

The Effect a Learning Reflection Journal has
on the
Quality of Second Grade Independent Writing Seatwork

by
Megan K. Haberkam

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Education

July 2014

Goucher College
Graduate Programs in Education

Table of Contents

List of Tables	i
Abstract	ii
I. Introduction	1
Statement of the Problem	2
Statement of Research Hypothesis	2
Operational Definitions	2
II. Literature Review	4
What Small Group Instruction Should Look Like	4
Small Group Instruction versus Whole Group Instruction	6
Challenges of Small Group Instruction	6
Effective Strategies for Implementing Small Groups and a Self-Regulated Learning Environment	9
Conclusion	11
III. Methods	12
Design	12
Participants	12
Instrument	13
IV. Results	16
V. Discussion	17
References	25
Appendix A	28
Appendix B	29

List of Tables

1. Effects of the Learning Reflection Journal	16
---	----

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine the effect a learning reflection journal would have on second grade students' independent written seatwork. The measurement tool was a writing rubric that was created by the researcher. This study involved the use of non-independent sample t-test to compare the data collected from the pretest and posttest scores on the writing assignment. The quality of independent writing assignments increased significantly after participants had made use of the learning reflection journal. This study included 22 participants, which included 17 girls and 5 boys. The mean posttest writing score (Mean =24.91, SD= 6.43) was significantly higher than the mean pretest writing score (Mean = 14.82, 5.12) [$t(21) = 15.19, p < .001$]. This study supports similar findings regarding learning reflection tools.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the United States, educational practices are in the process of a huge shift. The Common Core standards, which 45 of the 50 United States have adopted, focus on implementing the skills necessary to ensure that all students are career or college-ready. The curriculum focuses on integrating six 21st century skills. The first skill is informational literacy, which focuses on applying research proficiencies to find useful and reliable information in order to solve any challenge. The next skill is creativity and innovation, which is the exploration of the imagination to help to improve and refine original ideas. Collaboration is embedded in the Common Core standards; students are required to work together in order to share ideas and solve problems. Problem solving, defined as trying new innovative ideas and working them through until a solution is reached, is another 21st century skill. Students are expected to communicate effectively through reading, written language, and oral communication. The last 21st century skill is responsible citizenship, which focuses on proper technology use, global awareness, and moral capacity in and outside of the classroom. Teachers are preparing students to solve problems we do not even know exist yet. The teacher's new job in the classroom is to teach students not only facts to remember but also the skills to succeed and compete in today's society.

Many of this researcher's students have difficulty persevering in meaningful English and Language Arts independent work. They especially demonstrate difficulty when it comes to completing writing assignments successfully and with precision. Most of the children give up if they cannot immediately think of the answer. This causes several students to become off task, and their time is not being used productively to increase understanding.

The Common Core standards state that children will have access to rigorous instruction. The school system in which this researcher is a teacher would like to implement rigor through individualized instruction. In the elementary classroom, this requires teachers to meet with small groups. Students who are not working with the teacher are expected to be productive and also to be using critical thinking skills. In order to ensure this is occurring, all students need to have the skills and understanding of how to work independently on assignments that require perseverance.

Statement of Problem

What strategies are effective to ensure that all students develop the independent seatwork skills necessary to produce high quality written work while the teacher is working with another group of students in a primary classroom?

Hypothesis

The null hypothesis is that there will be no significant difference between the writing scores of second grade students when they complete writing prompts during independent seatwork before or after learning how to use a learning reflection journal.

Operational Definitions

Writing skills were assessed with a *writing prompt* that asked the participants what they did over the weekend, who they spent time with, and what their favorite part of their weekend was. The writing prompt was scored with a *rubric* that scored eight categories with points ranging from 0–4. The categories were as follows: 1) provided details in sequential order about his/her weekend; 2) described who he/she spent time with; 3) included details about his/her favorite activity; 4) used appropriate capitalization; 5) used correct grammar; 6) used the appropriate punctuation marks; 7) used correct spelling; and 8) produced an overall assignment that was neatly prepared.

Work that is high in these characteristics is considered *high quality written work*. The scores from the rubric were used to produce the *writing scores*. The higher the score, the higher the quality of the writing.

