

Examining Barriers and Facilitators in Using Teachers' Journals for Critical Space

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Abstract

Among the varying ways to reflect on practice, learning journals capture the stories and lived experiences of teachers and help the writer to learn from experience about an event, an idea, or emotions. What does critical space in learning journals look like and under what conditions is it accessed? This needs to be understood to develop strategies to assist teachers in their journaling. The key finding was that teachers use journals for many different purposes, not all of which are critical. “Critical space” is a place for teachers to critique and challenge their practice. It is found in journaling when privacy is assured or there is a trusted audience. Time and place are key to supporting teachers’ critical reflections. Teachers must believe that change is possible and that this change brings professional growth. Necessary mechanisms put in place at the classroom, school, and government level would support this practice. Multiple data sources were used including convergent interviews, email correspondence, and journal excerpts.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background

Recently there has been a growing emphasis on reflective practice to bring about change in classrooms, schools, and education. Reflection has become a key part of pre-service teacher training to encourage students to think more deeply about their learning and engage with educational theories; teachers are strongly encouraged to reflect on their work (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Heller et al., 2011; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, 2012). Some in-service training sessions offered by school boards and various projects funded by the Ontario Ministry of Education at the classroom and school levels include reflective components (Early Primary Collaborative Inquiry, n.d; Ontario Ministry of Education Teacher Leadership & Learning Program, 2014-15).

Teachers who are required to reflect on their work may not be fully comfortable with or knowledgeable about the theory of reflection or its place in their practice, particularly if they have been in the classroom for a number of years. Lieberman and Miller (2005) note that the need for teachers to reflect and the supports they require to sustain this practice may be quite different from the needs of pre-service teacher education students, novice teachers, and professionals in adult education programs or other fields. Dymont and O'Connell (2014) indicate that reflection by teachers may depend on where educators are in their career.

This study explores the barriers to, and facilitators of, using journals as critical space to critique and challenge practice and explores the conditions necessary for critical

space to occur. This chapter contains a discussion of this main objective, the significance of the research. A rationale for the study, the research questions, the limitations of the research and ethical considerations follows.

Chapter Two contains a review of the literature, Chapter Three provides a detailed description of the methodology, Chapter Four presents the data, Chapter Five includes a discussion of the data, and Chapter Six presents implications and recommendations for further study.

Purpose of the Study

This study explores examples of barriers to, and facilitators of, the use of critical space in teachers' journals and under what conditions critical space occurs. Critical space, a place to critique and challenge practice, is necessary for reflection and is described as a place where events, ideas, connections, and emotions can be examined and challenged to improve practice and to support professional growth. Critical space is a place where teachers can look at their professional self in relationship to others and use that lens to improve their practice and the educational system itself.

Using the perspective of narrative inquiry, Connelly and Clandinin (1994) suggest this happens as teachers reflect through storying, a process that helps teachers reflect and challenge their practice. Greene (1986) notes the importance of having a space to tell these transformative stories; "we have to find out how to open such spheres, such spaces, where a better state of things can be imagined; because it is only through the projection of social order that we can perceive the gaps in what exists and try to transform and repair" (p. 441). Connelly and Clandinin (1994) suggest that "We need to create spaces so teachers and students can begin to tell their stories and to have responses from many

different voices to help them imagine new possible retellings” (p. 158). Polkinghorne (1988) argues that when teachers examine their practice, there is an opportunity to shift thinking, engage with theories in light of practice, and develop self-awareness.

Journaling can be this space. Journals can be used by teachers to both improve their immediate pedagogical practices and examine the larger questions of their profession. By providing opportunities to reflect on teaching and school practices, journals may also be used to address issues of empowerment, social change, and knowledge.

But do teachers use learning journals to critically reflect on their daily work and, if so, how do they do this? How do they use journaling to critique and challenge their practice through writing? These are the questions that guide this qualitative study. This study uses teachers’ journals and shared stories to explore how teachers use journaling in their everyday experience. It examines how they use the retelling of classroom stories to replace old theories with new ways of thinking. It looks at how their development as professionals is facilitated using learning journals. Narrative inquiry is used as a lens to examine learning from lived experiences.

The research involves ten teachers, one Early Childhood Educator (ECE), and myself as a participant researcher. Participants were chosen through purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2008); all were female educators who identified themselves as journal writers.

Significance of the Study

There is a need to find ways that teachers can engage in critical reflection to critique and challenge practice and grow professionally. Dart et al.’s (1998) use of critical reflection involves looking at classroom situations from different lenses and finding new

approaches that lead to change in the classroom. Collaborative inquiry, book studies, and classroom research are effective ways to improve practice, but critical reflection is also an important support for teachers' efforts to improve student learning and become better teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Critical reflection has the potential to help teachers to respond meaningfully to students while meeting daily classroom challenges. Huerta-Charles (2007) states, "most of the time [teachers] have not had the opportunity, nor the support, for critical thinking about their practice" (p. 253). Critical reflection necessitates thinking deeply about problems of practice and requires the learner to replace old ways of thinking with new ideas and theories (Moon, 2006).

Journaling is a potentially important tool for providing critical space for reflection (Brookfield, 1995). there is a need to better understand how teachers use journals, to determine to what extent journaling facilitates critical reflection and articulate supportive conditions. In other words, what does critical space in learning journals look like and under what conditions is it accessed? This needs to be understood to develop strategies to assist teachers in their journaling.

There are far ranging definitions of critical reflection in the literature. Brookfield's (1995) definition involves reflection on underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that lead to systemic changes in education. For the purposes of this study I will use a more moderate view of critical reflection that focuses on teacher level changes meant to improve education within the existing school system (Dart et al., 1998). Teachers engage in multiple perspective-taking and seek different alternative outcomes to situations that arise in the classroom. This is the definition that is most closely tied to teachers' efforts to make changes to their daily practice. While Brookfield's (1995)

definition regarding, systemic changes may also be found in teachers' journals, teachers' journal writing focuses primarily on their day-to-day teaching and learning. As teachers' use their journal for daily reflection, their critical reflections are more likely to be closely aligned with the conceptualization seen in Dart et al. (1998). There is a large body of knowledge on reflection and its potential role in the professional development of teachers (e.g., Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Lassone, Gulman & Kosnik, 2009; Marcos, Sanchez & Tillema, 2006; Ruan & Beach, 2005; Schön, 1983; Zeichner, 1993; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). For the purposes of this study, I have accepted that critical reflection does play an important role. To examine how such a role can be implemented by individual teachers within a school, there is a need to identify the practical means by which teachers access the critical space that enables this reflection.

Journals have been identified as an important place for the creation of this space (Boud, 2001; Moon, 2006). Starting in pre-service learning, teachers are encouraged to use journals for this purpose yet we have little knowledge of the extent that this is done once teachers are in the elementary classroom. Learning about the impact of teachers' journals as critical spaces will be of interest to educators as they search for new ways to reflect on their practice.

A better understanding of the barriers to, and facilitators of, using journals for critical reflection, including under what conditions it is most likely to occur, will help teachers improve practice. Teachers may find similarities and differences between their experiences in the classroom and those of others, thus helping to reduce the feelings of isolation, opening up practice, and supporting a growing awareness of their learning (Brookfield, 1995). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) argue that sharing our experiences with

others can, “lead to an expanded understanding of the tensions and conflicted possibilities in the stories that people live” (p. 35).

I will facilitate sharing problems of practice with teachers and help them see that some of challenges they face in their work are experienced by others. Both the stories of practice contained in the teachers’ journals and an exploration of the means they use to reflect on their practice through their journal writing, can support teachers’ work as they discover how others find critical space through journaling to critique and challenge their practice.

Rationale

My own personal rationale for undertaking this research is related to my experience as a teacher in early years’ learning. Journaling has helped me to understand the changes in practice in Early Years learning in recent years. Teaching Kindergarten now is very different from when I began teaching thirteen years ago. Although I am excited about the changes, their number and speed have caused significant challenges in practice and much new learning. In Ontario, Early Learning programs are undergoing significant change in light of the Pascal Report (2009). Across Ontario, teachers, ECEs, and administrators are exploring how play can be used as a vehicle for learning in Early Years’ classrooms.

I journaled both as a teacher participant in a two-year study with the Ministry of Education (2008-2010) and for one year in fulfillment of my Annual Learning Plan (ALP) for my school board (2010). My journal contained ideas for student grouping, prompts to start activities, best practice strategies, and a list of test scores. For me, journaling first took place as I taught small group lessons on the circle time carpet and it

consisted of a few words quickly jotted down. It often became a juggling act, writing down my thoughts while simultaneously keeping my kindergarten students engaged in the lesson that I was teaching. At other times, I found a few minutes to write at the work tables while my students transitioned to the next activity or read on the carpet.

After having written in my journal for two years, I found that my reflections supported my teaching and learning. I enjoyed the time I took to write about my classroom experiences and reflect on the changes that were occurring in Early Year's learning. I saw many connections between what I was reading about classroom environment, engagement of children in their learning, partnerships with families, inquiry-based and play-based learning and the changes that I was making to my practice. The inner dialogue that took place in my journal began to focus more on how I could make substantial changes to my practice that aligned with my personal and professional beliefs. Starting from a more theoretical position about critical reflection as a doctoral student, my own journey moved towards practical connections with critical reflection, focused on the day-to-day reality of teachers' experiences.

These experiences have led me to wonder how others use journaling to help them teach. What do other teachers use their journals for? When we were in pre-service learning, journaling was meant to be a way of improving our practice. To what extent is this the case in actual practice? If at least some teachers are successful at doing this, how are they able to be? What sort of conditions enable them to use their journals as a space to think deeply about what they are doing in the classroom and how we can become better teachers?

Research Questions

The key research question for this study is

- What are the barriers and facilitators that teachers experience in accessing critical space in their journals?

To answer this question, I have further structured the main research question into four sub-questions

- What is the evidence that teachers use journals for critical space?
- What are the particular conditions that promote and limit teachers' use of journals for critical space?
- How can journals better help teachers to critique and challenge practice?
- How can teachers be supported as they use journals to engage in professional learning opportunities?

I explore examples of critical space in teachers' journals. Studying when teachers use their journals for critical space will help us to find ways to support their work to reflect critically in their journals.

The research questions were developed to address gaps in the literature relating to how practicing teachers use journals to open a space in their practice to critically reflect on classroom events and allow for a discussion about the barriers to, and facilitators of, critical reflection in learning journals including the conditions that encourage these types of reflections. The responses to the questions shed light on the types of support that teachers need to use their journals to bring about change and explore what supports are needed to facilitate teachers' use of journals as a critical space.

Limitations

A number of limitations arose in the study. The most important were the use of convergent interviewing, accessing teachers' journals, and the small sample size.

There were challenges finding teachers who were willing to talk about their journals because they believe their journals are private documents and the use of journals for their practice is personal. I did not get as much data and as many participants as I had hoped due to the reluctance of many of the teachers to share about their journaling. However, this challenge, itself, sheds light on the one of the key problems in journal writing identified in the literature and described in this study. Teachers view their writing as personal and private. With convergent interviewing, it was necessary to find participants from differing situations to establish a more representative sample, but this was difficult. I overcame this challenge through the identification of participants as rural and urban, new and experienced, and those who taught a wide variety of subject areas.

I found it difficult to find teachers who used journal writing as a reflective tool to think about their practice. This surprised me as my experience as a teacher and a graduate assistant indicated that journal writing, in particular reflective writing, was a common and embedded practice at both the Faculty of Education and within school boards. I found this not to be the case. Finding teachers who were willing to talk about their journaling and to share excerpts was challenging. Some I approached did not use journal writing, some had used journaling during projects, and others felt uncomfortable sharing their views on journal writing. For these teachers, journal writing was a private endeavour that they were unwilling to share.

Gathering journals or journal excerpts proved to be challenging. Three teachers who agreed to be interviewed would not share their journals for the reasons described above. Two misplaced their journals or threw them out. One had experienced a flood and her journal was lost. Another who agreed to share her journal did not submit it and did not explain why.

It was difficult to have the data transcribed in a timely fashion to use it to focus the conversation in the next set of interviews. I hired a transcriptionist to transcribe the recorded interviews. I sent the audio files to the transcriptionist through a secure website and she loaded the interviews. There were often several weeks in between sending the audio files and receiving the transcriptions. At first, this did not pose a problem. However, after the second set of interviews I used the summaries from the teachers' conversations to focus on the next set of discussions. Many times, I had two to four interview transcripts arriving from the transcriptionist at the same time. I had envisioned more of a seamless flow of data from the interviews and a more natural progression from one set of interviews to the next.

Ethical Considerations

Journals can be critical spaces that teachers use to reflect deeply on the events of the day and may contain unflattering comments or stories as well as sensitive information. Participants in this research study were asked to choose journal entries to share and to ensure that those mentioned in the entries were given pseudonyms to protect their identity. During interviews, teachers were asked to respect the privacy of students, families, or the school community by using pseudonyms. When teachers used names, I changed the name of the student, teacher, and assigned a pseudonym for the transcript

and summaries. As I read through journal excerpts, I substituted a pseudonym for the names of the student and teacher.

Ensuring transparency of the research project was another means to protect those involved. I sought permission to conduct the study in my classroom from my school board and contacted the school board's Research Officer for consent as I was using my teaching journal to collect data. I met with my principal in the fall to explain the project and then sent a letter of information and a letter of consent for the research study. I applied and received permission to conduct the study from the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. Once I was given permission to conduct the research in my classroom, I sent home letters of information about the study and letters of consent to all the families of the students in my classroom. Obtaining informed consent from parents of students in the classroom followed by open communication with the families of the students about the study ensured transparency of the research process.

One teacher contacted her union about my request to participate in the study. She believed that her journal was a private document and indicated that it should not be shared with other teachers or researchers. She declined my offer to participate in an interview but did agree to allow me to share her email to me concerning her thoughts about journals. I did not contact her after her email to me.

Only entries chosen by participants were used in this research. Photocopies of the journal excerpts were used as well as electronic versions. The source of the data used in the participants' profiles came from the teachers and from a search using the Ontario College of Teachers website to confirm years of teaching or specialization. Profiles of each participant were entered into the NVivo program in a folder entitled bibliographies.

Summary

This chapter presented the objective of the study and its importance. The theoretical components of the research hypotheses and the methodology were discussed. Among the varying ways to reflect on practice, learning journals capture the stories and lived experiences of teachers and help the writer to learn from experience about an event, an idea, or emotions (Moon, 2006). It is in the retelling of stories that new learning replaces outdated thinking. Journals are a potentially powerful tool for critical reflection but for this potential to be fully realized, there is a need to better understand, the barriers to, and facilitators of, using learning journals as critical space.

Greene's (1986) notion of opening critical space for new possibilities of working is of importance to this study and presents a means to explore practice and develop as professionals. By creating critical space, journals can be used to better understand cognitive dissonance, write counter-narratives, explore conflicting plot lines, create communicative spaces, explore intellectual and emotional reactions, and can therefore be used for professional development (Edwards-Groves, 2013; Peterson & Jones, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Russell, 2009). These reflections on events, ideas, and emotions can be used to research practice and to add to what is known about teaching and learning, building capacity and practical local knowledge.

Several ethical concerns were described in regards to confidentiality and anonymity of the students, school communities, and parents of the students when the teachers shared stories about their journaling or from their journals.

Narrative inquiry uses the lens of learning through stories and lived experiences and supports a deeper understanding of barriers and facilitators in using journals for

critical space, including under what conditions critical space can be accessed, and the supports needed to challenge and critique practice.

An in-depth review of the literature on journals and reflection, critical reflection, journals as critical spaces, challenges, and opportunities for learning and development are found in the following chapter.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Introduction

I provide a review of the literature on journal writing and what is known about things that encourage and discourage journals being used as critical space. Research on different types and formats of journaling, uses of journals, and fields of study that employ journal writing are discussed. Insights from the literature into levels of reflection as well as the occasions of reflection are highlighted and show that critical space can be used as a way to work through cognitive dissonance, write counter-narratives that disrupt the smooth stories of schools, explore conflicting plot lines through narrative inquiry, communicate with self and others as an intellectual and emotional outlet, and to generate new ideas and theories about practice (Edwards-Groves, 2013; Peterson & Jones, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988; Russell, 2009).

Journals

Journals are an important part of contemporary education and as such, can be an important tool for professional development. A survey of literature reveals that journaling is a popular method to learn from experiences in a wide variety of settings and may be an underused strategy for teaching and learning (Hiemstra, 2001). They are used to capture ideas and thoughts, record events of the day, track emerging insights and new understandings, and conduct an inner dialogue. Table 2.1 is an overview of the key findings from the literature review and highlights examples of authors who argue that although not all journals are critical, there are instances where teachers use their journals

for critical space. Teachers access critical space in their journals despite numerous challenges.

Table 2.1.

Key Findings from the Literature Review

Journal writing can be an important part of professional development.

Key ideas for journal writing:	Alternative view of journal writing:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Early career teachers journal more critically than late career teachers (O’Connell & Dymment, 2014) - Sharing journals leads to new thinking (Humble & Sharp, 2012) - Journal writing can replace old thinking with new ideas (Fullan, 1985) - Journal writing can support changes in thinking which leads to new practices (Fullan, 1985) - Journal writing is a way to access critical space to bring about change (Boud, 2001; Brookfield, 1995; Clandinin, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; Conle, 2002) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers view journal writing as tedious and meaningless (Otienoh, 2009) - Journals may work to maintain status quo rather than disrupt old ways of thinking (Brookfield, 1005; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; Zeichner, 1993)

-
- Journals help teachers to produce new practical knowledge and develop professionally (Moon, 2006)

This is true if the journals contain critical reflection.

- | Key ideas for journal writing: | Alternative view of journal writing: |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuum of critical reflection (changes to personal practice to systemic changes) (Brookfield, 1995; Dart et al. ,1998; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Valli, (see, e.g., Minott, 2008) - Revisiting journal entries sometimes deepens learning (Heller et al, 2011; Moon, 2006) - Not all writing in journals is critical (Brookfield, 1995; Moon, 2006) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rereading journal entries does not lead to new insights (O'Connell & Dymont, 2004) - All journal writing is critical (Wessel & Larin, 2006; Williams et al, 2005) |

Critical reflection occurs under certain conditions.

- | Key ideas for journal writing: | Alternative view of journal writing: |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different barriers to journal writing such as time, audience, place (Boud, 2001; Brookfield, 1995; | |
-

English, 2001)

If these conditions are met, teachers are more likely to access critical space in their journal.

Key ideas for journal writing:

- Various levels of and occasions for reflection in journals are found (Brookfield, 1995; Dart et al, 1998)
- Journals are viewed as both private and public knowledge
- Some journal writers need support in order to critically reflect (O'Connell & Dymont, 2004)

Alternative view of journal writing:

- Support for journal writing does not necessarily lead to critical reflection (Otienoh, 2009)

The learning from journal writing is twofold: first, the lived experience as represented in the journal (Moon, 2006) is used as research for growth and new learning and allows teachers to “be active constructors of their knowledge” (Dart, Boulton-Lewis, Brownlee & McCrindle, 1998, p. 296). Miller finds, “writing the immediate thoughts makes room for new avenues of thinking, new possibilities (as cited in Moon, 2006, p. 5; see, see also Dart et al., 1998). Second, learning occurs as the journal is reread for deeper insights that can provoke new thinking or a change in views, although the value of re-reading journal entries is one that is disputed in the literature (Dymont & O'Connell, 2014). Moon (2006) describes journals as a vehicle for learning that includes both factual accounts of daily happenings and “reflective commentaries” (p. 1). Learning journals

offer the potential to provide teachers with critical space (Brookfield, 1995; Moon, 2006; Stevens & Cooper, 2009) since they have the potential to allow, through reflection, for a critique of their practice.

Feedback and revisiting journal entries are problematic. Rather than helping, feedback from instructors on practicing teachers' journals is shown to impede learning in Otienoh's work (2009). Dymont and O'Connell (2014) found that rereading journal entries did not necessarily lead to new insights and that entries were rarely revisited. In contrast with other studies that propose that revisiting events in journals furthers learning, Dymont and O'Connell support the notion that learning from experience comes from the initial writing rather than in revisiting it.

When used as a critical space for teachers to question the world around them, journal writing can be viewed as "a way of making private inner thoughts about teaching and learning public for others to see, question, and understand" (Silva, 2000, p. 3). Sharing critical reflections contained in a teacher's journal may depend on first having a private space to develop ideas. Although reflection and learning from experience are viewed as an essential element of teacher growth, how teachers use journals for critical space to reflect and what is needed to support their efforts to do so is less clear (Baumann, 1996; Killeavy & Maloney, 2010; Ziechner & Noffke, 2001). Journals become not only critical spaces but are safe places to reveal misunderstandings and gaps in knowledge, to grapple with theory and practice, to examine assumptions, to work through strong emotions and confusion, and to thereby grow as professionals.

Journals have a rich history. English and Gillen (2001) note that the term journal is derived from the French word *jour* and referred to the length of travel time from one

place to another. The word is associated with the idea of a journey and emphasized writing about daily experiences. Three well-known journalers are Anne Frank, Etty Hillsum and Anais Nin. Their works serve as examples of how journals illustrate “coming to know through journal writing” (English & Gillen, 2001, p. 87). Hiemstra (2001) refers to Progoff, a psychologist, and his colleagues’ use of journals in the early 1960’s to enhance personal development by exploring thoughts and emotions through journaling. Knowles (1975) used journals to explore self-reflection and self-assessment to open people up to how others might view their actions. Later, diaries were used as a strategy to support learning and soon after Brookfield (1987, 1995) began his work on critically reflective writing that supported practitioners’ growth and development.

In her study, Otienoh (2009) found that teachers did not use journal writing to critically examine their practice or to make changes to the way they taught; their reflections remained descriptive and tended to record events as they happened. O’Connell and Dymet’s (2003, 2004) study of undergraduate students in education programs found that even with supports, future teachers were challenged to write deeply and reflectively in their journals. In a support workshop, students were provided with exemplars of journal entries and different types of journals. The participants were introduced to Bloom’s Taxonomy of Cognitive Thinking to better understand different levels of thinking and reflecting. Students who did not participate in a workshop to support their journal writing were found to have written at a deeper level than those who attended the workshop. This study provides evidence that supports for journaling may not necessarily deepen the level of reflection of journal entries. In a later study of university teachers, they found that the level of reflection was closely associated with the career stage of

faculty members (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014). Early career educators were found to write at a deeper level and more often while later career educators rarely wrote in their journals, choosing other forms of reflective practice. These studies point out the difficulty of stating that all reflections are critical in nature, that writing in journals leads to new learning, that support for reflection necessarily brings about a deeper level of writing, and that reflective practice occurs naturally with teaching experience.

The work of Dyment and O'Connell (2014) as well as Humble and Sharp (2012) provides further evidence that journal writing sometimes remains superficial and does not lead to greater awareness of long held assumptions, beliefs, and values, a goal of critical practice. Journals may contain hardened stories that exist without context and are repeated until they are viewed as the truth although they may not be an accurate reflection of reality (Conle, 2000).

