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Abstract

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Engaging all Students in Ongoing Discussion around Writing:
How Teachers Can Best Utilize Dialogue Journals

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Abstract

This study investigated ways that teachers could engage students in discussion around writing through use of dialogue journals. It was hypothesized that the individualized, written dialogue between teacher and student around a pre-dialogue scored response would impact student engagement and post-dialogue response score. Twenty-two students were given dialogue journals; they were observed, filled out questionnaires, and were interviewed informally. It was found that the individualization, focus on student improvement, and incorporation of multiple voices in discussion process was engaging; time was both a positive and a limiting factor in the dialogue journaling process for students and teachers. Teachers should consider individualizing student interactions, focusing discussion on student achievement, adding peer voices in journal processes, and replacing homework with metacognitive assignments.

Engaging all Students in Ongoing Discussion around Writing: How Teachers can Best Utilize Dialogue Journals

Dialogue journals are spaces of ongoing discussion between teacher and individual students (Peyton, 2000). In a class of 22 students, each student would have his or her own dialogue journal that the teacher and the student write back and forth in. Teachers can utilize dialogue journals in a variety of ways, depending on grade level, student demographics, and individualized student literacy needs. This topic is tremendously important because it provides students with the opportunity to continue learning in the classroom beyond the confines of a class period or school day. It is also significant because it is an alternative way to engage students in discussion in contrast to the verbal discussion that takes place in the classroom. Dialogue journals provide students who shy away verbally in class the option to participate in a different mode of discussion. Mays (2008) suggests that “teachers should vary question types and mediums. Addressing each child the same way in the classroom rarely works” (p. 417). With dialogue journals, teachers can address students who face difficulty speaking in face-to-face discussions, using a different medium. Subsequently, the dialogue that a teacher creates with an individual student will be tailored to meet the needs of that particular child. Ultimately, dialogue journals provide the means for teachers and students to drive the mandatory reading and writing coursework associated with the common core in new ways, specific to the learning needs, interests, and sociocultural context that the child is situated within.

If the topic of dialogue journals is not investigated, students will be the recipients of a disservice. Students will miss out on learning that extends past the classroom. If students do not have access to technology outside of school, they will not be able to continue engaging in reading and writing activities if they should choose. Research on dialoguing suggests that

teachers are utilizing online mediums such as e-mail to do carry out discussion with their students (Salter & Coneely, 2015). However, not every school has the funds to provide students with iPads or technology to use at home. Furthermore, not every parent or guardian is able to purchase iPads or technology for their student to use. In some schools, teachers create their own websites that students can utilize after school for homework help and much more. Moreover, if the topic of dialogue journals is not explored, students who have more challenges when participating in an academic discussion during class might fall further behind their peers in developing themselves as readers and writers.

Alternatively, if the topic of dialogue journals is investigated, teachers will benefit. Teachers will benefit because they will learn how other educators most effectively utilize dialogue journals in school to continue ongoing discussions around reading and writing. Ultimately and most importantly though, students will benefit from this topic of study. With utilization of dialogue journals, students will have an alternative medium to further their education and continue learning through written journal entries. For example, Hyatt (2013) used dialogue journals with her students to discuss mathematical concepts. Using dialogue journals to discuss mathematical concepts could be especially beneficial for students who typically have more difficulty engaging in discussion during class. Writing through a dialogue journal will allow students to co-construct meaning through a different medium in addition to the modes that currently exist in their school days. Additionally, because this form of discussion is private between the student and teacher, it might encourage students to communicate differently than they would in class. Students might feel more comfortable with expressing what they truly think, questions they have, uncertainties, or maybe communicating more thought in general (Ewald, 2012). Dialogue journals could also be a place for students to open up in a different way than

they might when many other people are listening. Maybe a student who does not verbally ask for help in class would be more apt to practice that skill through writing. Additionally, with dialogue journals, students will have the opportunity to spend more time connecting personally to the course content or asking additional questions of choice. Depending on how they are utilized, dialogue journals can be a positive influence in regards to literacy development, bridging the learning of common core state standards with relative student and teacher led discussion of choice, raising the level of engagement of students in the required course work topics and/or standards, and creating a space where students can feel comfortable connecting their outside knowledge obtained in daily lives to work done within the classroom.

Research around dialogue journals has been conducted in different ways. In Bean and Rigoni's (2001) study, pairs of grade-school and college students engaged in discussion through the use of dialogue journals. In their study, a specific, multi-cultural piece of literature entitled *Buried Onions* written by Gary Soto was used to launch initial conversation between the five different pairs. The researchers explored how intergenerational dialogue of people from different age levels transpired when engaging in a young adult novel where significant issues such as identity and power are at the forefront of dialogue; not surprisingly, both sets of students ended up learning much from their partner. In a case study by Larson and Marsh (2005) relating to the sociocultural theory, Maryita Maier, an elementary teacher from Rochester was examined. Part of her daily routine was to write to her students using dialogue journals. As Maier continued using dialogue journals as a way to write back and forth with students, she saw greater depth in their responses. These two examples highlight how dialogue journals can be used outside of the common core objective preparation to support learning that extends beyond the pre-planned

reading and writing work that teachers and students are bound to cover each day in preparation to meet common core demands.

In a select sampling of classrooms in a variety of suburban and urban schools, dialogue journals are not widely observed. Lack of use in regards to dialogue journals is surprising, for dialogue journals can be multi-purposeful, depending on the way in which they are being facilitated. They promote relationship building and trust between teacher and student. They open ongoing discussion for students to extend their literacy development from the previous coursework (Hyatt, 2013). Dialogue journals are an additional avenue for teachers to check for understanding of material, allowing for individualized literacy suggestions and feedback to help students grasp daily objectives. If a student is reading an independent reading book outside of class, dialogue journaling is a way for the teacher to ask the student questions about that piece of literature. Lastly, as stated before, dialogue journals are an avenue for students to draw on the experiences that shape them and make connections to the work inside of the classroom. Dialogue journals create a culture of continual co-constructed meaning between teacher and student.

Because discussion is an integral part of students' school career, this study was set forth in order to answer how teachers can best utilize dialogue journals to engage all students in ongoing discussion around writing. Twenty-two eighth grade students were given dialogue journals. Before the dialogue process began, a writing sample was collected. Then, I attempted to engage them in discussion around individual written work as it related to a school-wide rubric. Students were interviewed in focus groups and filled out a questionnaire about their experience. A post response with a similar question and text format was collected and scored with the same common rubric. Teachers were interviewed regarding best practices around discussion and dialogue journal usage. It was found that students were motivated from the individualization that

the discussion in the dialogue journals provided them with, that some students desired for peer voices to be present in the journaling, and focusing on student achievement was engaging. It was also made clear that sufficient time may be required for a process like this to be maintained. Teachers might want to consider utilizing the dialogue journaling process with one or two students who most struggle with participating in discussion, incorporating peers in the process, and stating the purpose of the journaling process to students. Finally, teachers may decide to replace nightly homework assignments with the dialogue journaling process or a metacognitive assignment as a way to involve students in the process of writing about writing without it being more of a time commitment for all parties involved.

Theoretical Framework

Lankshear and Knobel (2006) regard literacy as the “socially and recognized ways of generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through the medium of encoded texts within contexts of participation of discourses” (p. 24). The first word in Lankshear and Knobel’s definition, “socially,” is important to the definition as a whole, for it emphasizes that learning and literacy derive from social practices. Another part of Lankshear and Knobel’s definition that is important to understanding the meaning of literacy is illuminated by the words, “generating,” “communicating,” and “negotiating,” as they refer to “content.” Correspondingly then, in order to be literate, it is essential to make meaning, communicate that meaning, and discuss that meaning, socially. Building on that understanding of literacy, Lankshear and Knobel imply that one must make meaning, communicate meaning, and discuss that meaning, socially, “within discourses.” Thus, the type of discourse one is a part of changes the way one would make, communicate, and discuss that content socially. For example, school discourse is different than home discourse because there are different rules and expectations that coincide. Similarly,

the discourse utilized in an interview is different than the discourse one would employ with friends. Therefore, in order to be literate, according to their definition, Lankshear and Knobel would then argue that this creation, communication, and discussion that occurs between others, needs to change depending on the social situation at hand.

Children acquire literacy skills in their home, from their culture and historical roots, at school, and in other aspects of life in which there are different social constructs and discourses that they have experience engaging within. Experiences can range from riding the city bus, writing grocery lists with parents, or taking care of baby brothers and sisters. Depending on the discourse and a child's routine interaction with that discourse, over time, children begin to gain different knowledge about the literacy skills that are needed in all aspects of formal and informal discourses. In school, one of the main ways to develop one's literacy skills is through discussion as discussion brings a social aspect to the reading and writing that students engage in. Students need to be able to engage in all the social aspects that literacy encompasses—not only the traditional forms of literacy that one would correlate with school experiences (Larson & Marsh, 2005). Therefore, this understanding of literacy and the importance of creating meaning with others provides insight into the topic of dialogue journals as a form of discussion. Dialogue journals can be a tool to assisting students in building their discussion repertoire and deepening their abilities to engage in the negotiation of meaning with others. The definition of literacy in combination with the following theoretical framework, sociocultural theory, and the idea of “culture as a disability” as it is introduced by McDermott and Varenne (1995), will frame this research study. A direct connection will be made between each theory and the topic of dialogue journals.

The sociocultural theory deems that “learning is a mutually constituted social, cultural, and historical process that is mediated by language and interaction” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p. 102). Within the sociocultural theory then, since learning is defined as being “mutually constituted,” that suggests that there must be two or more parties actively involved in educational processes. For example, the sociocultural theory starkly juxtaposes models of education in which the teacher is the sole constructor and the students are the recipients. Moreover, the sociocultural theory reinforces that “children are key in constructing learning; children are not ‘constructed’ in some linear ways by their teachers” (Larson & Marsh, 2005, p.102). Therefore, students should be given opportunities to engage in an equal negotiation of meaning with others and with the learning at hand. One effective way to engage in this equal negotiation of meaning with others is through discussion where different voices are working together toward the creation of meaning in a classroom. However, during an in-class discussion, there is still the potential of certain students or certain voices not taking an active part in the co-construction of meaning. For example, students who are quieter in class could potentially miss opportunities to further their literacy skills in terms of the negotiation process that occurs during discussion if they shy away from verbally engaging with their peers or other people within the classroom such as the teacher or other students even. One way to do potentially engage all students in discussion and co-constructing knowledge is through the mode of a dialogue journal. Through the use of a dialogue journal, the teacher and each individual student can equally take part in the negotiation of meaning and the co-construction of knowledge. Because this type of co-construction takes place between the teacher and student in a privatized format, it naturally encourages students to become active in negotiating meaning with the teacher. The participation is unlike face-to-face whole group discussion where time constraints, dominant speakers, and anxiety can potentially

impact the amount of students whose voices are heard, leading to an unequal negotiation of meaning between all participants. With a dialogue journal though, each student is given the opportunity of a private discussion and conversation with the teacher, eliminating other variables that may obstruct equal negotiation of meaning.

The second theory that will inform this study is culture as a disability. Culture as a disability theory deems that “a disability may be a better display boards for the weakness of a cultural system” (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 327). According to this theory, disability, in a sense, is created by the systems that surround disability—not by the person or the disability itself. For example, McDermott and Varenne would argue that a person in a wheelchair should not be labelled as disabled or handicapped. Instead, there should be equal opportunities for a person in a wheelchair to carry out the same daily activities that a person who is not in a wheelchair carries out. In turn, this equal construct of opportunity would lessen the delineation that exists between able and non-abled bodied people in the world today. This wheelchair example is just one of many that can be used to illustrate the concept behind the theory of culture as a disability. Even more so, culture as a disability theory can be applied to the way teachers structure the negotiation of meaning in their classrooms. For example, if students are not given the opportunity to discuss in a safe environment in which they can co-construct meaning with others, then those students who do not naturally take part in discussion must not be faulted or failed in the education system. Instead, the fault lies within the way that a particular discussion system was implemented with students. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to find ways to engage all students in discussion, regardless of their ability. One way that this could be done is through the use of providing students with a dialogue journal. With discussion being an important tool in deepening conceptual understandings to prepare students to meet the demands

of the Common Core Standards, educators should actively seek ways to structure their classrooms to engage not just those students who naturally take part in discussion; teachers should find a way to provide all students with an equal opportunity to co-construct meaning and negotiate learning. At the end of the day, it is not the fault of students for not speaking up in classrooms; it is the fault of a poorly designed social construct as it pertains to discussion. With dialogue journals a medium to communicate, all students are given equal opportunity to discuss and develop literacy skills necessary to prepare for college and career.

Research Question

Keeping in mind that literacy is a social process, that students need to co-construct meaning and become active participants in their own learning, and that not every student has access to the same means or has the same set of skills in regards to communication, the following research question is at utmost importance as it addresses all of the above: How can teachers use dialogue journals to engage students in ongoing discussion around writing?

Literature Review

After collecting and synthesizing, pre-existing research in efforts to find out how teacher can best utilize dialogue journals to engage all students in ongoing discussion around writing, three major themes emerged. One theme that emerged pertains to recommended teacher moves that can be taken to engage students in ongoing discussion. Within this first theme, teacher moves such as questioning, encouragement, and format of discussion are reported as they relate to the research question stated above. The second theme that emerged is the potential role that peers can play in engaging students in ongoing discussion as research indicates that peers can positively impact student motivation in this area. The third and final theme that evolved from research in efforts to answer the research question is regarding beneficial metacognitive writing

processes that students can utilize to strengthen writing. It is important to note though that not all of the studies that are reported on use dialogue journals as a way to discuss with students.

However, each theme will be explicitly tied back to the research question where connections between the information presented through research and the topic of this study, dialogue journals, will be made. The three themes noted above will be presented in the order that they were introduced in this paragraph starting with the recommended teacher moves to engage students in ongoing discussion.

Recommended Teacher Moves to Engage Students in Ongoing Discussion

Many researchers discuss recommended moves that a teacher can take to engage students in the discussion process. First, Oliveira (2010) explains three specific oral strategies that teachers can use to engage students in discussion. These three specific engagement strategies include figurative language, parallel repetition, and engaging questions. Specifically, in Oliveira's study, three elementary teachers facilitated six discussions on the subject of science. After these teachers were video-recorded facilitating science discussion with students, the contents of these discussions were transcribed and coded specifically in terms of the engagement techniques listed above. Oliveira writes, "Figurative language code was defined as words, phrases, and expressions that teachers used in non-literal ways and that required students to draw on shared background, cultural knowledge, and/or imagination in order to interpret teachers' intended meaning" (pp. 751-2). Figurative language was not the only code in this study though. In addition to using figurative language as a way to engage students in science discussion, Oliveira explains that parallel repetition was coded in her study; "Parallel repetition was defined as repetitions of sounds, words, and grammatical structures that deviated from ordinary patterns of word usage commonly encountered in classroom oral discourse" (p. 752). The last type of

strategy coded in this study used to engage students in science discussion was categorized as engaging questions. Oliveira states, “Engaging questions was defined as oral queries more focused on student engagement rather than student cognition” (p. 752). Similar to the other two categories, figurative language, and parallel repetition, engaging questions were also utilized in order to encourage participation from students in discussion. Examples of engaging questions as they are explained by Oliveira ranged from rhetorical questions to humorous question types. Since this study was focused on engaging students in oral discussions, techniques such as the ones listed above, figurative language, parallel repetition, and engaging questions, were not mentioned in any of the other studies within the last ten years that this literature reports on. However, Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, and Young (2011) touch briefly upon the questioning of a teacher in a dialogue journal and how that influenced a student to disengage with the journaling experience. Correspondingly, in their study, two dialogue journals from behaviorally struggling students were examined. The researchers pointed to questioning as a potential cause as to why one student did not respond positively; “Since Matt was performing at grade level, he might have interpreted the teacher’s journaling requests as simplistic and condescending, perhaps this is why Matt failed to respond as positively as Connor to the teacher’s requests” (Anderson et al, 2011, p. 280). Because of Matt’s disengagement, the teacher dialoguing to Matt changed the questions she was asking and the manner in which she was asking those questions. If this teacher employed engagement strategies suggested by Oliveira (2010), such as engagement strategies such as figurative language, parallel repetition, and engaging questions, Matt may have responded differently. Instead, Matt may have had a different response to his teacher and her initial dialoguing approach than he did. However, because Oliveira’s (2010) study is limited in that it does not report on student perceptions of the

engagement techniques presented, there is no evidence to support this hypothesis. While it is important to consider the correlation between the teacher's role as a facilitator and engaging students in ongoing discussion the teacher's role as an encourager has also shown to be a large motivator of student engagement in dialoguing.

In terms of the role that teachers play in best engaging all students in ongoing discussion, research also suggests that teacher encouragement can lead to higher student engagement in dialoguing. For example, Ewald (2012) claims, "It is important that educators do not lose sight of the fact that students enter classrooms with previous and sometimes negative learning experiences, fears, bad habits, and expectations" (p. 44). In the particular case referred to above 110 college students beginning Spanish 101 utilized dialogue journaling as a way to interact with their teacher in regards to the new language that they were learning. Ewald reiterates that if students are entering Spanish 101 with negative pre-conceived notions, those preconceived notions could potentially impact students' attitudes regarding the course as a whole. Thus, it can be implied that if students' attitudes are impacted a particular way, their likelihood to engage in any said activity will most likely become impacted accordingly. Therefore, it is important that teachers encourage students in efforts to decrease or eliminate the pre-existing negative perceptions that may be present. With that being said, in regards to the findings of Ewald's study, there is a listing of several different ways in which teachers can encourage their students in the dialoguing process; the following ways are included:

Acknowledge the students' expressed concerns....Help students not overreact emotionally to the experience....React appropriately to students' tone and don't ignore or downplay their feelings....Promise to help and support....Offer advice when appropriate. Invite them to visit you and work with you. (pp. 45-6)

If teachers do little to help their students develop positive attitudes, lack of encouragement could lead to the halt of extended engagement in written dialoguing. In addition, Werderich (2010) reflects on findings from dialogue journals of boy readers. She found that teachers took the encourager role. Werderich writes, “The encourager role involved teachers providing encouraging responses” (p. 101). Encouragement was also mentioned by one of the students in another study. For example, in Robinson’s (2011) study to be a key contributor in engaging in discussion; one student wrote, “I mean there was a lot of encouragement by the lecturers which I think actually played a key part in using them to start with . . . and then I think we gradually saw the benefit of using them” (p. 17). Here, it is clear that the student appreciated the instructor’s encouragement. Even more so, it was the encouragement of the instructor that led this student into seeing the value of the task. Moreover, Hyatt (2013) also writes about encouragement as it relates to dialoguing and how this encouragement led to greater literacy gains; “The dialogue journals provided a platform for me, as their math teacher, to encourage them to consider and practice mathematical concepts that they may not have considered before in relation to their free time activities” (p. 47). If this teacher was not invested in the process of dialoguing with her students and did not put forth a genuine sense of encouragement, she would not be able to help her students connect the math concepts that students learned in class to similar concepts that are part of the students’ everyday life experiences. Just as much as the teacher’s facilitation of ongoing discussion is essential to student engagement, the teacher’s role as an encourager is also an important part of the student engagement process relating to the discussion or dialoguing process.