Independent seat work is an assignment that students are expected to complete on their own. Students have received instruction on the skills that are embedded in the independent work before they are assigned the task. In this study, the independent seat work consisted of responding to the writing prompt and writing in the reflection journal. A *reflection journal* is a checklist that students complete after they have completed their writing prompt on which they indicate the extent to which they think they met the criteria on the rubric.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Small group instruction in a primary classroom is a way to meet all students' academic requirements within a general education setting. Small group instruction enables an educator to address the needs of children with like abilities and like learning styles. While the teacher is working with a small group of students, the other students are expected to utilize their time productively without requiring the assistance of the educator. This can be addressed by ensuring that students understand that they have the strategies, skills, and resources in order to take charge of their own learning while they are working on meaningful independent work. This method is called self-regulated learning.

This review of the literature will examine small group instruction. Section one will address what this type of instruction should entail. Section two will discuss the benefits of small versus whole group instruction. Section three will explore the challenges of small group instruction. Section four will discuss effective strategies for implementing small group instruction so that students are working as self-regulated learners.

What Small Group Instruction Should Look Like

In order for small group instruction to be a productive use of time for all students, students have to understand the expectations for when they are and are not working directly with the teacher. When small group instruction works, it enables the class work to be rigorous and deliberate for all students in the classroom. Students work collaboratively to achieve an optimum learning community during small group instruction. According to Florez and McCaslin (2008), in order to achieve a collaborative classroom community model, students need to perceive group work with their peers and collaborative learning as “productive, active,

personally meaningful and engaging” (p. 2448). Florez and McCaslin found that an overwhelming number of students who received direct instruction with the program about working in small, cooperative learning groups perceived group work in an optimistic way. Florez and McCaslin’s results are consistent with the findings of classroom observation data report by Wiley, Good, and McCaslin (2009) who found that students with a low socioeconomic background who received adequate direct instruction on how to actively participate in collaborative group work viewed group work as engaging.

In order to ensure buy-in from the learners, students should set their own learning goals and must be motivated to complete tasks to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. In order to meet their goals with success, students need to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning process. This method of education is defined as self-regulated learning. Students can work in cooperative learning groups to discuss practices and plans to attack assignments (Dignath & Büttner, 2008). According to Dignath and Büttner (2008), several studies show that students who work in cooperative learning groups are more motivated, independent, and achieve higher academic performance than those who do not.

When self-regulated learning is working, group members know how to implement research techniques, how to think about their thinking (which is referred to as metacognition), and how to communicate with their peers effectively in collaborative learning groups. Students who are working in collaborative learning communities do not show academic insecurity when the teacher is not working directly with their group. Webb (as cited in Boekaerts & Corno, 2005) indicated that students helped one another when they worked together on small group activities; students deepened their understanding by explaining concepts to their peers, while struggling students benefited from the explanations provided by their peers. Struggling students were also

able to develop good work habits because they were modeled by the members of their group who are practicing self-regulated learning practices.

Small Group Instruction versus Whole Group Instruction

During the primary years, students develop academically at different rates. Small group instruction enables teachers to meet the needs of diverse learners. Jenkins (2008) conducted a yearlong study investigating the difference between groups that received small group instruction and groups that received instruction in whole group, measured through DIBELS testing. Students who received small group instruction scored significantly higher than students who received whole group instruction. Small group learning activities can promote student engagement and help students to learn to effectively to listen and respond to other's ideas. The small group model allows teachers to listen to students' discussions and clear up misconceptions students may have (Florez & McCaslin, 2008) while whole group instruction only enables one student to answer at a time, with the likelihood being low that all students respond.

Wilson and Trainin (2007) suggest that part of a student's self-efficacy is developed through peer comparison. When students work in small groups, there are fewer peers to compare themselves to. Small groups are generally determined based on ability and academic needs. Students will be more likely to have a positive self-efficacy when they are working with other children with like academic abilities.

Challenges of Small Group Instruction

Implementing small group instruction in a primary classroom comes with challenges. Classroom management, planning requirements, and having the correct learning materials for successful implementation are all challenges for the educator.

A motivational belief is a dimension of self-regulation. Motivational beliefs consist of self-efficacy, task value, goal orientation, and control belief (Hadwin, 2008). Students make choices to stay on task and about how they use their time when they are working independently. If students are not motivated to regulate their own learning, they will not be on task while the teacher is working with other students. Students must feel good about themselves academically in order to understand that they have the ability and skills to complete the task they feel is worthwhile (Ocak & Yamac, 2013).

