active listener, and writer. This will lead to an improvement in student writing, as well as in student participation and discussion.

### **Self-Revision**

Self-revision can be a difficult process, especially for middle school students, who are just beginning to develop the section of their brain responsible for metacognition (Scheepers, 2013). When students are beginning this process, they often look for surface errors: grammar, spelling, and punctuation, which would fall under the editing category, and would be in the final steps of the writing process. In comparison, revision of their own paper requires deeper thinking than they have been challenged to do previously. It requires them to look at how their paper can be improved based on quality of writing such as word choice and organization, spelling and grammar mistakes, which are corrected during the editing process. Teaching students the difference between editing and revision is an important step in the revision process because without the clarification, students will continue to make less effective revisions.

With self-revision also comes self-assessment. Andrade et al. claim that "self-assessment can be as simple as students circling the text on a rubric that best describes their work and attaching the marked up rubric to the assignment before handing it in," showing that revision can

be turned into assessment if students give honest responses on their assignment rubric (Andrade et al. 2009, p. 2).

### **Limitations of the Literature Review**

While the literature review did provide many studies about metacognition, very few focused on middle school. The majority of the studies were at the collegiate level with a few high school studies mixed in. The same restrictions applied to reflection journals. There were a select few focused on English, but the majority focus on areas like science and history. This was of interest to me because students need to grow in their writing, and reflection journaling has been successful in other content areas and could transfer into an English classroom.

Peer revision was an even harder subject to find adequate research on. Many of my articles touched on peer review as a helpful part of the writing process; however, the depth of discussion of peer review in these studies was very limited. Revision is of interest to me because my students have no idea how to revise, which is disappointing because it is such an important part of the writing process. I want to be able to teach my students how to be successful writers and revision is a key component of that. However, it can be hard to teach an aspect of writing that there has been so little research completed on. Therefore, it is important, as an educator, that I explore this area of study for my students.

### **Methods**

In order to open students' minds in regards to reflective journaling, teachers need to be aware that there are various methods with reflective journaling and peer revision, which is also an important part of metacognitive writing growth. Another important aspect of developing research shows that students are very responsive to reflection journaling format (Liuolienė &



Metiūnienė, 2009). To show how students can grow their writing skills, I implemented the following action research.

### **School and Participants**

This study was conducted in a 6th grade English class in a suburban middle school located in Virginia. This school is endorsed to have English every day, as opposed to the subjects of history and science that meet every other day on block scheduling. For this study, 20 students participated from one general English class taught by the researcher and the mentor teacher. Of the total number of students taught, 18 were Caucasian, 2 were Black, 0 were Hispanic, and three had 504/IEP accommodations as well. Students were only considered as participants after they returned their consent and assent letters. Participants and guardians were asked to sign appropriate consent or assent forms for this voluntary study.