In addition to researchers reporting on specific ways to utilize language and to encourage students, other researchers write about the impact the structure of dialoguing has on discussion

engagement as employed by the teacher. For example, Salter and Conneely (2015) conducted a study examining the difference between using structured and unstructured discussion forums as tools for student engagement; they claim, “It appears that students were generally not as engaged in the unstructured forum as they were in the structured forum; they were not more empowered, they used less instructor feedback, and they exhibited less modeling” (p. 23). Though this study involves discussion through the medium of technology, what this study was comparing, structure versus no structure, and its impact, is relevant to any type of discussion; whether that discussion format be in-person or through writing, it makes no difference. Although mention of online discussions surfaced in Salter and Conneely’s study, Ekşi, (2013) reports on the limitations of e-dialogue journal usage with student teachers:

The occasional drawbacks cited by prospective teachers were technical difficulties such as internet failure when they were supposed to submit their entries and not finding much to say in two different observation tasks and having to repeat the same things. (p. 1819)

Though technical difficulties were not frequent complaints, it is still important to consider when formatting ongoing discussion in efforts to best engage all students. For example, since some students may not be as technologically savvy, although developing competency in this area is essential to literacy development, especially considering the demands of our current society, the complaint about technical difficulties presented by Ekşi is valid, and it could potentially hinder some students from engaging in discussion. Therefore, when considering structuring ongoing discussion, it is important to be aware of the potential pitfalls that structuring an online discussion through the use of technology could provide.

Similar to Salter and Conneely's (2015) study, in Erikson's (2009) study, after interviewing 13 students who were involved in a comparative study between dialogue journals and blogs, it can be understood that teachers should assign topics to students when utilizing dialogue journals. Providing topics to students eliminates the students spending time thinking of their own topics. For example, Erikson states, "12 students noted that it was hard to think of topics for writing" (p. 97). Though this was not the only finding of their study, this is important information to consider. If 12 out of 13 students find it difficult to come up with a topic of their choice, allowing students to choose their own topics when dialoguing in a journal could potentially be a detriment in engaging students in written discussion. Neumann and McDonough (2015) would agree with the use of structure as the majority of students in their study reported through a Likert Scale feeling positive about the structured pre-writing activities. Structure has not always proven to be the most effective in regards to written assignments though. For instance, other researchers find probable cause to suggest the opposite. Too much structure could lead to inauthenticity when writing. Regan, Mastropieri, and Scruggs (2005) find that a lack of structure was more beneficial; they state, "A free flow of ideas in the context of an informal conversational prose may have been considerably easier and more interesting to produce than responses to traditional writing" (p. 45). For some participants then, a lack of structure was more motivational. Depending on the specific student, the debate of more or less structure remains. Therefore, it is really important to know each individual student and their literacy needs.

Ghahremani-Ghajara and Mirhosseini (2005) would agree with Regan et al. (2005) in that discussion should not be structured. Therefore, depending on the case, it seems that structure provides some students with positive direction but others with negative restraint. In Ghahremani-Ghajara and Mirhosseini's (2005) study, Iranian high school students used dialogue journals in

English class. These students wrote journal entries each week and their entries were not limited to topics. After the study was concluded, Ghahremani-Ghajara and Mirhosseini wrote, “Participants’ responses to one of the written interview questions on empowerment as our second body of data, strongly supported this empowering role of DWJ, with 27 out of the 30 participants endorsing the role of DJW in empowering them” (pp. 295-6). Here, the lack of structure led to student empowerment. In addition, unlike other studies which explained how structure led to an increase in engagement in students, Regan et al. (2005) find that similar to Ghajara and Mirhosseini (2005), for students with emotional and behavioral disturbances, allowing freedom of choice can be beneficial. Therefore, based on research presented, it can be concluded that depending on the situation, structured and unstructured usage of dialogue journaling can potentially be both helpful and unhelpful in terms of student attitude and engagement, and thus, it is important to consider the specific context that surrounds each situation where teachers use dialogue journals in a way to promote ongoing discussion.

In continuing with the structure of dialogue journaling and student engagement, another study finds that providing a structure in which a student feels safe is key to success and achievement. In their study, Foroutan and Noordin (2012) compare the usage of dialoguing through two different modes: traditional pen and paper and online through the use of e-mail. The results of the comparative study on ESL undergraduate students of intermediate writing proficiency showed that anxiety levels decreased more in the group of student who dialogued through e-mail. However, though the decrease in anxiety of ESL was greater in that of the e-mail group, comparatively, the difference between the decreasing in the two groups was not enough of a difference to be considered a statistical one. Foroutan and Noordin (2012) express the following:

Therefore, teachers attentively need to find methods to optimize learning by providing less-anxiety-provoking situations for their learners. Given the findings of this study, e-mail appears to have the potential in alleviating students' anxiety in writing, since it makes them more motivated and enthusiastic in their learning. (p. 15)

Though a traditional dialogue provides an area of safe space in which a student can share and discuss in a different manner with his or her teacher, it is significant to consider the dynamic that the structure of online dialoguing can bring in regards to student engagement. Likewise, Thomas (2014) concludes similar findings in her study:

The data analysis indicates the middle school students were more engaged in their learning and were more motivated with on-line literature circles compared to their previous face-to-face literature circles, reportedly because they knew they were going to discuss their book with an authentic audience. (p. 50)

When students feel that their thoughts are valued in a discussion, they will be more likely to participate. Similar to Foroutan and Noordin (2012), in this particular study, Thomas (2014) compared engagement in online literature circles and face-to-face discussions. In addition, there was a difference in the students who typically did not participate in face-to-face discussions. For example, it was also concluded by Thomas that students who did not typically participate in real time discussions responded differently in discussions online. Instead of not participating, these students who usually shied away during in-class discussions responded differently online. These students responded differently in an online discussion space because they felt their contributions were valued to those reading. Therefore, research indicates that when discussions are completed outside of the classroom, students who typically shy away, could potentially benefit (Thomas,

2014; Foroutan & Noordin, 2012). After looking at how students responded in discussions offline, it is clear that dialogue journals can provide a sense of ease and a different type of experience for students than face-to-face discussions can. Both dialogue journals and online discussion boards eliminate the face-to-face component. When re-considering Ekşi's (2013) shortcomings as related to technology difficulties, dialogue journals could be the best option in eliminating glitches and propelling discussion forward. It is important to note though, that for certain students, computerized methods may be a part of an Individualized Education Plan and therefore, this conclusion can't be generalized to all students. However, one part of the dialoguing process that would be important for all students to embark in relates to the purpose as it is told by the teacher (Bayat, 2010; Hyatt, 2013).

As a teacher, telling students the purpose of dialogue journaling process is also essential to keep students engaged. In Bayat's (2010) study, dialogue journals were required of pre-service early childhood teachers. It is clear that in this case, providing students with a purpose behind the dialogue journaling process helped to keep students engaged. For example, Bayat (2010) said, "In some entries they indicated their boredom with being required to keep journals in most of their courses without seeing the benefit of doing so" (p. 165). Although this study was completed with college-level participants who are closer to adult age than high school age, the implications of stating the purpose of dialoguing to those involved is integral in preventing aimless writing which could lead to disengagement with students of any age embarking in the dialogue journal process. To make the purpose of using the dialogue journals clear, in Bayat's (2010) study, the pre-service teacher participants were also required to examine themselves teaching through watching back video. Because the students knew the purpose for which they were writing, they were less apt to thinking of the process as busy-work or monotonous. In Hyatt's (2013) study,

the researcher engaged students in ongoing dialogue about math through individual dialogue journal writing. Because the purpose of using the dialogue journals was not made clear to the students at the start of the process, the experience for students was not as fruitful. Hyatt (2013) claims:

However, using the discussions to encourage mathematical thinking was often challenging. This was perhaps due to the fact that the students were never told that noticing mathematics in their activities of engaging in mathematical discussions was a goal of the dialogue journals. Perhaps because they did not know it was a goal, it was more difficult to engage them in that style of conversation. (p. 80)

Though the goal of the dialogue journals was to learn about the students' perceptions of math concepts outside the realm of the school-day, it is clear that as a teacher, she found it difficult to guide students' thinking in the journals without clearly explaining what she was looking for from them initially. Because the goal of Hyatt's study was to understand student perceptions and not necessarily guide student thinking, the findings are relevant to teachers who would like to use dialogue journals as a catalyst to guide student thinking. When using a dialogue journal to engage students in ongoing discussion around concepts or a procedure such as writing, a best practice may be to initially articulate the reason behind the process to students.

Picca, Starks, and Gunderson's (2013) study also highlights the importance of setting forth the purpose of dialogue journals to students. In completing their study, it was indicated that one potential pitfall of the dialogue journal process is that students could potentially use the space to vent about their own personal issues instead of keeping focused on the content and writing tasking provided by the instructor. For example, these researchers explain, "Students can

sometimes use the academic journals as a personal diary and reveal too much information” (Picca, Starks, & Gunderson, p. 90). Therefore, in order to combat this issue and keep expectations of student writing high, it is essential to inform students of the desired protocol. Picca et al. suggest, “We remind students that the assignment is for an academic course and to follow normative procedures that they see in sociological procedures” (p. 90). Even though in this case, the students are writing about sociology, teachers of any subject or grade should be clear with students regarding expectations. Similar to Hyatt’s (2013) findings, if students are going to be using dialogue journals to complete a specific task of the teacher’s choosing, Picca et al. (2013) would agree that it is vital to set forth that task initially. Otherwise, it may become confusing for students. Williams (2015) writes, “While the relationship of extended posts to higher order thinking does not imply causation, the evidence suggests instructors can influence graduate student depth of thinking in online DBs by making their expectations for depth of posts explicit” (p. 61). In many cases then, it is essential that instructors’ expectations are clear to students in order to promote participation, engagement, and achievement. Thus, if students are going to discuss the process of writing in their dialogue journals, they should be told this initially. That way, the teacher and students can make the most of the experience, decreasing the chance of engagement becoming lost in the process as students are confused about their task/(s) at hand. Lastly, research indicates that discussion group size as chosen by the instructor also impacts on student engagement (Kim, 2013; Shaw, 2013).

Moreover, group size as determined by the teacher is also an important part of the dialoguing process when considering student engagement and motivation. For example, in Kim’s (2013) study, the researcher set out to determine whether or not size of a discussion group would influence engagement and motivation. In order to determine if size of a discussion group would

be influential, each of the 138 individual participant's levels of interactivity was examined. The participants ranged from ages 21 to 67. Therefore, one drawback of this study in terms of assessing ongoing discussion for school age students is that the age group Kim completed this study on is older. Regardless though, after reviewing interactivity of the groups, it was shown that the smaller group had higher levels of interactivity. These results highlight the choices that teachers can make with students when promoting ongoing discussion with students. Moreover, Kim writes, "The students in the small-group discussions tended to open the others' messages more frequently than the class-size groups" (p. 125). When students are in smaller groups, they tend to feel a larger sense of comfort. Similarly, in Shaw's (2013) study, group size is also examined in order to determine if there is a correlation with engagement. Results indicated that students who were in the smaller discussion groups reported a higher level of satisfaction than those in larger groups. Shaw reports:

From hypothesis H1b, we concluded that different group sizes significantly influenced learning satisfaction levels when using an online support forum. From the results, we observed that students in the small groups (5.29) had higher satisfaction rates than students in the large group (4.81). (p. 203)

Even in an online space, smaller groups seem to be preferred by students. Again though, similar to Kim's study (2013) when examining the results of Shaw's (2013) study, it is important to keep in mind that neither study used participants from at the K-12 levels. However, despite the differing age range that the participants of these studies, the consensus between both results highlights that group size does play a factor in student engagement. Because dialogue journals are typically used between only two parties, teacher and student, studies by Kim (2013) and Shaw (2013) underscore the importance of keeping that traditional model of two participants

engaging in discussion small as opposed to including multiple other participants in the journal writing.

When attempting to engage students in an ongoing discussion, research recommends that the teacher uses engaging, responsive questions in dialogue with students, initially explains the purpose of the dialoguing process to students, provides elements of structure to the dialoguing experience, and creates a supportive environment for student discussions to propel forward. Although some research has suggested that students should be given choice in the dialogue journaling process, giving students' choice in the dialoguing process was not supported by all studies. Therefore, it may be necessary to consider the strengths and areas of need of the group of students who will be embarking in a particular dialogue journaling process before deciding on how structured or unstructured the process will be. As stated at the beginning of this theme, though some of the studies presented did not specifically use a dialogue journal as the means to propel ongoing discussion, the same takeaways can also be applied to written dialogue just as it would be applied to oral dialogue in a face-to-face setting or through an online setting. Although it can be agreed that teachers should take specific actions in the hopes to engage all students in ongoing discussion through dialogue journals, research regarding the engagement of peers is less conclusive, but the mention of peers was strongly mentioned in much of the research reviewed.

The Role of Peers Play in Engaging Each Other in Ongoing Discussion

Just as the teacher is an important key ingredient to engaging all students in ongoing discussions, peers can be engaging to students as well. For example, the purpose of Hail, George, and Hail's (2013) study was to find out if there was any difference in content and length between peer to peer dialogue journal writing and student to teacher dialogue writing. Data indicated that the content of both types of transactions was similar, for the students in their study discussed as

openly as peers as they did with their teacher. However, Hail et al. report that one interesting trend was the quantity of student writing over the course of the study. While the quantity of writing decreased with the teacher to student dialoguing combination over the course of the study, on the contrary, the quantity of writing increased with the student to student dialoguing combination. Therefore, this difference in quantity of writing over time implies that student engagement rose with the student to student discussions but began to decline in the student to teacher dialoguing. This study sheds light on the importance of involving peer to peer dialoguing in the dialoguing process. If teachers are utilizing dialogue journals in classrooms, it may be important to determine how that journaling process can be structured as an assignment to include student to student transactions, rather than just the teacher to student transactions. Because dialogue journals are typically exchanged between teacher and students, this comparative study provides reason to further investigate the differences in two types of format. Furthermore, while in this case, the discussion took place in written form, there is also much to be learned from peer-to-peer discussion that is dialogued through other forms as well. For example, in Watson and Hugo's (2015) study, although he used technology as a way to engage peer-to-peer conversation, he found that the students were motivated by each other. Findings suggested that students were genuinely involved in communicating with one another because the students knew that they could connect in a personal way to one another. When student to student discussion is incorporated, engagement and motivation have been noted as an increase.

Research on discussions that take place online also suggests similar findings that peer to peer dialoguing contributes to higher levels of student motivation. Watson and Hugo (2015) report similar trends in their study that examined dialoguing across different technological planes including MXIT messaging, or text messaging, e-mails, Facebook messages, and film reviews.

For instance, these researchers explain a finding from examining one of the seven girls included in this study related to peer-to-peer dialoguing: “But what emerged as a stronger energy driving the text particularly in the MXIT messages was a desire to connect with their friend and share an experience and the emotions and evaluations associated with it” (p. 137). According to this finding, it is obvious that some students may find a great sense of motivation when given the opportunity to dialogue with other peers. As a student, if it is known that another peer will be reading, evaluating, and responding, that can act as a trigger of emotionally investing in the dialogue process itself. Although the discussions examined by Watson and Hugo did not take the traditional paper and pencil approach that traditional dialogue journals consist of, technological discussions are all alike in the sense that they present student dialoguing modes of continuing the process of ongoing communication between two or more parties. Therefore, the findings from this study and Hail et al.’s (2013) study which found that students were more motivated over time to engage dialoguing when their peers were a part of the process are similar. It is important for teachers to understand that engagement in discussion overall can be positive in when peers can converse with one another.

While keeping on the topic of peer motivation in the dialogue journaling process, it is also important to consider the impact that peer to peer relationships can have on student engagement. One participant from Shang’s (2005) study stated that before involving her peers in the process, she did not used to read assigned articles by her teacher before the due date. However, this participant claims that when he or she knew that his or her partner was waiting for feedback, it was motivating. Thus, interacting with another peer in the feedback process may have the ability with to push students to read assigned material from class in advance. Mansor,

Shafie, Maesin, Nayan, and Osman (2011) also comment on the peer-to-peer motivation in terms of dialogue journal writing:

Numerous interactions occurred in dialogue journal writing between the writers and their peers. The interactions among them included giving feedback on the writers' feelings as in excerpts 3,6,11,12,15,16. The students wrote to get responses from their readers. They expect the readers to comment on what they wrote and share knowledge on the topic. Thus, journal writing provides excitements for them in terms of the anticipation of the responses made by the readers which sometimes are two ways as displayed by excerpt 3. (p. 159)

Regardless of the type of dialogue journaling, e-mail and the traditional written style, students are motivated by their peers, especially as these students wait in anticipation for commentary from one another. Therefore, when examining dialogue journaling and best practices to engage students using discussion, it could also be important to take into consideration what was found to be effective when discussions took place in an online space, different from e-mail. For instance, in Sloan's (2015) study, it states, "With regard to the first research question, the findings of this study indicate that there was a relationship between student students' motivation and the number of comments they received on their discussion posts" (p. 126). With that being said, it is apparent that when a classmate responds to a peer through a discussion forum, this can lead to higher levels of motivation for the peer who is receiving the comments. Students are motivated when they know that their peers will be involved in the discussion process; Thomas (2014) writes:

Finally, the excitement of knowing that what they wrote about will be viewed, and perhaps valued by an authentic audience, was said to have created enjoyment

and motivation for students to think deeply and to take a risk of sharing their thoughts. (p. 50)

Clearly, despite the medium of the discussion, it is evident that engagement is perceived by students when it is expected or anticipated that commentary will be provided back by a peer.