Wilson and Trainin (2007) argue that primary aged students develop their academic self-efficacy from teacher feedback and through peer comparison. Students who see themselves as behind their peers tend to be less engaged in instruction and assignments. Learners who receive negative public feedback from the teacher are likely to be withdrawn during class discussions and activities. Teacher/student feedback and peer comparison are normal parts of the development process. This challenge can be addressed through the classroom environment and through the way in which feedback is delivered from the teacher to the student.

To ensure appropriate implementation of small group instruction, the teacher needs to have the knowledge of how to plan lessons. To begin, educators have to understand how to shape the learners' self-regulatory skills. Student regulated learning is not spontaneously acquired; the strategies are directly taught and modeled. In order for students to feel comfortable with self-regulated learning implementation, they need to have an environment that helps them to control their own learning. This type of environment provides them with the opportunity to practice strategies (Vandeveld, Vandenbussche, & Van Keer, 2012). In order for this to occur, teachers have to change their traditional teaching repertoires. They need to be open to change. Educators' educational beliefs play a major role in the introduction and proper development of self-

regulated learning practices. Educators will need continuing professional development in order to become knowledgeable on how to implement the self-regulated learning practices into the classroom community (Vandavelde et al., 2012).

Once the proper learning environment is in place, teachers must receive professional development on planning and engaging students in cognitively activating lessons (Rieser, Fauth, Decristan, Klieme, & Büttner, 2013). Students may know exactly what to do, but they need to be engaged and must understand why they are completing the task. Students must believe in the value of the task in order to be engaged (Ocak & Yamac, 2013). In addition, students need to have access to the correct materials to stay motivated. They must know how to access the materials they need to set their goals, reflect on their learning, and how to find the information they need. The classroom environment and materials need to be motivating (Lichtenfeld, Pekrun, Stupnisky, Reiss, & Murayama, 2012).

Boekaerts and Corno (2005) suggest that interactive computer programs help students to self-regulate their learning because the programs help learners to see where their strengths and weaknesses lie and provide immediate feedback that is private when the teacher is working with another group. Students can take the feedback from the interactive computer programs to help them figure out where they are in the achievement of their learning goals. Their progress toward their learning goals should be reflected upon in a learning diary. The learning diary can help a student to see how he or she has made progress and what strategies have worked; also, this learning diary aids the learner in developing a higher academic self-efficacy (Leidinger & Perels, 2012). Students can be given a few minutes after each learning period to reflect in their journals. Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) agree that successful students use self-reflection after tasks are complete. The learning journal can be a successful way for children to reflect on their learning.

Effective Strategies for Implementing Small Groups and a Self-Regulated Learning Environment

There are many aspects of successful small group instruction. Two of the most important components that a teacher must address involve setting the tone of a safe classroom and putting the proper procedures into place for small group instruction to run smoothly.

Students show a stronger ability to read independently when they receive ability appropriate phonics instruction. Phonics lessons should be delivered through direct instruction. Children who are having difficulty reading will need more intensive and individualized instruction. Children who entered the classroom with higher literacy knowledge benefit from reading trade books rather than receiving phonics instruction. Educators should plan their small group lessons according to student ability. The goal of small group instruction is to meet the individual needs of students. Students who are at risk of a learning disability will need to be provided with longer lessons than other students in the room. Lessons taught to students who are at risk are most effective when they are scaffolded (Foorman & Torgesen, 2001).

Teachers need to create a supportive classroom environment. Students should be supportive of one another, and the teacher should provide support when necessary. The expectations of classroom procedures need to be clear to the students. Students should know exactly how to act when working with others, how to use their resources, and what rules are in place. When classroom management is in place, students spend less time off task (Rieser et al., 2013).