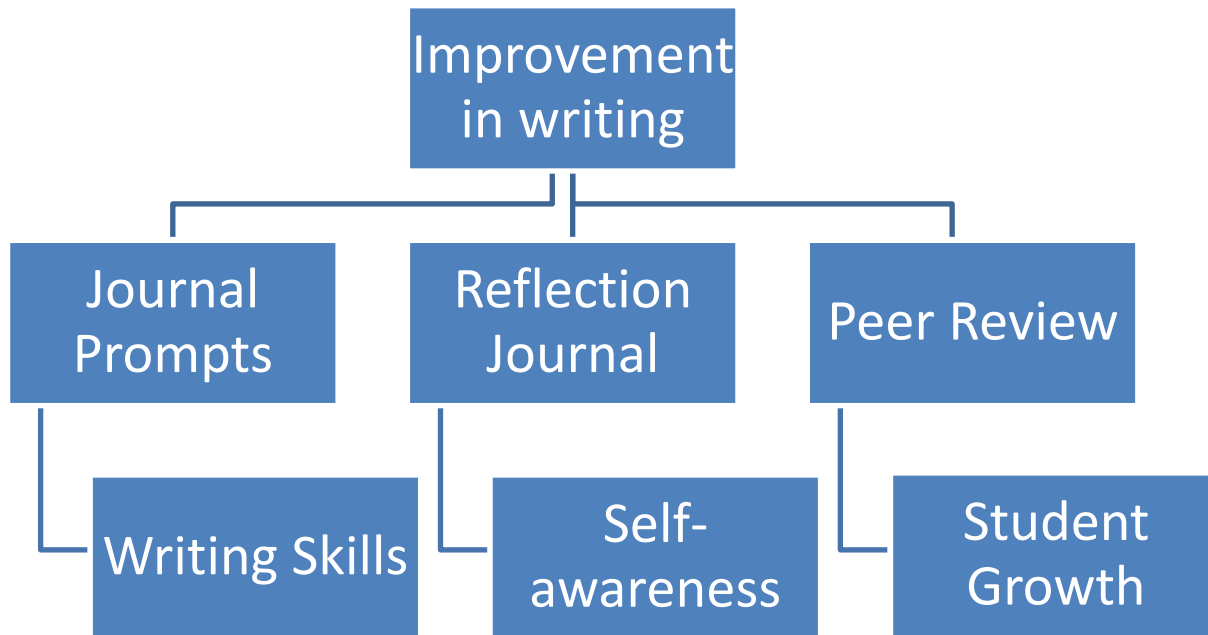
### **Research Design**

For this action research study, an instructional plan was implemented in which students were given daily journal entries to encourage creative writing and prewriting to create new topics. In addition to the journals, students reflected on their formal writing assignments they completed in class. These reflections on formal assignments were turned in with their writing, which is separate from their journals. The journals were evaluated over the course of the study for signs of growth in writing, such as complex sentences, grammar, and organization. In addition to the journals, students also completed two formal writing assignments. These assignments consisted of the student responding to a prompt, and completing at least a five-paragraph essay. The formal writing assignment reflections had three separate reflection components throughout the writing process to monitor student awareness throughout writing. In addition to these reflections, students were also heavily involved in peer revision because of its

connection to increasing metacognition, and thus their writing skills (Scheepers, 2013). In addition to reflecting on their formal writing, students turned in these reflection sheets with their completed essay to evaluate their metacognitive processing throughout their writing time. After these initial assessments of reflection and writing focus, students began to focus on revision. Revision was instructed and discussed in a gradual release model to allow students to gain independence. Once doing peer revision without assistance, students had check sheets and suggestion guides to encourage deeper thinking about revision and how being able to revise others' papers can be beneficial to their own papers.

### **Concept Map**

The diagram below represents the process for this research that was implemented in stages. Each stage has an exercise that students followed to achieve improvement in writing skills and thought awareness. Students had regular journal exercises that they turned into full length essays in a variety of formats. After completing these essays, students wrote reflection journal entries, and worked to determine what they needed to improve in their writing and why. In addition to these journals and prompts, students also engaged in guided and independent peer review, allowing for deeper thinking about both their peers' writing and their own. After their reflection journaling, students applied their reflections to both self and peer revision to achieve a higher level of essay at higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.



### **Data Collection and Measurement**

A variety of rubrics for different aspects of student writing were used for assessment in this study. Journal entries, reflection journals, and drafts were analyzed using rubrics that were designed by both the school district and myself. Students were assessed based on rubrics that evaluate their journaling and reflective writing. These rubrics were used by the teacher only, and will be described in detail in the discussion section. They were used to assess student growth and not for a classwork grade. Students only received a participation grade for their reflective journals. For peer revision, students had both self and peer assessment sheets that they filled out with each peer review session to track their progress. These were collected at the end of every peer review session. The rubrics used for this study were taken from the district wide rubrics, and the peer review rubrics were designed by an online source designed to help teachers create functional worksheets (See appendix A).

Data for this study was collected after I had taken over all the duties and responsibilities as teacher. I had a class discussion about journaling, and had a unit on peer review. Once students had begun writing formal pieces, I taught a mini unit on self-reflection journaling. During the first round of writing and peer revision, I interacted with students often and provided frequent feedback. This ensured that students had a grasp on these abstract concepts. For the following formal writing exercises, I gave less instruction, observed students interactions, and had students rely on check sheets and guide sheets. I continued to correct student errors and answer questions, during student revisions and teacher revision conferences but the majority of revision was placed on the student. During these revisions is when students began their reflection entries. These entries went throughout their drafting, revision, and after they had submitted their final piece. I had a guide or prompt on the smart board each day to guide or help students to get started with each reflection. I hypothesize that students would increase their metacognitive ability through reflective journal entries, and focused peer review.