So far in this review of peer-to-peer discussion and engagement, there is trend that peers can be motivating to students, but it is also necessary to understand that not every peer is as effective and as motivating as another. For example, to continue with this theme of peer to peer engagement in regards to ongoing discussion, aside from peers being a motivator in ongoing discussion in general, Sloan's (2015) study implies that the quantity and quality of contributions from peers is specifically important to investigate when considering engaging all students in dialogue journals. For example, it is not just important to organize peer to peer discussion. Rather, it is important to consider how this peer to peer discussion is specifically organized. Sloan reports additional findings regarding motivation; "While it was found that quality of comments was related to motivational factors, this study was also concerned with what specific traits in the comments were most valued by students" (p. 126). Genuine interest from commenters, validation from commenter, coherent comments, and a perceived friend relationship from the commenter were all high motivators for students in terms of the discussing asynchronously with their peers. Sloan concludes by claiming, "It seems apparent from the most popular responses in the Subjective Comment Rating selection that students valued discussions which supported existing peer relationships while also placing a premium on coherent responses from capable responders" (p. 129). Thus, it can be understood that specific aspects of peer to peer interaction in terms of engagement in ongoing discussions are particularly important for teachers to consider transferring to ongoing discussion of any format in classrooms. However,

peers do not only have to be limited to classmates though, for it is seen as engaging for students to interact with students outside of their classroom, too as it has been shown through the studies of Thomas (2014) and Bean and Rigoni (2001).

Incorporating peers from outside of the classroom has been motivating for students in terms of ongoing discussion. In particular, in Thomas's (2014) study, college students were brought into classrooms to discuss with students. There was evidence that bringing college students into the discussion process was motivating for those students involved. Thomas (2014) reports that one student noted that it was okay to do work with the teacher; completing work with college students was much more "cool" (p. 51). Hence, discussion with other people besides the teacher can be engaging for participants. Similarly, in Bean and Rigoni's (2001) study, researchers explored the dialogue between grade school students and college students. Here, dialogue patterns from between five pairs of grade students and their college student counterparts were analyzed. One of the high school students, Jesus, reported that in his experience with college student, Vince, the journal exchanges were helpful. Accordingly, Jesus relays that Vince was "cool" (p. 245). Therefore, as a teacher, one might consider involving college students in discussions that take place in or outside of the classroom. Just as the student from Thomas's (2014) study confirmed that working with a college student was much more motivating than only working with the teacher, this same conclusion can be drawn from Jesus's comment regarding Vince. Again, the idea of incorporating college students in the grade school discussion process could potentially have fruitful impacts. However, it is important to note that Bean and Rigoni (2001) did not complete a comparative study that delineated a difference between student to teacher and student to college student dialoguing patterns. Even so, just as teachers are an audience of discussions through the dialogue journal process, peers can be too. Peers can take the

forms of students from outside of the classroom such as college students. In addition, aside from peers being a natural motivator for students in general, other research indicates that leveraging students to lead discussions can lead to improved engagement.

In some studies, student led discussions were tested to determine effectiveness for those involved. Particularly, in McGlynn-Stewart's (2015) study, 33 participants in their third year of a four year undergraduate program participated in student-led discussions. A goal was to determine if these student-led discussions would increase understanding of the course content for those involved in the process. Another goal was to find out why this would be effective. McGlynn-Stewart writes, "One of the key advantages reported by my students was that I was not present and therefore they felt more comfortable to ask clarification or to raise potentially controversial opinions (p. 8). Hence, in this study that was focused on engaging students in ongoing discussions without the teacher as a facilitator, much can be learned and applied to various types of discussions. For example, if teachers were to think about best utilizing dialogue journals to engage all students in ongoing discussion, using peer led dialogue journals could be a potentially significant experience and have positive outcomes. In the conclusion of her study, McGlynn-Stewart suggests, "First, student engagement and understanding may be increased through participation in student-led seminars in many areas of education, not just undergraduate education classes" (p. 9). Although it can be concluded that student-led discussions could lead to increased participation in other areas of education, providing younger students with the autonomy to student lead discussions may not be as effective since student accountability is still developing. Therefore, if this same type of a study was done with students in elementary, middle, or high school, it might be hypothesized that there would need to be more structure set forth by the teacher. Either way, this idea of student-led discussions could be transferred to dialogue

journals. It might be worth exploring the difference between student-led dialogue journals and teacher led dialogue journals and how there if there is any difference in terms of engagement and motivation for students at the middle or high school level. Additionally, though research reports on a general positive trend in relation to peer-to-peer engagement, in a study by Hew (2015), results show that although peer collaboration can be helpful, about 65 % of the participants prefer teacher led discussions when given the choice between the two. However, regardless of the general trend towards teacher led discussions, students who preferred the student led discussions reported that with the teacher being out of the discussion, there was an alleviation of anxiety attached with coming to the correct understandings.

In contrast to McGlynn-Stewart's (2015) study which only gathered data regarding student perceptions of student-led discussions, Hew (2015) examines both student and teacher-led discussions. The mode of the discussions was different in both cases. For example, it is important to note that differently than McGlynn-Stewart's (2015) study which focused on face-to-face discussions, the type of discussions used in Hew's (2015) study were asynchronous. Regardless of the format of these two different studies on discussion though, in both cases, the students who were in support of the peer-led discussions found comfort in knowing that the instructor was not a part of the conversation. Hew (2015) explains, "Basically, participants felt awkward to question, or post something contrary to the instructor's posts since an instructor is usually seen as a source of authority whose views are usually deemed the right ones" (p. 30). Though the teacher-led discussions were preferred in this case, certain students found that talking without the presence of a teacher can be beneficial. Even though the student-led discussion group was only of favor to about 35 % of participants, it is interesting that the findings from the peer-led discussion groups coincide with the findings McGlynn-Stewart's (2015) work. When

thinking about how elements of these two works which do revolve around engaging all students in ongoing discussions could contribute to written discussion, it is worth remembering that even though a dialogue journal could make those students who typically shy away during face-to-face discussions feel more comfortable, this concept of the teacher being the only option to mediate and develop those dialogues underscores the importance of an option for some students to have the opportunity to discuss without the teacher being present. A downfall or limitation to allowing students to discuss without teacher reading the posts encourages a missed opportunity for research. It would be significant to compare or contrast the findings of dialogue journal discussion between teacher-student to those of student-student, but that would require telling the students that their discussions with peers would eventually be read by another party which could then devalue the authentic written conversation that could potentially take place. In addition, it could also be meaningful to see if similar or different trends would emerge in dialogue journal discussions as they did in face-to-face and online, asynchronous forums.

Although much research is presented on the value of peer engagement and its connection to dialogue journaling process, Berne and Clark (2006) suggest that students must explicitly be taught how to engage and co-construct meaning with others in peer-led discussions. In their study, ninth graders read a short story entitled “The Lottery,” and they engaged in peer-led discussions. The research from this particular study implies that even though peer-led discussions are beneficial, the maximum extent at which they could benefit and motivate students to engage in meaningful exchanges of dialogue could be better promoted if students know how to engage in meaningful dialogue and know how to use comprehension strategies effectively in making sense of the dialogue presented; Berne and Clark state:

For these groups to optimally serve as vehicles for developing students' strategic comprehension processes, we conclude that the following must occur: All students must be held accountable for fully participating in the discussions, students must engage in connected talk with one another about their ideas, and students must intentionally employ their strategic comprehension processes to better make meaning. (p. 685)

If students are not taught how to explicitly engage with other peers, the level of effectiveness of peer to peer discussions will decrease. The work of Berne and Clark contrasts to Hew's (2015) and McGlynn-Stewart's (2015) claims, for Berne and Clark (2006) also focus on the way students are engaging with each other as it relates to comprehension and meaning making. All in all, research supports that peers can be a motivating in general to discussions, but there are some stipulations such as different levels of effectiveness of peers that could potentially lead to unequal experiences for all students involved in dialogue journaling processes engaging in discussion around writing. Therefore, unlike the known control that the role of the teacher can have in best engaging students, the research around peers' roles in this process is less conclusive.

Different from the first theme, this theme regarding the potential role peers can play in engaging each other in ongoing discussion revealed that findings altogether varied. While much research pointed to the positive impacts that peer-to-peer discussion could have on engaging students in ongoing conversation, positive peer-to-peer discussions can't be generalized to every situation, for every student, especially as it pertains to younger students who are not as much developed autonomously. In addition, when thinking about this theme as it relates to the research question about engaging students in ongoing discussion through the use of dialogue journals, it is important to reconsider that many of the studies were completed with a focus on

online discussion formats which can be seen as similar to pencil and paper methods of writing, for both eliminate the face-to-face factor. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that incorporation of peer-to-peer interaction in the dialogue journaling process around ongoing discussion could potentially be helpful in motivating students; however, it is not yet clear the best way to do so as studies of dialogue journals have typically been completed with teacher to student interaction. After closely examining different teacher implementations for engaging all students in ongoing discussion in addition to the potential engagement peers can bring to the process, the content that the written dialogue is in response to is the last crucial theme that which will help to answer the research question.

Beneficial Metacognitive Writing Processes that Students Can Utilize

The concept of metacognition has proven to be beneficial in terms of student output. Metacognition, or the process of thinking about thinking, can be done both orally and through written language (Barbeiro, 2011). When metacognition happens in the written mode, it can have long lasting impacts on student achievement. Thus, there are many benefits for students who use metacognition in the form of writing about their writing. In Barbeiro's (2011) study, this idea of writing about writing, also known as meta-writing, is described as follows: "Pupils' writing about writing tasks, as a specific textual genre can be a means to develop their consciousness about the processes and the operations they carry out when performing writing tasks" (p. 816). When students write about the process of writing as it pertains to a specific genre of text, they become aware of their own thinking. The longer they practice this thinking over time, the more developed their conscious process of their own writing will hopefully become. In the past two thematic sections, the focus was most on engagement of the teacher and of peers in terms of the discussion process; however, those sections only address two out of three important parts of the

proposed research question. Therefore, the last part of the research question that needs to be answered is in regards to the content of the discussion, which is writing. Thus, it is necessary to examine how teachers engage students in written conversations about writing itself. Research on this topic is sporadic as there are many different ways to approach this meta-writing topic depending on context of students and age.

Myhill, Jones, and Wilson (2016) open their study stating, “This article brings together these conceptual strands to examine how teachers’ management of talk during the teaching of writing fosters students’ metalinguistic understanding about writing” (p. 24). Their study was extensive as it used students from 54 primary schools in England. Specifically, in order to help students understand their own writing processes with grander knowledge, Myhill et al. explain:

In the pedagogic focus, therefore, is not upon grammatical accuracy but upon grammatical choice, intended to help writers understand both the choices that published authors make in their texts, and the repertoire of choices that are available to them as writers themselves. (p. 27)

It is important then to teach students how to write grammatically correct and how to understand the choices that authors intentionally make as writers. Myhill et al. specify, “For example, children looked at how character description can be achieved through well-chosen noun phrases” (p. 27). Because this metacognition approach of thinking, talking, and relaying concepts of writing to students can be challenging and new, the teachers in this study were provided with professional development sessions that helped prepare them to be able to effectively propel conversations with their students about writing. These researchers suggest that the best way to encourage this type of thinking is not to simply control the conversation as the teacher. Instead,

Myhill et al. set forth the following recommendations for a teacher to encourage thinking as it relates to writing:

Fosters the justification of language choices made; Is prepared to challenge cliché done writing; Supports writers to make links between the grammar feature and its effect in shaping meaning; in writing; Generates questions and pursue misunderstandings; encourages experimentation and language play; Is prepared to discuss constructively why some attempts are less successful. (p. 28)

While many teachers were able to execute these ways in encouraging thinking of their students and promoting more in-depth discussions on writing, the study does make mention that it is very easy to over-talk, miss opportunities to extend discussion where it would lead to stamping an important understanding, or merely just signal approval of student thought without deepening students' conceptual knowledge. Unlike research presented by Myhill et al. (2016), in Wells's (2011) article, the author notes that in order to help students write about writing, it is important to discuss where and when they can transfer the writing skills that they learned to future writing endeavors.

It is clear that there are several different ways of approaching the concept of writing about writing. For example, Wells's (2011) process forces students to think where a current skill can be transferred to other platforms outside of the current setting. Students would be taught to that the skills learned in one context of writing could apply to others as well. On the contrary, Myhill et al. (2016) provide specific suggestions a teacher should take in response to developing students' metacognition as it relates to character description and development through examination of adjectives. Though both processes are nuanced in their approach of writing about writing, both imply the importance of the student explaining their thinking. In either case, it

appears that the teacher serves more as a precise facilitator rather than a directive leader. In light of the common core demands that students today now need to meet, these best practices in writing about writing lead to significantly positive student outputs (Lv, & Chen, 2010). More research has been completed on using process memos and reflections as a way to encourage students to write about writing.

In Parrott and Cherry's (2015) study, process memos are used to promote the writing about writing. In this case, specifically, process memos are used to address student weaknesses in writing. Parrott and Cherry state:

One of the main ways process memos help improve student writing is by assessing students' perceptions of their writing weaknesses. In the first process memo, we ask students if there is any part of their paper they may still need to improve for the final draft. (p. 150)

It is clear that reflecting on areas of weaknesses is helpful in promoting growth in writing.

Additionally, this idea of addressing student weaknesses in an area of writing was also noted by Myhill, Jones, and Wilson (2016). For example, as they presented the list regarding suggestions for teachers relating to writing about writing conversations, it is recommended that the teacher is prepared to discuss attempts where a student was unsuccessful. This is important as it is clear that in either case, the teacher would need to proactively prepare for anticipated students misunderstandings rather than reactively trying to redirect a discussion on writing in the moment. As stated in the Myhill, Jones, and Wilson (2016) study, it wasn't difficult for a teacher to lead the discussion ineffectively. This ineffective discussion leading on writing about writing can be significantly decreased if teachers pre-plan questioning based on anticipated student error in

thought process as it relates to writing. Addressing student error is essential in moving student writing upwards.

Barbeiro (2011) also reinforces the importance of encouraging students to think about problematic areas of students' own writing. He explains that it is important for students to experience metacognitive thinking activities. Barbeiro explains, "They can shed light on the domains that pupils focus on when considering writing, the problems they face, and the strategies and operations they carry out" (p. 817). Though many novice and veteran teachers alike might intuitively shy away from directly addressing perceived student writing weaknesses during discussion, this could actually lead to missed opportunity to correct student misunderstanding. When students are forced to think about their own writing in reflective ways, this will lead to more genuine, targeted, and appreciated feedback or redirection from their teacher. Though this study was completed with undergraduate sociology students, when engaging all students in ongoing discussion on writing through the use of dialogue journals, this idea of metacognition is significant. In contrast to the work of Barberio, Myhill, Jones, and Willson (2016), in addition to Wells (2011), other research on uses of dialogue journaling contrasts the idea of using the journaling process to correct student work. For example, in some cases, dialoguing is thought to be a non-corrective process. In particular, research provided by Hemmatti and Soltanpour (2012) suggests just that; their study emphasizes that the dialogue journaling process should not necessarily be used to correct student work. However, if the purpose of the dialogue journal is to engage students in conversation about their own writing and reflect on their processes, incorporating metacognition into dialogue journaling could change the way teachers see the process. Moreover, Hemmatti and Soltanpour's (2012) study was a comparative one, and their

results may call for reason to change the format of the dialoguing journal process to address student misunderstanding and to require student reflection.

Reflection has proven to be engaging for students. In Hemmati and Soltanpour's (2012) study on the effects of reflective learning portfolios and dialogue journal writing on Iranian EFL learners' accuracy in writing performance, researchers found that in comparison to the students who engaged in the dialogue journal process, the students who instead engaged in the reflective learning portfolio process had higher gains on the post-tests in terms of writing performance and grammatical accuracy. This potential accuracy discrepancy could be in part due to the students' genuine motivation due to the reflective nature of the learning portfolios in comparison to less genuine, reflective nature required of the dialogue journals. Hemmati and Soltanpour continue their discussion on the comparison between reflective learning portfolios and dialogue journal writing by stating, "The findings of this study support the scholars' claim that developing learning portfolios promote reflective thinking" (p. 22). The way that the dialogue journals were being used in this study in contrast to the reflective learning portfolios sheds light on the importance of using a dialogue journal to actively engage participants in the learning process at hand instead of back and forth conversation between two parties. Because it seems that the main gap in the lack of writing gains between the reflective portfolio group and the dialogue journal group is due to a grander sense of active participation from the student end, one can hypothesize that only reason the dialogue journal group was less successful is that it did not require active participation. If the dialogue journaling process in Soltanpour and Hemmatti's study required a more reflective thought process from students, than it too, could have been just as successful in terms of student output in comparison to the student output of the reflective learning portfolios. Dialogue journals may have a new purpose. They can be utilized for reflection and student

thinking about writing. An example of this type of reflection can be seen as Barbeiro (2011) explains that in his study, the participant teachers designed a reflection for their elementary students to complete along with answering, “What happens when I write?” (pp. 817-8). Data was analyzed in terms of length of response and content of response as it relates to writing processes. Without surprise, data analysis concludes that the higher the grade, the larger the grasp of written processes. However, even at a lower grade, students can still show ability to be able to think about the processes that they use when writing.

Read and Michaud’s (2015) also mention reflection as a form of helping students develop metacognition; “Structured reflection, however, is an important component of a WAW-PW approach, particularly when It affords students an opportunity to reflect on what they have learned about learning to write” (p. 434). Though they write regarding the college student and his or her experience in writing about writing classes, it is still worth considering the approaches they used as these approaches can be adjusted to fit the appropriate grade level. One approach mentioned that could be used when writing about writing with students in K-12 programs is in regards to examining, reflecting on, and analyzing scholarly writing. Instead of just reflecting on their own writing, it is also beneficial to have students reflect on the writing of scholars. For example, students could compare and contrast the techniques they use to those that scholars use. Examining scholarly writing is just another way of teaching writing about writing to students. Ultimately, Read and Michaud’s work is similar to Wells’ (2011) as both suggest it is important for students to engage in writing activities that will foster transformation of skills from one area of writing to another.