In order for students to understand their expectations while the teacher is working with the small group, they must receive direct instruction on the classroom procedures and expectations. Metacognition training will need to occur; this involves teaching learners how to

think and reflect on their own thinking and learning. Learners will also need training on how to work in cooperative learning groups. Students must be instructed on the steps to take when they have a problem or when they are unable to find the answer while the teacher is working in a small group. Dignath, Buettner, and Langfeldt (2008) contend that the best practice an educator can provide is direct instruction on planning strategies and problem solving strategies. The educator should emphasize the proper implementation of group work and the appropriate strategies and conversation techniques to use as a group member when working collaboratively with others. Dignath et al.'s findings show that if instruction of group work strategies is not taught before and during implementation during the primary years, students will not have competencies to work effectively.

Learners must develop a strong efficacy in order to work most productively during independent work. A student's self-efficacy depends on many factors. The first factor is how the student compares himself or herself to his or her peers during learning activities. The students must perceive themselves as competent of using the learning strategies that the teacher models. Students' self-efficacy depends on their perceptions of themselves. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to achieve high outcome expectations of the assignment, value the activity, and be more likely to persevere through the assigned learning activity (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Boekaerts and Corno (2005) agree that direct instruction should be provided on how to think about academic work, how to reason through problems, and how to question assertion and present arguments to use during cognitive activities. Boekaerts and Corno assert that these strategies are most successful in primary classrooms when the teacher models the strategies and

the students reciprocate and practice before being released to implement the strategies independently.

Students will benefit from direct instruction on how to plan, monitor, and reflect in their learning reflection journals (Rieser et al., 2013). A study performed by Leidinger and Perels (2012) found that students who used a learning reflection journal showed a significant increase in planning, self-evaluation, and goal setting. The learning journal increased the performance on students' mathematical achievement. Teachers estimated their students' motivation while using the learning journal as very positive. Students showed a higher confidence and were more likely to use other problem solving strategies than they were before.

Conclusion

Researchers agree that small group instruction can be an effective means of meeting all students' academic needs. The self-regulated learning model is one way to ensure students have access to rigorous materials that challenge their minds when the teacher is not working directly with them. Students are encouraged to work in collaborative learning groups in order to experience a valuable and safe learning community.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Design

The study had a pre-experimental, one group pretest/posttest design and was conducted using a convenience sampling of all students in a second grade English/Language Arts class. The independent variable was whether or not the participants had already used a learning reflection journal. The dependent variable was the potential change in writing scores between the pretest and posttest.

Participants

The participants were all in a second grade classroom in a small Title 1 school located in low-income suburban neighborhood. The neighborhood was located outside a mid-sized community in the Atlantic region of the United States. The total enrollment of the school consisted of 288 students. The school housed students in grades pre-kindergarten to fifth grade. The demographic makeup of the school was 42% white, 34% African American, 11% two or more races, 11% Latino, 1% Asian, and 1% Pacific Islander or Hawaiian. There were 22 heterogeneously grouped participants in the study. The participants ranged from below average to above average, based on teachers' observations of a student meeting second grade standards with success and the students' performance on nationally normed standardized tests. All students were 7 or 8 years of age. There were 17 girls and 5 boys involved in the study. There was no available control group, and it was not logistically feasible for the students to receive differing exposure to the independent variable, so it was necessary to use a one group pretest/posttest design.

Instrument

The writing prompts were scored by a rubric created by the researcher who was also the classroom teacher. The writing prompt used was as follows: Tell me about your weekend. What did you do? Who did you spend time with? What was your favorite thing you did?

The writing assignments were scored based on eight categories which included writing in sequential order, describing who they spent time with, including details on the favorite activity, using appropriate capitalization, using the correct punctuation, using correct grammar, spelling accurately, and preparing the assignment neatly. The participants could score from 0–4 in each category, depending on the quality of the work. See Appendix A.

The action research took place over a 16-week period. During the pretest, participants received the writing prompt to glue in their writing dialogue journal. The dialogue journal contained all of the students' responses to the writing prompts, the researcher/teacher's responses to the student, and the learning journal reflection sheet. During the pretest, the learning journal was not included since it had not been introduced and the researcher had not modeled how to use it. The researcher/teacher did respond to the students' responses to the writing prompts on the pretest. The children saw the rubric before they completed the writing prompt. The students were given back a copy of their scored rubric.

After students completed the pretest, the responses were scored based on the rubric provided in Appendix A. Based on a careful analysis of the participants' scores, the researcher planned direct instruction explaining and demonstrating effective use of the learning reflection journal. An emphasis was placed on proofreading and editing one's own work before putting the work away to be reviewed by the researcher.