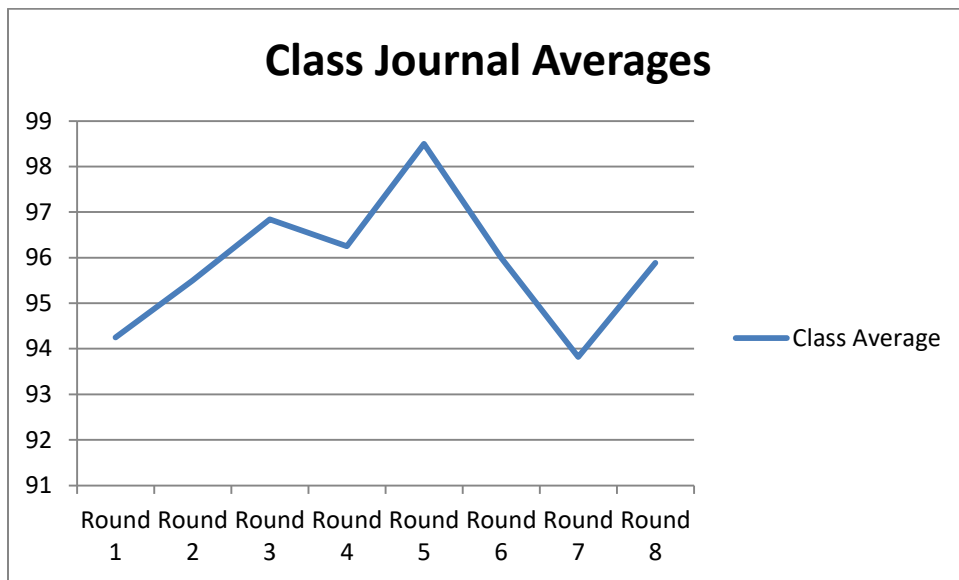
### **Results**

The data collected consisted of daily journal entries, reflection journals, student drafts of formal writing assignments with revision marks, revision sheets, self-assessment sheets, and peer assessment sheets. Using the rubrics, I qualitatively broke down what the students had done in their writing. Revision sheets and assessment sheets were analyzed by evaluating students' assessments of each other, using guidelines that accompany the assessment sheets. All of these data points were incorporated into graphs and charts to display changes in student growth and determine whether the study had a positive or negative impact on student writing.

Students were given four weeks of journals before their first essay assignment, in order to become comfortable with reflective entries and have more practice on reflecting on their own

experiences. These journals were assessed against a reflection rubric to chart growth as the first major essay approached. Journals tracked on an even plane staying in the upper range, a grade of 85-100, for the majority of the data points collected throughout the eight weeks. There were a few outliers that can be attributed to students with accommodations, and those scores ranged from 60-80 with one student's scores hitting a low of 25. These scores leading up to the first writing assignment established a baseline and is seen as journals 1-4 in the journal graph (See Figure 1).