The writing about writing process is often used at the college level. Just as Read and Michaud (2015) center their work on writing about writing from a college level standpoint, so

does Bird (2008). It can be inferred that metacognition as it relates to writing is a skill that students will eventually be asked to practice in their college careers. Bird states:

The primary goal of freshman composition is to improve all student writers—both the texts that students produce and the processes and knowledge that students use to produce their texts. A writing studies approach is highly successful with this goal because it goes beyond teaching writing processes and deeply engages students with the issues and concepts of writing, significantly expanding their understanding of writing and themselves as writers. (p. 169)

For students, it is both essential that they understand their mistakes and how to then apply those understandings to other pieces of written work. Likewise, Surat, Rahman, Mahamod, and Kummin (2014) also mention the importance of reflection to support the development of metacognition. Metacognition and reflection go hand in hand. Unlike Bird (2008) and Read and Michaud's (2015) work that reports on college student reflection, in Surat et al.'s (2014) qualitative study, 18 students from a Malaysian secondary school comprised of both low and high achieving students were assigned the task of writing an essay and afterward, reflecting on their writing of that essay. The results from student the student essay writing and the student reflection writing were then analyzed. Surat et al. (2014) claim, "Results of the study provided evidence on the lack of metacognitive skills namely declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge and conditional knowledge that contribute to student achievement on the essay writing" (p. 217). These three processes involve different types of skills. Thus, Surat et al. recommends the next step teachers take is to focus on all three processes, declarative, procedural, and conditional, when teaching or re-teaching essay writing to students during class. Thinking about this information in terms of dialogue journals, where the re-teaching and teaching will

instead, be individualized based on the learner, it would obviously make more sense to only address the specific area/(s) or need pertaining to each student. For example, if student A is only struggling with declarative processes as they pertain to formulating introductions, but student B needs guidance in procedural and conditional processing, the teacher's intervention regarding writing about writing will be individualized to meet the student where he or she is in terms of development in writing. Surat et al. claim that the metacognitive processes employed by students raise mean scores of essays. Although this claim is promising, this study is limiting in that it does not include quantitative results that specifically show the increase in mean essay scores holistically.

On the other hand, in direct juxtaposition with Surat, Rahman, Mahamod, and Kummin's (2014) study which does not include quantitative data, Lv and Chen's (2010) study provides readers with quantitative data in relation to essay scores over the course of one college semester. Over a period of time, this idea of metacognition can help to improve student writing scores. Specifically, in Lv and Chen's empirical study, metacognitive-based writing strategies were studied in vocational college students. Students were divided into two groups, one group receiving specific training on metacognitive strategies and one group not receiving this training. A pre-essay-test was given prior to the training to ensure that neither of the groups had a significant difference in essay scores. Then, with the 86 non-English major students who were the participants in this study, writing tests, writing journals, and interviews were analyzed. The group of students who received the metacognitive training grew more in terms of their writing than the group of students who did not receive the metacognitive training. Lv and Chen mention that although this study has encouraging results; these researchers believe that with more participants and a longer time frame, data would increase in validity. Additionally, if student

interviews were transcribed as another form of data, that would be helpful from a teacher's standpoint to understand how students who were presented with the training perceived its impact on their own writing. Regardless though, this study underscores the literacy gains in terms of writing that can be accomplished when students are provided with learning about metacognition.

Metacognitive strategies are useful for students of all achievement levels. In Silver and Graham's (2015) study, high and low achieving undergraduate students enrolled as non-English majors participated in one of two groups. The high and low achieving students were split up into groups. Like Lv and Chen's (2010) division of groups, in the experimental group of Silver and Graham's (2015) study, students were provided with knowledge pertaining to specific writing strategies; on the contrary, those students who made up the control group were not provided with any explicit strategic writing strategies by their teacher as observed by researchers. With the experimental group, the students were guided in three processes: goal setting, task-analysis, and construction of text. Researchers used diaries, questionnaires, and interviews to collect data. At the conclusion of their study, Silver and Graham explain, "Through stimulated recall, it emerged that students used strategies in combinations, orchestrated them to solve problems while writing and finally achieved their goals in writing" (p. 58). Hence, the students in the experimental group used a combination of the different strategies introduced to them such as planning strategies, self-monitoring, problem identification, content monitoring, and production monitoring. Moreover, Silver and Graham explain that this strategy approach was impactful for both types of learners, low and high achieving:

The strategy instruction cycle was designed specifically to suit the needs of the cognitive as well as the cognitive strategies and the instruction was highly task

specific, allowing learners of lower and higher proficiency to see the direct application of the strategies to tasks. (p. 58)

In thinking about how this can be transferred to dialogue journal writing then, teachers can provide strategies for students and individualize those strategies as they relate to metacognition and writing about writing for each individual student. Again, it is important to meet students at the level that they are at in order to propel them forward in their proficiency level. Research on the topic of metacognition and writing about writing highlight the positive outputs it can have on student writing and recommend specific strategies that teachers can use to in their classrooms to effectively carry out this type of procedure with students (Lv & Chen, 2010).

For this specific theme, it is clear that metacognition has been used across classrooms of various disciplines and levels. Though most of the studies and findings were completed with college students, there were some reported on that involved elementary and high school students, too. Regardless of the age group though, this research highlights that there are all different kinds of ways to encourage students to think about their writing process. Research in this section underscores the importance of the student to think through written processes first before the teacher attempts to redirect or guide. In addition, reflection about writing was a trend that emerged from many of the studies relating to metacognition pertaining to writing about writing (Myhill, Jones, & Wilson, 2016; Soltanpour & Hemmatti, 2012).

After compiling research in a grand effort to answer the research question that centers on teachers' utilization of dialogue journals promoting ongoing discussion on the topic of writing, three major takeaways from each of the above themes are worth recapping. First, teachers should carefully think through the specific tasking and framing of the usage of the dialogue journals and handle latter transactions between each individual student with specificity and encouragement.

Additionally, teachers should consider adding an element of dialogue journaling that includes peer-to-peer discussion. Teachers should utilize peer-to-peer dialogue without making this the majority of the dialogue journal process, as giving full control to students might not yield impactful results depending on the age group. However, incorporating an element of peer to peer discussions has been noted to be highly engaging and motivating to students and could potentially add a motivational aspect to journaling depending on how it is structured. Lastly, when discussing student writing with students through the form of writing itself, teachers should not miss opportunities to raise the think ratio through careful facilitation, to discuss student misconceptions in thinking, and to provide students with a variety of strategies that will ideally help target areas of difficulties in writing processes in order to improve written work products holistically and for all students.

Method

Context

Research for this study was conducted at a charter school in Western, NY. According to this school's website, there were approximately 335 students enrolled last year. These 335 students made up the population for grades five through eight. This school is one two middle schools, two elementary schools, and one high school in the area that function as their own regional district. According to the New York State District Report Card for the 2014-15 school year, approximately 53 % of students were males and 47 % were females. Last school year, 93 % of students were African-American, four percent were Hispanic or Latino, and three percent were white. The New York State District Report Card provides that one percent of students were documented as having limited English proficiency, eight percent of students were listed to have disabilities, and 83 % were classified as economically disadvantaged.

In each of the two respective classrooms of students that this research was conducted in, there are 22 students at the eighth grade level. In the first classroom, there are 13 girls and nine boys; the second classroom is made up of 18 girls and five boys. Approximately 89 % of students in the two classrooms are African-American while 11% are Hispanic or Latino. In the first classroom, two students have 504 plans. The second classroom is made up of general education students. All students in both classrooms school receive free lunch.

Participants

Teachers. For research purposes, four English teachers who work at this school will be formally interviewed. The first teacher who was interviewed is in her seventh year of teaching in general and her fourth year of teaching at this school. She teaches English Language Arts (ELA) at the fifth grade level and holds her initial and professional New York State Certification in Special Education and Social Studies, grades seven through 12. She is currently in the process of obtaining her extension annotation in grades five and six for Special Education and Social Studies as well.

The second teacher who was interviewed is in her estimated 14th year teaching in general, but she is in her first full year teaching at this school. However, she has taught in a similar charter school in Eastern, NY that is considered part of the same district despite the regional difference for a not yet confirmed amount of years. It is estimated that she holds her professional New York State Certification in ELA at unknown grade levels.

The third teacher who was interviewed is in her first full year teaching. However, she received a full year of mentoring with a veteran teacher at this school last year. Currently, she does not hold any certification, but she is in the process of obtaining her ELA certification estimated in grades five through 12 at a local college in Western, NY.

The fourth teacher who was interviewed is currently being mentored by another ELA teacher at the school. At the time she was interviewed, she had been working at the school for approximately one month. She is in her second year of teaching in general. She holds her initial New York State Certification in English, grades 7-12. She also holds a certification in TESEOL.

Students. I sent home parent permission slips to all of the students in the two classrooms on February 22, 2016. Half of the students from both classrooms, twenty-two students total, returned the parent permission form and were given child assent forms to also sign. Eighteen of the 22 students who participated in this study were 13 years of age while four were 14. Nineteen of the 22 students who participated in this study were African-American and three were Latino or Hispanic. In addition, 19 of the students who participated were girls while three were boys. In the first classroom of students, 14 took part in the study while six took part in the second. On the last district assessment given in February 2016, 32 % of the 22 students who took part in the study scored a level three, which is considered proficiency at this school, 45 % scored a level two, which is under proficiency, and 23 % scored a level one, or below proficiency. In the first classroom of students, 43 % of students scored a level three, 29 % scored a level two, and 21 % scored a level one. In the second classroom of students, 83 % scored a level two, and 17 % scored what would be comparable to a level one. At the start of their program at this charter school, the students were initially grouped by ability in regards to standardized testing. However, over the course of their years in the building, students are sometimes moved to a different classroom for behavior reasons. Currently, the groups are majorly divided by ability, but this is not the only factor in placement of students in these two classes. As determined by the school, the first group of students who participated in this study contained a larger amount of higher achieving students while the second class participated in this study contained a larger number of

lower achieving students. As reflected in the assessment data presented above, there is a difference between the two classes in terms of students scoring at all three levels. The first group of students is taught ELA in the morning from nine to 11 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday whereas the second group of students is taught ELA in the afternoon from two to four. On Wednesdays, the first group of students is taught ELA in the morning from eight to nine; the second group is taught from 10 to 11. Both groups are given the same coursework and held to the same academic standards. Most of the students in this grade have been in attendance at this school since the fifth grade, but there are a few students who joined the school in grades six and seven. Before attending this school, students attended a variety of different schools in the corresponding city district.

Researcher Stance

Presently, I am an eighth grade teacher at the school that this research study took place at. This year is my fifth full year of teaching in general and at this school. Prior to this school year, I taught sixth grade for four years. In addition, I am also a graduate student at St. John Fisher College in the process of obtaining my Master's in Literacy Education, grades five through 12. I hold New York State Initial Certification in ELA, grades seven through 12 and a New York State Initial Extension in ELA, grades five and six. In May 2016, I will have a New York State Professional Certification in ELA, grades seven through 12 in addition to an extension annotation in grades five and six. For the purpose of this study, I took the role as a privileged, active participant. Being a privileged, active participant in this study means that I observed my students during times that they are not being directly taught by me (Mills, 2014). Instead, I observed them during time in which they will be under the direction of other teachers.

Method

For this study, both qualitative and quantitative data was collected in efforts to fully answer the research question regarding engaging all students in discussion around writing. First, I collected a typical daily response from each of the 22 students who agreed to take part in the study. Using a typical school rubric for written responses that both teachers and students at the school are familiar with, I graded each written response out of seven points. I recorded their score in an excel sheet next to their name and proficiency level as it was determined by the last Interim Assessment. Then, I taped each student's written response and corresponding rubric into a journal. From here, I identified an area on the rubric to target my discussion to students around. For example, the categories were as follows: Name it and Explain it, Zoom In, Zoom Out, Sentences, GUM, and Capitalization. For reference, Name it and Explain it is the school's way of saying a topic sentence with an argument. Zoom In is similar to a sentence that contains a piece of textual evidence. Zoom Out is comparable to direct analysis. For the sentence category, students are expected to write in complete sentences without any fragments. GUM stands for Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics. Lastly, students are expected to capitalize the first letter of a complete sentence, proper nouns, acronyms, etc. The initial discussion prompting from me was different for each student, depending on the area that students needed to reflect upon. Then, I passed the journals back to the students with their response, rubric, and my questions or comments to them. I either handed the journals directly to the students or placed them in student mailboxes.

After passing back the journals, each day, I completed a brief walk-through in which I placed a tally mark next to student names on an excel sheet if I saw that student writing in their journals during homeroom, lunch, or study hall, times in which students are free. At these times,

the two groups of students that were observed were with other teachers and not with me. Therefore, as stated before, I took the role of the active, privileged participant observer.

After students handed the journals back to me or placed them on my desk, I made a tally next to their name on an excel sheet to indicate a return. I only marked a tally for a return if the student responded. As students responded, I followed up with more questions, further revision tasks, or prompting based on the need of the individual student, tying back to the rubric and to the initial response taped in the journal.

During the process, I interviewed teachers (Appendix A), I interviewed students (Appendix B) informally in focus groups based on proficiency levels as determined by the last Interim Assessment given at the school, and I handed out questionnaires (Appendix C). I interviewed teachers on how they engage students in discussion and how they might use dialogue journals to write about writing with their students. In the informal focus groups with students and the questionnaires, I asked students what they enjoyed about the process, what they would change, and how it compared to whole-group discussion.

Lastly, a couple of weeks after collecting the initial written response, I collected a second written response that mirrored the same type of assignment. I then graded each of the students again using the same rubric as used with the first written response. I recorded this score on the same excel sheet with the rest of the data. Towards the end of this data collection, students took another School Interim Assessment. I also recorded their most current score on the excel sheet as well as another data point.

Quality and Credibility of Research

According to Mills (2014), Guba (1981) suggests four key tenets in ensuring the quality of research. These four key tenets include credibility, transferability, dependability, and

confirmability. First, credibility is defined as “the researcher’s ability to take into account the complexities that present themselves in a study and how to deal with patterns that are not easily explained” (Mills, 2014, p. 117). There are various ways of ensuring credibility as it is previously defined. First, I collected data at the site of the study for three weeks. During this time, I persistently conducted observations, and I practiced triangulation. Mills states, “In research terms the desire to use multiple sources of data is referred to as triangulation” (p. 104). Therefore, in this study, four different sources of data have been collected and analyzed in order to ensure triangulation.

Secondly, transferability is defined as “the researcher’s belief that everything is context-bound” (Mills, 2014, p. 117). I used two strategies to ensure transferability. For example, I collected a plethora of detailed data. Additionally, I detailed the context that the study is situated within.

Next, in Mills’s work, dependability is defined as “the stability of the data” (p. 117). In order to ensure dependability, I overlapped methods of data, using different types to answer the same question/(s). Another important way to guarantee dependability is to record everything that is happening as it is occurring. This can be done through taking written notes or using recording devices through technology. Therefore, when I interviewed teachers and students, I wrote notes as I recorded the conversation that transpired using an audio recorder.

Lastly, according to Mills, confirmability is described as “the neutrality or objectivity of the data collected” (p. 117). Again, for this concept, it is essential to cross-check data collected from one source to another. An additional way to practice confirmability as suggested by Mills is to “keep a journal in which reflections/musings are recorded on a regular basis” (p. 116). Though

I have explained in brief how each of the four concepts will be guaranteed in this study, following is an in-depth description of the data collection as it was carried out for this study.

Informed Consent and Protecting the Rights of the Participants

Before beginning data collection, I created the following three forms for the appropriate participants: for the students' parents, I created a parent permission slip; for the students, I created an assent form; lastly, for the teacher participants in this study, I created a consent form. On each form, the purpose of the study was summarized, and the forms were tailored for the appropriate audience, stating specifically what the corresponding participants would be doing within the study. The forms included other information such as the dates that the study took place, contact information, and the rights that anyone involved with the study has. Anonymity of all participants was maintained, and after the study's completion, all corresponding records will be destroyed to protect the identity of those involved. Student work collected will be removed of any identifiable information.

Data Collection

In this study, data was collected in three forms. First, students were observed. For these observations, the role of an active, privileged observer was assumed by me. For example, I observed the students during specific times of the day such as study hall, lunch, and afternoon homeroom in which the students were with their homeroom teacher/(s). Since students were not in an academic class during these times, they had the option to complete homework, read a book, work on quiz or test corrections, and complete any other academic related work. I completed walkthroughs during these times, study hall, lunch, and afternoon homeroom, struck a tally next to each student's name if it was observed that the student was engaging in discussion using the dialogue journals. Students were told that the dialogue journals were to be used to write about

their writing as it relates to a common school rubric, but they were not be told that they have to complete this writing in school or during specific times. Tallies for each student per day could range anywhere from zero to three tallies. For each week, tallies could range anywhere from zero to 15 tallies. This information was tracked on an excel sheet created solely for the purpose of this study. On the vertical axis of the excel sheet was student names; dates were on the horizontal axis. This form of data began upon return of parent permission and student assent forms and took place until March 14, 2016.

In addition to observations, formal interviews with four teachers were also be utilized for this research, too. First, I created a set of formal interview questions around how teachers can best utilize dialogue journals to engage all students in ongoing discussion about writing. I later printed out three copies, setting aside one for each teacher. Prior to the start of the interviews, I confirmed the number of years the teacher has taught, number of years taught at the school, and the certification each teacher holds. During the week of February, 22, 2016, I scheduled 15 minute blocks of time. During that time, I interviewed each of the four teachers and recorded all interview sessions using the iPhone audio recording tool. The recordings supplement the written notes that were taken during the interviews. These interviews were held in other available space within the building.

Students were also interviewed during for this research. However, unlike the teachers who were interviewed separately and formally, the students who participated in the study were interviewed in informal, focus groups. Students were asked questions regarding discussing writing in the dialogue journals. Specifically, the students were interviewed by ability. For instance, a group of students who scored a three on the last assessment were in one group, students who scored a two were in another group, and students who scored a one were in the

third focus group. These focus groups allowed for cross-case analysis. The focus group, informal interviews took place between Monday, March 7, 2016 and Friday, March 11, 2016 between eight and nine in the morning. During their lunch, students were asked if they would be willing to be interviewed regarding their experience with the journal discussions. Then, based on ability as it was measured on the last standardized test given in February 2016, students were selected in groups, beginning with students who scored a three on the initial school assessment. A document with informal questions was typed up and three copies were printed, one for each focus group informal interview. The focus group interviews were recorded using the iPhone tool. One of the flex rooms that is not typically occupied during the school day was used for these focus group interviews. On the excel sheet I used to tally during observations, a number one, two, or three was written next to each student name. This number indicated the ability level of the students as it was measured on the last formal assessment.

All students who participated in the study were also given a questionnaire. This questionnaire asked similar questions regarding student experience with the dialoguing journaling process that the focus group interviews asked. This was another source of data as some students who fill out the questionnaire might not have taken part in the focus group interviews. This allowed for multiple forms of data collection regarding experience and engagement of students in this process.