After the children had completed the pretest, they were introduced to the intervention, the learning reflection journal. This is a journal in which students completed weekly writing entries in response to a designated topic. After they responded to the writing prompt, they completed a questionnaire that requires them to monitor and correct their work. The learning reflection journal encourages students to carefully review their work to ensure they answered all parts of the question and completed their work with appropriate spelling, punctuation, grammar, and neatness, which reminded students to proofread and revise their written assignments. See Appendix B.

After each written exercise, participants received feedback in their journals from the researcher. For example, if the participant went to the amusement during the weekend, the researcher would respond by sharing something personal about her trip to the amusement park. If it was evident that the student did not use the learning reflection journal to monitor his or her work, there would also be comment saying something along the lines of “Make sure you are taking the time to reflect on your assignment and complete the learning reflection journal.” The instruction was based upon trends seen with the improper use of the learning reflection journal and areas that proved to have deficits on the rubrics. The researcher also responded to each of the students’ writing prompt responses to create a dialogue between the researcher and the participants. The comments were generally focused on the content of the writing. However, at times comments were made if the participant needed to make better use of the learning reflection journal.

After 16 weeks of completing the learning reflection journal on a weekly basis, the students completed the posttest by responding to the same writing prompt about their weekend

that was used for the pretest. The posttest was scored with the same rubric, but this time students implemented the learning reflection journal after they completed their writing prompt.

Pretest and posttest scores were compared by a non-independent sample t-test.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that a learning reflection journal had on the quality of students' written independent work.

The participants' quality of written independent work improved drastically after the learning reflection journal intervention took place. The mean posttest writing score (Mean = 24.91, SD= 6.43) was significantly higher than the mean pretest writing score (Mean = 14.82, 5.12) [$t(21) = 15.19$, $p < .001$]. See Table 1.

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and t-test Results for Posttest Writing Scores

The Effects of the Learning Reflection Journal

Test Condition	Mean	Std. deviation	t statistic
pre	14.82	5.12	15.19
post	24.91	6.43	

N = 22

df = 21

* significant at $p < .001$

The null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference between the writing scores of second grade students when they complete writing prompts during independent seatwork before or after learning how to use a learning reflection journal was consequently rejected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact that the participants' use of the learning reflection journal had on the participants' quality of their independent writing assignments.

Implications of Results

The results of the study show that the quality of the participants' written independent work showed a significant increase during the intervention period compared to the quality of written work during the pretest. Thus, the null hypothesis that there would be no significant difference between the writing scores of second grade students when they complete writing prompts during independent seatwork before or after learning how to use a learning reflection journal was rejected. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that students working on independent writing prompts will have an increased quality of work if they use a learning reflection journal.

One practical implication of the research is that the learning reflection journal and dialogue with the teacher promotes a higher level of motivation in terms of written assignments as informally observed by this researcher. Participants noticed that when their work was clearly written they would get a longer response from the researcher. As the study progressed, students were spotted making corrections in their work after the researcher had already responded to their writing prompts. Participants took pride in their work and enjoyed having their thoughts listened to. Researcher observations suggest that if teachers are having problems with students preserving through and creating quality work during independent writing assignments, they should use learning reflection journals within their classrooms. Instituting a learning reflection journal, responding to the students' writing prompts, and providing the explicit instruction in how to use

the learning reflection journal and what quality written work entails greatly benefits students' written work. Enabling students to take ownership of their work by having them edit and revise their own assignments promotes a student-centered environment where participants are engaged in the learning process. Although the process was time consuming for the researcher, the researcher plans to use the method next year. The students' motivation to write was greater than the researcher had seen in any other previous classes she had taught.

As a result of learning how to edit and revise their work during the study, students will hopefully be able to apply this skill to other areas or subjects. Ideally, students who have had experience with the learning reflection journal will see writing as a way to express themselves and have their ideas justified rather than as a chore toward which they place minimal effort.