English and Gillen (2001) believe that "journal writing is an important part of the teaching and learning process; it is central to the reflective practice process approach of adult education and a good way of keeping track of ideas and of monitoring work in progress" (p. 89). They based this notion on their work in adult education, contending that writing can be of benefit to all learners. Conle (2000) suggests "to become better acquainted with their story was indeed interesting for busy teachers who had little time for reflective writing themselves" (p. 52). According to Greene (1986), a further benefit of reflective practice is its ability to re-energize teachers who are overwhelmed by the challenges of their day-to-day work. However, time was an issue raised by many studies in the sense that a lack of time impeded journal writing (e.g., Hubball, Collins, & Pratt, 2005; Otienoh, 2009; Ruan & Beach, 2005). Although one of the main benefits of journal

writing was slowing the pace of teaching and learning to allow teachers to re-energize, many of those involved in journal writing felt that the extensive time it took to write in their journals was a disadvantage. Journal writing was considered another add-on to teachers' days; many did not have previous experience writing reflectively and found the task onerous and empty (Otienoh, 2009).

Some teachers use learning journals to reflect and learn from lived experiences from their practice (Moon, 2006). However, there is little information about the use of learning journals as critical spaces for such work and what supports are needed for teachers to be able to use journals for professional development based on their practical and local knowledge. Recent literature suggests that although keeping a journal may be helpful to support some teaching and learning practices and professional development, it does not necessarily support critical reflection or lead to transformative action (Brookfield, 1995; Moon, 2006).

Journaling falls short of its potential as a tool to transform practice when educators' writing and thinking in the journal remain at a surface level and/or their reflections do not lead to action or change (Alterio, 2004; Brookfield, 1995; Dymnt & O'Connell, 2014). Barriers such as time constraints, lack of training and support, not trusting the process of learning through writing, questions about audience, and stages of career development can all impact the effectiveness of journaling as a reflective practice for teachers. These are impediments that educators who use journals to develop reflective practice need to overcome.

Barriers

Journals are important tools for improving practice and professional development if they can be used to help teachers reflect critically on their teaching. It is possible to determine whether teachers use their journals as critical space to reflect on their work (Dart et al., 1998; Hatton & Smith, 1995).

Time.

In their work, Peterson and Jones (2001) contend that time is a critical factor in students' ability to journal. They suggest there are three types of barriers to journal writing: situational, institutional, and attitudinal.

Situational barriers are challenges that prevent people from writing in their journals such as the time needed to write, perception of poor writing skills, fear of someone discovering and reading the journal, or difficulty finding a quiet spot in which to collect and write reflections. Institutional barriers occur when journals are used in a course and evaluated by others (Peterson & Jones, 2001). There is evidence that it is difficult to evaluate journal entries during coursework (Boud, 2001; English, 2001; Peterson & Jones, 2001; Stevens & Cooper, 2005). Struggles include assessing journals for content, length, and depth of reflection. Attitudinal barriers involve a lack of confidence in writing, little faith in the benefits of journal writing for growth and reflection, and feeling that dramatic events must be revealed in the journal to please the audience (Brookfield, 1995; Peterson & Jones, 2001). Boud (2001) argues: "the conditions under which journals take place can have a powerful influence on what is being produced and the extent to which writers can engage in critical reflection" (p. 17).

These findings highlight some of the challenges of using journal writing for critical space to support professional growth of teachers.

Otienoh (2009, 2011) found examples of the three barriers in her study. Teachers did not perceive journaling to be a means of improving their practice and therefore the feedback on their journal entries was not particularly helpful in bringing about changes in their practice. It is not clear if these teachers were supported in their reflective writing prior to or during their experience in the Certificate of Education Program where the research took place and it is not certain if supports, such as writing strategies or class time for writing were offered. It would be useful to know if the journaling experiences of the male and female teachers varied and if their perceptions related to gender and their journaling efforts.

Audience.

Reflections in journal entries may be influenced by who will read the journals and for what purpose. According to Boud (2001), “the expectation of writing for an external audience can profoundly shape what we write and even what we allow ourselves to consider” (p. 15), thereby effectively curtailing the process of learning through reflection and writing by limiting what may be written or troubled. When journal writing is used to measure learning, writers might avoid critically looking at events that feature their discomfort or unknowing, viewing such reflections as experiences that could demonstrate their lack of growth or understanding (Boud, 2001). In contrast, writers might focus on dramatic events if they feel that this is the expectation of journaling. Writing about traumatic or sensational events to comply with an expectation of revealing shocking events shapes journal entries and can limit learning (Boud, 2001; Brookfield, 1995).

Brookfield (1995) argues that ordinary or everyday events may take on extraordinary qualities if it is felt that dramatic personal self-disclosure is the sole goal of reflective journal writing.

Peterson and Jones (2001) note that journaling does not always lead to learning as writing in a journal might be thought to be tedious and not meaningful, challenging, and emotionally taxing. Moon (2006) agrees, since not all reflections lead to new learning or deeper thinking, key elements in transformation of practice. Thorpe (2004) cautions that there are many ethical considerations that should be addressed with the use of reflective journals for all involved parties: people writing the journal, people reading the journal, and people who have been mentioned in the journal. Killeavy and Maloney (2010) agree that reflective journal writing can be problematic and a practice that is often not continued once teachers are working in schools.

Who Uses Journals?

The use of journals for learning has been widely noted across many fields, including education. Literature on the use of journaling for pre-service teachers is extensive (e.g., Bayat, 2010; Dart et al., 1998; Garmon, 2001; Kreminitzer, 2005; Otienoh, 2009; Russell, 2009; Spalding & Wilson, 2002; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). Their use is a common practice encouraged and taught in faculties of nursing (Thorpe, 2004) and in service learning courses (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Clayton et al., 2005; Fiddler & Marienau, 2008), adult education (Boud, 2001; Brookfield, 1995; English, 2001; Jarvis, 2001; Moon, 2006) and in fields such as geography (Heller, Christensen, Long, Mackenzie, Osano, Ricker, Kagan, & Turner, 2011), social work (Fook & Askland, 2007), counselling (Hubbs & Brand, 2005), outdoor recreation (O'Connell & Dymont,

2003, 2004) and in higher education (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014; Stevens & Cooper, 2009) and by faculty members in post-secondary institutions (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014). Not only are journals used in many different fields, the type and format varies across the disciplines although the common thread is how journals support learning through exploring lived experiences (Boud, 2001).

Jarvis (2001) highlights professions that use journal writing as a part of learning and teaching. He notes that journal writing helps practicing teachers in Additional Qualification courses to explore their practice, emotions, attitudes, and beliefs about teaching. They are not shared in the course. Journals have been used in action research for collecting data. Nursing students kept journals to record observations and to record data during interviews. Visual artists in higher education had journals to track how subject content was taught to students and how students as well as staff felt about their program. Jarvis (2001) argues that journals can be effectively used to find meaning in everyday events and stories from the classroom in several different areas of learning in higher education. Peterson and Jones (2001) concur that journal writing can be a forum for critical thinking, making connections between practice and theory, as well to record data for research and to take note of events.

Types of Journals

Different forms of journals are described in the literature, including autobiographies, professional journals, theory logs, dream books, spiritual journals, and learning journals that are used for a wide variety of purposes. The literature documents well how each type supports the retelling of lived experiences (Boud, 2007; Moon, 2005; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). One form of importance to this study is learning journals.

Diaries, autobiographies, professional journals, spiritual journals, and day notes.

Hiemstra (2001) notes that journals, including diaries, are useful in supporting reflection through writing. Diaries contain thoughts, reactions, and feelings, do not usually follow a structure, and are written chronologically. Travers (2010) suggests that diaries help to make sense out of one's life experiences and help pull together otherwise disconnected stories, or memoirs, and experiences. Dream books or logs capture dreams to explore how the subconscious can shape waking moments. Autobiographies, life stories, and memoirs support sharing informal stories and experiences of people's lives with others. Unlike Hiemstra (2001), Grumet (1990) views the purpose of autobiographies more broadly and suggests that they can incorporate careful consideration of philosophical, sociological, and historical views, thus helping the writer work critically through new material or information.

Professional journals include interactive reading logs that explore a writer's reactions to materials under study (Moon, 2006). Theory logs are also cited in the literature (Moon, 2006). Professional journals are mainly written for work and used by the author or shared with a professional audience such as colleagues or supervisors (Stevens & Cooper, 2009). They can include notes or jottings about theoretical ideas and concepts that may be used by students in post-secondary institutes. Spiritual journals contain a person's religious thoughts and spiritual beliefs (Moon, 2006). Hiemstra (2001) refers to electronic journaling, journals using the Internet as a medium for sharing; they may take the form of blogs, wikis, or any other use of technology to support journal writing that might tackle the challenges of having too little time to journal.

Moon (2006) includes day notes as part of journal writing. She comments on the importance of the use of sticky notes or jot notes to capture key phrases or words to come back later to thoughts quickly captured on small squares of paper. She states, “What they are doing or thinking about on a regular basis...provides material for later reflection” (p. 144). Record keeping in a daybook supports networking, to-do lists, thoughts, contacts, references, and recording of meeting notes and may include a section or space for reflective thinking (Moon, 2006; Stevens & Cooper, 2005). Different journal formats help support a variety of purposes from recording dreams and jotting key words and phrases to using journals for professional growth.

Learning journals.

Learning journals are accounts of thoughts, reflections, ideas, views and even hopes or fears (Hiemstra, 2001). Moon (2006) describes learning journals or learning logs as a think place that can be written or recorded and may contain drawings or sketches. She notes that they may include both information as well as reflective notes, compiled in a way that illustrates the writers’ processing of daily events and reflections, his or her “thinking on paper” (Moon, 2006, p. 139). According to Moon (2006) and Hiemstra (2001), learning journals are primarily kept for personal or professional development and/or for spiritual growth.

Moon (2006) describes the content of a learning journal as a “representation of learning” and a way for the writer to work with and through “material of learning” or new knowledge (p. 18). This echoes Dewey’s (1910) view of reflection as “active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusion to which it leads” (p. 9). A writer takes

the new learning or idea, writes about it in the journal, and as he or she is in the process of capturing or exploring thoughts or recounting the event, new learning emerges.

There are several layers of learning captured by learning journals. Initial writing is one part of the learning that occurs if the writing takes place when the experience happens. The next phase unfolds as the event is written about afterwards and new insights surface during writing. As the event is described, a representation of the original occurrence develops and includes the author's interpretation. An opportunity to learn from the experience occurs if the writer rereads the entry (Moon, 2006). Richardson (1994) notes; "I write because I want to find out. I write to learn something I didn't know before I wrote it" (p. 517). Moon (2006) describes the journaling process as an "accumulation of ideas" and the "building up of knowledge" (p. 18). Building knowledge, however, is not necessarily reflective (Brookfield, 1995; Moon, 2006); it may be a process whereby incorrect information is replaced by more accurate accounts. Learning becomes reflective if there are new ideas or insights that emerge from the writing and the reflection (Dewey, 1910). The literature shows that learning journals are different from other types of journaling and can be an important part of professional development.

Purpose of Journal Writing

The main purpose of learning journals is to learn from experience or past actions and to change future actions to reflect new understanding (Moon, 2006). Journals allow writers to look at experience through the lens of learning and relate to prior experiences in light of present and future actions. They provide a means to focus thinking and make

sense of a situation, a feeling, or new information. Moon (2006) highlights ways that writers learn from their journals:

1. Journals slow down the pace of learning to leave room for reflection;
2. Journals increase teachers' sense of ownership over their learning;
3. Journals acknowledge the role of emotion in learning;
4. Journals deal with new information or material of learning;
5. Journals encourage metacognition, and
6. Journals enhance the learning process. (pp. 26-33)

Hiemstra (2001) points out numerous advantages to keeping a journal. By making connections to past experiences, learners can grow and develop on a personal and professional level as they reflect on experiences in the past with future goals in mind.

Although those who keep a journal are reflecting on their experiences, there are different levels of reflection, ranging from surface level that describe events to transformative levels of reflection that provoke change and a revision of ideas (Moon, 2006). Levels of reflection can affect the type of learning gained from journaling.

Reflection

Critical reflection and journal writing.

Journals can be an important tool for professional development if they contain critical reflection. Bolton (2010) notes:

Reflection is a state of mind, an ongoing constituent of practice, not a technique, or curriculum element. Reflective practice can enable practitioners to learn from experience about themselves, their work, and the way they relate to home and work, significant others and wider society and culture. It gives strategies to bring

things out into the open, and frame appropriate and searching questions never asked before. It can provide relatively safe and confidential ways to explore and express experiences otherwise difficult to communicate. (p. 3)

I define critical reflection as thinking deeply and substantively about events, ideas, and emotions from multiple perspectives (Dart et al., 1998; Dewey, 1910; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Schön, 1983). Boud (2001) suggests “the process of exploring how journals can assist their writers to learn is commonly described in terms of how individuals can use journals to enhance their learning” (p. 10). One purpose of journal writing is to reflect deeply on teaching and learning. Teachers can uncover assumptions and make connections between their teaching and learning, as well as social, political, or cultural issues. One teacher stated, “One of the reasons I write about my classroom is to challenge the limits of work, to keep trying to know more” (cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 213). For this teacher, journal writing provides an opportunity to reflect critically on positionality by “writ[ing] and read[ing] their practices” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 218) to know more about teaching and learning.

Reflection is deliberate and thoughtful, considered to be an important part of teaching (Jay & Johnson, 2002). It becomes critical when assumptions and beliefs are examined. Critically reflective teachers seek ways to make changes in their classroom, school, and community and use their practice as “sites of critical reflection” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 313). They reflect on their practice as a natural extension of their teaching and learning (Baumann, 1996; Ryan, 2009). As teachers dig deeper to better understand their practice, beliefs, and values, they can critically reflect on how their

assumptions support or challenge the dominant school culture or the status quo (Zeichner, 1993).

The literature on critical reflection supports the idea that teachers are looking at their daily work in a substantive way to unearth assumptions when they explore their practice (Brookfield, 1995; Moon, 2006). There are varying definitions of critical reflection in the literature. Brookfield (1995) explains that reflection is critical when it looks at “how considerations of power undergird, frame, and distort educational processes and interactions” and when it “questions assumptions and practices that seem to make our teaching lives easier but actually work against our best long-term interests” (p. 8). In their use, Dart et al. (1998), inspired by Hatton and Smith (1995), emphasize multiple perspectives and different viewpoints as essential elements of critical reflection. Key to Jay and Johnson’s (2002) definition of critical reflection is examining an idea, event, or emotion from multiple perspectives, creating openness or a critical space in which to explore the challenge in depth and a “move to action” (p. 79). They point to expectations that would be met by a reflective practitioner and suggest that the teacher would be able to study an aspect of their teaching in depth using different lenses in order to see it from all angles and in relation to their perspective, share their new thinking with others and receive feedback, and then take action based on new learning. Reflection involves what teachers might do or should do in light of their new understandings based on reflections.

Although Jay and Johnson’s (2002) definition of critical reflection includes examining an event, idea, or emotion from many points of view at the same time, it does not include the goal of empowerment. Their work on critical reflection focuses primarily

on discovering underlying reasons for actions and then how to bring about alternative actions whereas Brookfield's (1995) and Ziechner's (1993) work on criticality emphasize the need to empower those who have been marginalized in the past by laying bare assumptions and power structures that work against an individual's best interests.

Journaling is important for creating reflexivity, clarifying conflicting thoughts, situations or emotions by bringing them into focus for study, and acting as a place to hold ideas and thoughts until later (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1995, 2005; Dart et al., 1998; Moon, 2006; Zeichner, 1993). When used with a group, partner or in a triad, a journal can act as an avenue for feedback to improve practice though this alone does not make the reflection critical (Dart et al., 1998; Heller et al., 2011; Humble & Sharp, 2012; Ruan & Beach, 2005; Silva, 2000). The participants in the group, partner, or triad journal writing exercise share their ideas, emotions, and thoughts in the journal and receive feedback from their peer or supervisor. Their use may slow down the process of thinking, writing, and learning and allow them to be more present and reflective (Moon, 2006). It is only when partners look at underlying causes to problems of practice, seek to question long held views, or unearth power structures, their reflections become critical in the most rigorous interpretation (Brookfield, 1995).

By understanding the process of reflection, critical reflection can be identified and facilitated for those that need support to reflect on a more critical level (Jay & Johnson, 2002). This can be described as a three-step process. To critically reflect, an idea, event, or emotion is first described. The background is explained such as what happened, who was involved, and where the situation took place. Questioning why events have taken place or the reasons that are at the heart of the issue is an important second step in the

reflective process. The third step involves shaping future actions based on what has been learned about the event, emotion, or idea. Dewey (1933) argues that it is a holistic approach to learning and cannot be reduced to a step-by-step guide for teachers to follow.

Critical reflection can be challenging and difficult work. Fook and Askeland (2007) note that the work of unearthing assumptions may lead to feelings of uncertainty and resistance, which can limit the practitioners' potential for change. hooks (1994) explores the discomfort and pain of "giving up old ways of thinking and knowing and learning new approaches" (p. 43). Shifting teachers' identities is not easy nor is acknowledging teachers' "complicity in accepting and perpetuating biases" (hooks, 1994, p. 44). Some teachers choose to hold fast to what they know, do, and think, while others who engage in reflection and action may continually trouble what they know and do by "intentionally...foster[ing] uncertainty" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 149) to learn more about teaching and learning (Cochran-Smith, 2000). Goodman (2001) argues that people have the potential to change their actions and beliefs when they are at their learning edge. The extent and type of change in teachers' practice differs widely (Ziechner & Noffke, 2001). Their learning is shaped and often pushed further by the discomfort that is created with unknowing brought about by critical reflection, constant questioning, and introspection.

Critical reflection can bring about change and growth. Coghlan and Shani (2008) refer to learning journals as learning mechanisms that can encourage change for the better. Journal writing can help teachers shed light in unexpected ways on everyday classroom situations by viewing what is happening in classrooms through a new lens. Different ways of working and responding can result. The reframing of daily teaching

challenges us to revisit what we know about teaching and learning. Cornish and Cantor (2008) argue that learning comes from reflective thinking. Journals provide a space to form ideas, build theories, and think through writing. They note that journals support the learner's reflections on their experiences, allowing them to draw new meaning from a variety of perspectives and explore underlying assumptions. Thus, reflecting on alternative outcomes to situations faced by learners is a key element of critical reflection.

Writers understand that learning happens over time and that they can keep track of progress in journals, noticing their learning, assessing where they are in their journey, and taking ownership of their professional development when journals are used to deepen thinking (Cornish & Cantor, 2008). Smith suggests that journals, "provide a venue that supports professional development, allows the writer to analyze decisions, and can lead to enhanced performance in teacher research and service" (as cited in Cornish and Cantor, 2008, p. 50). Dymont and O'Connell (2014) concur, noting that growth came from writing about the lived experience and not in revisiting it. This is contrary to some literature about journal writing that suggests rereading journal entries adds to a growing awareness of a situation when it is revisited (Moon, 2006). Rereading entries provides a further opportunity to learn from the initial experience.

There are a variety of reasons to use journals; among them is their use as a vehicle to reflect on learning and lived experiences. However, there are different definitions of critical reflection in the literature. For this study, it is useful to acknowledge the continuum along which these definitions lie. At one extreme, Brookfield (1995) defines criticality as looking at underlying assumptions and power structures, whereas a more moderate view of critical reflection is utilized by Dart et al. (1998) who focus on

encouraging multiple viewpoints and searching for alternative outcomes as they relate to a teacher's practice in his or her classroom. Dart et al.'s use of critical reflection focuses on personal changes to teachers' practices, including underlying assumptions that shape their actions on a day-to-day basis. Brookfield (1995) examines systemic changes whereas Dart et al. (1998) look at teachers' classroom or school practices. The core idea of critical reflection in the literature is the intentional use of lived experiences in ways that bring about transformation in teaching. Journals have the potential to create a space to capture teachers' critical reflections, supporting their work by helping them think of new ways of working. It is evident in this context that while there may be examples of Brookfield's definition of critical reflection in teachers' journals, Dart et al.'s (1998) conceptualization will likely be more prominent.

Timing of reflection.

Boud (2001) suggests there are three situations where reflection might produce new thinking and new action:

1. Reflection-in-anticipation of events;
2. Reflection-in-midst of action, and
3. Reflection-after-events. (pp. 3-4)

Journals can play a critical role in each occasion of reflection. Boud's (2001) work sheds light on the different types of reflection that may be evident in teachers' journals as they record, reflect, and act on events throughout the school day. Each reflection could be written about as a lived experience in a journal and provide an opportunity to think deeply about events before they happen, as they happen, and after they happen.

Reflection in anticipation of an event occurs as individuals begin to think about what might happen during an event. Emphasis is placed on the learners, their hopes and wishes as well as prior knowledge. Journals can be used to explore what might happen and how the learner will prepare or think about the events to come. A description of the upcoming event would be appropriate at this stage of reflection or the skills, strategies, or planning that might be called upon during the event (Boud, 2001). The literature on reflective journal writing shows that this is where many writers focus most of their time and efforts and rarely move beyond this stage of reflection. They do not reflect critically (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014). This may occur for several reasons, including lack of support on how to deepen the reflective process and move beyond a descriptive state, a lack of time, fear of the potential audience who read the journal entry, and a disbelief in the effectiveness of journal writing as a means to learning from experience (Boud, 2001; Dyment & O'Connell, 2004; Otienoh, 2009).

Another occasion where reflection might occur is during an action or event. This situation is characterized by teachers' observations, any interventions that they may make, or reflections in action that create change while a lesson or an experience is unfolding (Schön, 1983). The journal supports developing awareness and slows down the pace of learning to gain more insight. This holds potential for critical reflection to occur as the learner becomes more deliberate in thinking about underlying reasons why decisions are made or why particular actions are taken. Boud (2001) argues that "it is through exposing these decisions to scrutiny that the assumptions behind them can be identified and a conscious decision to act from a new perspective can be taken" (p. 13).

Reflection allows the teacher an opportunity to think more deeply about the event and to revisit the situation through a journal entry (Boud, 2001). Thinking through an event supports the idea that new learning occurs as the writer retells the story or lived experience in the journal (Moon, 2006). A person's emotional state might be included in the reflection and decision-making, and new ideas and learning are gained as insights evolve, connections between old thinking and new thinking are explored, and trends or patterns are observed (Humble & Sharp, 2012). Boud (2001) notes that negative feelings about an event can be released once written about in a journal and positive emotions can be celebrated in the same way.

Levels of reflection in journals.