The last form of data that was collected for this study is student work sample artifacts. For example, during the week of February 22, 2016, an open ended response was collected from all students taking part in the study. This sample open ended response was part of the usual classwork that students are assigned; it was not created specifically for this research. This piece of work was graded by me as it is typically graded using one of the rubrics that the school

provides and that the students are familiar with. I then attached each student's open ended response into a journal. Following each student's response was the rubric that has been filled in by me pertaining to the response. Correspondingly, at the end of the study, on March 10, 2016, a second open ended response with the same rubric requirements was given to students as normal during English Language Arts class. These open ended responses were collected, scored with the same rubric as the first open response, and stapled at the end of student journals. These two open ended responses that were scored before and after the dialogue journaling discussions on writing were examined and analyzed. The purpose of the examination and analysis of these two pieces of student work provided data on whether or not the discussion on writing between teacher and student has helped to further develop students in one or more areas on the rubric. The students were not given any help during their writing on either of the two days that the student work samples were collected. This ensured that the work produced by students was done independently for both writing samples. The scores for both open ended responses were added to the excel sheet where the observation tallies were tracked and the level of the student in regards to standardized testing was recorded.

Lastly, the dialogue in each of the journals was examined and analyzed. Each student's dialogue was coded in terms of quality of response. For example, overall, student dialogue was coded in one of three ways: complete, partial, and incomplete. If student dialogue was coded complete, that indicated that the student has responded and answered all questions in full to me. If student dialogue is coded partial, that conveyed that the student did not consistently answer or respond in full to me. If student dialogue was coded incomplete, that suggested that the student did not did not answer the questions or respond in full to me. This coding was examined in relation to the student work collection when analyzing to see if there is the correlation between

quality of student dialogue and writing growth as it is measured on a rubric. The student dialogue journals were coded in March 2016. The codes, C for complete, P for partial, and I for incomplete were added to the excel document where the tallies, assessment scores, and the open ended response data was recorded.

Data Analysis

Firstly, the observation data was used to analyze genuine student engagement in the journaling process in which students wrote about writing. Because students were not given a direction as to when they were to write in the journals, this tallying document provided me with information about whether or not students were genuinely engaged in the activity without promoting from teachers. For example, if there were a plethora of tally marks next to students' names that indicated that at large, those students participated in the discussion process genuinely without the requirement from their teacher/(s). In addition to this observation tracking, the number of times a student returned his or her dialogue journal was also tallied over the course of the study and tracked on the same excel sheet. The reason for the return tally count was because the observations might not have always captured the student engaging with their journal as some students might not have been using it during the specific observation times. For example, maybe students used their journals at different times that were not observed. I compared the tallying data with pre and post-dialogue response scores. For example, I used the tallying data to see if there was a correlation between the number of times students responded in their dialogue journal and the growth of their writing as it was measured using a common rubric. Ultimately, the observation and return tallies would not be enough data to answer the research question or to truly gauge student experience with the dialoguing process on its own. Therefore, I continued to analyze other data as well.

Secondly, the teacher interview data was used to understand how other teachers would best utilize dialogue journals in their classrooms to promote ongoing discussion around writing. After listening to, reading, coding, and analyzing the information that the teachers presented, trends were examined and documented. This examination and documentation of the teacher interviews was important in answering the research question because part of the research question includes the wondering regarding how teachers can best utilize dialogue journals to promote ongoing discussion. The teacher perspective was an important data source which aided in answering the research question in full. Each of the four interviews was transcribed. Then, each line of the teacher interviews was coded with a word or phrase which summed up the content of that particular teacher response to the question. Comments were grouped together by like codes and compared to other forms of data.

The data from the informal student focus groups was used as a second way of assessing whether or not the scholars did genuinely enjoy or engage in the process. While the observation of student use of the journals was useful, the focus group interviews added to my understanding of this study. Unlike the observations, with this source of data, I knew how the students actually felt and thought regarding this process of written discussion about writing. Like the teacher interviews, the informal student focus group interviews were transcribed. First, I coded each student response with a positive or a negative sign to determine if the student generally was satisfied or dissatisfied with the process. Again, like I did with the teacher interviews, I then placed a one word code next to the positive or negative sign which summed up the content of the student responses. Responses were grouped together by like code. These codes from the informal focus groups were compared against the other forms of data too.

The student questionnaires were a third data point in terms of student experience and engagement in the dialogue journaling process. The questionnaire was compiled of the same questions asked in the focus groups. The questionnaire was just the written form of the student focus group informal interviews asked through a different medium of communication. Each student's questionnaire response was coded with positive and negative signs. The signs indicated a positive or negative reaction to the dialogue journaling process. Next to each sign, a one letter word or code was written to describe the overall content of the comment provided by the student. Responses were grouped together by like code. Again, these codes were compared to other sources of data.

Both pieces of open ended response work completed by students were analyzed in terms written gains. For example, on the written on excel sheet were the students' scores on both the pre-dialogue and the post-dialogue open ended response samples. Any student who made gains in terms of the post-dialogue open ended response was highlighted in green. Any student who made gains between the last two school assessments was also highlighted in green. This data was helpful when comparing to the observation tallies to see if students with more tallies made larger written or literacy gains and vice versa.

Lastly, the dialogue between teacher and student were analyzed. Specifically, the dialogue was coded in three categories: C for complete, P for partially complete, and I for incomplete. The categories were divided into these three codes in order to see how many students in total engaged with the task in full, how many students engaged in the task partially, and how many students struggled to engage in the task. Again, this information was analyzed in relation to the tallies and all the other forms of data collected such as student rubric scores.

All of the data described in this data analysis section was read again and again. After several re-readings of the data, the codes from all data sources were then grouped into four major categories. These categories were then translated into themes. The four themes that emerged are described in the Findings and Discussion section that follows. Each theme is separated into its own sub-section.

Findings and Discussion

In an effort to answer the research question about how teachers can best utilize dialogue journals to engage all students in ongoing discussion around writing, after careful data analysis, four themes emerged. The first theme that emerged is that teachers should individualize the discussion process to engage each student around applicable writing processes. The next theme that emerged is that teachers should incorporate multiple voices in dialogue journals to engage all students in ongoing discussion. Another theme that emerged was that teachers should utilize dialogue journals as a way to engage all students in ongoing discussion around writing with a focus on student improvement. The last theme that emerged is that the utilization of a dialogue journal as it is used to engage all students in ongoing discussion around writing requires sufficient time to effectively implement.

Individualize the Discussion Process for Each Student around Writing Processes

One hundred percent of students wrote that writing about their writing in a journal with their teacher helped them to become a better writer (Questionnaire, March 2016). However, students did not all provide the same reason for why the dialogue journal process helped them to become a better writer. On Question 4, students reported different reasons for believing that the dialogue journal helped them to become better writers (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). For example, when asked if writing about writing in a journal with me helped to become a better

writer, one student said, “Yes, because I am able to put analysis to my writing” (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). After the dialogue journaling process with me, this student implies that it is now possible to earn credit on written responses in the analysis category, proving that dialogue journaling can provide students with a perceived sense of improving problematic areas of writing that may not be given as much attention in class. Like Barbeiro (2011) explains, it is essential for students to think about problematic areas of their own writing. Because the analysis component was challenging for the student above, it was essential for me to focus my questioning and dialogue around that particular area on the rubric, so I could best assist the student on written work, individualizing the process. Another student who agreed that the dialogue journal helped, stated, “I do believe this helped me become better. I think so because it helped me check my work for silly mistakes” (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). The student who said this often times has the potential to earn a one hundred percent on all written responses, but he typically does not check his work at the end to look for sentence level errors and thus, his written work scores are often lower than they should be; however, throughout the dialogue journaling process with him, my focus was on encouraging him to write about his written sentence level mistakes, and that is just what he did. Although Hemmatti and Soltanpour (2012) would disagree that a journaling process should be a medium for encouraging the correcting of work or focusing on mistakes, in the case of the students who took part in this study, the individualized discussion around specified areas of the rubric such as sentence level conventions has proven to be helpful. After writing about how the dialogue journaling process helped him to improve on his questionnaire, in addition, on his post-dialogue response, he earned full credit, which was 57 points higher what he earned on the pre-response. The 57 point increase is significant because it directly highlights that the dialogue journaling process, when

individualized to meet students where they are academically or with their writing, has the potential to move students from under proficient to above proficient in less than three weeks of time. This finding is consistent with what Lv and Chen (2010) found as it relates to the idea of metacognition, writing about writing. For example, when these researchers grouped students into two groups and examined post-written scores, it was found that the group who practiced metacognition made more gains on their writing in contrast to the students who did not engage in metacognitive activities. Since the student with the 57 point increase also had a completed dialogue journal and was one of the students with the highest number of transactions in his journal, it can be inferred that students who engage in individualized instruction around metacognition through a dialogue journal have the potential to make more gains in their writing like the students who engaged in metacognition in Lv and Chen's (2010) study in contrast to students who do not engage in reflective thinking.

Other students who filled out the questionnaire confirmed their individualized reasons for why the journal process was beneficial. One student in particular wrote, "I think im improving as a writer because how I remember to elaborate on my claim" (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). While many students are able to construct a claim that includes a restatement of a question and a direct answer, the part of writing that many students struggle with is providing analysis in that topic sentence that reveals a deeper understanding of the text; it is confirmed through this student's explanation that the dialogue journaling process has aided in helping her reflect on previous writing, indicating that she now remember to dig deeper when constructing a topic sentence of a written response. Similarly, in their research, Read and Michaud (2015) mention that reflection is an effective way of helping students develop metacognition. Without the opportunity to reflect, this student's handle on metacognitive

strategies as they pertain to her own writing would not be as developed, and her potential for a higher proficiency as it relates to writing may be limited. For example, as stated previously, in Lv and Chen's (2010) study, the student group who did not practice metacognition, did not make as many written gains as the students who did. While continuing with the findings that support individualizing the discussion process for students in the dialogue journal, a different student wrote:

At this moment, writing in a journal with my teacher, has helped me become a better writer because I can now see where I mess up. In my writing, I can see what I should improve on like spelling, punctuation/commas. (Student Questionnaire, March 2016)

Because in-class discussion is not typically generated around sentence level errors, the individual focus for this student on punctuation and commas through the means of a dialogue journal has proven to be an effective way of helping her with the conventions section of writing that she wouldn't have had the opportunity to dig deep into in a whole class setting. Since Bird's (2008) work confirms that metacognitive processes are skills that are transferrable to college, in theory, the student above will now be able to transfer a process she learned through her dialogue journal, checking for sentence level errors, to any piece of writing she constructs in the future. Although it can't be proven that this student will transfer a process she learned through dialogue journaling at the time, it could be an important consideration for future research. More students also confirmed that the dialogue journaling process has been individually helpful. In particular, an additional student wrote, "I believe it did because it made me more conscious of my zoom out sentences. It made me make sure to always connect it to my argument" (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). Maybe this student felt confident in putting analysis into his or her writing but

wasn't always used to actually doing it; however, because of the metacognitive discussion that was initiated by me around zoom out statements for this specific student, the student is now able to reflect on what it takes to construct a proficient analysis in a written response. Although Lv and Chen (2010) and Silver and Graham (2015) did not utilize dialogue journals as platforms to leverage reflection through, these researchers would agree that teaching students explicit writing strategies will help students gain proficiency and increase written scores. Ultimately, all of the previous student responses have one thing in common: These students appear to have validated the journaling process due to their individualized successes. Again, since the focus of the discussion as it was tailored by me was based off of individual student need, these student responses on the questionnaire echo the effectiveness that my tailoring discussion to the needs of the students had. Clearly, these students remembered the specific area of their writing that was targeted in the dialogue journaling process. Not only did tailoring the discussion questions to student based on individual need aid in student validation of the journaling process, it engaged students as well. Because students in Erikson's (2009) study were given the option to choose their own topics in dialogue journals, 12 out of 13 students found it a difficult task to do. On the other hand, since I provided my students with discussion directions that suited their individual needs, the participants in my study did not lose interest in phase one of deciding on what to write about in their journals.

Additionally, interestingly enough, four out of five of the students who provided specific rationales for how the dialogue journaling process helped them to become better writers improved in score from their pre-writing response to their post-writing response. Even more so, four of those students improved in the exact category that they wrote about on their questionnaires. It is also worth noting that the post-responses were not even returned to students

after they were graded. Instead, they were immediately collected and used for data analysis. Due to the fact that the post-responses were not returned to students after they were graded, it seems that these four students were confident that their writing in the specific areas mentioned did indeed improve. Though one of the five students did not necessarily improve her score holistically, she did indeed improve her writing in the specific category that she mentioned in her questionnaire response. For example, in her pre-response her argument sentence stated, “I agree that the poem is talking about death” (February 2016). In her pre-response, she did not provide the “why” behind her reasoning. Differently, in her post-response, she stated, “I disagree that this poem speaks about denial of dreams; I believe it speaks about the fact that some dreams fade away” (March 2016). Because the dialogue journaling process with her was centered on adding the “why” in her argument sentence, she clearly remembered to do this in a response that took place after the metacognitive discussion between the two of us was over which illustrates that her proficiency in the area she applied metacognition to, she improved on. While she received a score of 0 out of one in the initial response for her topic sentence, she received a one out of one in the post-response because she provided an interpretation and extended upon her answer whereas the first time she did not. Differently from Regan, Mastropieri, and Scruggs’s (2005) study which found that a lack of structure was more motivational, for at least five out of the 21 students who participated in this study, the structured discussion appeared to have led them to writing gains and the remembrance of those gains. In the case of this study, the structure was the individualization of the discussion topic based on student need or area of strength. Student validation of individualization and corresponding writing gains as they were determined from pre-response to post-response were not the only instances of data which highlight the importance of individualization of discussion through the dialogue journaling process.

This same concept of individualization as it relates to discussion surfaced in one of the formal teacher interviews as well. For instance, when asked about ensuring complete participation by all students, the teacher responded with the following statement: “When you see that the kids aren’t talking to each other or already finished, you can ask a stretch it question to push their analysis even further” (March 2016). Likewise, in the dialogue journals, I had to utilize my knowledge of a student’s current progress as it related to discussion in order to best serve that particular child in the moment; because all of my students needed a slightly different direction of discussion depending on their learning needs, it was essential for me, their teacher, to choose the highest leverage questioning and metacognitive strategies to individualize instruction. If I responded in a way that did not match a student’s individual needs, just as Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, and Young (2011) described, the result could have been less successful. For example, in their study, these researchers described a situation that occurred when a teacher was simplistically responding to a student in a dialogue journal. The student participant was disengaged from the teacher’s dialogue, so she began to pose her questions differently to re-engage him. Similarly then, as the above teacher hinted at in the interview, it is important to know the students in your classroom, so when appropriate, as a teacher, the correct prompting can be delivered. In the case described above by the teacher, she was obviously referring to an in-class discussion. However, her words are still important to consider and analyze for transfer to other modes of discussion as well, especially as it relates to the dialogue journal. A different teacher also brought up the importance of individuality when engaging students to write about their writing. For example, when asked if she ever employed metacognitive writing with her students, the teacher responded:

Yeah, and I have messed this up so many times. Just saying write about your writing or how do you think your writing is, it entirely falls flat on its face. But if you know what you want them to be looking for, if you want them to be looking for diction, or like the usage of text evidence, pre-planting those questions.

(Formal Interview, March 2016)

Because this teacher has implemented dialogue journals with her students in the past, she has found that it works more effectively with students when she asks students individualized questions around their written responses; therefore, this teacher might deem a poor question to ask students something similar to the following: “What did you do wrong here?” On the other hand, it seems that if this teacher had a student who was struggling with finding the best evidence, she might ask something like the following: “Why is the evidence in paragraph one, sentence one better for your argument than the evidence in paragraph 2, sentence six? Just as Myhill, Jones, and Wilson (2016) suggest to teachers, it is essential during times of redirection to place emphasis on word choice of the teacher facilitator. Similarly, when I questioned students in the journals, I worded my questions in such a way, so students would come to the correct understanding themselves rather than needing a plethora of additional prompting and breaking down from me as their facilitator. Too much prompting and facilitating could lead to a lesser absorption of individualized instruction in a dialogue journaling process.

This same concept of individuality was brought up in all three of the informal student focus groups as well. Other students, who may not have mentioned specific writing focuses in their questionnaires, seemingly mentioned that writing in the dialogue journal was helpful in alleviating the stress of sounding incorrect in a whole group discussion. Specifically, one student stated, “In this journal I participate more because if I get it wrong, I don’t want to get laughed at”

(Focus Group 1, March 2016). Therefore, the dialogue journaling process is more engaging to this specific student due to her individual needs as they relate to discussion and participation; because this student is not as vocal as some of the other students in the in-class English (ELA) discussions, providing her with the opportunity for a written conversation has increased her levels of participation. Just as the dialogue journaling process was empowering for the student who found more comfort in a written form of discussion, in Ghahremani-Ghajara and Mirhosseni's (2005) study, 27 out of the 30 participants found the dialogue journaling process to be empowering, too. Though the dialogue process in their study was not structured, in both cases, the dialogue journaling process proves significant potential to empower students in ways that they may not have experienced before in their classrooms or school experiences. Likewise, a student in a different focus group reported something along the same lines regarding the benefit of dialogue journaling in contrast to whole group discussion; "I believe that it is beneficial because it allows kids who might not want to hear their mistakes in a public situation look at their mistakes and fix it at future times" (Focus Group 2, March 2016). Without this dialogue journaling discussion opportunity, students who typically do not take much away from the metacognitive conversations in-class due to the higher number of students and lack of individualization of the dialogue, did engage in the written discussion this process provided. Similar to what Thomas (2014) found, when students feel that their thoughts are valued during discussion, they will be more likely to participate. In both cases, because discussion took place in smaller groups, student participants might have felt an overall sense of genuine interest from their audience in contrast to face to face discussions where individualization is often overlooked. Again, in the third focus group, this idea of fear was also presented; "It is not judged by other people if we are doing something wrong" (Focus Group 3, March 2016). This information from

students in all three focus groups tells me that regardless of the ability, the dialogue journaling process was likeable for those students who do have a sense of fear when sharing their thoughts or written work with a larger group, in a public space. A similar finding surfaced from Thomas's (2014) study. For example, it was concluded that the students in that study were more engaged and motivated in their learning when it was not in-class. According to Thomas's study, the reason for an increased engagement was because the students knew their audience would be receptive.