Theoretical Implications

This study supports the theory that learning reflection journal activities improve students' self-efficacy during independent assignments. Students show a greater motivation when they are given more responsibilities with regards to their own work. In addition to practical implications, the results of this study also have implications for theories about using metacognitive strategies to increase student engagement in the learning process and improve achievement. Metacognition is a term that means thinking about one's thinking. Students are much more engaged in their learning and learning style if they think about and understand the process it took to arrive at their final product or answer. Thinking about what strategies work for them helps them to begin the tasks in a timelier manner and understand the classroom resources available to enhance their own learning. Previous research has indicated that students that use metacognition strategies are more engaged and successful students. In the current study, students were led to write about their thinking and the process of creating quality work while using the learning journal.

Consequently, these results support the theory that metacognitive strategies are effective learning tools.

Threats to the Validity

The sample size and characteristics were threats to the validity of the study. The study sample was small and limited in scope. The class used in the study consisted of 22 heterogeneously grouped students, predominantly female, in a Title 1 school. This is a threat to external validity in that it limits the ability of the results of the study to be generalized to different demographic groups such as students in higher income areas or to groups consisting predominantly of boys. There was also a potential experimenter effect that could be an external validity threat. The researcher was not blind to the intervention that the participants were receiving. The researcher had a preexisting relationship with the students because the researcher was their current teacher. The researcher was instructing the participants and scoring the rubrics. There is a chance that the researcher could have unconsciously been doing something because she was either hoping for a certain outcome or over-analyzing the process of scoring the rubrics because of a preexisting relationship with the students.

There were multiple threats to internal validity. Internal validity refers to the ability of the researcher to say that the experimental variable, the treatment, caused the differences observed in the dependent variable and not another variable. An important aspect of the threat to internal validity was that there was only an experimental group; therefore, they acted as their own control group. The study included a one group pretest/posttest variant design. In a one group pretest/posttest design, only one group is used, but a pre- and posttest are used. This can create threats to the internal validity of the study. Using subjects as their own controls does not control for all types of confounding variables, only those that are stable within an individual over

time. The pretest allows for comparisons over time relative to a starting point, but this design does not allow for comparisons relative to a control group. It is not true to say that gains from pre- to posttests were caused only by the treatment.

Two factors not controlled for in a study without a control group is maturation, which is natural changes over time, and history, which are events outside of the treatment that could influence results. The study occurred over a 16-week period. The time was sufficient for writing improvement to be evident. However, the natural maturation of the students could have played a role in the increased quality of their written independent work since students typically write better as they get older. The history of receiving writing experiences across the curriculum in addition to the learning journal also likely impacted student performance since increased writing experiences should improve writing skills, regardless of instructional technique. These are threats to internal validity.

Connections to Previous Studies/Existing Literature

Prior to this action research study, other studies have also shown ideas that were similar to the learning reflection journals/self-reflection tools. The learning reflection journals/ learning reflection tools were proven to have a positive influence on students academically including a higher academic self-efficacy (Leidinger & Perels, 2012), and greater academic performance (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). The findings of the current study are consistent with these results. There were some similarities in how the intervention was implemented across the Leidinger and Perels' (2012) study, Schunk & Zimmerman's (2007) work, and the current study. For example, students were given time after assignments to reflect on their progress. This suggests a time for active self-monitoring of progress may be an important component of the intervention.

There were some variations between how the Leidinger and Perels (2012) and Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) implemented the learning journal/reflection tool intervention and how the learning journal intervention was implemented in the current study. In the study by Leidinger and Perels, students set their own goals for the next assignment and they reflected in a journal by writing; in the current study, students did not specifically engage in goal setting. Current findings suggest that goal setting may not be a necessary component of the intervention.

Another variation in the studies was content matter. The Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) study focused on improving writing and reading skills while the Leidinger and Perels (2012) used the learning reflection tool as a way to improve their repertoire of mathematical strategies and the processes involved in solving math problems. The current study focused on writing. The positive findings of these various studies suggest that learning journals can be effective tools in multiple content areas.

In the two published studies, the researchers did not provide a checklist for the students. The reflection process was open for individual students. In this study, this method would have not have been developmentally appropriate since the participants were primary aged students who were developing writing skills. While Leidinger and Perels' (2012) study involved primary aged participants as well, their study focused on mathematical problems which do not require clear written language. Schunk and Zimmerman's (2007) study did not include checklists because the students were intermediate aged students. The participants most likely had prior understanding of the basic elements that written work needs to include. This suggests that providing students with an opportunity to participate in any kind of reflection is beneficial to academic gains, that the intervention can be tailored to the age levels of different students ,

and that there can be variations in the amount of direction provided by the instructor in the reflection process.