Different models are used to determine the level of reflection in journal writing (Dart et al., 1998; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Humble & Sharp, 2012). Hatton and Smith (1995) propose a three-level reflection model of assessment: descriptive, dialogic, and critical. At the first level, the journal entry describes an event, giving the reader context and content experienced by the writer. The second is dialogical. The writer is engaged in a conversation with him or herself. The last is critical reflection in which the learner is gaining new insights, connecting theory to practice, and applying what they now know to their learning. Humble and Sharp (2012) contend that the initial level is the least helpful form of reflection for learning while Brookfield (1995) would argue that only the last level would have the potential to be considered critical. Importantly, Hatton and Smith's (1995) hierarchy of reflections does not meet the criteria for critical reflection proposed by Brookfield (1995) in that the last level of reflection does not explicitly include issues of power and unearthing underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs.

Dart et al. (1998), using Hatton and Smith (1995), outline four stages of reflection when journals are used to develop critical thinking. The first is a description of events. The second requires the writer to search for a reason behind the event or feeling written in the journal. The third involves reconstructing the experience to find alternative actions or outcomes. The last requires the learner to consider new viewpoints and unearth assumptions. The depth and levels of reflection shed light on how journals are used to either record events, to support changes in thinking, or to lead to transformative action. There is some evidence that describing events is an important first step in developing reflection (Zembylas & Barter, 2002) while others suggest that little deep thinking and subsequent change in practice is occurring if the reflection stays at the first level (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014). I see Dart et al.'s (1998) conception of criticality as being more moderate than Brookfield's (1995) in that systemic change does not have to be overtly present.

In contrast, Moon (2006) suggests that writing at the first level is significant for the learner. At this level, reflections provide some background information about the experience and help to establish initial facts. Dyment and O'Connell (2014) argue that many students, as well as educators, remain at the descriptive level and never reach the critical level; they lack the skills to reflect through their writing, find that audience impedes deeper reflections, and/or do not have the time to write critically. The levels of reflection could be viewed as a continuum in the development of the professional, appropriate for the early stages of a career or study when educators have many new questions or problems of practice. This fundamental level provides an opportunity for the learner to “capture data, organize thoughts, and catalogue events” (Dyment & O'Connell,

2014, p. 424) rather than think more critically about their teaching and learning. This is an essential part of a students' or new teachers' learning, a stage in their development as a knowledgeable professional.

The literature demonstrates that many of the journal entries used in studies continue to illustrate descriptive accounts of events and ideas with little criticality (see Dymont & O'Connell, 2003, 2014; O'Connell & Dymont, 2004; Otienoh, 2009; Silva, 2000). According to Dymont and O'Connell (2014), "most individuals are writing at low levels of the hierarchy" (p. 424). However, they suggest that lower levels of reflection are appropriate at times in a person's learning or career, arguing "perhaps, the pressure to move up the hierarchy [of reflection] is unjustified" (p. 320). In contrast, Yinger and Clark wrote about teachers, "given the opportunity to write about and reflect on what they were doing, remarkable and exciting changes took place. Much to their surprise, they found themselves solving problems...that had previously worn them" (as cited in Moon, 2006, p. 78). These conflicting findings suggest the need for a closer look at journal writing for what enables critical thinking.

Humble and Sharp (2012) recommend that all levels of reflection be used in journals, but they emphasize that critical thinking should occur at times as well. This contradicts an earlier finding of Yinger and Clark (as cited in Moon, 2006), who found that teachers made dramatic changes to their practice because of their journaling and reflection on their writing even without critical thinking. Humble and Clark (2012) find that all levels of reflection, not only critical reflection, support learning although it is critical reflection that leads to transformative change while Yinger and Clark argue that

all reflection contributes to transformative change. The findings of both studies are mirrored in the work of Otienoh (2009) with practicing teachers and their use of journals.

In her work with the Certification of Education Program (CEP), Otienoh (2009) found that the practicing teachers were not developing the skills needed to reflect substantively in their journals and that one reason could be the type of feedback received about the entries. She used semi-structured interviews to explore perceptions of reflective practice and journal writing of 12 male and female experienced teachers, eight elementary and secondary teachers, and four CEP course facilitators. Her findings question whether the type of feedback received served to support and motivate teachers to critically explore teaching through journaling. Most journal comments tended to frustrate the teachers, although the CEP facilitators expressed satisfaction with their feedback to the teachers. It is interesting that the views of teachers and facilitators about journaling and feedback were so different. This may be because the teachers and the facilitators had different views about the journals' effectiveness in prompting reflection on practice. They had different agendas for the learning associated with the course, or the levels of reflection were different. The teachers may have thought that they were writing reflectively in their journals while their facilitators found that the teachers were writing descriptive accounts of events, ideas, or emotions.

Peterson and Jones (2001) challenge the notion that learning journals are used solely for critical reflection. They argue that women use journals for a wide range of topics and content and thus instructors have a difficult time teaching students to use journals as critical space; thus, students are challenged to use their journals for learning in ways that they have not used journal writing in the past. They note, "The traditional

education model has not always prepared women to explore deeply the issues emanating from both the material and the educational process or to analyze their feelings and responses to new material” (p. 62). They write that journaling is not an effective tool for the reflective process, is very time-consuming, and has little impact on learning. Peterson and Jones (2001) found that students were unable to meet expectations for journal writing as part of a course and that instructors were unclear about what they wanted students to learn from the activity; participants believed that the learning that was possible through learning journals was not realized.

This finding is echoed by others (Cornish & Cantor, 2009; Dymont & O’Connell, 2010; Moon, 2006; Otienoh, 2011). Dymont and O’Connell (2003b) write extensively about undergraduate students’ experiences with learning journals. They note that learning journals do not always lead to deep learning and that many times, students write superficially or at a descriptive level in their journals. “An overarching reason for the poor quality of reflection in journals is that many instructors fail to provide adequate training to their students to help them journal in effective ways” (Dymont & O’Connell, 2014, p. 236). Studies that analyze the content of learning journals are inconclusive. Dymont and O’Connell (2010) state, “Such journals often show little indication of engagement, higher order thinking, or critical thinking” (p. 234). Issues they contend affect the criticality of the reflection include lack of experience in reflective writing, not knowing how to do more than describe an event, and not knowing what reflection is and how it can support learning. They point to having a trusting and open relationship with students as necessary to encourage critical thinking. Critique, challenges, guidance, and feedback go a long way to supporting students’ efforts to critically reflect in their

journals. Two further conditions are the regularity with which students complete their journals and providing structures for writing for students to follow. The more often they use critical reflection in the learning journals, the more adept they become. If these conditions are not met, Dymont and O'Connell (2010) found that writing remained mainly descriptive in learning journals.

Otienoh (2011) reflects on the efficacy of journal writing to support critical reflection. One of her studies points to several reasons why teachers are challenged by the practice of reflective journal writing, including time constraints, lack of motivation, de-professionalization of teaching, heavy workloads, inadequate understanding of reflection and reflective journaling, lack of obvious benefits of journaling, and a lack of initial and ongoing support within the school structure. She suggests that further research using a larger sample is needed to better understand if and why journaling has not been embedded in practice, why teachers find it challenging to sustain the practice, if journal writing has been an integral part of their practice, and whether they find it difficult to continue to journal.

Moon (2006) argues that reflective writing is descriptive and oftentimes remains at the surface. This type of writing does not lead to change or to deep thinking. Mezirow (1990) indicates that reflective thinking involves challenges to thinking that result in acting and that the action taken in turn results in social change. Moon (2006) refers to the "commonsense view of reflection" that illustrates how people think, watch a goal come to fruition, rework what is already known, or engage in "cognitive housekeeping" (pp. 36-37). In this instance, critical reflection is not the outcome or goal of the reflective thinking process and reflective journaling is not focused on discovering new insights or

associating those insights with social justice and equality of opportunities concerns. Moon (2006) assumes that everyone can reflect. However, there is a disparity in the way that people use reflection to support professional development. Not everyone uses reflective journal writing to explore critical space or grow professionally. She notes that it can be challenging to encourage reluctant writers to use journals as critical space and move beyond describing description of events, ideas, or feelings, and cautions, “some description is necessary in a reflective account that is used in a formal situation to provide background for the reflection” (p. 41). Although higher levels of reflection are encouraged for transformative change, Moon (2006) echoes Dymont & O’Connell (2014) in that all levels of reflection have a place in learning.

Williams, Wessel, Gemus and Foster-Sargeant (2002) found that many physical therapy students’ journals were descriptions of their current thinking, and did not identify any new ideas. However, the authors stated that the students were achieving high levels of reflection. Evans and Maloney’s (1998) case study of three pre-service teachers during their practicum found that they rarely attained a high level of reflection in their journaling. Teachers were dedicated to journaling and found it an effective tool to support their professional development. However, all levels of journal writing can be useful to beginning teachers in building capacity. Evans and Maloney (1998) note, “reshaping views, philosophies, and images of teachers and teaching to a sophisticated level may require substantially more experience and professional knowledge than that of an undergraduate teaching degree” (p. 38). They conclude that simply reporting events has a place in learning as well.

Cornish and Cantor's (2008) work involves the use of journals to encourage metacognitive thinking in their courses. Initially students needed significant support to reflect in learning journals. After substantive supports such as the use of writing prompts, a revised definition of reflection shared with students, writing samples for students to read, and written feedback from the instructors, the use of journals to provoke critical thinking was an effective reflective tool.

Minott's (2008) work with pre-service teachers supported Cornish and Cantor's (2008) finding. Minott (2008) noted that pre-service teachers' journal reflections did not often include instances of critical reflection. Valli's (1997) typology of reflection was used to find that most instances of reflection in the journals remained at one of the other levels of reflection including:

- Reflection-in-action;
- Reflection-on-action;
- Personalistic reflection, or
- Deliberative reflection. (p. 56)

Encouraging teachers' abilities to use critical reflection for professional growth was an area of need highlighted by Minott's study. The hierarchy of reflection supports understanding of the different levels of reflection that might occur in journal writing.

Wessel and Larin (2006) point out that the topic of journal entries of physiotherapy students varied from their first to the last year of studies but the levels of reflection in their writing did not change significantly. Using Williams et al.'s (2002) five levels of reflection, they rated each journal entry and found that students moved from a descriptive level of concept to the next level of reflection, which involved describing

emotional or cognitive reaction to an event. Some limitations were the age of the students in the program, the use of English as a Second Language in the entries, and few supports such as writing prompts to help guide students to deeper levels of reflection. Journal topics were similar to another study of physiotherapy students (Williams et al., 2002) and included a focus on the client, relationships, professional behaviours, the parameters of practice, and communication. Wessel and Larin (2006) found that students' efficacy increased from Year One to Year Three, which they demonstrate by providing in-service training, coping with more complex situations, opposing views, as well as gaining more experience and opportunities to develop as professionals.

Summary – Levels of reflection

The literature indicates that different levels of reflection can be identified in learning journals (e.g., Dart et al., 1998; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Valli, 1990). The levels range from descriptive to critical and can be viewed as a hierarchy. However, there is some disagreement in the literature about the importance of each level of reflection to learning and whether the aim for those who use learning journals is to arrive at the last level of reflection, critical reflection. Moon (2006) and Humble and Sharp (2012) argue that all levels of reflection support the learner. Dymont and O'Connell (2014) and Wessel and Larin (2006) suggest that it is the stage of career, or period of study in the case of students, that might determine which level of reflection the learner is using in his or her journal. There is consensus in the literature that many learners struggle to move beyond descriptive accounts even though at times, they might think that they are critically reflecting. Moon (2006) notes that not everyone can reflect through writing; difficulties arise if they do not have the skills to write critically or if they lack support.

Format of Learning Journals

Formats of learning journals, particularly in pre-service teacher education programs, include reciprocal or dialogue, triad, computer mediated online journals and individual journals. Reciprocal or dialogue journaling fosters communication and interaction between journal partners (Garmon, 2001; Ruan & Beach, 2005; Silva, 2000). Triad journals invite a third voice into the conversation (Silva, 2000), while online journaling uses technological advances, thus opening space for newly configured teaching/learning partnerships and communities (Ruan & Beach, 2005). Table 2.2 illustrates the different formats of learning journals, examples of authors from the literature, and some key advantages as well as disadvantages to the type of journal teachers use.

Table 2.2.

Types of Learning Journals by Advantages and Disadvantages

Format of Learning Journals and Example of Author	Advantages	Disadvantages
Dialogue Garmon, 2001	Feedback from colleague or expert can be helpful; can ask for clarification; share problems of practice; seek advice; slows down	Challenging to maintain; time consuming; need a trusting relationship to reveal vulnerabilities; may write about “revealing” events to please reader; partner might not be as invested; little connection made by

	the pace of learning to reflect	students between journaling and new thinking
Triad Silva, 2000	Involve other colleagues; receive feedback from several parties; slows down the pace of learning to promote reflection	Time consuming; need a trusting relationship to share critical information; partners might not be as invested as others; might not want to reveal vulnerabilities for fear of exposure; writing for audience
Online peer Ruan & Beach, 2005	Flexible timing, eliminates travel; feedback from peers	People have different priorities; relationships may not be maintained; technology issues & challenges
Blogs and electronic journaling Stevens & Cooper, 2009	Reach a wide audience, share information and learning; immediate & timely; use of technology as a motivator; can write at own leisure	Public forum; might not share gaps of knowledge; releasing private information
Online dialogue Fecho et al., 2005	Use of emails helped some teachers communicate; could be timely; helped	Use of emails were less effective for other teachers; easily distracted online, computer issues; didn't create a relationship with online journal

colleagues who lived far partner; time constraints
away from each other
communicate

Dialogue learning journals.

Garmon (2001) describes dialogue journals as an interaction between two individuals, an ongoing conversation that responds to concerns and questions that arise in practice. He notes that there has been little research to determine what benefits and drawbacks journal writing has for new teachers or teacher candidates. He conducted a study with 22 prospective teachers over a semester to explore the advantages and disadvantages of reflective journal writing in a multicultural education course. The journals contained students' reflections on the content of the course as well as became a means of communicating with the professor. Entries were submitted twice a week and feedback was offered. Students were encouraged to respond to the professor's feedback and the length and medium of journal entries were specified. Online journaling through emails was encouraged. Entries were assessed according to completion rather than content. At two points during the study, Garmon asked students in a questionnaire how they felt about dialogue journaling and what they perceived to be disadvantages and advantages to journaling. He found that the pre-service teachers were generally supportive of the use of dialogue journals and valued the feedback as well as the avenue to share ideas and thoughts with their classmates. This finding supports the notion that dialogue journals keep the lines of communication open between partners in the shared

journals, give a better understanding of where the learner is in terms of his or her learning by providing insights into thinking, and can be used as a vehicle for growth.

Garmon's (2001) findings illustrate in part how dialogue journals helped teacher candidates' efforts to reflect critically. It is the "process of engaging in reflective practice [that] requires the practitioner to become a 'researcher in the practice context'" (Shepherd, 2006, p. 334), as they peer into their own "thoughts and actions as a means of responding to a problem, confusion, or discrepancy usually associated with one's professional practice" (p. 334). The dialogue journal entries focused primarily on the connections teachers made between their feelings and/or experiences and the course content. Unfortunately, Garmon does not give further insight into this finding by providing examples of the nature of these connections or how critical they were. Most of the journal entries highlighted in his study refer in general terms to the teachers' belief that journaling supported self-reflection. The study reveals several drawbacks to using dialogue journals such as time constraints, length of journal entries, and due dates for the journal entries.

Triad learning journals.

Silva (2000) argues that triad journaling, which involves a teacher candidate, a mentor, and a supervisor, can be effective in stimulating reflection for pre-service teachers. It is a relatively unused method of inquiry. Silva's study involved ten triads composed of an intern/mentor/professional development associates (PDA) over the span of two years. The interns were student teachers; classroom teachers became mentors and supervisors assumed the role of PDAs. Journals were introduced to the triads as a means of communication between participants. Interns were asked to journal three times a week

and to focus on ideas and questions related to their teaching. Mentors and PDAs provided feedback and their reflections. One of the primary benefits of triad journaling was the use of journals to embed reflective practice in education programs by increasing communication between the triad members, helping triad members to shift and assume new roles in their relationship, and serving as a forum to problem-pose and problem-solve classroom events, curriculum, or about particular children. In addition, the triads created “professional energy” that leads to professional growth by all the members of the triad. The journals provided the critical space for this development to occur. One intern noted, “I find it very helpful. I believe that the constant reflection is very important to my growth as an educator” (cited in Silva, 2000, p. 12).

Although criticality as defined by Brookfield (1995) in the writing was missing from the journal entries as the entries did not heighten awareness of power structures or systemic changes to the education system, their journaling does meet the expectations for criticality as seen in Dart et al. (1998). The triad members viewed their concerns through different lenses and sought alternative outcomes. One issue that arose in Silva’s (2000) study was trust between interns and mentors. The interns expressed concern regarding writing about problems or challenges they observed in the mentors’ classrooms. Although the mentors did use the triad journals to raise questions such as “what is the difference between wait time and think time?” (Silva, 2000, p. 8), issues of power and underlying assumptions are rarely mentioned. One exception was, “could you give her opportunities to initiate and take a leadership role?” (Silva, 2000, p. 8), giving some beginning insight into power structures that could be explored in more depth in that classroom. However, further information about the circumstances, question, or response in the journal is not

shared. Silva (2000) notes that for most of the participants in the study, the hierarchy of supervision between the intern, mentor, and supervisor was “flattened” (p. 11) using the triad journals as each member of the triad was energized by the synergy of their relationships.

Silva (2000) suggests that time, having a trusting relationship between the members of the triad, and the audience, are factors in the effective use of journals for reflection. One participant wrote in her journal, “I am so enjoying your journal...I hope you are able to continue as your teaching load increases” (p. 9). Another participant suggested “it was really time consuming...when she finally gave it back to me she said, ‘I just don’t have time for this right now’” (p. 8). In contrast, some participants believed that time was not a concern and that they enjoyed writing in the journal and reflecting. The triad journal helped to give them distance and perspective, slowing down the pace of learning.

Trust was another barrier to writing in the triad journal. Silva (2000) noted that nine participants were enthusiastic about sharing their journal with their group members while the last participant was reluctant. In the last triad, the intern did not have a trusting relationship with the mentor teacher and struggled as a result of their relationship according to Silva. In this instance, Silva notes that the intern’s relationship with the mentor and supervisor was not strong enough to encourage reflection or critical thinking. This intern observed that sharing her journal with her mentor and supervisor made her uncomfortable and believed that her writing was shaped by sharing her journal entries. She stated, “I believe that by doing so [sharing the journal] our reflections are no long truly authentic...no longer as meaningful” (cited in Silva, 2000, p. 13). This view of the

influence of audience is supported in the literature (e.g., English, 2001; Dymont & O'Connell, 2003, 2004, 2014)

Online peer learning journals.

Ruan and Beach (2005) studied the benefits of online peer dialogue journaling in the final year of study of 21 female teacher candidates. They worked with at-risk students over nine weeks and provided weekly feedback to a journaling partner of their choice using the Internet forum Coursenet. Journal entries focused on this work and were authored and dated, which allowed partners to respond to each of the entries and create a thread of discussion. The participants responded to two questionnaires about their experiences using an online format for reflective writing. Barriers such as time constraints, space, and audience were addressed in the study with the use of the Internet for writing, co-negotiated time frames for posting journal entries, and the self-selection of partners.

The journaling experience allowed most of the teacher candidates the opportunity to reflect on their practice. They wrote about what they learned from their work with an at-risk reader over the course of nine weeks. Partners asked questions such as “what went well/not so well?” and “what can I do to make it better next week?” (Ruan & Beach, 2005, p. 68). For the most part, they responded positively to online peer journaling and valued the convenience of this format, integrating technology into the classroom, receiving feedback from classmates, and gaining new ideas from other students. One indicated journaling online helped her to reflect on her practice. Ruan and Beach (2005) point out the isolating nature of personal journal writing since it is an individual activity

and encourage the development of a community of learners. This was echoed by Fazio's (2009) study of five middle and secondary school science teachers.

Unfortunately, Ruan and Beach's study (2005) does not shed light on the criticality of the journal reflections written by the dyads. They describe the journal entries as a mix of challenges and successes faced by the teacher candidates while on practicum. They note that many of the candidates experienced uncertainty in their role as a reading tutor and wrote about their doubts about their ability to support a struggling student. In this sense, the reflections in the online journals could be considered critical as the teacher candidates explored uncertainty and doubt. Many of the examples from online peer journal entries emphasize the need to try new strategies, activities, or better manage their time rather than deal with issues of empowerment or underlying assumptions.

Most of the participants in Ruan and Beach's (2005) study commented on how helpful it was to have a forum for sharing ideas, although they did not connect the results of their online journaling to improvements in practice. The convenience of computer-mediated journaling helped students to maintain an on-going conversation with their peers; online peer dialogues gave flexibility and extended the instructional space virtually and there were fewer issues concerning time. Students found that it gave them more time to think and reflect before they had to respond.

Some students in Garmon's (2001) study of dialogue journaling felt that one of the disadvantages of journaling was the time needed for responses. Harrington and Quinn suggest that computer mediated journals may foster deeper and richer reflection on teaching and learning because of the increased response wait time, thereby reducing descriptive or surface level journal entries (as cited in Ruan & Beach, 2005). In contrast,

the disadvantages of online peer dialogue journals included technical difficulties students experienced while online or trying to access the online site, the unstructured nature of online communications, and differing levels of student participation.

Blogs and journal software.

Stevens and Cooper (2009) explore journal writing using computers, blogs, and digital formats such as Web CT or journal software. Online or computerized journal writing offers a different experience than the more traditional journal writing in a bound or spiral book. For example, online or digital forms of journal writing may be facilitated by easy access to the Internet and its resources. They caution that a computer environment has many distractions such as surfing the Internet or answering emails that interrupt the flow of writing and thinking. Advantages of using computers include the ability to integrate other documents into the journal entry, easy access to additional resources and information, and the possibility of sharing journal entries with others.

Stevens and Cooper (2009) point out that there is a distinction between journal writing for self-illumination and for a public audience in a blog. They state “the function of a blog is to start or add to a conversation and communicate with others...blogs may not be as conducive to exploring random thoughts, ideas, biases, and assumptions as freely and as uncritically as in a private journal” (p. 176). They raise the question of whether educators can be critically reflective in their writing using such a public medium. This is echoed in the work of O’Connell and Dymont (2003) and Boud (2001) who caution that audience is an important factor in determining the motivator and a possible inhibitor of journal writing. Ethical considerations about journal writing in a public realm raised by English (2001) should be carefully weighed before writers use a blog, including

revealing personal information, liability issues if incidences of misconduct are raised in journals, and showing colleagues, students, families, and others in a negative light.