There were two specific cases that are important in developing this theme. For example, two students who took part in this study often struggled with behavior during class and staying on task, one more than the other. However, during the three weeks in which the dialogue journaling process was taking place, these two students were more focused and on-task in English class than they have ever been in the 2015-2016 school year. Without my supportive nature through facilitation, the dialogue journaling process alone may not have been as personally motivational as it was for them. Because these two really took a liking to the personal attention and encouragement that they were both receiving from me, as suggested through Ewald's (2012) work, that personal attention and encouragement could have been the potential source for their behavior changes and heightened investments in their work. For example, throughout the entire process, I consciously made efforts to provide them with encouragement and recognition every step of the way. After the process ended and all of the journals were collected, these two students' behaviors became more disruptive and more off-task. The reason for this was probably because the students found the journal motivating and without the process present, their motivation began to drop which highlights that to these students, the dialogue

journal processing was almost as an incentive to them; moreover, for these two girls, the dialogue journaling process may have been more than just an opportunity to engage in a private discussion around writing. For these students, the dialogue journaling process was a method that they found comforting and exciting. Unlike the disengagement that Matt experienced in Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, and Young (2011) reported on in their study, these two students found the dialogue journaling process to be personally motivating which could have been largely due to the supportive nature of my facilitation to them. Though neither of these students necessarily made any gains from pre to post response, both of them did have high number of tallies in the return column next to their names. In their cases, the written discussion provided them with a motivation to stay on task. It is important to know what each student needs to be successful. Though this success may not be overnight for some students, over time, there is potential for it. Ultimately, despite the reasoning for the individualization of the discussion process, data from both teachers and students alike seemed to suggest that individualization is a tool for engagement, especially as it relates to this dialogue journaling process regarding writing about writing. Individualizing the discussion process for students is just one of the themes that was found through analyzing the data.

Teachers Should Incorporate Multiple Voices in Dialogue to Engage All Students

After analyzing the data, it became clear that teachers should potentially incorporate more voices in the dialogue journaling process, beyond just the teacher student. For example, in every source of qualitative data that was collected during for this study, the theme of incorporating multiple voices in discussion formulated. First, in each of the four formal teacher interviews, peer to peer discussion was mentioned. When asked what her main reason for using discussion was, one teacher said, “It also lets them A, collaborate and B, share ideas amongst

each other” (Teacher Interview, March 2016). Dialogue journaling could have been more engaging for the students in my study if I found a way to incorporate peers in the process, too. For example, in Bean and Rigoni’s (2001) study, it was found that incorporating college students in the dialogue process in place of the teacher led to positive gains for both parties involved. It is possible that for some students, the dialogue journal process would be most beneficial with a mix of teacher and at least one or two other students. However, it is important to keep in mind though that some of the students who were motivated may have found comfort in not having other peers involved. Both of the reasons this teacher provided point discussion being a process that involves some peer to peer construction of meaning. Another teacher said, “I think discussion is a really great way for kids to see what their peers think” (Teacher Interview, March 2016). Again, without the opportunity to discuss with another peer in a dialogue journal, the primary reason for utilizing discussion may become void in some educator’s opinions. Just as Berne and Clarke (2006) suggest though, without telling students how to explicitly discuss with peers, the involving of peers in discussion might not be as meaningful as some researchers or educators may think. In addition, in the questionnaires and the informal focus groups, a similar trend regarding the need for peer voice came to the forefront. For example, 38% of students who filled out the questionnaire stated that the dialogue journal process was less interesting than discussing writing in class (March 2016). That means that overall, majority of students, 62 %, found the dialogue journaling process to be more engaging than in-class discussion. It appears then, that although the desire for peer involvement has been expressed, more students prefer teacher led discussion. Similarly, Hew (2015) found that 35 % of participants preferred student led discussions in contrast to the 65 % that preferred the teacher led discussions. The findings of my

study are consistent with those of Hew's as more students preferred teacher facilitation over peer facilitation in either case.

When asked if writing about writing was more or less interesting than discussing writing in class, one student wrote, "It is less interesting because I can't hear what other people have to say" (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). It is possible that because students are not as interested due to only conversing with one voice in the journal, a lack of participation in the dialogue journal on their part may have occurred. For example, Mansor, Shafie, Maesin, Nayan, and Osman (2011) reported that the students in their study felt a sense of anticipation when discussing with peers; thus, if peers are not involved in the dialogue journaling process, it may become mundane to students. Similarly, another student participant responded to the same question by writing, "Writing in a dialogue journal about my writing is less interesting than discussing writing in class because I have less opinions to build off of about a subject" (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). If a dialogue journaling process is limited to teacher and student transactions only, there will be a limited opportunity for students to negotiate meaning with one another. It is important to note that a student participant from Shang's (2005) study said that before the peers were made part of the process, she was not as motivated to complete the pre-work. Hence, if students are not given the opportunity to discuss with one another, there may be a larger lack of motivation existing for some students as many long to make sense with their peers. Additionally, another student wrote, "Writing in a dialogue journal is less interesting than discussing writing in class because there are only two perspectives instead of a whole classes opinion" (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). Although it would be too time consuming to incorporate an entire class in a single dialogue journal, this student's response underscores the reason as to why educators use technology as a medium for whole class discussion when the

resources are available. Likewise, Sloan (2015) found that the quantity of contributions from peers was a motivator. In particular, it was implied that the more contributions from peers that were made, the more interested the students were in participating. In other words, students are motivated by each other. Again, a different student wrote a similar concern about adding peers to the dialogue journaling process: “It is less interesting because I like to hear what other people have to say in the classroom” (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). Although a teacher opinion could be motivating for some students, an opportunity to discuss with only a teacher may not be exciting for all students. Therefore, like Bean and Rigoni (2004) did in their study, it may be necessary to add in other students to the dialogue journaling process. However, unlike these researchers, it may not always be necessary to add in students from outside of the classroom. Students from inside of the classroom will suffice. Lastly, one more student wrote, “Instead of having just one opinion, I would like to get more opinions on my writing” (Student Questionnaire, March 2016). It might be that this student wants to validate the commentary received by ensuring that more than one person agrees has the same understanding. This way, the student isn’t left thinking that it is just one person who is commenting on the writing presented. In the dialogue journaling process then, it is evident that some students may require co-constructing meaning with another peer or student in addition to the teacher when completing metacognitive acts. However, it is also critical to consider that just because peers are added to the dialogue journaling process, does not mean that just incorporating voices will be enough; for instance, Sloan (2015) concluded that the student participants in his study valued the content of the comments that their peers were giving. Depending on whom your peer is and the quality of the commentary they are providing, student experience will be impacted.

This same mention of need for multiple voices in the dialogue journals surfaced

again from all three of the student informal focus groups. Interestingly though, there was a much more heavy mention of it in focus group two than in groups one or three. First, in focus group three, students were asked whether they believe they participate more in class or in the dialogue journaling process. One student replied, "I would say I do better in a group discussion because I get to, after I hear what people say, I get to do it all right after" (Focus Group 3, March 2016). In discussion then, some students were more motivated when listening to their peers' advice over the teacher's and found the dialogue journaling process to be less engaging. A reason for this could coincide with what Hew (2015) found in his study; for example, often times, students enjoyed discussing with their peers without the teacher being present because the teacher was seen as a source of authority. Although it might not be possible for teachers of grade students to allow discussions to take place without a teacher being present, this finding connects to what the student participants in my study are saying. In both cases, students want to negotiate meaning with each other instead of just ping ponging with the teacher. Not surprisingly, this student was also one of the students who wrote that the dialogue journaling process was less interesting. On the questionnaire, she mentioned a similar longing for more voice in the discussion process. She was the only person in focus group three though that presented the desire of an increase of voices in the dialoguing. In focus group one, some students would have agreed with the student from focus group three. One student said from focus group one said:

I think I participate more in class because I hear what other people say.

Like if we are reviewing multiple choice, and I pick an answer, and I put no evidence next to the answer and someone says that is right and they

give me a best evidence for the answer I chose, then I would change my answer. (Focus Group 1, March 2016).

In order to make the dialogue journaling process engaging for all students, I could have included a peer to peer discussion aspect to it. Similarly, 35 % of students in Hew's (2015) study found peer discussions preferable to teacher led discussions and probably would have agreed with the 38 % of students from my study who reported that the dialogue journaling process was less likeable than in class discussion. On the contrary though, 62 % of the students who participated in this study stated that the dialogue process discussion was more engaging than the in-class (Questionnaire, March 2016). At large then, majority of the students, 62 %, found the dialogue journaling process to be more engaging than whole group discussion even without the addition of other peers. This finding is consistent to the 65 % of student who preferred teacher led discussions over peer-led discussions. The consistency between statistics from my study and Hew's (2015) reveal that dialogue journaling can be engaging as it is structured with only student to teacher interaction, but to engage all students equally, modifications could be considered as they relate to incorporating peer voice.

Though the students who made mention for a desire of more voices in the discussion process did not account for the majority of student participants, their commentary can simply not be ignored or dismissed. In addition to the one student in group three and one, there were two others in group one who also stated that they participated more in class discussions (Focus Group 1, March 2016). Dialogue journaling participation and engagement for certain students could have been increased if other peers were more involved in the process. Just like Bean and Rigoni (2001) utilized college students as comparable peers to grade students, the results of this study could have been altered, engaging more students, if that modification had been provided as a

choice to students. As stated previously though, there were more students who mentioned that in-class discussion is more interesting due to being able hear the voices from others in focus group two in comparison to any other focus group. Following is the chronological commentary from five students in focus group two who preferred the in-class discussion. First, I asked the students if writing in their journals about their writing was more or less interesting than discussing in class. When asked to explain, the first student stated:

I think that it is less interesting because when you do it in class and you do something wrong, you have someone there to help you or to fix your mistakes, but in the journal, you have to wait for you to revise it. (Focus Group 2, March 2016)

By trading information with others through dialogue, students have the opportunity to increase their knowledge on a particular component of writing which can be seen as engaging to students. Likewise, in Shang's (2005) study, a student said, "By exchanging information, I have more opportunities to practice my typing and enhance my computer knowledge" (p. 204). Though both students are referring to differing processes and course knowledge, the major point to be highlighted is that peers can be just as useful to developing the knowledge base in a classroom setting as teachers. A second student in focus group two responded to student one's comment and said, "I think it is less interesting because when we have discussion, everyone can have their own opinions on your work" (March 2016). Students must trust that their peers will give meaningful, effective feedback in order for peer involvement in dialogue journaling to be considered fruitful. If students do not think that peers will provide her with meaningful, trusted feedback, they might agree with the 36% of his participants in Shang's study who did not believe peer feedback was helpful in the email dialogue process. Then, after the second student in focus group two responded, the third student then spoke; "I think that class is more interesting because

instead of this where there is only two people” (Focus Group 2, March 2016). When more students are consistently participating, others may feel more invited into the conversation as an important voice. Similarly, in Williams, Jaramillo, and Persko’s (2015) study, a student reported, “Consistent group participation allowed me to be an active participant where dialogue and engagement [in the inquiry process] was encouraged and expected” (p. 59). When the third student stopped speaking, the fourth student answered; “Less because you could have more help with it because if you don’t have the right evidence, you can grab someone else’s evidence” (Focus Group 2, March 2016). Just as student two indicated through her response, student four probably also trusts the English Language Arts (ELA) skills of her peers enough to utilize their feedback in her own work. On the other hand, one student in Shang’s (2005) study stated, “My peer’s English is poor, so I can’t get useful feedback because I don’t trust my peer’s suggestions; it will negatively influence my writing” (p. 204). Though it was not mentioned directly by any of the students, trusting one’s peers probably comes into play as to why focus group two students truly want to hear from others besides their teacher. Lastly, the fifth student in focus group two stated, “Okay. I think it is less interesting because it was not a lot of people to help, like you know what I mean. Like if you do something wrong, then you have to wait” (Focus Group 2, March 2016). Some students are motivated by the opportunity to receive help from other students. Shang (2005) includes the words of one student from his study:

I didn’t use to read the assigned article in advance. However, when I knew that my partner is waiting for me to give her some feedback, that kind of incentive motivates me to finish reading the article as early as possible, as well as study it as hard as possible. (p. 204).

Whether you are on a student who is providing or receiving feedback, it can be more engaging if you know that you are the main source of another person's success. Unlike the other two groups, in focus group two, five students in a row seemed to agree that in-class discussion is more engaging than discussion in a dialogue journal. In all five students' responses, there is a strong correlation between interest level and interaction with other people, or students. Student one's response is interesting because it also mentions the time lapse as being the reason for not enjoying the dialogue journaling process as much.

Overall though, in focus group two, the majority of students, 56 %, did not prefer the dialogue journaling process to in-class discussion (March 2016). It can be hypothesized then that the students in focus group two have more of a desire to connect personally to other people than students from focus groups one and three. Similarly, in Watson and Hugo's (2015) study, although technology was used as a means to engage peer-to-peer conversations, he found that the students were motivated in these conversations because the students felt they could connect to one another in a personal way. Therefore, the majority of students in focus group two would probably agree with the students in Watson and Hugo's study. As an important note, the students in focus group two are the middle achieving students. It is interesting that the higher and the lower achieving students seemed to generally be more pleased with the dialogue journaling process while the middle achieving students largely were more displeased with the process as it lacked multiple voices. It is also possible that 56 % students with average proficiency do not need as much individualization from teacher feedback because the course material is most on par with their instructional level in contrast to students with a higher or lower proficiency level. In Shang's (2005) study, although proficiency levels of students were not compared against engagement with discussion forms, 56% of students remained positive about interacting with

their peers in the email dialogue journaling; one student said, “Since I can discuss; receive feedback; learn grammar and vocabulary, and get more information from my peer, I get more fun in reading; I consider this way of learning more authentic” (p. 204). If students trust their peers, are taught how to explicitly discuss with one another, and/or desire a larger sense of connection with people, incorporating multiple students in one dialogue journaling could potentially be worth the consideration for future research. In addition to teachers individualizing the process and incorporating more voices into the process, teachers should also consider utilizing dialogue journals as a way to engage all students with a focus on student improvement.

Teachers Should Utilize Dialogue Journals as a Way to Engage All Students in Ongoing Discussion around Writing with a Focus on Student Improvement

After analyzing all of the different modes of data collected in depth, it was clear that students truly appreciated the sense or perception that their writing was improving through the use of the journal. As stated before, on the questionnaires, 100 % of students who answered question number one said that they liked writing about writing in their dialogue journals (March 2016). Though not every student felt that the dialogue journaling process was more interesting than discussing in-class, students clearly saw that the process was set forth to help them grow and improve and thus, enjoyed it overall. This is an overwhelming statistic as it is a much higher rate of satisfaction than reported in other literature. For example, although Ghahremani-Ghajara and Mirhosseini’s (2005) study explains that 90 % of students reported that the dialogue journals provided an empowering experience for them, there were 10 % who did not agree. When asked the same question in the informal, focus group interviews, 95% of students explained that they liked writing about their writing in their dialogue journals. The overwhelming high percentage of students in either case proves that the dialogue journaling process can be engaging when

structured as a way to better student writing. The 5% of students who were not of the 95% did not report disliking the process. The discrepancy is explained in the following sentences: One student wrote in the questionnaire that she liked the process; however, when she was asked during the informal, focus group two, she said, "It was okay." Though her language was not exactly the same in comparison to what she wrote on her questionnaire, her response has a rather neutral connotation rather being negative. Either way, even with this student's differing response, when cross-analyzing the data, altogether, that would indicate that 98 % of students reported the process to be likeable. Again, 98 % is higher than the 90 % that found the dialogue journaling process to be empowering in In Ghahremani-Ghajara and Mirhosseini's (2005) study.

Regardless of this one discrepancy and a trend that some students, especially the middle achieving students, prefer in-class discussion due to increased number of voices present, not a single student reported that they did not like writing about their writing in a dialogue journal in the questionnaire nor did they report that they didn't like the process during the informal, focus group interviews (March 2016). Since the dialogue journaling process was structured in such a way that required students to reflect on areas of growth as it was measured on a standard rubric, it can be perceived that the direction encouraged students to want to interact with the process; if the dialogue journaling was left open for students to write about their writing with no clear focus on student improvement as it was measured on a common rubric, the process may have been less engaging for the student participants in this study. Similar to the process of writing about writing in my study, in Soltanpour and Hemmatti's (2012) study, there was a much higher result of student achievement when students were encouraged to reflect on their work as oppose to a platform which didn't require much reflection; specifically, students who took part in the reflective learning portfolio process in contrast to the dialogue journaling process had higher

post-test gains in their written responses; the reason that the reflective learning portfolio group had higher post-test gains in their written responses was possibly because they saw the opportunity for reflection as a way to improve their work, which was engaging. However, if all dialogue journaling processes adopted the goal of student achievement and revision, students might feel more engaged in the process as a whole. My dialogue process adopted this reflective nature of Soltanpour and Hemmati's reflective learning portfolio process, and the students clearly appreciate that aspect of it. Similarly, it seems that in their study and mine, students are engaged and motivated when there is a focus on improvement.

When looking at the responses for why students liked writing about their writing in the dialogue journals, 86% of student reasons for taking a liking to the dialogue journal discussion about their writing centered on the idea of improvement or perceived sense of improvement (Questionnaire, March 2016). If dialogue journals are used without a perceived urgency in regards to improvement, students may have a less positive experience as they have had in other cases. For example, the students in Soltanpour and Hemmatti's (2012) study who did not utilize reflective learning portfolios had lower levels of achievement than students who reflected meaningfully. The same student who stated during the informal, focus group two that "it was okay," wrote the following statement on her questionnaire: "Yea I did like writing in the dialogue journal because it help me correct some things" (March 2016). Thus, it appears that this particular student liked the process because it helped her to gain more mastery in her writing and improve, regardless of her desire for more voices in the process. Similarly, when asked why the dialogue journal process was likeable, another student wrote, "I did like writing in the dialogue journal because it gave me time to look over my work to see how I could revise and fix it and make my work better in the future" (Questionnaire, March 2016). Without the opportunity for

further reflection of writing course work through the dialogue process, students will not have as many opportunities to deeply internalize errors to improve upon in the future. Garmon (2001) reports a similar finding; “The second most frequently cited benefit of dialogue journals was that they promoted students’ self-reflection and self-understanding” (p. 42). If dialogue journals were not structured in a manner in which students could improve upon their work, the results might differ as students might find that there is no purpose to them. An additional student from my study also made a similar comment on her questionnaire; “I like writing in the journal because it is a one on one conversation with your teacher where you can ask questions and receive feedback” (March 2016). Without the dialogue journaling process, students at this school do not always have the chance to ask questions that might pertain to their own self-improvement during an in-class discussion; moreover, even if they do have ask a question, it might not be answered in the depth that the student would need it to be in order to propel a further understanding. Likewise, Garmon (2001) found that “a fourth benefit was that the dialogue journals provided a regular opportunity for students to express their ideas about the issues being dealt with in the course” (p. 42). If dialogue journals were not made an option for these participating students, there is a chance that some of the questions they asked might not have been answered. Students might not have felt that they truly had the means to ask questions that pertain just to them or their work. Again, when answering the same question about the process, a different student wrote, “I did like writing about my writing in the dialogue journal because it allowed me to receive constructive criticism on how to become a better writer” (Questionnaire, March 2016). This student’s desire for constructive criticism is essential to report because it proves that contrary to other literature, dialogue journals can serve as another avenue for teachers to correct kids. For example, differently from Hemmatti and Soltanpour’s (2012) study which implied that dialogue

journaling should not be used as a platform to provide constructive criticism, students from this study want to do better and without a focus on their improvement, the dialogue journaling process itself would be disengaging. Furthermore, other students continued to report wanting to improve. In particular, a student noted, “I did like writing in the dialogue journal because I was able to go into depth with my mistakes and learn how to improve my skills” (Questionnaire, March 2016). Although students have opportunities during in-class discussion and writing workshops to improve their writing, it is seldom that they are able to go in depth with a mistake that pertains specifically to them in order to make their writing better or take their writing from good to great like they are in a dialogue journal. Similar to what was reported in Barbeiro’s (2011) work, when students write about their writing, they not only write more, but the processes they use in their writing begin to increase as well. Dialogue journals have the ability to be the mediums or platforms for successful, in-depth discussion of important written components, guiding students towards proficient.