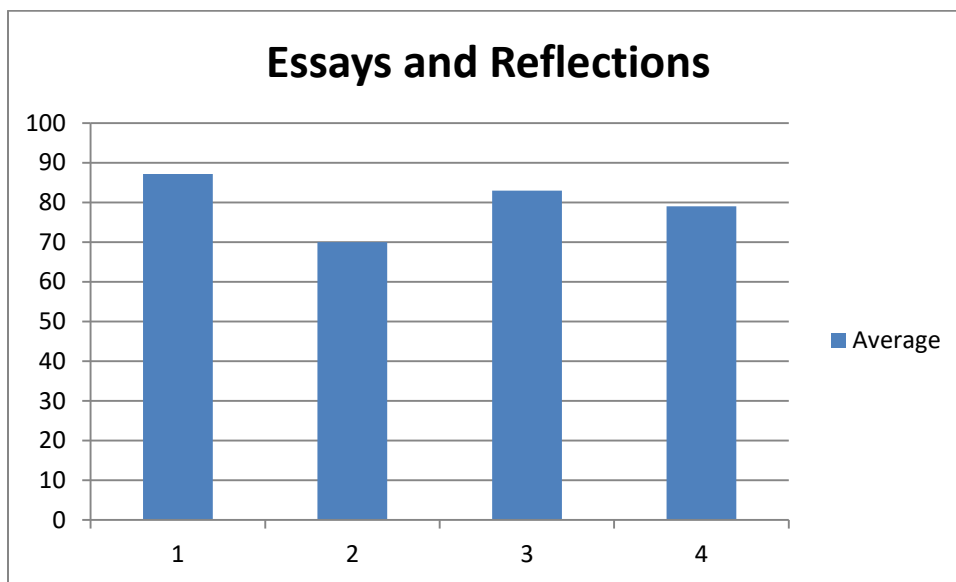
**Figure 1**



After the first writing assignment, students completed a round of peer revision stations. Students were informally assessed based on the revision and editing markings on their papers. Primary reflection scores ranged from 70-90 with two distinct outliers at 30 and 40. While these numbers were a little lower than I anticipated, based on the journals, they were still high enough that I was not concerned about their starting point. This was proven in the scores of their next major essay.

While the Figure 2 shows a drop in scores for the second essay, the second reflection scores show an increase in performance. This means that students were recognizing more errors than in the previous revision and reflection. This is promising for the revision stations because students' scores increased on average by 9 points in comparison to their first reflection. This increase correlates with the second half of the journals, weeks 5-8, and their steady plane to slight increase in scores; thus indicating that the journaling was successful throughout the research, as well as the reflections (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2**



Once I had looked at the group averages for each assignment, I then started to look at individual progress. By the end of the eight-week journal collection, every individual student had an average of 93% or higher on the journal entries. There was one participant that averaged a 46.8% by the end of the journal period, but the student demonstrated tremendous progress throughout the eight weeks, considering their initial scores on journals were a 25 or lower. For this student, scaffolds and prompts were put in place to guide the student and encourage them in small steps to complete the journals and attempt reflection on their own paper. As the weeks of

the study progressed, the participant showed gradual progress, to where by the end of the eight weeks she was completing a five-sentence paragraph and was answering guided reflection questions. By the end of the journaling period, this student's scores had increased from a 25 to a 100 with some modifications to her scoring scale. This was one of the biggest accomplishments of the study.

Based on observation of student engagement, students were actively engaged in journal entries, and wanted to share their entries with the rest of the class after each writing period. Students were focused on their journal for the entire 15-20 min writing period, and were looking for edits and revisions to make in their entries. When I was doing weekly journal checks, I would often find editing marks, and as the weeks went on there would be more marks as students continued revision and editing practice. This shows that students were applying their reflective skills into their writing through these revisions.

### **Discussion**

Before beginning the students' daily journaling exercise, I had to teach my students what I wanted from the journals. I had students write down rules and expectations for the journals and we talked about the length that an entry should be, which is at least one paragraph. I assessed these weekly based on the district-approved rubric (See appendix) and then gave students a completion grade if they had completed all of the journals for the week. This was to ensure that they were being held accountable for their entries.

The reflection rubric is broken up into two skill areas, which are Depth of Reflection, and Experiences/Examples. These two sections are split into five levels with five being the deepest level of reflection, and one demonstrating little to no reflection or understanding. The initial round of data showed that students in the data pool scored on the higher end of the scale ranging

from threes to fives in both categories with a few outliers, which can be attributed to students with IEPs based on the number assigned to each student. This data was surprising given that the students that participated in the study had scored lower on other assignments not related to this research; I anticipated a slightly lower average on the initial data.

I believe the elevated numbers in the data can be attributed to having students completing about four weeks of journals before their first big writing assignment. Students' scores stayed consistent or went up throughout these four weeks, which shows that there was growth in their reflective writing with minimal instruction. These journals did not require deep metacognitive thought, perhaps this also contributed to the higher range in scores; however, it did allow them to gain confidence in their writing and better understand what each prompt was asking of them.