The other studies mentioned also did not include the researcher responding to the students' work after the reflection process took place. Although the students in all three studies made gains, it is not clear if the researcher providing feedback in the journal in the current study also improved the motivation of students.

Another way in which the current study differed from the two discussed studies is that in the current study and in Leidinger and Perels' (2012) study, the students were in the primary grades while the students in Schunk and Zimmerman's (2007) study were older. However, the Leidinger and Perels learning journal did not focus on improving the quality of the students' quality of their written language. The current study also found learning journals to be an effective intervention with improving the quality of students' independent writing skills. This provides preliminary evidence, which has not been demonstrated in the past, that learning journals can be effective in improving younger students' writing skills.

Clearly, learning journals have been found to be effective under a variety of conditions. This suggests that there is a wide range of options for implementing the learning journal intervention that can be tailored to the students and the situation.

A study conducted by Reiser et al. (2013) showed that students benefit from direct instruction on how to plan, monitor, and reflect in their learning reflection journal. In the current study, students were given explicit instruction and continued guidance in the appropriate just of their learning reflection journal. The current findings are consistent with those by Reiser et al. in suggesting that educators take an active role in teaching the students how to use the journal.

Implications for Future Research

Future studies that look at the long-term effect of the use of learning reflection journal would be beneficial to determine whether students will still edit and revise their work if the learning reflection journal is not provided. One option would be to conduct an ABAB design study in which the researcher 1) obtains an initial baseline, 2) initiates a treatment phase, 3) withdraws treatment and obtains a second baseline, and 4) initiates a second treatment phase. This type of design could potentially show greater evidence of the effectiveness of the intervention if it indicates that the effects persist even when the intervention is withdrawn.

Another suggestion includes looking at the difference between using positive reinforcement along with learning reflection journal or with the learning reflection journal in isolation. Students show a higher level of motivation when they receive systematic rewards which may include specific rewards for the targeted behavior. Additional studies could see if this has any influence on students' motivation to produce quality written work during independent writing time when systematic positive reinforcement is present.

A study that uses a greater variety of subjects would be beneficial so that results could be generalized to more groups. Other studies could include groups of students that equally represent both sexes, are from various socio-economic backgrounds, and include students in various age ranges.

A study that measures the students' level of motivation during independent writing assignments before they used the learning reflection journal and their level of motivation after they have learned how to use and practiced with the learning reflection journal would be worthwhile. This could be measured through a participant self-report questionnaire, or the

researcher could measure the time on task while students are working on independent writing assignments.

Conclusion/Summary

The results of the study show that the quality of written independent work significantly increased over a 16-week period among second grade students using a writing learning journal. Although there were limitations to the study and results are considered preliminary, study findings and researcher observations support implementing learning reflection journals in elementary school classrooms as a strategy to improve writing quality and student motivation. It is essential that students are readily able to communicate through written language. Clear written communication is an essential skill for 21st century students who are career- and college-ready.

References

- Boekaerts, M., & Corno, L. (2005). Self-regulation in the classroom: A perspective on assessment and intervention. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 54(2), 199–231. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2005.00205.x
- Dignath, C., Buettner, G., & Langfeldt, H. (2008). How can primary school students learn self-regulated learning strategies most effectively?: A meta-analysis on self-regulation training programmes. *Educational Research Review*, 3(2), 101–129. doi:[10.1016/j.edurev.2008.02.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2008.02.003)
- Dignath, C., & Büttner, G. (2008). Components of fostering self-regulated learning among students. A meta-analysis on intervention studies at primary and secondary school level. *Metacognition and Learning*, 3(3), 231–264. doi:[10.1007/s11409-008-9029-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11409-008-9029-x)
- Florez, I. R., & McCaslin, M. (2008). Student perceptions of small-group learning. *Teachers College Record*, 110(11), 2438–2451.
- Foorman, B. R., & Torgesen, J. (2001). Critical Elements of Classroom and Small- Group Instruction Promote Reading Success in All Children. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 16(4), 203–212.
- Hadwin, A. (2008). Self-Regulated Learning. In T. Good (Ed.), *21st century education: A reference handbook*. (pp. I-175-I-184). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: [doi:10.4135/9781412964012.n19](https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412964012.n19)
- Jenkins, B. J. (2008). *An examination of the effectiveness of two grouping strategies for literacy instruction in the primary grades*. (Ed.D., The University of Alabama). ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (304683092).