It appears that 76% of students found writing about their writing to be a likeable process, for they perceived it as a medium that helped them to improve their writing skills or to better themselves as writers. Being that 76% is more than half of the students who participated in this study, it can be concluded that in order to generally engage students in the dialogue journaling process, it is essential to structure journaling with the end goal being that students will gain more proficiency in one area or another in regards to their written work through an emphasis on metacognition. Interestingly, Lv and Chen’s (2010) discussed in their study, the student group that engaged with metacognition strategies made larger gains in terms of their writing in contrast to the student group who did not have the opportunity to engage in metacognitive strategies. Although this study did not compare and contrast the written growth of students who used

metacognition and students who did not, it can probably be assumed that a similar finding would have occurred. A student who did not note a similar reason for liking the journaling process in the questionnaire, made a comment in the actual dialogue journal discussion itself pertaining to this idea of improvement. She said, “This notebook about my writing is really helpful and is helping me understand my mistakes” (Dialogue Journal, March 2016). Because this student took the time to go out of her way to comment on the helpfulness of the dialogue journal, it can be understood that the dialogue journaling process is one of the most beneficial activities that she has engaged with in regards to English class and writing. Unlike Matt from Anderson, Nelson, Richardson, Webb, and Young’s (2011) study, the student from my study was engaged with the processing due to the collegiate nature and the rigorous question stems to engage her in an ongoing conversation around her work. Another student also made a comment in her dialogue journal to me that stated she was thankful for the opportunity to be provided with additional guidance; she said:

I just want to thank you for taking the time to help me better my work and always pushing me to my full potential. I see how much I have grown as not only a writer but also as a person because of you, and I am forever thankful for this. I am very proud of how far I have come this year and I still have a lot more growing to do.

Hope you have a good weekend. (Dialogue Journal, March 2016)

In this case, the student’s response underscores how important dialogue journaling can be to written growth if it is used correctively. Though Hemmatti and Soltanpour (2012) used dialogue journals non-correctively, the commentary provided by students in response to question one on the questionnaire and the un-solicited commentary by the two students in the dialogue journals themselves could potentially suggest just the opposite; teachers should consider using dialogue

journals correctively as students appear to be engaged due to their perceived improvement in the area of writing.

After completing a cross-case analysis, it became evident that the level three students, the higher achieving students, had the highest percentage of pre to post-response written gains (Student Work Samples, February and March, 2016). Through this piece of data, it can be interpreted that dialogue journals, as they were used to write about writing with teacher facilitation, might be not the best way to help under-proficient students become more proficient through writing. Contrarily though, in Sliver and Graham's (2015) study, it was implied that metacognitive strategies, as they could be used with both higher and lower levels, were impactful. Although 76 % of students wrote that the dialogue process helped them to improve in some way, from pre to post-test, less than that, 50 %, scored higher on the post-response. Sixty-four percent of those students who scored higher on the post-response were the level three students, the higher achieving students. Table 1 below shows the pre and post scores of the level three students, the number of times that the student returned the dialogue journal with a transaction, and the level of completion, C being totally complete, P being partially complete, and I being largely incomplete. The difference in points between pre-dialogue and post-dialogue is also calculated.

Table 1

Level 3 Students Pre-to-Post Written Scores

Name	Pre-Score	Post-Score	Difference	Transactions	Completion
Jonny	43	100	+57	11	C
Ashley	71	100	+29	10	C
Yolanda	71	100	+29	9	C
Kristen	71	86	+15	6	C
Jaimie	71	86	+15	1	P
Diamond	71	71	0	10	C
Holly	57	57	0	1	I

Note. The Pre-Score response was completed in February 2016. The Post-Score was completed in March. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of the students.

In the first five pre to post- scores, there is a range from a 15 to 57 point increase from the response they wrote prior to engaging in the dialogue journaling process to the response they constructed after they engaged in writing about their writing for a period of time. Because the discussion was targeted to give students practice with examining their own written mistakes in depth as oppose to examining a common error representative of an entire class, students internalized the discussion and applied it to latter written responses. In such a short period of time, individual student gain can be moved greatly through a large focus on students' improvement as it is applicable to each student. Interestingly enough, four out of five of these students have the highest number of transactions and completely responded to all of my questions, comments, and directions in the journal. It seems then, that the utilizing metacognitive strategies with kids in a dialogue journal can have immediate impacts on writing achievement as it is related to a common rubric. Similarly, Lv and Chen (2010) found that post essays scores

were higher in students who engaged in metacognitive training versus the students who did not engage in this type of thinking. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that generally, the more engagement with metacognition one has, the higher the written gains will be. In addition, continuing with examination of Table 1, the two students who made 10 transactions were the students who wrote directly in their dialogue that the journal was helpful. For Ashley, a 29 point increase occurred; though Diamond did not make any written gains in as measured on the post-response, it is of wonder if she would have increased her writing abilities as measured on a rubric if the study was to continue for a bit longer. Holly, a student with incomplete dialogue was the only student from this focus group who stated that she preferred the in-class discussion to the dialogue journal because of the multitude of voices. Perhaps Holly would have completed her dialogue journal responses to me if the process included one or more peer in it. Even more so, the addition of the peer could have resulted in her gaining more of an increase from pre to post dialogue. Looking at Table 1 holistically then, it is important to note that generally, the higher achieving students were fully engaged in the journaling process, took part in discussion with me frequently, and made gains in less than one month in terms of their written work. Since the dialogue journaling does require a certain level of autonomy, it is possible that the higher achieving students gained more through the process in term of literacy gains as they relate to written scores, for these students have a higher degree of work ethic and focus applicable to the dialogue journals. For other students of lower proficiency levels to have as fruitful as gains, it might require more than just written dialogue. It might also be worth pairing written dialogue as it pertains to those students' achievement with verbal dialogue as quick touch points. These written gains could potentially be the result of the focus on student improvement as it individually corresponded to each student. So far, it has been evidenced that teachers should

individualize the dialogue process for students, teachers should consider incorporating more voices into the dialogue journaling process, and teachers should frame the entire process with a focus on student achievement and improvement. The last theme that came about is that utilization of a dialogue journal as it is used to engage students in ongoing discussion around writing may require sufficient time to effectively implement.

Utilization of a Dialogue Journal as it is Used to Engage all Students in Ongoing Discussion around Writing May Require Sufficient Time to Effectively Implement

As the data was being coded, there was just one category that didn't seem to fit with the others: time. However, time surfaced in many of the different data sources that were collected. For example, the teachers interviewed mentioned time being a factor in using a dialogue journaling process. Additionally, some students also mentioned that there was not enough time to always respond right away in the journal as it was not a part of actual class time. This hypothesis then, regarding needing sufficient time, is supported through the observation data as well. First, in one of the formal interviews, a teacher interviewee stated:

I have done a dialogue journal with my seventh graders. I did it with their creative writing. I had 120 students, and I responded to them once a week. It was a really daunting, incredibly time consuming thing to do. I did it for two, three months maybe. (Formal Interview, March 2016)

The time commitment attached with dialogue journaling could potentially be the reason that there are not many teachers in my school that currently utilize the process. In addition, within the city or surrounding cities that I am employed in, I do not know any other teachers that currently use the dialogue journals as Larson and Marsh (2005) describe Maryita Maier doing in her Western, NY classroom in which she returned dialogue journals to all of her students every day.

Furthermore, because this teacher has done dialogue journaling in the past at another school different from the one she works at now, the information she provided me was from a differing perspective from the other teachers as they have never used the dialogue journal process before (Formal Teacher Interviews, March 2016). This teacher knows first-hand that the dialogue journaling process as it pertains to writing back and forth with individual students, especially of high volume, could possibly be overwhelming, unmanageable, and not sustainable. Even more so, her words are significant in that they highlight that time plays a role in this process if it is not made part of the school day like Maryita Maier, an elementary school teacher from Rochester made it (Larson & Marsh, 2005). This example provided by one of the interviewed teachers is just one instance of the mention of time coming up as it relates to dialogue journaling. Thus, though it may be an engaging process, the time constraint may be a potential detriment to that engagement if it can't be sustained over time.

The first teacher that I interviewed also brought up time in her interview. She stated:

My only concern with this journaling process is that I have 96 students. It would be very challenging for me to read all of them, and do everything that we do in class. What I think would be applicable to the fifth grade classes is something similar that we did in class the other day. There might be a way to implement it a couple times a week, but I would not be able to do it daily. (Formal Teacher Interview, March 2016).

In order for teachers to engage students in the dialogue journaling process, they would have to be willing to spend time on writing to students at some point either before, during, or after school. Similar to what students suggested in Garmon's (2001) study, dialoguing once a week was preferred. This commentary by one of the teachers interviewed and the recommendation from the

participants in another study contrasts to to what Larson and Marsh (2005) write about Maryita Maier as it relates to dialogue journals and her daily responses:

After the exchange, the students went to their desks to find the dialogue journal Maier had left for them. Each night, she wrote to her students and each morning they wrote back. She began this practice the first week of school and did it every day for the rest of the school year. The daily occurrence of this activity and the regular pattern of the text scaffolded their reading development over time. (p. 113)

Although Maier may have been able to sustain writing to her students daily in dialogue journals, it probably requires extra time on her end. For example, in describing Maier earlier, Larson and Marsh explain, “She was normally there early so she had plenty of time to prepare for the students’ arrival, or she would have stayed at school the night before until after 6 o’clock or sometimes later” (p. 113). Again, though Maier sustains this process throughout the school year, the observation of her staying late and arriving early suggests that activities like the dialogue journal take extra time. Thus, Larson and Marsh’s description of the dialoguing process and the amount of time Maier spends at school implies a similar finding that the teachers I interviewed expressed for the context of my study. Students also mentioned time as being a limiting factor in engaging with the process.

A similar trend with the time lapse of the dialogue journaling process being a possible disadvantage came about from the students, too. For instance, in the focus group two, a student stated, “Okay I think it is less interesting because it was not a lot of people to help, like, you know what I mean, like if you do something wrong, then you have to wait” (March 2016). The drawback then to the dialogue journaling process or any other process that is not in real-time is

that the lack of immediacy of feedback and participation could hinder the entire process altogether. Similarly, in Shang's (2005) study, most students reported that it took too much time to get answers. Subsequently, in focus group one, another student mentioned time as being a factor of her disengagement with the process. The student was asked whether or not she participated more in a whole group discussion about writing or if she participated more in the dialogue journaling process. She responded with, "It is half and half. Sometimes I got too much homework to write in the journal" (Focus Group 1, March 2016). For some students, if the dialogue journal is not assigned as a part of a class like it was in this study, there is a possibility that time outside of class could hinder student engagement in the process; moreover, this student word highlights that even if a the dialogue journaling process is structured in an effective manner, if it is not completed within the confines of a school day, certain students may not be engaged in the process or may find excuses to not utilize it. A similar anxiety was brought about from Shang's (2005) study as it was found that of the students who participated in the study, "49 % disliked email dialogue journaling because they felt such as task took up too much time since most of them had jobs in the daytime" (p. 204). Though the students in Shang's study were of the college age, in both cases, outside factors impacted their engagement with the dialogue process. It is also possible that in efforts to eliminate time constraints from being a factor, instructors embed online medium for students to discuss. In their study, Forotoun and Noordin (2012) used e-mail dialogue and traditional journal dialogue with participants. Though the purpose of their study was not to find out which journal type was best for time purposes, it is easy to understand why technology may be used for such a process. However, it is important to re-emphasize the point that not every student has equal access and opportunity to technology which makes the use of e-mail dialogue journaling only an option for certain classrooms.

Time was also seen as challenging through the observation data. For example, when observing students during their free time, I struck a tally next to each person's name next to that date's column when I saw the student writing in their journals. Out of the 12 days that I completed my observations, students were observed a total of 17 times utilizing their journals (Observation, February and March, 2016). That is 17 times total for all 22 students, not 17 times per student. Specifically, that averages out to about one student utilizing his or her journal per day (Observation, February and March 2016). Although the dialogue journaling process for this study was structured in terms of content, it was not structured in regards to time which could have played into the fact that more students were not observed engaging with their dialogue journals. Salter and Conneely (2015) discuss that in their comparative study, students found the structured discussion process to be more engaging than unstructured discussion overall. Therefore, if I would have given students a minimum requirement for returning their journals, the engagement could have been greater as it was observed daily and as measured through returns. Another factor that might have played into lower observation numbers of students engaging with their journal is that mid-way through the observations, students' free time during study hall was completely taken away. The study hall periods turned into either small group or large group tutoring blocks for math or English Language Arts (ELA) in preparation for the state test as directed by administration. With that being said, student free time was then limited to morning and afternoon homeroom and lunch. Though this change in study hall time may or may not have made a difference in the amount of observations of students engaging in their journals, it is important to consider as part of the context of this observation data. Hyatt (2013) explained that she had difficulty in trying to mathematically engage her students in conversation the way that she was hoping. She claimed that this could have been due to the fact that the students were

not told the goal of the dialogue journals from the start. Similar to Hyatt, who did not state the goal of utilizing dialogue journals with her students from the beginning, I did not tell the students to use their journals at a specific time. Therefore, removing the structure of telling students when the dialogue journal needs to be written in, provides students with the flexibility of when and where they would like to respond. Therefore, it is essential to note that students could have chosen to engage with their dialogue journals outside of school. In addition, the walk-throughs I completed when tallying observations were brief. Because these walkthroughs were brief, this observation data was only limited to a very small amount of time, daily. As stated in the Data Analysis section, the observation data was not enough to truly understand the velocity of the student engagement. Because the observation data was not enough to truly understand the velocity of student engagement, I also counted the number of returns from each student. The return data enabled me to account for student engagement with the journals that was outside of my observation walk through for that specific day. Specifically, during the course of the study, approximately 95 returns were made in totality. On average then, that means that approximately 41% of students returned their dialogue journals on any given day within the time frame of the study. Being less than half of the students participating, that number is lower than I would have liked or expected. Thus, the students in my study may have felt similarly to the students in Garmon's (2001) study who frequently explained that two journal entries a week was too much. Though 100 % of participants reported liking the process, if only 41% turned in their dialogue journals at least once a week, it is clear that time could have been a limiting factor. In addition, some students did not make any returns while other students made up to 10 returns. The students who made more returns may have had more time after school and less after school duties to complete dialogue entries more often. Unlike Garmon's study which required students to turn in

two journal entries per week, my study did not give any specifications about how many entries needed to be complete at all. To that end, if I would have set a limit of at least one journal entry per week, I would have increased the amount of participation overall. Furthermore, in particular, nine students made one return or less, five students made two to three returns; eight students made between five and eleven returns (Observation Data, February and March 2016). Fifty-nine percent of student participants then returned their dialogue journal at an average of at least one time per week that the study was conducted for which implies that majority of students found the dialogue journal to be engaging enough to write in despite the attached time constraints. If a requirement of one journal entry was required per week as participants in Garmon's (2001) study suggested, students who did not return the journal at all during my study would have had at least one experience with discussing in it before passing a judgement as to whether it would be interesting to participate in or not. Though not all reasons have been accounted for, it can be hypothesized, based on data, that the two major reasons why students did not engage with the process as much as others have to do with a lack of peer involvement and a time constraint issue. Students are in school from as early as 7:20 a.m. and as late as 4:40 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday on any regular given school week. By the time transportation is factored into those times, a student's day could be as long as almost 11 or 12 hours. On top of regular homework and additional outside of school duties or activities, dialoguing in addition to that may be truly a challenge for some particular students given their situations. With all of the demands of school and home, it is no wonder that teachers like Maryita Maier have made the dialoguing process part of students' school days.

Time could have also been a factor in the students' response completion back to me in their journals. For example, out of 22 dialogue journals, eight students responded in full to all of

my questions, comments, and directions. Nine students responded partially to my questions, comments, and directions. Five students did not respond to anything in their dialogue journals. However, some of the incomplete responses may in part be because the students were not told that they had to write in the journal a certain amount of times. However, if I had changed the structure of the dialogue process to require a specific amount of entries, I would not have received as accurate of a picture of genuine student engagement in the process itself. However, many researchers like Williams (2015) have found that when students are told exactly what is expected, they are more likely to follow through on this process. It may be worth considering adopting this same process but giving students a minimum requirement for returning the journals and for entries. The number of students who might be coded C for a completed dialogue would probably increase from what I saw in my study. Though there has been a large trend in different sources of data pointing towards a concern for time as it relates to the dialogue journaling process, there was some mention of the prolonged time taken to discuss in the journal as being a positive.