Killeavy and Maloney (2010) found teachers made little use of blogs to tease out meaning from classroom events; instead, they described events such as school evaluations, classroom management, and feelings. The researchers introduced blogs to seminar workshops for new teachers at St. Patrick's College in Ireland from 2007 to 2008. Twenty-eight participants were involved in the study; 23 created blogs at the outset. They were given training on how to create and maintain blogs and examples of blogs were shared. The participants were divided into two groups: those with prior experience with blogging and those without. Questionnaires helped researchers to understand their prior experiences with technology as well as the frequency of its use in their lives. Blogs were monitored over a four-month period and focus group discussions followed. Participants were offered an opportunity to reflect on the how the blogs helped or hindered their learning and the creation of communities during the interviews.

The findings were that the electronic journal format did not encourage teachers to reflect critically on their actions or beliefs in a substantive way, nor did the entries help to fight feelings of isolation or create a sense of community. Killeavy and Maloney (2010) posit that new teachers need more support and guidance to reflect and make meaning from the daily events in their classroom as well as encouragement to open up their work to other teachers. They suggest that further study into different reflective tools is warranted as well as the types of supports needed for reflection and sharing teachers' stories.

Online dialogue learning journals and emails.

Fecho, Graham, and Hudson-Ross (2005) raise related issues in their review of new teachers' use of blogs and electronic journals to reflect on teaching and learning as well as to create peer support networks. The authors believe that online journaling could facilitate access to critical space. According to Fecho et al. (2005), critical space or "wobble" (p. 175) is a "space of uncertainty that lies between and among figured worlds...creates opportunities for examining practice in ways that might not otherwise occur" (p. 175). The wobble lies between what teachers know from their experiences in the classroom and new ideas shared by knowledgeable peers. Accessing critical space could help the teachers in the study to critically reflect on their practice and improve their teaching and the authors believed the online journal would facilitate the teachers' critical reflection and professional development. Fecho et al. (2005) suggest that exploring critical space or "appreciating the wobble" (p. 180) can push teachers beyond superficial changes to classroom practice and help them to reconsider values, beliefs, and assumptions.

In a two-year study, Fecho et al. (2005) found that online communication between teachers was both facilitated and hindered using emails. Teachers communicated their ideas, thoughts, and assumptions about their practice with a partner through emails, similar to online dialogue journals. The researchers worked with 61 teachers on a project focused on teacher collaborative action research and the development of learning communities. However, after the second year only half of the participants remained in the study. Teachers from teacher networks in the United States were grouped according to their interests in a research question and encouraged to find a partner within their group

to dialogue with over the span of the project. The researchers hoped that teachers would share ideas, strategies, and questions around their group research question via email. They discovered that while some used email to maintain contact with their partners, others lost touch soon after the project began.

There were many reasons that the use of emails was both successful and problematic (Fecho et al., 2005). A disadvantage was the time needed to maintain relationships online as well as personal obligations. Some believed that online communication allowed them to talk to other teachers experiencing similar concerns in their practice. One teacher in the study mentioned how her involvement in the online journaling project had opened up a space to critique her practice and how she became more comfortable inviting feedback on her practice from colleagues in her group and later on, in her department and school.

Other participants used their online journal to discuss the differences between school climates, attitudes towards openness, and issues of equality and diversity, and then make changes to their classrooms. There were several instances where participants engaged in conversations and reflections with each other. Fecho et al. (2005) argue that some of the participants could “take risks, challenge assumptions, use their strengths as experienced teachers and reconstruct their identities while relying on each other for both perspective and support” (p. 193). The critical space opened up by online journaling allowed some teachers to consider different perspectives and to examine their own assumptions.

Fecho et al.'s (2005) findings are supported by Humble and Sharp's (2012) work on shared journaling to stimulate new thinking and ways of working. Fecho et al.'s (2005) findings are:

- Need to support critical space or wobble to reflect on practice;
- Use of shared journaling to encourage multiple perspectives, and
- Relying on partner in shared journaling for support.

Humble and Sharp (2012) taught similar qualitative research methods courses and engaged in shared journaling as part of their professional learning. They state, "The journal provided us a safe place to share our musings, concerns, questions, triumphs, and disappointments" (p. 11). The shared journal, consisting of a mutually constructed Word document, created a critical space to test out new ideas about qualitative research, ask questions about teaching, share classroom examples, engage in a critical conversation about their work, think through given and projected assignments, create relationships, and support their growing confidence. The authors note growth in their own professionalism and ability to teach the qualitative methods course resulting from their shared journaling.

Increased professionalism for both Humble and Sharp (2012) meant a firmer understanding of the course content, an exchange of strategies and activities to combat resistance to qualitative work, and the connections made to the material the instructors were introducing to students and reviewing for themselves. Although Humble and Sharp (2012) do not explicitly identify potential barriers to shared journaling, one such disadvantage would be finding a partner with whom to journal. They point out that it was important to choose a writing partner carefully, someone who is in a similar teaching situation with shared goals and preferably a peer.

Fecho et al. (2005), however, note that online journaling with teachers can be problematic and maintaining an online or distant journaling partnership does not always produce the “clarity, connection, and confidence” (Humble & Sharp, 2012, p. 7) that Humble and Sharp (2012) highlight in their study. Other drawbacks of journaling from Fecho et al.’s (2005) study are not responding in a timely manner, making public information in the journals without the consent of the other participant, and not responding honestly and critically to journal entries. Issues of trust, audience, and criticality are found in the literature as possible disadvantages to shared journaling.

Summary – Format of learning journals.

Journal formats vary widely from the use of diaries that chronologically record events in a person’s life as they happen, including emotions, feelings, and reactions, to professional journals which are used to record notes from meetings and appointments, and to learning journals that help writers to replace old thinking with new ideas. The learner chooses a method of writing that best suits his or her needs at the time. Certain journal formats tend to be more closely associated with critical reflection. Professional journals, spiritual journals, blogs, and diaries tend to focus on descriptive accounts of events without examining underlying reasons or how different perspectives might change outcomes (Moon, 2006; Stevens & Cooper, 2009). On the other hand, learning journals help writers to explore an event, emotion, or idea and create ideas that are oriented towards transforming learning. However, simply using a learning journal does not necessarily mean that the writer is reflecting critically. Autobiographies and day plans are not necessarily critically reflective though they can be (Brookfield, 1995; Moon, 2006).

Journal formats such as dialogue, triad, or online peer, online dialogue, or email learning journals have the potential to encourage critical reflection. Feedback or a conversation with an interested partner can lead to a deeper level of reflection though again, this alone does not guarantee critical thinking. Studies by Killeavy and Maloney (2010), Otienoh (2009), Silva (2001), Ruan and Beach (2005), and Stevens and Cooper (2009) demonstrate many instances in which participants wrote with a partner or in a triad and journal entries remained at a superficial level. In contrast, Humble and Sharp (2012), Garmon (2001) and Fecho et al. (2005) note that their shared online journaling was at times critical in nature. Perhaps the most critical journal entries are found in Humble and Sharp's (2012) work of two professors who shared an online journal. Although there were instances of criticality in Fecho et al.'s (2005) study, the authors mention a number of drawbacks due to the nature of online journaling for many teachers.

Journals as Critical Space

Greene (1986), Humble and Sharp (2012), and Moon (2006) contend that learning journals can be an important tool for critical reflection through the creation of critical space. The notion that journals provide a place, or space, where teachers write observations and thoughts that lead to critical re-appraisals of educational practices is important. Critical space can be used to work through cognitive dissonance, write counter-narratives, explore conflicting plot lines through narrative inquiry, communicate with self and others, as an intellectual and emotional outlet, and generate new ideas and theories about practice to make transformative change (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; Edwards-Groves, 2013; Fecho et al., 2005; Kremenitzer, 2005; Polkinghorne, 1988; Zembylas & Barter, 2002). Greene (1986) notes, "some educators continually strive to

remain in good faith, to avoid giving way to a purely compliant practice; to refuse to approach their work as an enterprise intended to train ‘good citizens’” (p. 78).

According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), “an individual’s experience is more than living out of a socially determined script” (p. 39). Teachers’ experiences captured in their journals may deviate from the dominant discourse in education causing cognitive dissonance. Journals can be used as an opportunity to explore issues and concerns that surface during their work in the classroom. When used to unearth assumptions and question the policies and practices of school boards, journals become a space where teachers can critique and question their employers and their own views and practices.

Some teachers use journaling to re-examine what they know and are learning in their daily work. As “experience and learning are seen to exist in a dialectical tension or praxis, each one illuminating the other” (Brookfield, 1995, p. 226), Brookfield proposes that teachers use a variety of tools to help them think critically. He argues that becoming a critically reflective teacher is a continuous process that follows the rhythm of a teacher’s learning. He notes the dearth of information about how teachers acquire the necessary skills to critically reflect on their daily teaching and learning.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) suggest that journaling can lead teachers to critically examine, deconstruct, and reshape curricular visions as well as inform their practice as they create counter-narratives to dominant views of education. Teaching and learning can mean more than the transmission of discrete sets of skills and can move towards ensuring that greater equity in, and access to, learning opportunities are provided to students. Teachers are pursuing opportunities in their classroom that co-construct meaningful and relevant learning experiences, question educational truths to bring about

change, and incorporate teaching and learning strategies that are respectful, inclusive, and transparent. One teacher writes that her journal provided a space to critically reflect on the intersections between test-taking exercises and showing what her students know:

It is hard not to come to a conclusion that, on a test like this, the fact that the students know so much sometimes makes them appear not to know enough. To a person not fluent in Ernest, I suspect that the correctness of his answer will not be recognized. Perhaps, Ernest should have been more savvy and kept his answer clear and simple [as the space for writing allowed]. If so, then I have done him a disservice, because I am teaching him to write, not to fill in blanks efficiently. (as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 136)

She examines her deeply rooted feelings regarding the test's inability to account for the growth in her students' learning and looks critically at the assumption that testing accurately reflects learning. Journaling is one tool she uses to disrupt her school's assumptions about standardized testing.

In their study of graduate geography students, Heller et al. (2011) describe how reflective journal writing is used by students to explore field experiences and the learning that results from the field experience. The authors suggest that journaling:

Serves as one of the only spaces researchers may have all to themselves in the field; a place to record joys, frustrations and fears as fieldwork continues. It is also a collection of memories, a way of documenting one's journey as a researcher. Using our journals as a reflexive process both in the field and afterwards allowed us to document important pathways of learning about our research and about ourselves. (p. 79)

In the Heller et al. (2011) study, eight graduate students and one instructor focused on the use of research journals to explore new learning. Seven participants used journals to link theory studied in the classroom to fieldwork. The others facilitated the research; the instructor acted as a mentor. The experiences of the seven were noted in journals written in the field and then shared during a one-day workshop. They wrote about topics introduced in their coursework such as ethics, positions in the field, power relations, and critical reflection. The findings demonstrate that the reflective nature of the journals supported the development of self-awareness in the learning and allowed them to think more deeply about their research journey, questions from the field, and their positionality vis-a-vis their research and their biases. The writing was “active engagement with change” (Heller et al., 2011, p. 79) and helped them to discuss their new understandings about the research they were conducting; it provided them with an opportunity to explore their personal growth from their field experiences as they accessed communicative space for critical reflection. In a similar way, teachers’ journals can act as a critical space in which to explore their classroom practices as well as to better understand their development as reflective practitioners (Brookfield, 1995; Moon, 2006).

Heller et al. (2011) found many common themes raised in the journals: redefining power relations, reciprocity in research, and managing fatigue. Reviewing the entries as a group during their workshop was a valuable experience; it made the teachers more aware of common questions and concerns despite differences in fieldwork opportunities and diverse locations. The authors encourage other researchers to take on a similar challenge, namely of researching and journaling about lived experiences as well as sharing insights with others. Unfortunately, they do not discuss any limitations they experienced with

their research. A discussion of the disadvantages of journal writing during fieldwork, as well as challenges faced during their workshop, would provide a richer picture for others who would like to explore how journal writing can enhance research.

Greene (1986) refers to critical space as a window opening, seeing other possibilities, and “moving towards possibilities to live and teach in a world of incompleteness of what we all are but are not yet” (p. 79). Journaling has the potential to open up such a space in order to make sense of the challenges teachers face in the classroom. They can be used as a space to reflect on teaching and school practices as well as address issues of empowerment, social change, and knowledge. A critical perspective allows teachers to think deeply about what they teach, how they teach, and to make meaning of their daily work (Borman, 1990).

Learning journals have the potential to create critical space that can be used to redefine teaching, disrupt the status quo, and question practices. This brings more to teaching than simply transferring discrete skills. Critical space might look like cognitive dissonance where the learner reflects on the difference between his or her views and experiences and what is happening around him or her. It could provide a place to reflect on a different outcome or way to teach through a counter-narrative. When two or more versions of an event are recounted, creating counter plot lines, a space is opened up for different perspectives. Critical space allows learners to explore intellectual or emotional responses to conflict in a safe environment or to find a place to share ideas. Table 2.3 shows what critical space might look like and where it can be found in teachers’ daily work. Examples of authors who refer to critical space and key ideas are presented in the table. There are many ways that critical space is described in the literature. This table

provides an overview of some of the key terms used and the main ideas associated with the terms.

Table 2.3.

Overview of Critical Space in the Literature

Critical Space Identified in the Literature and Examples of Authors	Key ideas
Counter narratives Clandinin, 2001; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; Conle, 2002	Generate stories that disrupt the narratives told by schools; alternative views of schools
Counter plots Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1998	Alternative versions of the same stories told by different people; an alternative outcome to a situation, feeling, or idea
Communicative space Edwards-Groves, 2013	Use of dialogue to explore problems of practice with colleagues
Intellectual and emotional space Barnett, (as cited in Moon, 2006); Kemeziter, 2005; Zembylas & Barter, 2002	Thinking about practice to check emotional responses to classroom events, ideas, and feelings
Cognitive dissonance Russell, 2009; Fecho et al., 2005	Gap between what you know is true and what you would like it to be; “wobble” (Fecho et al., 2005, p. 175)
Professional development	Needs to be a change in thinking before people

Fullan, 1985	change their actions
Voice Evans & Maloney, 1998; Humble & Sharp, 2012; Moon, 2006	Giving space for people to voice their ideas, feelings, and revisit events

Cognitive dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance, a gap between what they know to be true at the time and what is unfolding or a chasm between current beliefs and present actions, can act as critical space. Teachers might experience cognitive dissonance, since they are often aware of the difference between their actions and their beliefs. Russell (2009) notes this as, “the gap is between what teachers have always done and what teachers would like to do” (p. 82), leaving teachers to wonder if their current practices in the classroom mirror what they envision their teaching to be like in the future. Fecho et al. (2005) posit that the dissonance that some teachers feel as they explore their practice has the potential to lead to reflection and in turn, to challenge current actions. Journals can serve as a space in which to critically reflect on how actions mirror or do not mirror teachers’ values and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Counter-narratives.

Counter-narratives can also be considered as teachers’ critical space. Clandinin (2001) suggests the narratives that teachers tell can be considered counter-stories to the dominant stories that are told by schools. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2005) refer to these as stories that teachers tell about their experiences in the classroom that bump up against the stories that schools or society tell about teaching and learning. Counter-narratives are

stories that challenge the dominant ideas of the school system and cause tension between teachers' and the school's views; they contradict dominant perspectives.

Clandinin, Murphy, Huber, and Orr (2010) discuss the “prescriptive professional spaces” (p. 82) such as out-of-classroom spaces in which teachers are required to follow school or ministry policies and where practices as well as the schools' dominant stories exist. Private or critical spaces such as classrooms or journals are a place where tacit and professional knowledge are practiced. As teachers move between the professional space of the staffroom or the hallways at school and their private spaces, challenges may surface in their daily work and their lived experiences might be quite different from those stories told in professional spaces (Clandinin et al., 2010; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). MacDonald and Shirley (2009), suggest that new understandings and “opportunities to step outside the classroom” (p. 74) can propel change in a teacher's practice by encouraging the use of critical space such as a journal to critique and challenge their school's dominant stories. Exploring alternatives to a school's stories can support teachers' efforts to reflect on what is happening at school and in their classrooms and seek new ways of teaching and learning.

Clandinin et al., (2010) suggest that as teachers attempt to negotiate between the two spaces, they may try to smooth over differences and find common ground. They argue that teachers “erase, write over or silence tensions to maintain the smooth stories of schools” (p. 82). Journals could be used to challenge differences between their stories from the classroom and the stories of the school; however, there is little support in the literature to suggest that many teachers who journal are critically examining their practice (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014; Moon, 2006; Peterson & Jones, 2001).

According to Clandinin et al. (2010), critical spaces can exist between professional and private spaces, “tensions that live between people, events, or things and are a way of creating a between space, a space which can exist in educative ways” (p. 82). Journals serve as the created space that supports teachers’ professional development and knowledge building if they reflect critically on practice. The opposite may be true if journals are used to support the smooth stories told by schools or society. Conle (2002) sheds light on the challenge of stories that are no longer connected to a personal story or lived experience and become part of the mainstream discourse about education. These stories remain the same, are context-free, and often uphold the status quo, such as a story that reinforces a stereotype or is used many times to reinforce a point without reflecting on it further. The story becomes the truth.

Similarly, there is danger that stories used as good examples are retold and reinforced. Conle (2000) cautions that in these two circumstances an “all knowing narrator’s power does not leave room for other interpretations” (p. 9). Stories may have other interpretations as they are told and re-presented. Teachers’ stories may confirm the viewpoints or assumptions about schools, helping to maintain the status quo rather than bring about generative change. When teachers engage in reflection, Zeichner (1993) cautions that there is potential for reflection to “further solidify and justify teaching practices that are harmful to students...questions related to the broader purpose of education in a democratic society sometimes get lost” (para. 10). In this case, reflection may serve to support the status quo rather than disrupt dominant views and provoke change.

Similarly, journals left unquestioned or critiqued by others might uphold the status quo (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; Zeichner, 1993). When written in isolation without peer review or critical friends, journaling may reinforce beliefs and actions rather than critique or uncover assumptions (Brookfield, 1995). Reflective journal writing can become “endless loops of self-modulated introspection” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 67) that remain unchallenged or questioned. Brookfield (1998) states: “a self-confirming cycle often develops whereby our uncritically accepted assumptions shape actions that then only serve to confirm the truth of those assumptions” (p. 197). In this way, journal writing can maintain assumptions and not bring about change.

Conflicting plot lines.

Critical space in journals might be described through conflicting plot lines. Polkinghorne (1988) sheds light on how conflicting plot lines can be used to think about the lived experiences or stories of teachers and schools. At times, plot lines conflict and open up a space in order to explore why there are two versions of the same experience. Polkinghorne (1988) explains: “the two different plot lines...by producing two different interpretations of the same set of events, are leading to misunderstandings and conflict” (p. 163). Examples of contradicting narratives or plot lines might show that reflective practice is an essential part of what is good teaching (Brookfield, 1995). However, the literature reveals that little time is afforded to teachers to reflect on their teaching and learning and there is virtually no training or support to embed and sustain reflective practice other than one-time in-service training (Dyment & O’Connell, 2014; Oteino, 2011; Ruan & Beach, 2005).

The second version of the story deviates from the first and Greene (1986) creates a possibility for new understanding as teachers puzzle through differences between versions of the same story. Do teachers smooth over the story as Clandinin (2001) suggests by erasing the differences, writing over them, or silencing the differences? Do teachers explore in their journals why there are two different interpretations of the same story; for example, of reflective practice?

Reflective journals may provide a space for teachers to engage with new ideas and disrupt dominant views of education (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Little, 1993; Moon, 2006). Another study might reveal that teachers do not use journals to dig deeply into their practice and use them to give a descriptive account of the classroom, delving only superficially into issues and concerns of practice, maintaining the status quo or dominant views in education (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014; Otenioh, 2011; Ruan & Beach, 2005).

Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) notes that “teacher knowledge is deeply personal” (p. 29) and journals can help bridge the gap between what is private and public knowledge. The private knowledge that teachers have has the potential to contradict the public knowledge or dominant view, exposing conflicting plot lines between the teachers’ experiences and knowledge and the school or education system. However, journals can support teachers’ efforts to re-story practice through counter-narratives on an individual level and at the school level as they write in their journals, viewing events in a different light or imagining alternative ways of knowing. Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007) argue that the next step is to “leverage the stories to affect policy and practice” (p. 35) echoing Elbaz-

Luwisch's (2007) notion of re-storying or finding alternative narratives about schools and learning and making public the conflicting views or plot lines.

Moon (2006) refers to journal entries as "knowledge-in-pieces" (p. 71). She suggests that once a story or event is retold in a journal and shared with others, it moves from the personal to the public and becomes part of collected knowledge. Lieberman (2009) explains that traditional professional development organized by outside experts "oversimplifies and underestimates how teachers learn, the conditions under which learning occurs, and how knowledge is developed and finds its way into a teacher's repertoire" (p. 1876). Critically reflective writing in journals that illustrates conflicting plot lines could offer different opportunities and ideas for professional development. By researching their practice and thinking deeply about what is going on around them, teachers search for alternative ways of knowing and when they share what they are learning through their stories, they make their developing insights available for others to build on and critique.

Summary – Cognitive dissonance, counter-narrative, and counter plot lines

Three ways to access critical space in learning journals have been explored: cognitive dissonance, counter-narratives, and conflicting plot lines. The common idea is journals' potential as a space to work through tension created between tacit and professional knowledge, public and private, and local and global. Cognitive dissonances reflect a gap between what teachers know through their lived experience and what they see around them at school (Russell, 2009). Counter-narratives are teachers' stories that conflict with those told by their school, Board, or the government (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009). A space opens up between two versions of the same story as in conflicting

plot lines (Polkinghorne, 1989), thus allowing teachers an opportunity to negotiate in the critical space created. Teachers can use the tension, negotiating in the space between to inform both policy and practice.

Communicative spaces

Critical space can be a place for communication. Edwards-Groves (2013) suggests that examining the gaps between practice and curricular visions supports the improvement of practice. Journals can be used to think more deeply about the constraints or challenges that teachers face in their daily work. In Edwards-Groves' study of the use of dialogue that helped to provoke critical thinking, teaching colleagues created a communicative space for discussions about teaching and learning, to work towards a deeper understanding of practice. The author found that colleagues could carve out a space for talk to improve practice since it allowed them to "interrogate, interpret, and comprehend those factors which enable and constrain teacher and research practices" (Edwards-Groves, 2013, p. 18). A communicative space can support efforts to look deeply at practice, to critique what they do in the classroom to bring about growth on a professional level, and to take what they have learned from their lived experiences and apply it to other educational settings or future actions. This study shows the possibility of using journals as communicative space in a similar way, particularly if the journal is shared with others such as with dialogue journals, triad journals, online peer journaling, or emails.

Boud (2001) contends that journals are a form of self-expression, a way to record events, and can be used as therapy to work through problems of practice. There are similarities between the vision of communicative space that promotes critical dialogue

with colleagues that Edwards-Groves (2013) suggests and the idea of journal spaces as a form reflective practice, enhancing teachers' abilities to interpret, critique, and explore other ways of working. Edwards-Groves (2013) points out that the transcripts, like journal excerpts, from dialogues with colleagues are the texts to be analyzed and critiqued for insights. Parallels may be drawn between the stories shared orally among teachers and the lived experiences that teachers write about in their teaching journals. In the case of journal writing, the stories in the journals become the texts that create the communicative space to which she refers.