My students' confidence was definitely high going into our first major writing piece, which was a research paper with a topic of their choice. The freedom to choose from a history or science topic helped to engage the students, and in turn increased their engagement and their scores. This research project took about two weeks and concluded with a paper and a presentation. However, before students could turn in their final drafts, they had to go through a day of peer revision stations.

With the peer revision stations, students had a partner and moved through stations together. I was able to review their progress in the stations through their checklists (See Appendix) and their revision marks on their rough drafts. These gave me insight as to how students were viewing others' papers and if they were noticing similar mistakes in their own papers as time went on. I encouraged students to mark up their papers liberally, with a rainbow of colors according to the color key I had set up prior to stations. I was satisfied with the data I received back from students because their papers were covered in correction symbols and lines,



showing understanding of the task. In addition, as I went through each paper, a pattern began to emerge. The more marks students were making on theirs and their partners papers, the better their own papers became. This informal assessment pattern transferred into the formal reflection as well. Students that achieved higher journal grades translated to higher initial essay grades and then better reflections.

The reflection after stations and final drafts were even more telling. Unfortunately, there was a limited amount of time to complete the first major writing assignment and I had to make the first reflection much shorter than I wanted due to curriculum and time restraints. The initial self-reflection lesson was abbreviated and the material was made into a condensed version. I believe this is why there was an increase from the first reflection to the second, because during the second reflection students had a longer reflection sheet and a little longer lesson. They also had a larger amount of time to ensure that responses were well thought out and genuine. I believe this partially accounts for the elevated scores in reflection two.

### **Conclusion**

Writing is a major component of the school curriculum, because it is used in every subject. It is important for students to be efficient in writing to be able to express their thoughts and ideas. When teachers add a writing component it engages students and connects them to the curriculum. As the results of this study demonstrate, when teachers allow time for daily journals and for reflection, it can improve students' writing. In addition to improving their writing, reflection can also improve students' retention of subject matter. While the results were not significant, this does not mean that journaling and peer revision are not linked to writing success. There were some limitations to this study. The major limitation I had was the time I had for the first reflection section was cut short. This did not allow students adequate time to make quality

reflections and as a result connections to their writing material. Initially I had planned for 2-3 days of mini reflection lessons to get students into the proper state of mind to make quality reflections. This turned into one 20-minute lesson, which only introduced the concept and did not allow students time to explore reflection. While I did not lose a lot of time for research, the lack of instruction did not help students have a solid grasp of what I wanted them to get out of their reflections.

The second limitation was the small number of participants. Some students did not turn in their consent forms, and some students that turned in consent forms from their parents did not agree to their assent forms. This limited my participants by about a third. If more students had participated, there would have been more data to analyze with journals and more reflections to assess for a more accurate depiction of the success of the study. Reflection journals and peer review may not be a cure all for students who struggle with writing, but it definitely can be helpful and increase student awareness in their writing.

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### Appendix A

#### Writing Reflection Rubric

Skills	5	4	3	2	1	Score Earned
Depth of Reflection	Demonstrate a conscious and thorough understanding of the writing prompt and the subject matter.	Demonstrate a fairly clear and thorough understanding of the writing prompt and the subject matter.	Demonstrate a basic understanding of the writing prompt and the subject matter.	Demonstrate a limited understanding of the writing prompt and subject matter	Demonstrate little or no understanding of the writing prompt and subject matter.	
Experiences and Examples	Use specific and convincing examples from the texts studied to support claims in your own writing, making insightful and applicable connections between texts	Use relevant examples from the texts studied to support claims in your own writing, making applicable connections between texts.	Use examples from the text to support most claims in your writing with some connections made between texts.	Use incomplete or vaguely developed examples to only partially support claims with no connections made between texts.	No examples from the text are used and claims made in your own writing are unsupported and irrelevant to the topic at hand.	