- Leidinger, M., & Perels, F. (2012). Training self-regulated learning in the classroom: Development and evaluation of learning materials to train self-regulated learning during regular mathematics lessons at primary school. *Education Research International*, 2012 (735790) 2090–4002 doi:[10.1155/2012/735790](https://doi.org/10.1155/2012/735790)
- Lichtenfeld, S., Pekrun, R., Stupnisky R. H., Reiss K., & Murayama, K. (2012). Measuring students' emotions in the early years: The achievement emotions questionnaire-elementary school (AEQ-ES). *Learning and Individual Differences*, 22(2012), 190–201. doi:10.1016/j.lindif.2011.04.009
- Ocak, G., & Yamac, A. (2013). Examination of the relationships between fifth graders' self-regulated learning strategies, motivational beliefs, attitudes, and achievement. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 13(1), 380–387. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=85466207&site=ehost-live>
- Rieser, S., Fauth, B. C., Decristan, J., Klieme, E., & Büttner, G. (2013). The connection between primary school students' self-regulation in learning and perceived teaching quality. *Journal of Cognitive Education and Psychology*, 12(2), 138–156. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1366017557?accountid=11164>
- Schunk, D. H., & Zimmerman, B. J. (2007). Influencing children's self-efficacy and self-regulation of reading and writing through modeling. *Reading and Writing Quarterly*, 23, 7–25. Retrieved from <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/>
- Vandavelde, S., Vandenbussche, L., & Van Keer, H. (2012). Stimulating self-regulated learning in primary education: Encouraging versus hampering factors for teachers. *Procedia - Social*

and Behavioral Sciences, 69(0), 1562–1571.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.12.099>

Wiley, C.R.H., McCaslin, M., & Good, T. L. (2009). *Improving teaching through the use of classroom observation data*. Final report submitted to the William T. Grant

Foundation. Retrieved from

https://www.coe.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/mccaslin_vita_2013_.pdf

Wilson, K. M., & Trainin, G. (2007). First-grade students' motivation and achievement for reading, writing, and spelling. *Reading Psychology*, 28(3), 257–282.

doi:10.1080/0270271060118646

Appendix A

Learning Reflection Journal

Scoring Tool for Writing				
Criteria	Scores			
	1	2	3	4
Gave details in sequential order about their weekend.	Gave one detail.	Gave two details in order.	Gave 3 details in order.	Gave 4 or more details in order.
Described who they spent time with.	Gave the person's name.	Gave the person's name and their relationship to them.	Gave the person's name, their relationship, and an adjective about them.	Gave the person's name, their relationship, and at least 2 adjectives about them.
Included details about their favorite thing they did.	Named their favorite thing they did.	Gave one detail about their favorite thing they did.	Gave 2 two details about their favorite thing they did.	Gave 3 details about their favorite thing they did.
Utilized appropriate capitalization.	3 errors were made with capitalization.	2 errors were made with capitalization.	1 error was made with capitalization.	Paper is free of capitalization errors.
Sentences were grammatically correct.	3 grammatical errors were made.	2 grammatical errors were made.	1 grammatical error was made.	Paper is free of grammatical errors.
Used the appropriate punctuation marks.	3 errors were made with punctuation.	2 errors were made with punctuation.	1 error was made with punctuation.	Paper is free of punctuation errors.
Spelling was correct.	3 errors were made with spelling.	2 errors were made with spelling.	1 error was made with spelling.	Paper is free of spelling errors.
The overall assignment was accurate and neatly prepared.	Handwriting is legible.	Handwriting is legible and errors are clearly erased.	Handwriting is legible, errors are clearly erased, and a clear paragraph is formed.	Handwriting is legible, errors are clearly erased, a clear paragraph is formed, and the paper is free from visible errors.
Total Score				

Appendix B

- ☐ Did I use the correct capitalization?
- ☐ Did I use the correct punctuation?
- ☐ Did I check my spelling?
- ☐ Does my work make sense?
- ☐ Did I stay on topic?
- ☐ Did I give enough details?