Trede, Higgs, and Rothwell (2008) discuss different types of critically transformative dialogue:

- Reflective self-dialogue;
- Collaborative analytical dialogue;
- Transformative dialogue and action, and
- Formative and reflexive dialogue. (as cited in Edwards-Groves, 2013, p. 21)

Reflective self-dialogue occurs when people look at their work and make observations. When they invite other people to reflect on the work and begin to think about changes to practice, it becomes collaborative analytical dialogue. Transformative dialogue and action involve trying new ways of working and reflecting on new practices. Formative or reflexive dialogue is when people critique and challenge the changes to practice. If narratives in journals, a written representation of a lived experience, fall within the examples of transformative dialogue, a critical space has the potential to open up possibilities for new learning and new visions and become a "space of agency" (Edwards-Groves, 2013, p. 29). Agency is created when new ideas are developed in the

critical space, changes in practice are worked through, and action is taken based on new learning. Edwards-Groves' (2013) study demonstrated that creating a critical and transformative space supports teachers as they work together for change. Teachers were "able to generate transformative spaces which engendered agency in a profession being pressed into compliance and performativity" (p. 31). She determined that there is a need to support teachers who are searching for ways to carve out critical spaces to make changes in their work and in education, in general. Greene (1986) argues that we need to "move beyond where we are, to break with submergence, to transform" (p. 429). However, to do so, spaces need to be created for such transformation to occur.

Intellectual and emotional space

Intellectual and emotional space may be considered critical. Barnett refers to creating an intellectual space where the learner has an opportunity to take the time to write and reflect, a way to stop the clock that might otherwise not be available in a busy life (as cited in Moon, p. 26). This is an interesting observation as the lack of time to reflect and write is often cited in the literature as one of the main impediments to journal writing (Boud, 2001; Dymont & O'Connell, 2014; Hubbs & Brand, 2005; Moon, 2005; O'Connell & Dymont, 2003, 2004). Teachers may feel overwhelmed by their daily work and unable to find time and space for reflection through journal writing (Hubbs & Brand, 2005; Killeavy & Maloney, 2010). However, Thompson and Pascal (2012) note:

the busier we are, the more reflective we need to be...the more pressure we are under, the clearer we need to be about what we are doing, why we are doing it, what knowledge is available to help us do it to best effect. (as cited in Dymont & O'Connell, 2014, p. 425)

Zembylas and Barter (2002) state that creating a space for learning helps teachers “find emotional comfort that supports the efforts of pre-service teachers to become reflective practitioners” (p. 331). They refer to space for pre-service teachers to build capacity and knowledge, reflect on and take risks in their learning, tie practice to theory, and as a venue for new ideas. Given space for reflection, they suggest that an examination of beliefs and assumptions is more likely to occur, an important first step in developing critical awareness.

This echoes Boud’s (2001) notion that journals contain feelings and emotions that result from reflection-after-events. In this case, journals act as a place to release negative emotions or to celebrate successful experiences. They serve different emotional purposes whether it be celebratory, set aside or work through negative feelings, or find a neutral emotional spot to continue teaching and learning.

Kremenitzer (2005) studies how experienced ECEs use journaling to support their emotional and social intelligence as well as abilities to self-regulate. Her study used focused emotional intelligence journals and a shared group experience as a frame. In her previous work as an instructor, she used emotional and social intelligence journals in her coursework with pre-service graduate and undergraduate teachers to introduce focused reflective journaling. In their journals, students were encouraged to track their responses using a scale that lists a variety of emotional responses to classroom events. For example, teachers may record feelings of anger, frustration, happiness, or what she terms a neutral response to situations. This feeling is accompanied by a written explanation of the event. Ideally, teachers are working towards a neutral response to jarring and unexpected classroom situations. The journals helped them work through their emotions and become

more aware of how they react to stressors. They develop a greater awareness and a heightened ability to regulate their actions and reactions by noting their emotions and the triggers in their focused reflective journal.

Kremenitzer (2005) used this journaling technique with 47 pre-service teachers over one year. A weekly group online sharing activity was held to discuss entries. She found that educators could identify patterns in their emotional responses to stressful classroom situations and explore the incidents as well as their responses further in an emotional intelligence journal. Journals allowed them to self-check and regulate their reactions in the classroom.

Kremenitzer (2005) views reflective journaling to renew teachers' practices; she encourages teachers to keep an emotional journal to better understand their feelings. She notes a lack of information in the literature on how practicing teachers used journal writing and whether their pre-service experiences with journaling are carried on in their professional practice. Stevens and Cooper (2009) argue that journal writing can help those in the profession feel re-energized and note that there is a dearth of information on how journal writing is used by practitioners in their professional work.

When journals are used to create a communicative space, they provoke dialogue, either with self or colleagues. Similar to the hierarchies found in the levels of reflection (e.g., Dart et al., 1998; Hatton & Smith, 1995), there is a continuum for transformative dialogue (Trede, Higgs, & Rothwell, 2008). At one end of the spectrum is self-reflection while at the other end of the continuum is reflexive or critical dialogue, an intentional and purposeful conversation to advance practice, which is thought to bring about transformation.

Summary – Communicative, intellectual, and emotional space

Journals can create space for intellectual or emotional release, supporting learners as they work through new ideas or feelings. Barnett (1997) notes that this allows learners to slow down the pace of learning to provide time for reflection. Having a space to work through reactions or feelings can be comforting (Zembylas & Barter, 2002). Kementitzer (2005) found that the emotional space in journals helped to record and store feelings so that teachers could return to the classroom able to face the next challenge. The difficulty is discovering when communicative space provides for thought that goes beyond providing personal comfort to one engendering critical reflection.

Professional development

The knowledge that teachers build through their lived experiences and research in their classrooms can serve as “models of possibilities” (hooks, 1994, p. 131) for other teachers. Anderson (2002) writes, “It is somehow more compelling to read an account by fellow insiders about their practice than research done on that practice by an outsider” (p. 22). Conle (1990) agrees, “being drawn into another’s experience means being pulled into the world that is not one’s own, but one that one can nevertheless connect to in some fashion” (p. 55). Some teachers draw on the experiences of others to learn and many of these classroom stories and reflections are captured in journals. Since the reader reacts to the story by finding similarities and/or differences considering his or her experiences, the stories become a vehicle for learning and growth.

Journals can be used for professional development (Moon, 2006) since they allow an exploration of past, present, and future action and support an exploration of how new thinking can shape future practice. Reflecting in journals on theory, on practice, on how

theory shapes practice, and on how practice shapes theory are important sources of knowledge and can support teachers' professional growth (Dart et al., 1998; Moon, 2006). It is the lived experiences, consisting of assumptions, beliefs, and experiences, which provide the source for reflection.

Despite the promise of journals as sources of practical knowledge for professional development purposes and their potential to bring about change, there is evidence that journals do not always lead to transformation (Moon, 2006). Glazer, Abbott, and Harris (2004), Herr (1999), and Anderson and Herr (1994) found that there were many reasons why reflection did not lead to action. This includes such barriers as time constraints, uncertainty about how to proceed, lack of administrative support, feelings of helplessness, and fear of consequences for working against the status quo. There are occasions when critical reflection becomes an activity rather than an empowering practice or focused on the everyday tasks of teaching (Zeichner, 1993).

Often in-service training is characterized by skill mastery rather than reflective practice (Brookfield, 1995). By researching their practice and thinking deeply about what is going on around them, teachers can search for alternative ways of knowing. Journals can serve as a critical space for them to build on what they know. Further, when they share what they are learning, they make developing insights available for others to build on and critique. Stories or lived experiences shared often resonate with others. Although the journals may be shared, they are for the growth and learning of the writer (Boud, 2001).

According to Fullan (1985), inquiry and a problem-posing stance bring about personal goal setting and having a personal goal can lead to larger organizational

changes. He states, “changes in attitudes, beliefs, and understanding tend to follow rather than precede changes in behaviour” (Fullan, 1985, p. 393). When teachers are thinking deeply about their work in journals they have an opportunity to use journals as critical spaces to examine long held beliefs and assumptions. He suggests this initial self-interrogation, which can take place in a teacher’s journal, might be the first step in changing practices. To institute larger changes, individuals must first recast how they think and act. By examining their practice in journals, they can begin to marry old ideas with new learning, creating a space for change in practice. When new skills replace old ways of doing, teachers can find new meaning in promising practices; “the most fundamental breakthrough occurs when people can cognitively understand the underlying conception and rationale with respect to “why this new way is better” (Fullan, 1985, p. 393). This deep change, however, can only happen if teachers are reflecting at a deeper and more meaningful level. Once teachers decide why this new way is better, transformation and action as it relates to new learning changes practice. Fullan (1985) contends, “Continuous planning, action and reflection are necessary for change” (p. 405). Adopting new ways of thinking and acting involve the fear of the unknown, support small tentative steps towards change where the learner can experience some initial success, develop new skills, and begin to take ownership over his or her own learning. Where can teachers find a space to open up possibilities for new ways and doing? Journals can be a critical space for teachers to plan, act, and reflect to make changes to their practice.

Fullan (1985) suggests change occurs in increments and starts with the individual while Moon (2006) contends that journals support the connections that teachers make

between their practice and educational theory, supporting professional learning. By relating a lived experience to what is known in the literature or by developing a new theory about their learning or teaching, journals facilitate learning from experience (Moon, 2005). Burnaford, Fischer and Hobson (2001) suggest that teaching is close to who we are and reveals parts of ourselves. Journals can help teachers to unearth assumptions and reveal their thinking to others to learn more about teaching. The process of journal writing is essentially the act of “hearing and seeing your thinking” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 9). Clandinin and Connelly (1986) state journals provide “teachers opportunities for reflection at moments of contradiction and discontinuity to allow...teachers to reconstruct their narratives of experience” (p. 386). If teaching is an outward expression of who we are as individuals and as intellectuals (Cole & Knowles, 2000), journaling can help teachers to reflect on their growth and deepening understanding of outside events, relationships with others, and the conditions and opportunities that present themselves for learning throughout teachers’ professional lives.

Luna, Botelho, and Fontaine (2004) refer to the “dominant discourse that positions teachers as passive recipients of other’s expert knowledge rather than knowers in our right” (p. 69) and teachers’ ability to “disrupt the commonplace” by building their knowledge (p. 72).

Summary – Professional development

Journals can support teachers’ professional development by individualizing learning, thus responding to the learning needs of each teacher. They are a source of knowledge that can be studied, shared, and built upon with colleagues as they write about past actions to inform future decisions. Fullan (1985) points out that the first step to

transformation is to change the way teachers think and then to change actions. Journals can support changes in thinking and help bring understanding about underlying factors that necessitate change. In so doing they have the potential to assist the development of critical reflection. Although journaling can support teachers' professional development, it does not necessarily guarantee that teachers are critically reflecting in their writing. This leads to the question, under what circumstances do teachers use their journals as critical space to reflect?

Voice

Journals provide a vehicle to find voice when telling about a lived experience, to listen to and open up to different perspectives, to become more confident, and to strengthen the author's points of view (Humble & Sharp, 2012; Moon, 2006; Wolf, 1989). Wolf (1989) speaks to journaling to compile thoughts, committing an inner voice to paper and thereby giving strength to one's perspectives. Conle (2000) suggests, "to become better acquainted with their [own] story was indeed interesting for busy teachers who had little time for reflective writing themselves" (p. 52). Journals can help writers get in touch with themselves. Evans and Maloney (1998) indicate that journaling can help students find a voice in their writing or engage in an inner dialogue about their new thinking with the aim of building professional capacity.

Hubbs and Brand (2005) refer to journals as a "paper mirror" (p. 60). Narratives often reveal as much about the reader as the lived experience. Writing can shed light on how the storyteller identifies in the selection of the lived experiences shared. The idea of giving teachers voice can be problematic, however, as it assumes that they are powerless to make their views known on their own and need help.

Limitations of Journals

Drawing from Freire's (1970) work on praxis, Giroux (1988) argues that reflection can bring about action. Carr and Kemmis (1986) refer to praxis or reflective action as informed actions to bring about change that engages teachers in reframing their daily work by exploring how their thoughts and beliefs about teaching and learning shape their actions. Reflective tools such as journal writing can help teachers to think through their work and inform future action. Journaling supports critical reflection to help understand teaching and learning, to improve practice, and to lay bare values, assumptions, and beliefs (Goswami, Ceci, Rutherford, & Waff, 2009; Hubball, Collins & Pratt, 2005). However, at times, teachers can reflect critically on their work but not act. This is referred to as arrested action (Herr, 1999) and occurs for a variety of reasons.

Arrested action.

In a study of teachers engaged in critical reflection, Glazer et al. (2004) note that although teachers want to act on their concerns, they struggle to find a means and a collective willingness to do so. There are tensions around deciding how to act on reflections; the level of comfort and commitment to action are varied as well. Glazer et al. remark that even though the group had not decided on action, individuals took steps to make concrete changes in their practice, school or community.

Although some teachers are reflecting critically, many do not act on their reflections (Glazer et al., 2004). Herr (1999) argues that teachers who critically reflect on their practice may encounter obstacles when they try to act. She explains; "to arrive at a distinctive, critical analysis of a place where one returns to work day after day creates a particular challenge for teachers" (Herr, 1999, p. 14). The challenges that teachers face

may include time constraints, lack of support from administration, systemic barriers, school board policy, budgetary limits of the school, fear of reprisal, or personal issues such as the feeling of powerlessness (Baumann, 1996; Glazer et al., 2004). Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) refer to the break in the cycle of reflection and action as arrested action, where teachers reflect but do not act to bring about the changes that are needed and uncovered through their critical reflections.

The beliefs that teachers hold are not always reflected in their actions. Smith (1999) and Kumashiro (2009) caution that liberatory research practices, for example, can be carried out in ways that are less than emancipatory and serve to maintain power structures. Kumashiro points out that some forms of research that aim to liberate may be just as problematic in practice when actions in the field do not reflect beliefs. This may hold true for teaching practices that aim to empower students and/or teachers. Teachers may believe in anti-oppressive education or a critical practice. However, their actions in the classroom might not mirror these values. For example, they may use teaching strategies that limit democratic discussion rather than open up the possibilities for communication between students and teachers. It is important to unearth the hidden assumptions that undergird teachers' beliefs and actions to further explore them.

Reflection as an activity.

Reflection can take on the appearance of an activity rather than a habit of mind (Dewey, 1933; Giroux, 1988; Zeichner, 1993); it becomes a means to an end and disconnected from issues of equity and access to educational opportunities. Zeichner (1993) problematizes reflection as a means to an end and suggests that the use of the term has come to be commonplace. When this happens, the connection between critical

thinking and the broader purpose of education to ensure that all students have access to, and equity of, learning experiences is tenuous.

Being reflective does not necessarily ensure that the reflections are critical (Brookfield, 1995). Teachers can be reflective by thinking about the everyday techniques of teaching (Schön, 1983) whereas being critically reflective implies that teachers are examining their practice in a deep and substantive way to uncover underlying assumptions. What the learner does with the new information is important; a person can be critically active in reflecting on events when their reflections help to change actions or future steps.

Moon (2006) argues that for reflection and therefore, transformation to take place in a learning journal, new theories need to replace beliefs or assumptions as well as past and present experiences must inform future actions. She refers to this process as networking whereby new ideas are connected to a network of ideas or belief system of the journaler: “We might also reflect when we learn from the representation of learning. In other words, when we write, etc. something and then what we have written stimulates more thinking (and perhaps more redrafting)” (Moon, 2006, p. 25). Dart et al. (1998) concur, stating that learning journals provide writers with an opportunity to “reconstruct” thinking (p. 314). However, when new thinking does not replace old ways of doing, reflection does not lead to transformation or change.

The push for teachers to critically reflect on their practice has been strong (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; MacDonald & Shirley, 2009; Moon, 2006; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). At times, teachers experience dissonance between professional development opportunities that encourage critical thinking and a

lack of time, support, or space to engage deeply and thoughtfully in their work (Baumann, 1996; Black, 2005; Cole & Knowles, 2000; Garcia-Gonzalez, 2000; Glazer et al., 2004; Herr, 1999; Wade, 2009). When the barriers of time, lack of support or space to reflect critically hinder teachers' critique of practice, reflection becomes an activity to be done rather than a meaningful search for insight into their daily work. Some researchers speak to the importance of developing the critical thinking skills of teachers, moving beyond the use of reflection as an activity (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Fletcher, 2006) and how these skills develop over time (Dewey, 1933; Fennell, 1995; Goswami et al., 2009; Shulman & Shulman, 2004).

Akinbode (2013) explains, "developing reflective practice is considered desirable in the teaching professions, and most teachers probably consider themselves to be reflective practitioners, actively seeking to reflect on their professional practice" (p. 62). In their study with faculty members and students, Dymont and O'Connell (2014) found the opposite to be the case. Despite the challenges of creating a critical space for reflection, Clandinin and Connelly (2004) argue that reflection on practice can have a powerful impact on what teachers do and say in the classroom.

Summary

Journaling provides teachers with an opportunity to revisit the events of the day to gain new perspectives or insights into their evolving teaching and learning (Anderson & Herr, 1999), into their students' learning, and to critically examine issues that affect educational opportunities, some of which have been highlighted in the literature on journals (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993). Reflection in journals can best be understood using the notion of critical space. As journals have the potential to be

important tools for improving practice, they can be used for critical reflection. Using lived experiences or narratives to build knowledge, journals can support teachers' efforts to make changes to their work, re-energize, or maintain promising practices in the classroom (Edwards-Groves, 2013; Huber et al., 2013).

The literature is conflicted about how teachers use journals to reflect on teaching and how this reflection impacts teaching and learning. The use of journals as critical spaces has the possibility of engaging teachers in thinking about practice and social justice in the classroom (Romanish, 1987) and on how knowledge can be constructed differently (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). The notion of critical space allows an understanding of the conditions necessary for critical reflection to occur in learning journals and how critical space can support professional development.

There are many obstacles to overcome to realize the potential of journals as vehicles for learning. To summarize, these barriers include, audience (Boud, 2001; Brookfield, 1995; Thorpe, 2004), time (Peterson & Jones, 2001), space (Peterson & Jones, 2001), situational, institutional, and attitudinal constraints (Peterson & Jones, 2001). For Boud, to facilitate critical reflection in journal writing, teachers need to be assured of privacy. Brookfield suggests that critical reflection is facilitated in journals when teachers do not feel the need for dramatic self-disclosure but write about their ideas, thoughts, and experiences in the classroom. For Thorpe, to facilitate critical reflection the ethical issues related to audience need to be clear. To facilitate critical reflection in journals, teachers need time to write in their journals, have confidence as a writer and believe in the benefits of journal writing for professional growth according to Peterson and Jones. They also suggest that one of the main institutional barriers in critical

journal writing is having entries evaluated or a requirement of a course or by extension for practicing teachers, part of their job.

It is important to better understand the critical reflection that occurs in journaling and those obstacles that prevent teachers from accessing critical space in their journals. Providing teachers with a critical space, journals can help develop capacity and enable professional growth. I address the literature about the usefulness of journals for changing practice. It has shown that using journals critically can lead to change, that there are different definitions of criticality, and the need to determine what is needed to encourage criticality in journal writing.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter contains a description of the methodology I used to examine my research question: *What are the barriers and facilitators that teachers experience in accessing critical space in their journals?* and the four sub-questions:

- What is the evidence that teachers use journals for critical space?
- What are the particular conditions that promote and limit teachers' use of journals for critical space?
- How can journals better help teachers to critique and challenge their practice?
- How can teachers be supported as they use journals to engage with professional learning opportunities?

I explain the design of the study, describes the participants, and how the data were collected and analyzed.

Research Approach

This study employs narrative inquiry methodology, which examines stories, experiences, or descriptions of events gathered in the field, in interviews, or during a conversation (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986; Clandinin & Rosnick, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1988). Chase (2005) states, "narrative is a way of understanding one's and other's actions, of organizing events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connection and seeing the consequences of actions over time" (p. 656). Stories describe an event, an

important part of someone's life, or a life experience; they can help make sense or meaning of what is happening around us. Narrative inquiry is characterized by the focus on reflection, stories as lived experiences, and storied representations in data collection and analysis.

Narrative inquiry is a study of “the social, cultural, and institutional narratives within which individuals' experiences are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 12). Through teachers' narratives we learn more about the possible tensions and conflicting discourses they encounter at school and in their daily work. One of the most current dominant discourses is the importance of reflective practice and becoming a reflective practitioner (see e.g., Brookfield, 1995). By studying teachers' experiences through narrative inquiry, we can seek to understand their “storied landscape” as told through narratives, as they communicate their ideas, and as they organize events. We also can use narrative inquiry to understand how their use of journals supports their beliefs of themselves as reflective.

Narrative inquiry has its roots after the narrative turn in the 1980s and 1990s. The use of stories or narrative is both a research method and methodology in research (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Although narrative inquiry, storying, and narrative are often used interchangeably in the literature, they focus on the use of stories to bring understanding or sense (Clark, 2010) to complex or chaotic situations. Narratives are social in nature, can be written or told, and have an audience whether it is real or imagined that influences how and what is shared (Clark, 2010).

People search for meaning or make sense of their own experiences within a wider context and what we already know. Narrative and making sense of our experiences are a

part of how we learn. Bruner (1996) posits that narrative is a “mode of knowing” (p. 18) both in the telling and listening to stories or a description of events. According to Clark and Rossiter (2008),

The way we do this is by creating a narrative about what we’re learning; in other words, we work to story it, to make the elements of what we do not yet fully understand hang together. We work to achieve coherence. We can do it in our heads, we can do it out loud, we can do it on paper, and it can be done alone or with others. The process of constructing the narrative, the story, is how we can see our understanding of something come together and make sense. (p. 66)

The narrative is constructed to make the elements of the story cohere. Clark and Rossiter (2008) suggest that writing is thinking on paper as the storyteller or storywriter brings the elements of the story, organizes the events, communicates ideas (Akinbode, 2013) or “gets knowledge” (Brockmeier & Harre, 1997, p. 278). Bruner (2006) states, “it is precisely narrative’s function to instantiate and localize what is conventionally expected in a culture, and to illustrate the troubles and the perils that the conventionally expected may produce” (p. 232). Stories or events are studied by examining the “what” and “why” as well as the “where” and “when” (Rutten & Soetaert, 2012, p. 329). This examination shapes how we see or resee our daily life. It is a way to construct reality. Bruner (2005) is particularly interested in the conditions and situations that people tell their narratives and share their experiences. Brockmeier and Harre (1997) describe narrative as a “set of instructions” (p. 275) that sheds light on “a variety of practices communication, ordering and making sense of experiences, becoming knowing, giving excuses and justifications” (p. 275).