**Appendix B**  
Consent Letter

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Hello, my name is Lindsey Aylor, and I am a student teacher in your child's classroom. I am currently a graduate student at the University of Mary Washington working towards my Masters in Secondary Education. A requirement of our program is to conduct an action research study in an area related to our studies. *I am inviting your child to participate in a research study I am doing. Involvement in the study is voluntary, so you may choose to have your child participate or not. I am now going to explain the study to you.*

I am interested in learning about the connections between reflection journaling and peer review and how they affects student writing. As part of this research, your child will be taking part in regular reflection journaling and peer review with fellow students. ***This project will be part of your child's work for class. It will in no way require extra work for him or her.***

Your child's work will be kept confidential. His or her name will not appear in any reports of the project. All names will be changed to protect his or her privacy. Following the project, all materials collected will be destroyed. Participation in this project will not affect your child's grade in any way. His or her participation in the study is voluntary, and you have the right to keep your child out of the study. In addition, your child is free to stop participating in the study at any time. Your child would still participate in the classroom project, but data for the research study would not be collected from him or her.

*The benefit of this research is that you will be helping me understand the influence of journaling and peer review on sixth grade students and how it influences their writing. The only potential risk is that your child may be uncomfortable talking about their writing with their peers. This risk will be minimized by working through guided peer review with myself or mentor teacher Ms. Randolph and gradually releasing students into independent work.*

The University of Mary Washington Institutional Review Board, which is a committee responsible for ensuring that research is being conducted safely, has approved this research and that risks to participants are minimized. For information about the IRB review of this research, contact the IRB chair, Dr. Jo Tyler, at [jtyler@umw.edu](mailto:jtyler@umw.edu).

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact my university supervisor, Dr. Jo Tyler ([jtyler@umw.edu](mailto:jtyler@umw.edu)) or myself ([laylor@mail.umw.edu](mailto:laylor@mail.umw.edu)). Please return this form by January \_\_\_\_ 2017. I look forward to working with you and your student!

Thank you,

Lindsey Aylor

I have read the above letter and give my child, \_\_\_\_\_, permission to participate in this project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent/Guardian Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to keep all information and data collected during this research project confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Researcher Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**Appendix C**

## Student Assent Letter

Dear Student,

I am very excited to be your student teacher throughout the spring! For part of our writing practices, we will be doing daily writing and reflection prompts. In addition to these daily writing exercises, we will also be doing peer revision with every full-length writing assignment.

When we are working on writing assignments, you will be completing reflection assignments on your writing. You will be given prompts for these assignments to guide you through these journals. In addition, you will be doing peer review with fellow classmates. When doing peer review you will have worksheets to guide you and help you to assess your partner at the end of each peer review session. In addition to peer review, you will also complete an assessment of yourself and your work for each assignment

*Your parents were given a letter about taking part in this study. If your parents did not allow you to participate in this study, you will not be asked to sign this form. However, if your parents did allow you to participate, I encourage you to participate in this study.*

*You do not have to be in this study. No one will be angry with you if you decide not to do this study. Nothing bad will happen if you take part in the study and nothing bad will happen if you do not. However, if you decide not to participate, you still will work in groups and do all of the work that we will do; I will just not use your work in my research. Even if you start, you can stop later if you want. You may ask questions about the study.*

*If you decide to be in the study, I will keep your information confidential. This means that I will not use your names or the name of the school in anything I write and I will not reveal any personal, identifying information about you.*

*Signing this form means that you have read it or have had it read to you, and that you are willing to be in this study. If at any point you have any questions, please ask me!*

Thanks,

Ms. Aylor

I have been read the above letter, all my questions have been answered, and I agree to participate in the project.

---

(Student Signature)

---

(Date)



I, \_\_\_\_\_ will keep your names confidential.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Student Teacher/Researcher Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