Some of the students though, presented that the time actually worked in their favor in terms of participation. For example, the students were asked if they participate more in a whole group discussion or in the dialogue journal process. A student from focus group one stated, “In the journal I just take my time. In class, we have a time limit to figure stuff out” (March 2016). Many students alike may struggle to answer discussion questions on the spot during class due to anxiety or their own individual learning needs. Here, the time lapse between dialogue entries acts as a positive for this student; instead of having to answer a question about writing immediately with limited think time during an in-class discussion, the dialogue process offers a student like this more time to comprehend, reflect, and respond to a question about writing. A student from

Garmon's (2001) study would disagree with the student from my study; this student said, "On the down side, doing the journals took a lot of extra time. I tried to think about what I wanted to say, and then had to find the time to actually write it" (p. 46). Again, another student from my student mentioned the positive aspect that the time lapse provided her when she said, "I go more in depth in the dialogue journal because I had more time to thoroughly look back on my errors and reflect on them than I did during group discussion" (Focus Group 3, March 2016). The dialogue journaling process then can provide students with a deeper dive of in-class discussion as students who are actively engaged in the process can spend the time engaging in more dialogue around a particular are when applicable. On the other hand, there are students like Linda from Garmon's (2001) study that reported spending approximately 45 minutes responding to a journal entry is too much in addition to supplemental course requirements. One more student from the same focus group of my study agreed with her peer in that the extra time given in the dialogue journaling was an advantage of the medium; she said, "Also, I like the journal because it gives you more time to write instead of just a couple minutes to speak" (Focus Group 3, March 2016). For example, unlike real-time discussion in class, behind a notebook, there is always an opportunity to take a little extra time if needed because the pressure of responding immediately is eliminated. Similarly, in Thomas's (2014) work, time was also potentially positive for the students who were part of online literature circle groups. Again, unlike the other data that revealed time being a negative in the process, there was also a trend in student responses that highlighted the positivity of having more time to respond in discussion through a written mode as opposed to a verbal.

On the questionnaire, similar comments about time were made by students. One student wrote on the questionnaire, "I participate more in the dialogue journal because I can write in it at

any reasonable time” (March 2016). Giving students the freedom of a discussing outside of class is a way to activate engagement, especially for students who might want an opportunity for extended learning beyond what was established in class time. Kathy from Garmon’s (2001) would agree with this student as she stated:

One of my biggest problems is that I’ll go into class, concentrate and participate in class and then as soon as I leave class I’ll totally forget about it until the next class. What the journals do is they give me the opportunity to go back over the material we discussed in class. A lot of times they help me formulate my opinions about certain issues, mainly because writing these journals really forces me to think about we’ve talked about in class. (p. 42)

Similarly, another student from my study wrote, I think I participate more in the dialogue journaling process because I could think about an answer longer and harder” (Questionnaire, 2016). This student was able to spend more time thinking about writing about writing than she did in class which could lead to a deeper understanding of the writing curriculum and transferrable skills. Again, just as the student from Garmon’s (2001) study suggested, the course content can be deepened through use of the dialogue journals. Lastly, when asked if there was anything else they would like to share about their experience with me, the same student who said that they prefer the journal because you get more time to write asked, “Can we do this in class?” Although class time can’t obviously be all given up for the excitement of one student’s desire for more dialoguing time, it makes me wonder if the dialogue journaling process would have been more engaging for students if it was done in class in contrast to outside of class. With that being said, I would be interested to see how the students in Maryita Maier’s classroom respond to the process being made a part of a typical day (Larson and Marsh, 2005).

From this study then, four particular themes came to life through data analysis. First, teachers should individualize the dialogue journaling process regarding writing about writing. Secondly, teachers should consider incorporating more voices into the dialogue journaling process. Next, teachers should approach the dialogue journaling process with an emphasis on student improvement and achievement. Lastly, the dialogue journaling process may require sufficient time from teachers and students in order to be effectively engaging.

Implications

After analyzing the data, four clear implications came to the forefront. These four themes bring about some important implications for the field of teaching. First, it was made clear through the student questionnaires, informal focus group interviews, and the teacher interviews that teachers can best utilize dialogue journals to engage students in ongoing discussion around writing by making the discussion process individualized. For example, if teachers are using dialogue journals to discuss writing with each individual student, it is essential to make that discussion meaningful to his or her own area/(s) of strengths and needs. In terms of discussing writing with students without the use of dialogue journaling, teachers should consider choosing a piece of student work per day to generate conversation around. Although teachers may already be centering in-class discussion around student work that represents a gap for the majority of students, there may be some students who don't take anything away from those discussions, for maybe their work needs development in an area that has not been utilized for whole-group discussion. Therefore, in an effort to provide each student with an equal access to education as it relates to the discussion process, teachers should think about incorporating dialogue journals as a way to ensure that each student has equitable opportunity to engage in discussion that is meaningful to them or teachers could center whole group discussion around each student's work

every day, rotating through that cycle until all students' work has been at the center of conversation. Although I generally am one of those teachers who uses a piece of student work that represents a larger trend in my class to engage students in conversation around, I am now going to make an effort to ensure that each student's work is made a part of a conversation. As mentioned before, for me, and other teachers alike, it might be worth implementing a rotation, so each student has the chance to view their work as the center of conversation. This concept of individualization, whether it is through a journal or in-class, is essential to student growth. Students will most likely be more invested in the process when they see that their work is made important as the forefront of a discussion. Another way that individualization can be ensured as it relates to this area of discussing writing is through a closely monitoring independent work time, which is something that I already implement during my daily class sessions. For example, after I set students off to complete any task independently, I then begin to monitor student work, working my way around the classroom in a specific pathway, ensuring that I check-in each student or as many students as possible, given the time frame. I typically give students praise for work done correctly on their papers and then direct them to change work that could be improved upon. The praise and the improvements are based on individual needs. Thus, closely monitoring independent work time could be another opportunity for teachers to engage in individualized discussion with students who don't already do so. Though this individualized discussion would be quick and verbal, it provides teachers with another alternative to engage students in discussion around their work using independent work time as a medium for that. A healthy balance of all three types of discussion recommendations would be the most fruitful for students, but every classroom is different in what the students need to be successful. Thus, this study sheds light on how to orchestrate all types of discussions in and out of the classroom.

Another implication that came about from the data was the desire for more voices in the dialogue journaling process. Thirty-eight percent of students who said the dialogue journaling process was less interesting seemingly felt this way because there were only two voices involved. Therefore, as a teacher who might consider a dialogue journaling process, it is essential to research how one might best structure that with the addition of peer to peer dialoguing. For example, it might be manageable for teachers to dialogue with two students at once instead of just one. For this to be effective, it would make sense to group peer dialoguing by areas of strength and needs, so the students working in the dialogue journals together would receive one of two things. One, they would still receive individualization which can be engaging and was talked about as the basis of the first implication in the last paragraph. Two, students would receive the opportunity to hear more than just the teacher's voice when discussing. Teachers may decide to even place more than two students in one dialogue journal. The decision about how many students per group may depend on a number of factors. In the Literature Review of this paper, it was found that students were more engaged in the discussion when the groupings were smaller. For instance, Kim (2013) discovered that the smaller group had higher levels of interactivity than larger groups. Thus, when students are in smaller groups, they usually feel a greater sense to share because it can be less intimidating. Thinking about the size of groupings impacts my teaching practice because if I was going to continue to use dialogue journals with my students, I would consider discussing with two or a few students in each journal; I wouldn't want the journal groups to become too large. This idea of grouping also encourages me to rethink my in-class discussion seating charts. For example, currently, my students are grouped by general ability in the classroom and not seated based on individual strengths and needs. However, moving forward, I want to structure my student seating chart so that when it is time for smaller

group literature circles, I can better provide that group with a piece of feedback meaningful for everyone in the group. Also, by changing the seating charts, grouping students together with like strengths and needs, those students may be encouraged by each other to discuss a struggle that they can all commonly relate to. One drawback of the seating model described above is that if students are grouped by like areas of need, a halt in discussion may occur if all students become seemingly stuck. I wonder if grouping by area of need would lead to more or less written growth than grouping students with different areas of need together. Whether discussion is being done in-class or through a mode of writing, it is equally engaging for some students to hear from other peers and multiple voices. Teachers should be encouraged to provide students with ample opportunity to hear from their peers in all types of discussion modes in order to foster engagement for all.

Another implication that came about through this study was the idea of focusing on student improvement of achievement. For example, it was found that 100 percent of students liked writing about their writing in the dialogue journals. Even more so, more than 75% of those students expressed that they liked the process because it helped them to become better writers or improve their abilities (Questionnaire, March 2016). Therefore, when teachers structure a discussion, whether the discussion is through a dialogue journal or in-class, all students should be made aware that the purpose is to help them to develop their own writing skills. In this study, I did not tell the students that the purpose was to help them better their writing skills. The only thing I told them was that it was a written discussion between me and them in which we would discuss their writing. Through the process itself, students figured out that it was a way in which they could receive help as shown through their responses on the questionnaire. However, because discussion might not always have the capacity to be as individualized in-class, it might

be worth teachers' time to explain to students the purpose behind all types of discussions that are utilized. In the Literature Review section of this paper, it was reported that students were often times disengaged when they did not understand the purpose an assignment. Specifically, Bayat (2010) explained that students were bored when they didn't see the larger purpose of the task that they were required to engage in. If student engagement is fostered through telling students that the purpose of a discussion is to focus on student improvement, teachers must also develop a culture of error in their classrooms. For example, it is normal in my classroom to use a student error or misconception to generate conversation around. The students understand that the purpose is to help everyone learn, and it is not to be viewed as a negative; they are engaged in the discussions that take place around improving student work from good to great. However, in order to create a culture of error, it takes time. If you have already maintained a level of trust and community in your classroom, it will probably be easier to implement a culture of error. If you do not have a sense of community of trust already established in your classroom, you will need to do that first. The same concept rings true with dialogue journals. If you establish trust and a culture of error with students, the metacognitive discussion will be more engaging. When thinking about the importance of engaging students through a focus on student achievement and improvement, I think about ways in my teaching practice that could also reflect this more. For me, moving forward, I would also like to be more mindful with giving more daily, written feedback. If the goal is for students to improve, and students are motivated by their improvements, it is my job to provide them with the data to see that they have made those improvements. Though I do provide regular feedback on classwork, I often times do not take as much time in reviewing student homework. Therefore, in efforts to heighten engagement of my students in discussion, I am going to utilize homework examples to generate discussion around

as well. Engagement in discussion should not just be limited to in-class work; it can be extended to homework assignments, too. Whether the discussion is in writing through dialogue journaling or in-class, ultimately, teachers should consider establishing levels of trust with students, so errors can be utilized as teaching moments to increase student writing or achievement and not viewed as disheartening.

Last but not least, one implication that was re-occurring throughout the study relates to the idea of time and having enough of it to effectively utilize dialogue journals. Though Larson and Marsh (2005) explain that Maryita Maier returned dialogue journals to students each day in her classroom, these authors also shared that she spent extra time at school out of her normal contracted hours. It is important to consider then that the dialogue journaling process can be time consuming. For me, I think that choosing students who typically struggle in whole group discussion to keep journals with is the best case scenario. Choosing students who struggle taking part in discussion to dialogue with around writing, or any domain for that matter, would allow me as a teacher to find an alternative way to engage students who may shy away during class or who may need extra development in the discussion area. It would also be a way for me to make sure that these students were not left behind or not given equal opportunity to engage in discussion as other, maybe more naturally vocal students do. While some teachers may have the capacity to dialogue with five students, other teachers may only have time to choose one student. It would seem more likely that elementary school teachers would have a larger capacity to utilize dialogue journaling as a form of discussion as those teachers generally only have one class of students. On the other hand though, ironically, it is the upper level students, middle and high school, that probably need more opportunities to engage in dialogue journaling as a means of discussion, for discussion is a large part of college that students may need to participate in the

future. One way to combat the possible time restraints of dialogue journaling would be to replace nightly homework with the journaling process. Even though it might not make sense to always replace daily homework assignments with dialoguing all year or every day of the week, it is definitely an option that teachers should consider doing. In future research, it may be worth doing a study on engaging students in dialogue journaling instead of nightly homework. Would student achievement increase? Would students find it more engaging? Would it be worth it for teachers? The bottom line is that at the end of the day, with a growth mindset relating to dialogue journaling, more students will hopefully be given an opportunity to discuss in a way that they may never have been exposed to before.

Conclusion

Because discussion is an integral part of students' school career, this study was set forth in order to answer how teachers can best utilize dialogue journals to engage all students in ongoing discussion around writing. Twenty-two eighth grade students were given dialogue journals. Before the dialogue process began, a writing sample was collected. Then, I attempted to engage them in discussion around individual written work as it related to a school-wide rubric. Students were interviewed in focus groups and filled out a questionnaire about their experience. A post response with a similar question and text format was collected and scored with the same common rubric. Teachers were interviewed regarding best practices around discussion and dialogue journal usage. It was found that students were motivated from the individualization that the discussion in the dialogue journals provided them with, that some students desired for peer voices to be present in the journaling, and focusing on student achievement was engaging. It was also made clear that sufficient time may be required for a process like this to be maintained. Teachers might want to consider utilizing the dialogue journaling process with one or two

students who most struggle with participating in discussion, incorporating peers in the process, and stating the purpose of the journaling process to students. Finally, teachers may decide to replace nightly homework assignments with the dialogue journaling process or a metacognitive assignment as a way to involve students in the process of writing about writing without it being more of a time commitment for all parties involved.

If I was to do this study again, there are two ways I would do it. First, I would contrast two groups of students' engagement and written gains as they relate to the use of dialogue journals and ongoing discussion around writing. Specifically, one group of students would only interact with me in the dialogue journal. The other group of students would interact with me and another student. Similar to the study I completed, I would ensure that there was a mix of all three proficiency levels in both groups, and I would use all of the same methods to collect data and measure engagement in addition to written gains. In addition to this, another idea that I have for future research is to replace daily homework with the dialogue journaling process. Similarly, the student engagement could be measured through questionnaires and informal focus groups. Instead though, the students would be asked if the dialogue journaling process was more interesting than daily homework. Just like my study, student written gains could be tracked and measured. Would the dialogue process be more helpful in transferring skills to in-class written responses or would daily homework assignments? Moreover, which would students find more engaging?

There were a few limitations of this study. One limitation was that I was only able to observe the students interacting with their dialogue journals to gauge levels of engagement during small windows of time. Because study hall block was interrupted due to state testing, I was limited to even less time of observing students with their dialogue journals than I

anticipated. Another limitation of this study was the time constraint for the students. Because students are in school for approximately nine hours a day and have four homework assignments daily, with the exception of Wednesday night in which they only have three, a lack of dialoguing may naturally have occurred. If students were given the dialogue journals as part of regular class time to write or in place of a homework assignment, that may have naturally increased the amount of discussion that was done in the journals altogether. In addition, it is possible that because the dialogue journals were not made part of an everyday routine that students were not as invested in writing in them as they could have been. Lastly, because students were not told that they were expected to write in their journals a minimum number of times, that may also have contributed to a lack of motivation and engagement for students as it relates to the dialogue journals.

A couple of questions and wonderings regarding my study still remain in the end. First, would a longer time frame of dialoguing with my students have yielded written gains for more than 50% of student participants on the post-response? With that being said, I would be interested to learn what the results would have been for the post-response if I had six weeks to dialogue with students. Another question I still have is as follows: Why did the middle achieving students make more mention of wanting more peer to peer voice in comparison to the higher and lower achieving students? I would be interested in learning if it was just a coincidence due to only having 22 participants total or if a trend of middle achieving students desiring for greater peer interaction would be consistent among other classrooms and schools as well.

In conclusion, it is essential to remember that students' preparation is our responsibility as educators. Hence, if students are not given equal opportunities in preparation due to the structural constraints of a school system or classroom, or do not have equal

opportunities to prepare themselves, teachers must actively work to change that. In order to be literate in today's society, it is necessary to be able to negotiate meaning with others. If teachers are not helping students to engage in co-construction of meaning, it could cause them a huge disservice moving forward into the demands of college and career. Though dialogue journaling may not be an up and coming process that teachers are utilizing due to technology as an alternative discussion space, for schools and populations with a lack of technology as a medium for discussion, in this study, dialogue journals have proved to be engaging and have impacted some students' written abilities in even just a short time of three weeks of individual discussion. Because dialogue journaling is individualized and focuses on student improvement, it is definitely a process that should be more widely considered even in today's world of technology. In the end, I am impressed at how even a small, three-week shift can affect engagement of students and led to written gains. With teaching, it is always important to keep an open mind and to try new things. Though I might not continue the process with all 22 of my student participants, there are many implications that I can take away from this action research that I can apply immediately to my classroom practices in relation to in or out of school discussion.

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Appendix A

Formal Interview with Teacher / For Researcher's Use Only

Name of Teacher: _____ Interview Date & Time _____

Number of Years Teaching: _____ Number of Years Teaching at School: _____

Certifications Held: _____ Certifications in Process of: _____

Other:

Thank you for taking the time to interview with me. Now that I have provided you with information about the study and you have signed the consent form, I am going to ask you some questions. Please answer with as much detail as possible.

1. What is your primary rationale for utilizing discussion in your classroom as an ELA teacher?
2. What strategies do you use to best engage students in discussion?
3. How do you ensure that all students are participating in discussion?
4. Do you have your students write about their writing? If so, how do you do structure that? If not, how would you structure that?
5. If you were going to use dialogue journals as a medium for kids to write about their writing, how would you do that?

Appendix B**Informal Focus Group Interview / For Researcher Use Only**

Name/(s) _____

Focus Group Ability _____

Date & Time _____

Thank you for agreeing to interview about your participation with the dialogue journal process. Since you and your parents have both signed that you are able to be a part of this study, I am now going to ask you some questions. Please be as detailed as possible in your responses.

1. Did you like writing about your writing in the dialogue journal? Why or why not?
2. Is writing in a dialogue journal about your writing more or less interesting than discussing writing in class? Explain.
3. If you could change anything about the process to make you want to continue writing about your writing in a journal, what would you change, and why?
4. Do you believe that writing about your writing in a journal with your teacher helped you to become a better writer? Why or why not?
5. Do you think that you participate more in a whole group discussion about writing or do you think you participate more in this dialogue journaling process? Elaborate.

6. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with writing about writing in a dialogue journal?

Appendix C
Questionnaire

Name _____

Date _____

Thank you for agreeing to fill out this questionnaire about your participation with the dialogue journal process. Since you and your parents have both signed that you are able to be a part of this study, I am now going to ask you some questions.

Directions: Answer the following questions below using as much detail as possible.

1. Did you like writing about your writing in the dialogue journal? Why or why not?

2. Is writing in a dialogue journal about your writing more or less interesting than discussing writing in class? Explain.

3. If you could change anything about the process to make you want to continue writing about your writing in a journal, what would you change, and why?

4. Do you believe that writing about your writing in a journal with your teacher helped you to become a better writer? Why or why not?

5. Do you think that you participate more in a whole group discussion about writing or do you think you participate more in this dialogue journaling process? Elaborate.

6. Use the space below to write down any other comments you wish to share about this process.