The purpose of narrative inquiry is to learn more about the experiences teachers share, make meaning from these experiences, and connect our growing understanding to theories about learning and teachers' stories. Kanpol (1997) also points out that narrative inquiry has the potential to infuse theory with personal narratives or stories, "putting a human face on education" (Edwards-Groves, 2013, p. 18).

Through their journals, teachers recount or revisit stories and events from their classroom. In examining the stories of classroom experiences, it is necessary to examine and analyze the level of reflection used to write the stories or describe their classroom experiences to better understand the barriers and facilitators they face when accessing critical space through reflections in their journals. A methodology that allows an analysis of teachers' classroom experiences can help us understand whether they are using journals to reflect critically and if so, what helps or hinders critical reflection. Narrative inquiry methodology allows a determination of the extent of critical reflection in learning journals and the conditions under which this reflection is created—or in other words the barriers or facilitators.

The research question of this study aligns with this methodology since it provides an opportunity for educators to expand on what they believe are the most important aspects of journal writing to their practice, and revisit stories contained in learning journals that illustrate how teachers access critical space to critique and challenge practice. Narrative inquiry is closely connected to studying experiences as story and the use of story as a source of practical and new knowledge (Clandinin & Rosnick, 2007). This approach supports a leveraging of stories to make sense of classroom events that effect change in practices (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007, p. 35) and has the potential

to shift a person's way of thinking and working as they reflect on these experiences or events (Jarvis, 2000). The objectives of narrative inquiry involve reflexivity, interpretation, and representation of a sequence of events. According to Hollingsworth and Dybdahl (2007), by studying stories and experiences, we are encouraged to be reflexive by "disrupt[ing] the commonplace" (p. 72), and to "resee, rethink, and revise the familiar texts of our classroom practices" (p. 73) as stories are recounted and shared with others in order to find meaning in those experiences. It is when experiences are retold that we find clues about how people feel and how they interpret an event, and we can better understand their thinking. Narrative inquiry attempts to make sense of moments made extraordinary (Shor, 1992) through their retelling, bringing to the surface key themes or plots that can be found across different stories.

Lieberman (2009) explains that traditional professional development organized by outside experts "oversimplifies and underestimates how teachers learn, the conditions under which learning occurs, and how knowledge is developed and finds its way into a teacher's repertoire" (p. 1876). By researching their own practice and thinking deeply about what is going on around them, teachers search for alternative ways of knowing and when they share what they are learning with others through their stories, they make their developing insights available for others to build on and critique. Learning journals, for example, written accounts of teachers' stories or ways of organizing events, makes their learning and their growing understanding visible over time (Clark & Rossiter, 2008).

Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) and Akinbode (2013) note that lived experiences begin with listening to teachers' stories to bring about new understanding and deepen reflective practice. Elbaz-Luwisch suggests, "understanding teaching requires that we pay attention

to teachers both as individuals and as a group, listening to their voices and the stories they tell about their lives” (p. 5). It is in teachers’ personal understandings and interpretations of the experiences, how they organize events (Chase, 2005), they have had about journaling and how they access critical space through their journals that we can gain insight. Elbaz-Luwisch (2007) suggests, “teachers learn and grow professionally as they tell and retell their stories of practice with colleagues” (p. 8). Connelly and Clandinin (1994) argue that stories are told, retold, and changed through their retelling. Stories help us to learn from others and to share our experiences (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) suggest our efforts to make meaning, better understand, and gain clarity, are supported when stories about an experience are shared.

They explain, “a person’s experience must be listened to on its terms first without the presumption of deficit or flaw and critique needs to be motivated by the problematic elements within that experience” (p. 20). When experiences are shared, they help us make sense of an event and to look more deeply for assumptions and meanings, exploring those problematic elements in the story or lived experience. Clandinin and Rosnick (2007) elaborate that when stories are dissimilar or when problems of practice are described, the “tension of conflict or conflict of possibilities” (p. 35) can push our thinking about what we know about classroom practice. Exploring similarities and differences is related to convergent interviewing, an action research method that seeks to better understand points of agreement and disagreement between people (Dick, 1990). Some teachers draw on the experiences of other teachers rather than rely on outside experts, as they are more likely to see similarities of experiences, feel that they can learn from others’ practices, and are aware of ways to improve their practice (Anderson, 2002).

In summary, there are several things that make narrative inquiry an effective means to explore stories and experiences as a source of data. Savin-Baden and Van Niekerk (2007) suggest that in narrative inquiry, open-ended questions are key and encourage storytelling. Narrative inquiry moves away from questions and employs summaries or rephrasing key ideas to check for and create shared understanding between the participant and the researcher.

Data Sources and Data Collection

Data sources in narrative inquiry include field notes of shared experiences, journals, unstructured interviews, storytelling, letter writing, and autobiographical or biographical renderings (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). The data sources in this study include interviews, teachers' learning journals, my learning journal, and email correspondence, which provide evidence of how teachers reflect on and access journals for critical spaces, how they use their journals to challenge their practice, the types of supports they need to sustain journaling, and how their reflections in their journals support their growth as professionals.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that to have credibility in research findings, the researcher must use multiple data sources. Using more than one data source supports the study's confirmability, the extent that the research is influenced by the key themes of the study and not by the researcher and his or her ideas and personal bias'. In this study, a range of data sources was used, including interviews, journal excerpts, and email correspondence. Using multiple data sources collected over the course of a school year supported my understanding of the place of journals in the teachers' daily work as told through their stories and their descriptions of classroom events. The interviews were

conducted while the learning journals were collected. Email correspondence for one teacher was collected at the same time as the interviews and journal entries. For the others, email correspondence was collected after the interviews and journal entries were gathered. These later email correspondences addressed questions that were not directly answered during the interviews or mentioned in the journal excerpts and entries.

Having rich descriptions of how teachers use journaling in their daily practice supports transferability (Polkinghorne, 1988) of findings or key themes to other classrooms or situations. These detailed descriptions provide examples of how teachers were using their journals to support critical reflection, ties to the literature, references to workshops during which they explored new ideas, and conversations with colleagues. Two teachers shared “jot notes” to illustrate examples of journal use in their classrooms or their thinking about a classroom event. These were thin examples of how journals are being used by teachers since they contained only a few words or a key phrase. However, during the interviews, they spoke at length about their journals, sharing stories about their use of journaling to deepen their practice as well as examples about their teaching and how they organize events (Chase, 2005) in their classroom.

The descriptions from the interviews of these two teachers helped to paint a richer picture than the jot notes, which did not describe their thinking or actions taken in the classroom. Two others described things in detail in their journal excerpts. One corresponded by email to answer the research questions; her entries painted a rich picture of journaling in her practice. Another spoke at length during the interviews about journaling and shared journal entries in which she described the context, students, classroom strategy, and her feelings as well as reflections.

To ensure confirmability (Polkinghorne, 1988), I kept a research journal during the study. Malterud (2001) states, “A researcher's background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (pp. 483-484). I wrote in a journal throughout the research, recording initial reflections and emerging understandings as I interviewed teachers and collected journal entries. Once I began entering data into NVivo, I saved reflections electronically and they became part of the data. Using self-narrative in narrative inquiry attends to many of the same elements of journal writing such as learning from experiences, replacing old ideas with new thinking, and becoming more self-aware (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Data Source: Interviews.

One way to collect stories or experiences as data is through interviews. Interviews had no set time limits. Eight initial interviews were conducted at an average of 30 minutes each (see Table 3.2). The stories shared of lived experiences are a key feature of interviews. Polkinghorne (1988) suggests, “Our lives are ceaselessly intertwined with narrative, with the stories that we tell and hear told, with the stories we dream or imagine or would like to tell” (p. 160). When given time during an interview and the use of an open-ended question to elicit stories such as, “tell me about your experiences”, people share stories of their actions, feelings, and thoughts as they make sense of events in their lives.

I explored the research question about how the journals are being used and the barriers to, and facilitators of, using journals as critical space, by employing a convergent

interview technique (Dick, 1995). Although used primarily in action research, I found convergent interviewing was a helpful interviewing technique in narrative inquiry. This method encourages teachers to share lived experiences or stories from their practice (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007), which form the basis for the interviews and helps to develop key themes from the interviews to gain insights as patterns across stories surface (Williams & Lewis, 2005).

Stories consist of a series of narrative statements collected through an interview. The statements are “broken...identified according to the function they serve in the narrative account” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 164). The narrative contains the main theme or plot of the story, a recount of events, feedback on the actions taken, and a description of those involved or the location of the story to support the listener’s understanding of what has taken place. It reveals emerging patterns that can be found across stories from different events and told by different people (Polkinghorne, 1988).

Convergent interviewing explores similarities and differences between experiences, seeking reasons to explain why experiences are different across classrooms (Dick, 1995). This interview technique relates closely to narrative inquiry’s objective to look for tensions or conflicts of possibilities in the stories (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Similarities and differences in convergent interviewing form the probes for interviews that served as points of reflection. As suggested by Edwards-Groves (2013), I used the transcripts and summaries from interviews as a form of checking to allow participants to collaborate and help create meaning from the texts.

Data Collection: Interviews.

I conducted convergent interviews and chose participants through purposeful sampling by selecting educators who use journaling to reflect (Creswell, 2008). Convergent interviewing requires that researchers ask a single general question or to expand on a statement to encourage participants to talk openly and at length (Dick, 1995-9). I asked each participant to tell me about their journaling practices in general and to share examples of how journaling supported or did not support their daily practice. The interview started with this general statement: "Tell me about your experiences with journaling". The participants responded to this general statement with their experiences with journaling and examples of stories from their classroom they explored in their journals.

The interviews were grouped in sets of two, with educators interviewed separately; there were eight initial interviews in total. One interview was conducted through email exchanges and one was over the phone. Each teacher was interviewed at least once. The sets of interviews were organized by participants who were least alike as per convergent interviewing (Dick 1990) to allow for points of agreement and disagreement from the perspective of the educators to surface early in the interview process. Criteria for determining dissimilarity were years of teaching experience, academic background (specialist teacher or grade level teacher), geographic location (rural or urban), and/or school teaching assignment (Kindergarten, Primary, Junior, Intermediate or Senior).

In the first set of interviews, I spoke with a Primary teacher in the first interview and then a Post-Secondary teacher in the second interview. In another, I spoke with a

teacher who had over ten years of experience and in the second I spoke with a new teacher. I began each interview by using a general statement; “Tell me about your experience with journaling”. I allowed them to tell their story in their own words and at their own pace according to the principles of convergent interviewing. At the end of the interview I gave an oral summary of the main points that were raised in the interview and then typed the summary from my field notes, sending the written summary to the participant as a way of member checking (Creswell, 2008).

Each interview was recorded using a handheld Sony MP3 Linear PCM audio recorder and the interview was transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. The audio file was uploaded to the transcriptionist’s secured Dropbox account. The transcriptionist returned the transcribed audio file to me via email. The file was then loaded into the NVivo program into a folder created for each participant. The transcribed summary was sent to the participant by email to review for accuracy and any changes requested to the summary were made. Requests for changes to be made to the summary were sent to me by email from two people; I made the changes.

The transcripts of the conversations and the summaries were entered into NVivo, a data analysis software program used in qualitative research studies. The transcript from each interview was read through several times for understanding by myself, coded for common threads and repeated behaviours, and sifted through for new insights to understand how teachers were accessing critical space and using journals to support their growth (Creswell, 2008). Codes were selected based on the research questions and the literature review. After selecting codes for the interview transcripts and summaries from

the interviews, key words and phrases were highlighted using a colour scheme originated in NVivo.

The points of agreement and disagreement elicited from the first set of interviews were used as probes for the second set of interview. These probes were used only after the participant was asked to share their experiences with journaling using the general statement, “Tell me about your experiences with journaling”. The participants had many opportunities to speak about their journaling before the being asked to respond to the probes. In the second set of interviews, the probes were:

- When is journaling private?
- When it is public?
- When do you use a framework for journaling?
- When do you choose to write without one?
- Does journaling bring distance or does it bring events and feelings closer?

Each interview followed a similar pattern. The interview began with a general statement requesting the educator tell me about her journal writing practices such as “tell me about your journaling experiences”. I took notes of key points of our conversations and then shared them at the end of each interview in an oral summary. We agreed to the main points that were raised during the interview.

Probes.

In the first set of interviews, probes were not used to elicit further explanations as the probes surface from key ideas generated during the previous set of interviews. In subsequent sets probes were asked after the participant shared their experiences of journaling based on the points of agreement and disagreement of the prior set of two

separately conducted interviews. These convergent and divergent points were entered in memo form in NVivo and came from the summary of key points that were shared orally as well as in written format with participants. The points of agreement and disagreement in each set of interviews helped to focus the conversations. The probes from the second set of interviews were:

- Does teaching experience play a role in journal writing?
- Does journal writing help you to understand your work as a teacher?

These probes were used in the next set of interviews to help focus the discussion. The probes from the third set of interviews were:

- Does journal writing make you feel more comfortable about tense situations?
- Does teaching experience play a role in journal writing?

To receive feedback from the teachers, I invited five teachers to talk about the main themes that surfaced from the data. They lived in the same city, while other participants lived in other parts of the province. This follow up interview allowed them to come together to talk about their experiences of using journals to better understand their teaching practice. Two were available to meet with me. The interview lasted 30 minutes.

Probes were used to focus the discussion for the follow up interview. The two teachers were asked to respond to the probes that highlighted areas of disagreement that surfaced during the convergent interviewing process. The probes were written and read orally to the teachers at the interview. The follow up interview was recorded and an oral summary at the end of the interview was given for common understanding. The summary and audio file of the interview were transcribed. I read through the transcript from the interview several times for understanding, coded for common threads and repeated

behaviours, and sifted through for new insights (Creswell, 2008), using NVivo. The transcripts and summaries served as another source for a discussion of critical reflection.

I gathered all the probes used in the eight interviews prior to this follow up interview to focus discussion and to read the summaries for key ideas and themes. The probes that I used for this follow up interview were:

- When is it more useful to journal about successes rather than concerns or critical incidents?
- When does, journaling provide distance?
- When does journaling help to bring issues closer to tease out meaning?
- When is it more useful to have a framework to journal?
- When is it more useful to use freestyle writing?
- When is rereading our journal entries helpful?
- When is journaling not helpful?
- What shapes journal writing?
- Does teaching experience play a role in journal writing? And if so, what role?
- When does journal writing help you to get your thoughts on paper?
- When does it help you to write about a situation?

These questions guided the conversation and were shared with the participants at the interview. The conversation focused on journal writing, engagement in critical reflection, and points of agreement and disagreement that surfaced during the interviews. They could check their understanding and perceptions with each other's experiences during the interview.

Data Source: Journals.

A key use of narrative inquiry is to uncover general themes or plots in the stories recounted by participants. Journals often are the vehicle used to tell about stories or experiences and to revisit and reflect on events that shape lives. Some teachers use their professional journals in this way.

There are many ways to gather data when using narrative inquiry as a methodology. To inform their research, the narrative inquirer can use data in the form of field texts such as journals. Callister notes, “journals can help develop narrative skills, integrate theory research and practice, release feelings about experiences, see different truths in a situation and increase observational skills” (as cited in Travers, 2010, p. 205). Edwards-Groves (2013) suggests that field texts serve as a catalyst for dialogues or conversations and act as artifacts and representations of the stories that people are living and sharing. As with interviews, texts can be used to elicit main ideas or themes in the recounted stories that teachers tell as part of their lived experiences.

In narrative inquiry, it is helpful to use journals to gather stories, explore the evidence of teachers’ use of journals for critical space, what particular conditions promote teachers’ use of journals for critical space, and how journals help teachers to critique and challenge their practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Travers, 2010)). Teachers’ journals contain stories of events and can be used to gather their reflections and their use is an appropriate method for collecting stories and lived experiences to explore examples of teachers’ use of their journals for critical space. Teachers use journals to record classroom stories and experiences to share with others or to reflect on later. The

stories are representations of the classroom experiences and help to illuminate thinking about events as they revisit them in their journals.

Travers (2010) suggests that journals, for example, can act as a record of what teachers say and do in the classroom to be used at a future time for professional development. Journals help us to “retell stories through research texts” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 128) and support our examination of events or phenomenon. Narrative inquiry helps to show how teachers use their practice and reflections to grow professionally. Journals support telling stories of practice and narrative inquiry elicits teachers’ stories about their classrooms. By reading stories captured in their journals, a better understanding of journaling as a reflective tool and the supports that teachers need to sustain this practice are explored. Journals can research texts and later analyze for character, place, scene, plot, tension, end point, narrator, context, tone, similarities and dissimilarities (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 131) or metaphors and epiphanies in narrative inquiry (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

Data Collection: Journals.

A key component of the data collection was teachers’ learning journals. I used participants’ journals and used my own in the study. Each teacher was invited to share excerpts of her choosing from her journal. Four teachers shared excerpts of their journals with me, and one shared the whole journal. The excerpts and the complete journal were read as separate texts and key themes were extracted. Codes were used based on the research questions. Key words and phrases in the interview transcripts and summaries were highlighted using a colour scheme originated in NVivo. The journal and journal excerpts were read and key phrases and references were coded in the same manner. New

phrases and references in the journals that had not appeared in the transcripts or summaries but were related to the research questions and/or the literature review were colour-coded with a colour not previously used.

I noted my thoughts, ideas, and connections from the literature on early years' teaching, action research studies, and classroom experiences. I used my journal to make lists, take note of ideas, and record classroom observations, as well as to keep track of meetings and interviews. At first, I used a paper bound book and later journaled using the memo function of NVivo.

Data Source: Emails.

Polkinghorne (2006) states, "it sometimes becomes apparent that there are gaps in the data. When possible, the researcher gathers additional data to fill in the ensuing links to produce a full and explanatory study...the interdependence of story and data" (p. 18). A follow-up email was sent after the interviews were completed and the journals were collected. The email was helpful in learning how journals support teachers' critique of their practice as well as how they could be supported as journals are used to engage in professional learning opportunities.

The email questions were specific to the research questions that dealt with the following areas of interest:

- How can journals help teachers to critique and challenge their practice?
- How can teachers be supported as they use journals to engage with professional learning opportunities?

The emails provided a further opportunity to reflect. Six teachers responded to the follow-up emails.

Data Collection: Emails.

One teacher corresponded via email four times about her journal writing. She preferred to email her narrative about journal writing rather than participate in an interview. The following questions were sent by email as a follow up to the interviews and sent after I had collected the journals

1. What kind of supports do you need to reflect in your journal about a classroom event or a challenge to practice? Is a quiet space needed? Is time carved out of the day for journaling a necessity? Do you need a place to leave your teaching journal that is safe and secure if you journal at work? Do you need support with journal writing activities? What would be helpful?

2. How does journal writing help you to push your thinking about teaching? Can you give me an example or two from your practice to demonstrate how you discovered something new about your learning or your students' learning because of your journaling? What kind of change in your practice or actions did you make because of this new learning?

Key words and phrases in the emails were highlighted using a colour scheme originated in NVivo. The journal and journal excerpts were read and key phrases and references were coded in the same manner. New phrases and references in the journals that had not appeared in the transcripts or summaries but were related to the research questions and/or the literature review were colour-coded with a colour not previously used.

Participants

The 12 participants in this study participated in interviews, email correspondence, and were asked to share their learning journals or excerpts of the journals over a school year. The participants were from Northern and Southern Ontario, taught a variety of subjects and grade levels, and had different years of experience in teaching, ranging from five to 31 years. The teachers taught in a variety of levels of education, including primary and post-secondary; their teaching assignments varied from science preparation teacher to occasional teacher.

Selection of participants.

One source was ETFO (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario) which has a program that engages female teachers in reflective thinking and action research in their classroom. Each year, 30 teachers participate in the Reflections on Practice (ROP) Women's Leadership Institute, in which they conduct action research in their classrooms, participate in a community of learners, and write reports on their projects.

Six teachers from this group participated in my research. I approached teachers who stated that they were using journaling in their project. Other contacts for potential participants in my research study were teachers who participated in professional development programs run by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Many of these programs asked teachers to reflect in journals on their teaching and learning. For example, Kindergarten and Grades 1 to 3 teachers who participated in the EPCI (Early Primary Collaborative Inquiry) were invited to keep a journal as part of the inquiry project. Across Ontario, many school boards were involved in the annual project, which was a point of contact with teachers who journaled about their classroom work. I spoke

with the administrative resource person who was a principal at a local school and the early years’ consultant with a local school board to find out if there were teachers who had journaled during the project in past years.

Three teachers who participated in EPCI participated in my research. I knew them from previous school board workshops where they had stated that they used journaling or had brought their teaching journals to share data collection with the group.

I spoke with teachers during professional development opportunities to ask if they were willing to speak about their journaling experiences. One was recruited to participate using this method of contact. I contacted a teacher through my work as a graduate student at a local university.

Table 3.1 is an overview of the participants, using pseudonyms.

Table 3.1.

Overview of Participants

Name	Grade taught	Years of experience	Journal or journal excerpt shared	Source of contact
Avery	Occasional teacher	5 years	Yes	ETFO, ROP
Amanda	Kindergarten	12 years	Yes	ETFO, ROP; EPCI
May	Junior/ Intermediate	7 years	Yes	ETFO, ROP
Teresa	Primary science	10 years	No	ETFO, ROP

Shannon	Kindergarten	11 years	No	EPCI; local school board
Karen	High school, post-secondary	37 years	No	Graduate work
Sarah	Primary, Kindergarten	10 years	No	ETFO, ROP
Lana	Primary	9 years	No	ETFO, ROP
Lisa and Brenda	Lisa – primary Brenda – Early Childhood Educator	Lisa – 10 years Brenda – 21 years	Yes	EPCI
Laura	Kindergarten	10 years	Yes	ETFO, ROP; EPCI

Note. ETFO is the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario; EPCI is the Early Primary Collaborative Inquiry project of the Ministry of Education; ROP is the Reflections on Action Women’s Institute of the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario

Table 3.2 is an overview of the multiple sources of data.

Table 3.2.

Overview of Data: Excerpts

Participant	Length of interview	Length of transcript	Number of pages or words of journal excerpt
Avery**	3 email conv.	524 words	7 pages; 3 journal entries

Amanda** ^f	25 minutes	28 pages, 5666 words	13 pages; 19 entries
Lisa and Brenda**	20 minutes	25 pages, 4326 words	2 pages; 2 entries
Teresa	39 minutes	39 pages, 8483 words	None
May	14 minutes	19 pages, 3310 words	2 journal entries
Shannon**	41 minutes	42 pages, 8462 words	None
Sarah ^f	14 minutes	16 pages, 2390 words	None
Karen**	24 minutes	26 pages, 4617 words	None
Lana	42 minutes	37 pages, 7963 words	None
Paula*	email conversation	297 words	n/a
Laura	n/a	n/a	50 pages

Note. *Respondent did not want to be interviewed or share her journal though did agree to share an email conversation; ** Respondents answered follow up email listing examples of how their journals critiqued and challenged their practice; ^f took part in follow-up interview

The twelve participants in this study use journal writing to think critically about their daily work. Below is a summary of the participant, number of years of teaching experience and how each was contacted. The level of participation in the study is outlined, including whether each participant shared journal excerpts and how they participated in the study through email or interview.