## Appendix D

## Reflection Sheet

# Review: Feedback

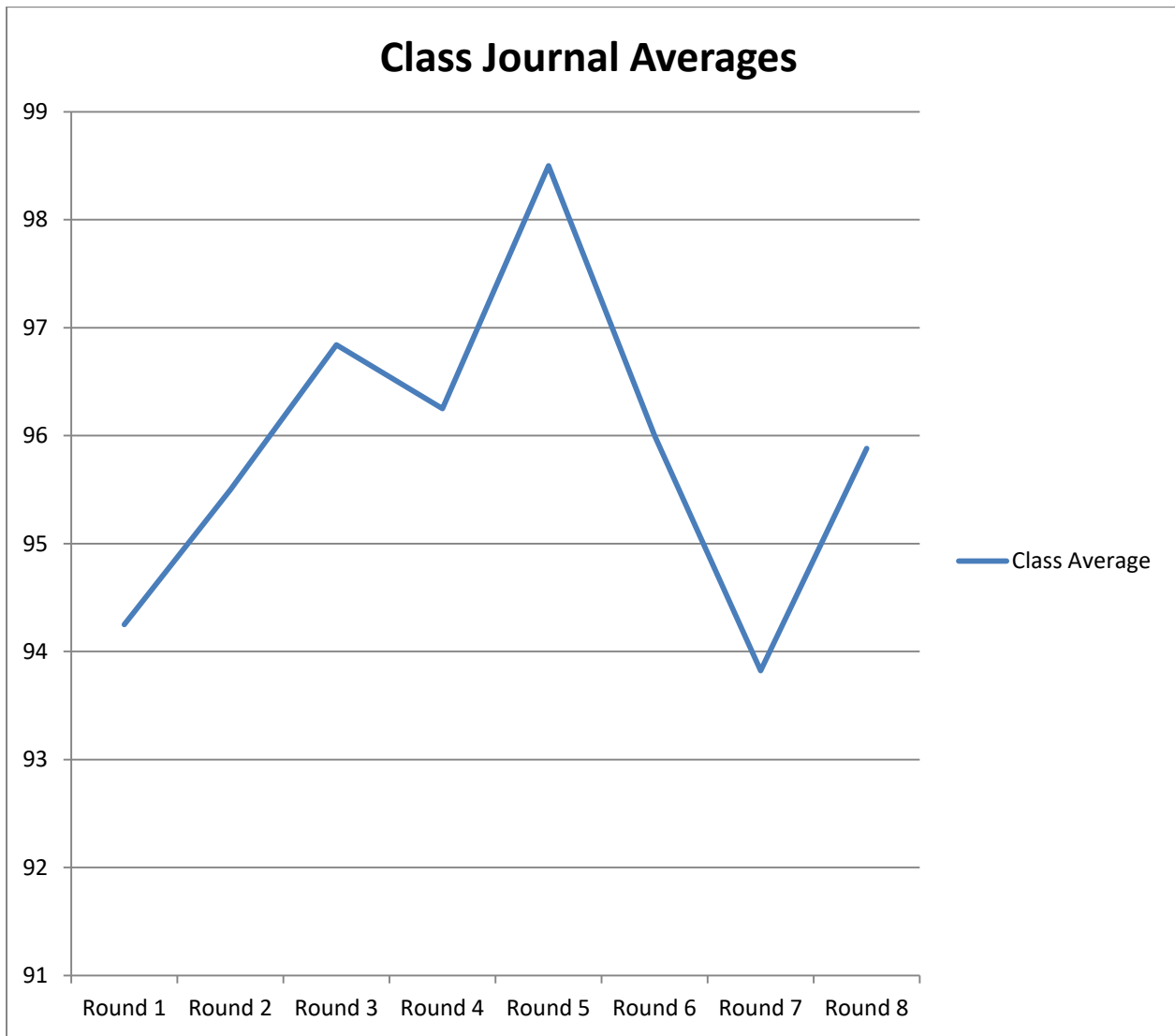


Name:		Peer-assessment #1			Peer-assessment #2		
Criteria		Didn't	Tried	Did	Didn't	Tried	Did
1	Does the review persuade the reader to agree with the writer's opinion?						
2	Does the review provide evidence to support the ideas being discussed in each paragraph?						
3	Are a wide variety of persuasive devices (e.g. rhetorical questions, repetition, strong verbs and adverbs) used to enhance the writer's opinion?						
4	Is vocabulary varied, interesting and relevant to the film being reviewed?						
5	Are all sentences well structured and do they make sense?						
6	Is all punctuation correct?						
7	Are all words spelled correctly?						
8	Does the review include the correct structure including introduction, body and conclusion?						
9	Are connectives (e.g. also, similarly, furthermore) used effectively to show transitions between paragraphs?						
10	Have paragraphs been used correctly to help the reader follow the writer's argument?						
<b>Medals: (main strengths)</b>							
<b>Missions: (improvements needed for this essay)</b>							



**Appendix E**

**Class Journal Averages Graph**



**Appendix F**

**Class Essays and Reflections Graph**