Avery. Avery has been an occasional teacher for five years. She has a master's degree and is considering doctoral work in education. She was contacted through ROP as a teacher conducting action research on her practice. She was given a reflective journal as part of ROP and journaled during the times allotted at the training sessions. She received a manual that contained more information about the use of journals to gather data of practice. Avery shared excerpts of her journal with me and participated in an email correspondence about her journaling experiences. She participated in a follow up email.

Amanda. Amanda works in the Primary Division at a school with very high student needs. She has been teaching since 2001 and taught Kindergarten for the past two years. Amanda has conducted action research in her classroom. She was contacted through ROP and used a reflective journal during these workshops. She was given a journal to write in and information in a manual about using journaling to gather data for her research project. She participated in an interview, sent me her entire journal, attended the follow up meeting as well as sent follow up email correspondence. Amanda uses a personal journal to note her thoughts outside of her teaching and has kept a journal since she was young. In her professional work, she used a journal to gather data for her research project with ETFO. She recorded her classroom observations, plans, and ideas

after her workshop with ROP and was encouraged by her project group's facilitator to try journaling.

Lisa and Brenda. Lisa and Brenda work together as educators in a Kindergarten classroom. Lisa is a teacher and Brenda is an ECE. They have been teaching partners for several years and have a relationship of respect and sharing. Both have been very active in shaping full time Early Years' learning in their school board. Since they work as a team at their school and felt that they would be more comfortable interviewing together about their journaling experience I interviewed them together and all correspondence and follow up was conducted with both. They each signed a consent form to participate and received a letter of information about the research study. I invited them to a second interview to check my understanding of the emerging trends that began to surface after the interviews. They sent two excerpts from their jointly-written journal and participated in the follow up email correspondence. Lisa used a journal in her private life. She began using a shared journal with Brenda after it was suggested to gather the data of her practice by the Early Learning coordinator for her school board. Brenda had not previously used a journal; she began to journal with Lisa for the EPCI.

Teresa. I met Teresa during a professional development opportunity. She had taught for ten years and had participated in, as well as conducted, teacher research. She has a specialization in science. The Ontario Ministry of Education has recognized her as an exemplary teacher for her work on establishing an Eco club in her school. She participated in a research project about exemplary teachers and participated in the ROP as a teacher researcher. She stayed an additional two years as a facilitator and was responsible for supporting a small group of teacher researchers as they planned,

implemented, and wrote about a change to their practice. Teresa participated in an interview about her journaling practices. She had said that she would share her journal though did not do so and did not explain why. Teresa uses journal writing in her classroom teaching and has done so since she was a new teacher. She journals about her classroom practice as well as during her research projects with ETFO and specialization courses.

May. May taught for seven years. She worked in a same gender classroom at the intermediate level and has been involved in two research projects through ROP, one year as the principal investigator and the second as a facilitator. May participated in an interview and sent in two excerpts from her learning journal. She is new to journaling. She journaled for her research project with ETFO though had not used journaling prior to this experience.

Shannon. Shannon taught since 2002 in small urban and rural schools in the Canadian North. She has a background in Early Childhood development and teaches Kindergarten. She also teaches adult students enrolled in the education program at her local university. Shannon participated in an interview and a follow up email correspondence. She chose not share her journal. Shannon uses a journal in her daily teaching. Her journal entries are written on post-it notes and she has used this method to keep track of her thinking for many years.

Sarah. Sarah worked at many northern Canadian schools during her career as a teacher. She taught Grade 2, although spent some time in Early Years' classrooms at the same school as Amanda. Sarah has been involved in classroom research both as a researcher as well as a facilitator through ROP. She has three years of experience in

conducting and facilitating teacher research. Sarah participated in an interview and a follow up interview. She used a journal to gather data for her research project with ROP. She has facilitated journaling for other teachers as a group leader with the ROP program.

Karen. Karen is a post-secondary teacher who was an English high school teacher and guidance counselor for 37 years. She taught in many schools, including a women's prison, and worked with both adults and adolescents. Karen participated in an interview but did not share any journal excerpts. She did send a follow up email. Karen has used both personal and professional journals since she began teaching.

Lana. Lana is a second career teacher. She taught at the elementary school level for ten years and had a leadership role in her school. Lana completed a master's degree in Education and participated in action research projects as a participant and a researcher. Like Amanda, she was given a teacher's journal during ROP and participated in a few sessions of journal writing. She was given a manual that outlined the benefits of journaling to gather data. She participated in an interview about her journaling experiences. Lana did not keep her journals after they were completed and did not share any excerpts. She has used professional and personal journals throughout her life and in both her teaching and nursing careers.

Paula. Paula taught for 17 years. I met her during ROP and worked with her for a year. She was a facilitator of ROP and participated in the program as a teacher researcher the previous year. One afternoon as she was addressing a group of teachers at the workshop, she mentioned that she used journaling in her teaching and learning. I approached her to ask if she would be interested in participating in my research study. Originally she was unwilling to participate and believed that her journal and writing were

private. Paula agreed to respond to my comments about journal writing in an email that she gave me permission to use in my research.

Laura. I taught Kindergarten for 12 years in French Immersion in a northern Canadian school. I wrote in a teaching journal for two projects, EPCI and ALP (Annual Learning Plan), prior to using my journal for this research. Journaling has become a very important part of my daily teaching. I write in my journal during the school year and use my journal as data.

Data Analysis

There are several ways to analyze data collected using interview, journals, and email methods. Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk (2007) argue that analyzing stories in narrative inquiry involves searching for epiphanies and metaphors revealed through storytelling. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that analyzing texts in narrative inquiry consists of chronicling and summarizing field notes such as journals and transcripts from interviews and is helpful when exploring stories as data. Labov (1982) points out that it can be useful to search for general themes to orient the reader in the story (as cited in Polkinghorne, 1988).

I used the data analysis software, NVivo, to analyze multiple data sources including transcripts and summary of key points that the teachers had agreed to from the interviews, teachers' learning journals, my teaching journal, and email correspondence from the teachers. Data analysis was ongoing throughout the research study. I created folders for each of the data sources and then subfolders for each of the participants. I created memos that became part of my journaling about points of agreement and disagreement and reflections regarding the interviews.

Three ways to visualize the data provided an initial understanding of potential key themes and emerging patterns. Attention was given to the educators' use of metaphors and epiphanies to support a deepening understanding of how they created critical spaces through their journals. Word trees (Schneiderman, 1992), tag clouds (Harvey & Bauman, 2012), and graphs (Almstrum et al., 2008) were created using NVivo to highlight the use of language and patterns in coding in the interviews by the participants, in their journals, and in their email correspondence. The branches in the Word tree illustrate the different ways that the participants spoke about journaling. In a tag cloud, the number of times a word appears in the interviews, journals, and email correspondence will result in larger font for those words.

Interviews, journals, and email correspondence related to the teachers' comment about journaling were read line by line. After being entered into NVivo, data were coded into categories. Like comments were grouped together; these are referred to as parent nodes. Similar or related statements made by the participants were then classified into subgroups. In NVivo, subgroups are referred to as child nodes. For each of the data sources, including interviews, journals, and email correspondence, 11 parent nodes and seven child nodes were created illustrating the teachers' comments about journaling. The parent node is reflection while the child nodes are classroom practice and self-awareness. The parent node private versus public endeavour includes the child nodes private and public. The parent node format of journal involves the child nodes computer journaling, free style writing, and template. There are nine further parent nodes: planning next steps, time constraints, making learning visible, journaling to celebrate success, being comfortable with journals, journaling about negative experiences, journaling as tedious,

and journaling comes with experience. The last nine parent nodes are not grouped further into subcategories as the teachers' comments did not necessitate further classification.

A deductive process (Milke & Warner, 2011) was used comparing the themes that emerged from the literature review with the elements contained in the data. At the same time, using an inductive process (Allen, Kaestle, & Goldberg, 2011), the importance of the relevant themes was validated using NVivo's classification features to identify counts for codes linked to each theme. The key themes from the literature review that shaped critical reflection in journal were time and audience. The themes that emerged from the data were having a secure place in which to journal, a belief that change is possible, and a belief that change brings about professional development surfaced from the data, including the importance of having time to write in journals and the concern for privacy and/or a trusting relationship if the journal is to be shared with colleagues.

Interviews.

I looked for references made during the interviews concerning critical spaces, the conditions under which teachers access these spaces, narratives about journaling, stories about how teachers used journals to challenge their practice, and what kind of supports teachers need to sustain journaling in their practice as I read and reread the transcripts. The codes assigned to these references were colour-coded for easier reference using the colour choices offered by NVivo and to create a visual representation of the data. The references were categorized and similar items were grouped. The categories suggested a set of themes or main ideas. Summaries of the references in the interviews were created using NVivo to better understand the importance of each of the themes. For example, the

teachers referenced reflection, reflections on classroom practice, and self-awareness more than other ideas during interviews, in their journals, and in emails.

Teachers' learning journals.

Teachers' learning journals were entered in NVivo as they were sent by the teachers through email, fax, or the post. Handwritten journals, including my journal, were scanned and entered into NVivo; electronic journal entries files were inserted into the data analysis program, using the Insert function in NVivo. As with the interview transcriptions, I looked for references that pertained to the research questions and searched for stories that highlighted the use of journaling, in particular focusing on whether the excerpts were critical using Dart et al.'s (1998) hierarchy. The references were colour-coded and categorized, and these categories suggested a set of themes. Summaries of the references written about in teachers' learning journals were created using NVivo to understand the importance of each of the themes in the teachers' learning.

Emails.

At the end of the study, I emailed the participants to ask for clarification on several key points. All participants received the same follow-up questions. I received five responses, which were entered into NVivo. I searched for teachers' comments related to the follow up questions and colour-coded them. These were grouped and the main themes surfaced. Summaries of the references mentioned in the emails were created using NVivo to better understand the importance of each of the themes to the research questions.

Summary

Narrative inquiry methodology is used in this study since it allows for the collection and study of stories and experiences to better understand how people view

significant events, how they are feeling considering these events, and their reflections as they share these stories and experiences. The data collection methods are convergent interviewing, collection of teachers' journals, email correspondence and self-narrative. During the interviews, teachers shared their experiences in the form of stories. The retelling or reliving of the stories change and shape their experiences. Email correspondence is a vehicle to share stories or clarify the teachers' thinking about the role of journaling in their practice.

Eleven participants and the researcher were purposefully selected for their use of journaling as a reflective tool in their practice. They were interviewed about their use of journals in their practice and four shared teaching journals. One emailed her answers to the research questions. A follow up email was sent to address two research questions. There were multiple data sources, a research journal was kept to support an audit trail, data collection, and analysis were described in detail, all lending to the trustworthiness (Polkinghorne, 1988) of the research study.

Key themes surfaced during the gathering of teachers' stories, shedding light on how the teachers were using journaling to better understand their practice and as a way to collect the stories from their classroom.

Chapter Four: Presentation of the Data

Introduction

This chapter presents the main findings. Five themes were identified through a deductive process comparing the themes that emerged from the literature review with the elements contained in the data and an inductive process during which themes surfaced during data collection and analysis and were most often referred to by the participants. The first theme is that there is evidence that teachers experience both barriers and facilitators when using their journals to access critical space. They can use their journals as critical space only under certain circumstances. The remaining themes help identify the circumstances: audience influences what and how teachers write; time constraints and place shape teachers' efforts to journal; reflection is dependent on a belief in possible change; and reflection is dependent on teachers' beliefs that journaling supports their efforts to develop as teaching professionals. The themes give an understanding of how journals better help teachers to critique and challenge their practice. This understanding allows a clear idea of how teachers can be supported as they use journals for teacher growth.

Overview of the Data Using Tree Maps

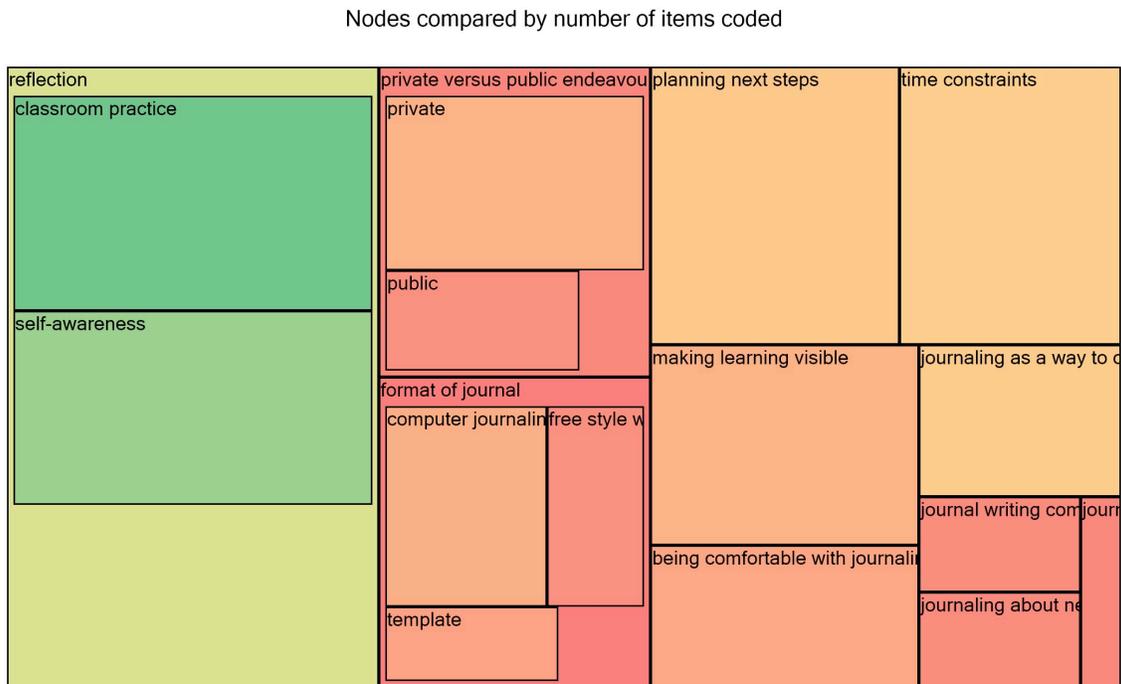
The importance of the relevant themes was validated through NVivo's classification features to identify counts for codes linked to each theme. Five themes emerge that enable an understanding of the relationship between journaling and critical space. Tree Map graphs developed through NVivo analysis visually display the

importance of the various codes and relationships between associated groups of codes (Schniederman, 1992). The list of codes, representing the various themes, is found in Appendix J in Table A-1. Figure 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, display codes, classroom practice and self-awareness, related to the theme that reflections contained in journals range from descriptive to critical.

Tree Map for Interviews

Figure 4.1 summarizes the data from the teacher interviews. The themes of private versus public, reflection, classroom practice, self-awareness and time constraints appear as the largest rectangles in relation to the other rectangles. These were the topics that the teachers most often referred to in the interviews, illustrating their importance to the teachers’ journal writing.

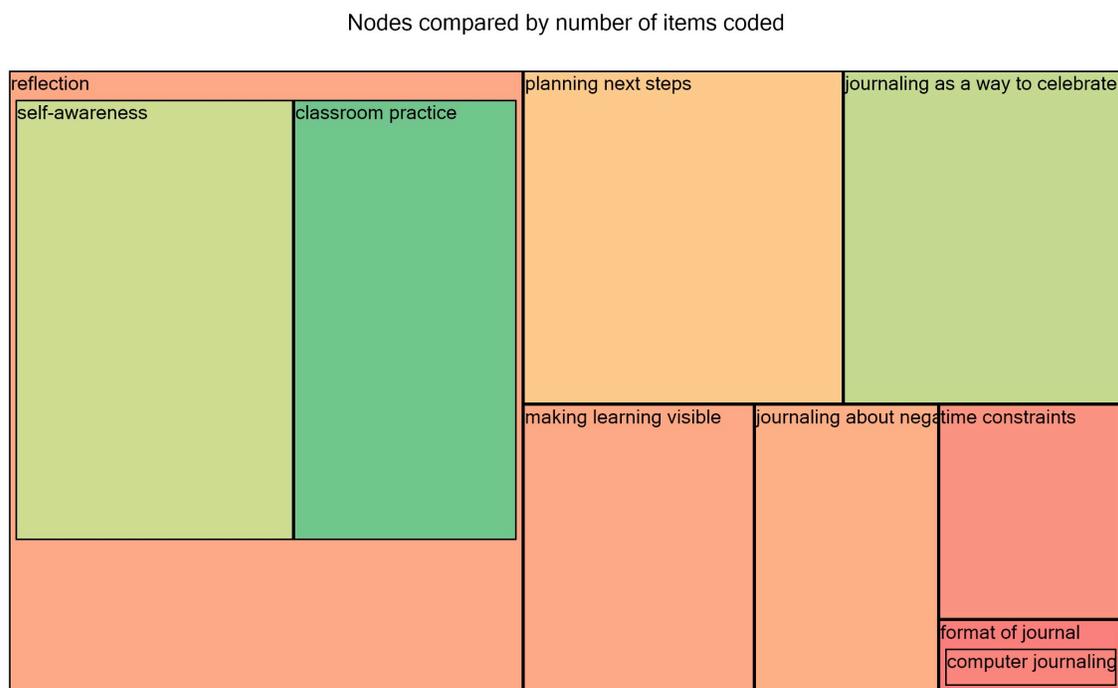
Figure 4.1. Frequency of nodes contained in interviews



Tree Map for Journals

Figure 4.2 shows a visual display of the coded data from the teacher journals. Themes of reflection, classroom practice, self-awareness and time constraints appear as the largest rectangles in relation to the other rectangles. This demonstrates that teachers are thinking about journals as tools of reflection for their classroom practice and are cognizant of time factors. Planning next steps and journaling to celebrate successes appear equally in the teachers’ journals. Making learning visible, journaling about negative experiences and time constraints are referenced in the teachers’ journals as often as each other and speak to their importance.

Figure 4.2 Frequency of nodes contained in journals

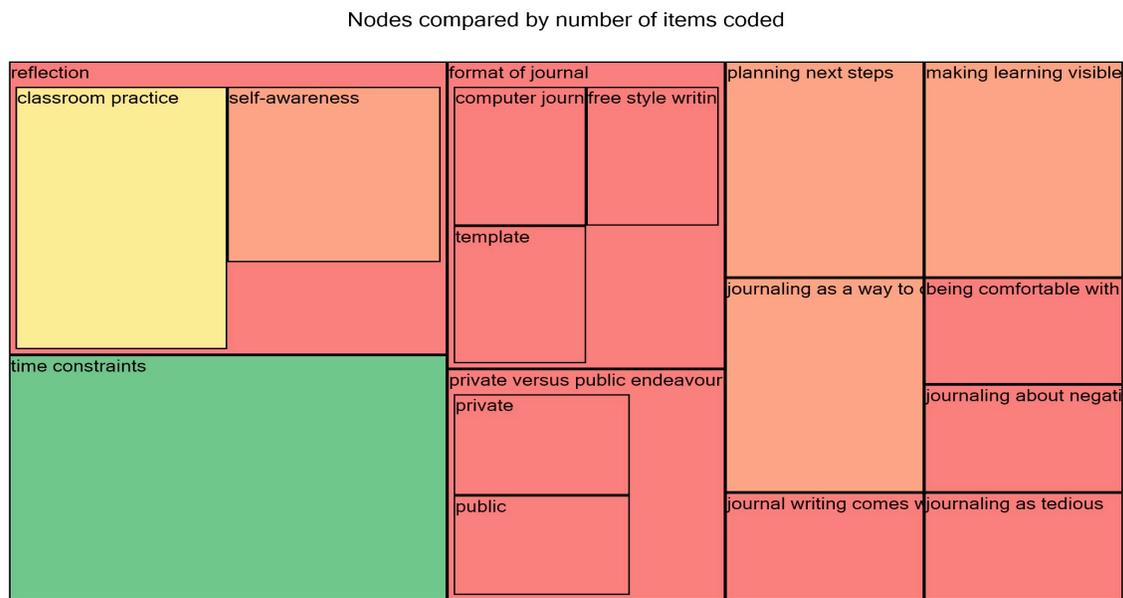


Tree Map for Emails

Figure 4.3 contains the coded data from the teachers’ email correspondence. The theme of time constraints appears as one of the largest rectangles in the figure,

representing the frequency with which time was referenced. Under the parent node of reflection, classroom practice was more often mentioned in the email correspondence than self-awareness.

Figure 4.3 Frequency of nodes contained in emails



Theme 1: Critical Reflection can be Identified as Occurring in Learning Journals

Critical reflections can be identified as occurring in learning journals under certain circumstances. These conditions allow the barriers and facilitators that help or hinder teachers’ use of journals as critical space to be identified. Based on this understanding, the remaining four themes provide an understanding of the conditions under which critical space is accessed.

The interviews, review of journals, and email correspondence revealed that journaling is used for a variety of purposes and not just for critical reflection. As well, critical space exists in journaling and can be identified. The data demonstrate the importance of using journals for critical space varies. Table 4.1 highlights the format of

the teachers’ journals, the strategies they used in their journal, and whether the teachers revisited their journal entries. The table shows that teachers used their journals for a variety of reasons, not only for critical reflections. The table illustrates the way that teachers think about their journaling, using the journal as “a record” (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012) and to “clear their mind” (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). The teachers employed many metaphors to describe their journaling such as when Karen stated that her journal allowed her ideas to “percolate” (Karen, interview, January, 17, 2012) or when Teresa suggested that her journal was a place to “park her thoughts” (Karen, interview, April 2, 2012).

Table 4.1.

Journal format and journaling strategies

Name	Type of journal entry; format	When journaling occurred	Strategies used	Revisit journal entries?
Avery	Paper journal; post –it notes, Rates system strategies in her journal	At home	Gather data	Yes
Amanda	Tablet; observations; freestyle writing; communication logs, tracking sheets	During planning time at school; at home	“serves as a record”, “clear her mind”, “step back”, “to change you need to look at what you are doing first”	Yes

Karen	Paper journal; jot notes	At home	let ideas “percolate”	Yes
Sarah	Paper journal; what?, so what? What next?	At school, (template) and at home (more free flowing)	“reflective tool” “time to think” gather data helps with the “why”	Yes
Teresa	Paper journal; template; post-it notes; freestyle writing	At home; during school	“park your thoughts” “written “representation of her journey as a teacher”	Yes
Shannon	Post-it notes; jot notes on her day plans	At school during lessons	prompt thinking and then action, what is next, “this is what I am thinking. I want to make sure I’m doing”	No
May	On her day plan	At school	“record her thoughts”, gather data of her practice	Sometimes
Lana	Paper journal; freestyle writing	At home; at school during recess or lunch	“voice”, coping, clarify issues, student growth, “letting your thoughts roll as you write”, “record of our thoughts and actions”	Sometimes for research or project work

Lisa and Brenda	Paper journal; freestyle writing	At school during or after lessons	“makes you stop and think about what you are doing” helps you to “revisit why” to set a focus	Yes; go back and add things to the journal
Laura	Paper journal; NVivo software – memo function; freestyle writing	At home	Capture your thoughts, Record observations, to plan next steps Puzzle out ideas, Make connections to the literature	Yes; reread before writing a new entry

Identifying Critical Space

Before examining barriers and facilitators in teachers’ use of journals as critical space, it is necessary to identify critical space. The examination of journals for critical space focused on the content of what teachers wrote in their journals to draw out differences between description and reflection of a critical nature (Dart et al., 1998).

Teachers write about events, student learning, and next steps for individuals in their journals, as well as their learning and thinking. There are many instances in which the entries describe events, situations, or emotions; teachers often describe their efforts to track students’ progress. Amanda, Avery, Lana, and Sarah often begin their journal entries by recounting an event or how they are feeling that day and conclude the entry with what can be identified as critical questions or reflections. Amanda’s journal contains descriptive entries at the beginning of the year until she had settled on a focus for her

journal writing. As time went on, her writing becomes more reflective, challenging what she is thinking and doing in the classroom, raising doubts, engaging with information from professional development opportunities, and touching on underlying issues in her practice. Shannon's journal was, for the most part, descriptive in nature.

Tables 4.2 highlights the content of the teachers' journals (from the entries or participants' descriptions), echoing the reasons for journal writing outlined by Boud (2001). Those considered critical based on Dart et al.'s (1998) description are bolded. The data were gathered from examples teachers shared during interviews, journal excerpts if appropriate, and email correspondence. Many of the journal entries are descriptive accounts of classroom events. Entries illustrate teachers' thoughts about what parts of a lesson worked, report cards, planning ideas, observations, and small group work.

Table 4.2.

Identifying Critical Space: Content of Journals

Name	Content of journal
Avery	Classroom management strategies, student behaviour, student engagement
Amanda	Research , self-regulation, emotions, observations, her feelings, positive experiences, classroom environment , teaching strategies, good conversation
Karen	environment, relationships , events, information about students, student engagement , teaching, connections in her practice
Sarah	Research , oral language, observations of students, plan next steps in learning, attendance, poverty

Teresa	Teaching, research , lesson planning, situations to share with colleagues, feelings, emotions, positive experiences, classroom events, equality, inclusivity
Shannon	Small group work, questions about her practice, teaching, social skills, report card
May	Research , students' comments, classroom events, her practice, her reaction to events
Lana	Personal goals, research , students, observations, student writing, community, sense of belonging, how students view themselves
Lisa and Brenda	Questions for students' learning, observations, notes from meetings, classroom materials, extending learning
Laura	Classroom environment, books and resources , student behaviour, research , next steps, concept maps for projects, reminders, notes during workshops

Table 4.3 identifies which teachers are using their journals for descriptive purposes or critical reflections. Most could be classified as being descriptive; none were totally descriptive. All have comments that are critical and/or reflective in nature.

Table 4.3.

Participant by Nature of Content

Name	Totally descriptive	Primarily descriptive	Equal distribution	Primarily critical	Totally critical
Avery		X			

Amanda		X
Karen		X
Sarah	X	
Teresa	X	
Shannon	X	
May	X	
Lana		X
Lisa/Brenda	X	
Laura		X

There are examples of the range of descriptive and critical entries in the teachers' journals which help to illustrate when and if the conditions for writing critically have been met. Conditions such as space influence the criticality of some teachers' entries such as those written by Karen. While some of her entries are descriptive, she accesses critical space in her journal that can be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on behaviour challenges and recording of classroom events. She reflects on student engagement and how she might involve students who are not participating in the class or how she might take a step back from students who are too involved. She writes in her journal at home since school is not a safe place to journal. The last condition is the belief that the changes teachers make to their practice helps them to become better teachers. In Teresa's practice, journaling helps her to look at her teaching critically. The critical space can be differentiated from more descriptive passages as she reflects on gender as well as equity and inclusivity in the way she asks questions of her students.

Participant Examples

In this section I describe some critical reflection that takes place in participants' journaling.

Avery.

Avery, an occasional teacher who works with young learners, uses her journal for descriptive purposes but critical reflection can be identified as a key part of her journal. Avery reflects on how she needs to remain firm and follow her rules when she is faced with challenging behaviours as an occasional teacher. Her journal supports her thinking about her practice in regards to classroom rules and expectations. Although she does not change her rules after her reflection, her journal entry provokes some initial consideration about how change may enable her to be a more active part of the classroom. How can occasional teachers build relationships with children that they have limited interaction with?

As an occasional teacher, she compares the differences in challenging behaviours between a play-based Kindergarten and one that uses more traditional teaching methods. She observes in her interactions with the different classes that young students have fewer behaviour struggles in a play-based program. More specifically, Avery writes about how her classroom management strategies are helping her address challenging behaviours. She argues, "this class was difficult to do, the age plus two-minute rule. There were so many behaviour issues that took up so much time" (Avery, journal entry, February 7, 2012).

The classroom management strategies she employs are attending to some of the behaviour issues she faces as an occasional teacher. She reviews a classroom rule with

her students and how they remember the rule although still find it challenging to follow. She concludes that the students are sitting too long on the carpet for their age and that the circle time routine is developmentally inappropriate for those students. In this example, her journal entry is of a critical nature, disrupting the routines for circle time or whole group activities on the carpet that have been set in place by the regular classroom teacher. As an occasional teacher, she is required to follow the outline of the day left for her.

She writes, “I tried to have many positive interactions but students required a great many warnings, reminders, and consequences” (Avery, journal entry, February 7, 2012). Her journal helps her to puzzle through why students are unable to follow the classroom rule as well as next steps on how to approach this challenge. She can think through her writing by revisiting events; her thinking becomes clearer as she writes and then reflects on her entries. It is in revisiting her journal that she often adds more critical reflections to her journal.

When Avery reviews her journal before teaching the class again, she reflects, “one of the biggest insights I have had is that I was too concerned with what the children will think” (Avery, email to author, May 14, 2013). She believes that as an occasional teacher her “rules are her rules” though at the same time, her journal helps her to think about relationships and how to “meld more seamlessly into their classroom” (Avery, journal entry, February 15, 2012).

Much of what she writes seems descriptive in nature as seen when she writes:

This class had exemplary behaviour and part of this was I am sure keeping them on the carpet for brief periods of time. They are a play-based classroom so our meetings were quick to the point and fun. There were few behaviour issues. The

agenda helped the children plan their day. I had the children do a name activity and immediately upon arrive (sic) to give me time and help with attendance. It fit with their routine so it went smoothly. (Avery, journal entry, February 15, 2012)

While this part of her journal entry is descriptive in nature she returns to her journal and adds a more critical reflection about developmentally appropriate practice. Avery refers to how her activity fits with the schedule planned by the teacher, reiterating her beliefs about “melding seamlessly” as an occasional teacher into the established routines of the classroom (Avery, journal entry, February 15, 2012).

As she explains, “this age of children really like their routines and are quick to tell you when you are doing something different from their regular teacher. The closer the day aligns to their usual day, the more comfortable they feel”, (Avery, journal entry, February 15, 2012). She links her thinking to the importance of creating a safe and warm environment and adhering to routines in order that students know what to expect during the day (see, e.g., Carter & Curtis 2003; Wein, 2011), demonstrating some criticality in her journal writing according to Dart et al.’s (1998) conceptualization.

She moves back and forth between descriptive and critical reflections in her journal. She describes an event in the classroom and connects it to a reflection about the importance of getting to know students and creating relationships though does not state it as such. She writes, “I did a song with them called *More We Get Together* that has a verse for adding everyone’s names, it was so helpful for me because it reinforced seeing the student and learning their name” (Avery, journal entry, February 15, 2012). At the end of the day, she notes, “I definitely bonded with this class. I was called by name, received art, was invited into conversations, come to for comfort, hugs and celebrations”

(Avery, journal entry, February 15, 2012). Later that day, she reflects more critically on the revised early years' program in Ontario and developmentally appropriate practice. This is one of the few examples of Brookfield's (1995) stricter definition of criticality as she briefly refers to systemic changes to Ontario's early years' program. She meets Dart et al. (1998)'s use of critical reflection by anchoring her discussion of early years' learning and developmentally appropriate practice with references to her practice:

FDK [Full Day Kindergarten] programing is much more appropriate for this age of students. It gives them [students] time to explore and learn and the freedom to do it on their terms. Learning students' names is critical. K [Kindergarten] students are very offended if you don't know their name or get it wrong. It was relationship building as well. (Avery, journal entry, February 15, 2012)

Another day in a different classroom, Avery writes more descriptively in her journal:

The children did not deal well with transitions and were incredibly rambunctious after coming back from the library; after coming back after recess it was very difficult to teach them and I had to send a child with ADHD [Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder] from the room. The beginning of the day with an activity to get started on right away was successful but the students with behaviour issues need a great deal of encouragement and some did not complete even the morning entry activity (which is not unusual the teacher tells me). (Avery, journal entry, February 23, 2012)

She describes the day at school with a new group of students and recounts activities and some of the behaviour challenges she faces though does not take the opportunity in her journal to reflect more critically on why these challenges came about, an alternative

outcome to the challenging behaviour or her actions, or what the children's perspective might have been at the library or during the morning activity.

While many of her entries are descriptive, she accesses critical space in her journal that can be differentiated from more descriptive entries about behaviour challenges and classroom activities. In the critical space provided by her journal, she reflects on student engagement, developmentally and age-appropriate practices, and play-based learning.

Amanda.

Amanda, a Primary teacher, is one of the participants who uses her journal for frequent critical reflection. At the same time, descriptive content is also present. Factors such as time at the beginning of the school year when she establishes routines and gets to know the children have shaped the type of entries she writes. It is only much later that Amanda reflects more deeply on the emotions, sensory issues, poverty, and family circumstances that lead her to clarify her understanding about her students.

She often begins by describing her emotions at the end of the day. Her journal is a place to write how she feels about the day:

Trying to sit every night and just write about how I felt about the day. I went through phases of it basically just being like notes about what happened during the day, just like tracking things. It wasn't always reflective. (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012)

In her journal Amanda describes the behaviour of a student and her beliefs about her growing awareness of her needs, emotions, and actions with little critical reflection. An

example of a more critical entry is illustrated in her journal on March 26, 2012 when she writes:

Overall she is better at articulating her feelings, and seems to feel safe sharing. For example, she was hiding over near the writing centre today at 3:05 with her jacket on. I asked her if there was some kind of problem and she said yes. She told me that she misses her mom. She is more aware of it at the end of the day when she is going home to foster care and has difficulty with the transition.

(Amanda, journal entry, March 26, 2012)

Here Amanda reflects on the causes of the child's challenging behavior at that time of day. She uses her journal to realize that the transitions from school to foster care is an important reason for the child's struggles.

Her entries move back and forth between descriptive accounts and critical reflections according to Dart et al. (1998). She explains that at times her journaling is descriptive, a recording of simple observations from the classroom, while at other times her writing and thinking become more critical, particularly when focused on students' emotions and self-regulation in the classroom, a challenge to her practice. "I found the times when I could really sit and write more is when I was really able to kind of take a step back and maybe think of a different way of attacking things" (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). When Amanda thinks about alternative outcomes or new perspectives, her journal entries rise to the level of criticality espoused by Dart et al. (1998).

One example of a descriptive entry concerns her observations about the letter and number fluency of her students:

This week we checked alphabet knowledge (recognition of upper and lower case, as well as sounds). It was interesting to see how many of the students know 80% of their upper and lower case letters as compared to previous years. I know there are many factors at work, and that each group is different, but in general their alphabet knowledge is better than in previous years. (Amanda, journal entry, September 19-23, 2011)

Although she alludes to many reasons why students may be more knowledgeable, she does not explore this topic further. In a similarly descriptive way a few entries later, she notices students engaged during their first week of school:

Adding blocks and chairs to the cars to support their ramps. They have found random objects (beads and stickers) to decorate drawing and writing projects.

Without actual art materials out they have used writing centre materials to make fans, necklaces and hats. (Amanda, journal entry, September 12-16, 2011)

Although her descriptions are not necessarily critical in nature, she begins to reflect on how she will keep pace with students' growing curiosity and imaginative play. Amanda touches on the relationship that students have with materials, environment, and each other as they interact in the classroom though does not explore this aspect of the classroom environment or the link between creativity and learning more critically in her journal. She writes, "I am concerned that the wide range of imagination I am seeing and the constantly changing uses of materials will make it challenging for me to keep up or to focus their learning through play for any meaningful length of time" (Amanda, journal entry, September 12-16, 2011). She later refers to changes that she has made to her practice such as morning routine changes.

Another example of the descriptive nature of some entries is, “A is very tired in the morning. He has gotten better at telling us when he is tired but still doesn’t seem to know how to tell us he is hungry” (Amanda, journal entry, March 26, 2012). Amanda’s observations focus on the emotions and energy level of her student. Although her reflection helps her to clarify her thinking about her student’s behaviour in the morning as he comes to school, she rarely writes about underlying factors until much later in the year. In the spring, after many months of journaling and near the end of her project on self-regulation, she reflects on some of the root causes of challenging behaviours in her classroom:

I know my paper for ROP is supposed to be about testing a strategy and seeing how it works, but I realize that it is just not ever going to be that simple. There are so many factors involved that we cannot control. Students’ reactions to other students, to things that happen at home, there is so much. Then add hunger, lack of sleep, diet, consequences for things at home that cause anger later in the day at school. I understand that and it completely makes sense. (Amanda, journal entry, April 2-3, 2012)

In this journal reflection, Amanda reflects critically about issues of control in the school day according to Dart et al.’s (1998) definition. Her journal entry does not rise to the level of criticality according to Brookfield (1995) to look at systemic changes or underlying assumptions. Using her journal to reflect on a child’s actions, she explores root causes and identifies some key concerns such as being tired and hungry as possible reasons for the students’ behaviour. She notes, “D has been feeling tired and sick but has been making fairly good choices anyway. She often struggles to control her behaviour

when she is feeling tired but she has been doing better with that” (Amanda, journal entry, March 26, 2012). She writes later about why this student chose to work at the play dough table to calm herself and begins to think more critically about the child’s actions, the use of sensory materials, and self-regulation.

She describes how she tried to talk to the student about the choice to work with the sensory material and the student’s response. In many journal entries, Amanda begins by describing an event and adds critical reflections at the end of the entry for further thought. Her comments about the reason why the child chose the material, her observations about the child’s emotions, how the child is self-regulating, and her conclusion that he is trying to meet his sensory needs by using play dough are critical. She writes:

He chose to come in after I buzzed the office and angrily sat himself down at the play dough table. That seemed to calm him down. I said, ‘this will help you feel calm’ and he said, ‘no it won’t’, angrily but I wonder if that is why he chose it.

(Amanda, journal entry, March 29, 2012)

Amanda examines her student’s feelings as he transitioned during the school day. She writes next steps in her journal to check-in with students to help them develop more self-awareness and gauge her teaching and learning regarding the students’ emotions as she seeks an alternate outcome, “I don’t know how successful my observations are really going to be. I will try the visual check-in next week and see how that goes. I don’t know if it will help or not, but I will try it” (Amanda, journal entry, April 6, 2012).

She later writes:

I still find that I am having a difficult time with the same students in the morning. They are articulating their feeling but not yet motivated internally to find a way to resolve their feeling in a way that helps them to join a group or follow routine.

(Amanda, journal entry, May 7, 2012)

She reflects on strategies for self-regulation in relation to her students, teaching practices, and action research project. She frequently describes events in her classroom or outside in the playground as they relate to her project. This journal entry is descriptive in nature and does not meet the criteria in terms of reflecting on alternative outcomes or different perspectives. Amanda simply retells the event in her journal, including both her and the child's actions, without critical reflection:

She didn't want to get off the equipment. I reminded her that last time she did not get off in time she spent the following day at the office while we played outside. We both reminded the remaining students. When most students were lined up I gave a ten count, slowly. I told them that if they weren't off by then they would miss outside time tomorrow. (Amanda, journal entry, April 11, 2012)

Amanda's critical use of journaling is seen when she uses it to make connections in her daily work, "you make connections but then put them together and maybe this is the problem that I need to solve" (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). Her use of journaling for critical space provides Amanda with a way to note possible ties between students and classroom routines, focusing on what the issues are in her classroom rather than simply the results or consequences of her or her students' actions.

The entry in the first weeks of school begins with a description:

This first day of school was busy as usual and felt like any other September, for the most part. I did notice that students had no trouble coming in and finding their name at a cubby. They also did well at cleaning up. I must note that out of 21 students, 6 of them did not attend full time JK [Junior Kindergarten] and 2 did not attend JK at all. (Amanda, journal entry, September 7-9, 2011)

Amanda adds reflections about possible reasons why the students are doing well that day such as:

Clean up time went smoothly. This may be in part because we have fewer toys out in the room, but in general it seemed that most of the children just ‘knew what to do’. They chose a centre and got to work putting things back where they belong, they asked if they didn’t know where to put something yet, and they got the room cleaned up quickly with very few reminders. Overall the adults had to do very little during this part of routine that is usually very stressful in September...

During whole group writing, most children got to work right away. Many of the children were ready to start adding letters to their work. No one hid under the table, no one crumpled their paper, and no one scribbled all over their page because they didn’t know what to do. (Amanda, journal entry, September 7-9, 2011)

The rest of her entry describes the students’ sign-in routine, readiness to read, work at centres, and how they manage their belongings. At this early stage in the year, her entries focus mainly on describing how the day unfolded, though she begins to make some connections to what the children already know from their previous year at school and how fewer resources in the room are shaping the classroom environment in a positive

way. Amanda uses her journal more critically when she reflects on these connections rather than simply describing the children's actions in the room.

While most of the critical comments come later in the year, some of her entries in September are critical and begin to include her growing awareness of the students' need to communicate their emotions and a gap in her knowledge that she needs to research to better respond to her students' social thinking:

We worked on emotional vocabulary this week. That was one area that seemed a little lacking for me. We are working on developing that for the purpose of being emotionally aware and solving difficulties with peers and expressing needs to adults. (Amanda, journal entry, September 12-16, 2011)

At times, her writing helps her to see beyond a behaviour and determine the reason for the behaviour. For example, Amanda reflects on one child's struggle to self-regulate during the morning routine. The student is very tired and finds it difficult to engage in some of the learning experiences she plans. She observes that he is often running around the classroom during this time of day and has the most difficulties settling into classroom routines. She notices a pattern in his behaviour that she has captured in her journal, demonstrating critical reflection. She notes in her journal, "very tired this morning. He has gotten better at telling us when he is tired but still doesn't seem to know how to tell us when he is hungry" (Amanda, journal entry, March 26, 2012). Later, she remarks, "at the end of the day he was dressed but back in the classroom and hiding behind or under the light table. When I asked how he was feeling he again told me that he was too tired" (Amanda, journal entry, March 26, 2012).

The following week, Amanda reflects more on the same child's learning, "Had a couple of difficult days. He left the classroom several times. One note of interest – he was very wound up, angry in the morning that K was not sitting with him on her first day back. I didn't realize that he was looking forward to having her back" (Amanda, journal entry, March 29, 2012). She concludes, "From first thing in the morning he did complain of being tired. We have gone back to always asking him if he is hungry in the morning instead of expecting him to know" (Amanda, journal entry, March 29, 2012). Again, rather than simply describing the child's actions, she searches for underlying reasons for this child's behaviour in the morning, demonstrating how her writing is critical. She reflects on whether he is hungry and if he understands why he is tired when arriving first thing in the morning. Amanda helps the child to identify his emotions, meet his need for food, and be ready to learn.

This connection between behaviours of a student and the classroom routine is made visible as she writes about the child in her journal. Amanda connects how her morning routine challenges the child's readiness to be attentive, participate appropriately during circle time, and meet certain expectations, noting how students may need to up-regulate or down-regulate to be calm and focused for circle time. Later she begins to change her morning circle as she becomes more aware of the struggles of many of her students during this time of day. Questioning and changing her behaviour as an appropriate response rather than focusing on changing students' behaviour is a sign of critical reflection according to Dart et al.'s (1998) notions of criticality. She searches for alternative outcomes and looks at the issues through the eyes of her students.

Amanda's journal is a mix of descriptive and critical entries. She comments that at times she only noticed the surface-level issues not the root causes of challenges until she began to journal: "I am already wondering how I am going to adapt my program to meet the skills and needs of this group who seem so much more comfortable at school, with routines and working in general" (Amanda, journal entry, September 12-16, 2012). She reflects on how the children in her classroom and their learning needs are quite different from the previous year's class. She thinks critically about her program through the lens of her new students, their perspectives, wondering how to change or adjust her practice to be responsive. Using the critical space in her journal to understand her students and her teaching practice affords Amanda an opportunity to think more deeply and more critically about her practice. The critical space can clearly be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on behaviour challenges, numeracy, and literacy activities the children engage in, and conversations with children. In the critical space provided by her journal, she reflects on how the environment shapes learning, the importance of teaching social and emotional skills for self-regulation, and play-based learning.

Karen.

Karen, a post-secondary teacher, uses her journal for critical reflection and descriptive purposes, "my journal often is about reflecting back on my lesson for the day or the activities for the day and thinking about where they were successful. If I notice that somebody was not engaged, how could I engage them?" (Karen, interview, January 17, 2012). She makes notes that she can refer to if a situation escalates or if she needs more background information to support a student's learning.

While some of Karen's journal entries were descriptive, she accesses critical space in her journal. The critical space can be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on behaviour challenges and recording of classroom events. In the critical space provided by her journal, she reflects on student engagement.

Sarah.

Sarah, a primary teacher, uses her journal to keep track of students' progress and to describe classroom events. At times, the journal provides critical reflection in relation to her action research project. She believes that one way to explore the questions of her practice that puzzle her is writing in her journal to understand different perspectives, find a new way of doing, and solve classroom issues. Sarah describes herself as getting "dug in to trying to solve those [difficult] problems" and reflects that many times resolving conflicts often takes more time than expected, suggesting that "they cannot be solved in one day or even one year" (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012).

She uses her journal to study different questions such as student absenteeism, oral language development, wait times, and her language in the classroom. Through her writing, she searches for patterns with students who are often away and then can reflect on the issue of student absenteeism on oral language development. At the time, Sarah does not elaborate on why students in her classroom are often absent or what some of the underlying factors might be such as poverty, disengagement, health and wellness, family situations or how the school culture shaped relationships within her classroom or the school though she begins to explore the link between absenteeism and low oral language development.

“Writing makes you think harder and it also opens up a better area like something you remembered or tried. I think it is a great tool” (Sarah, interview, June 21, 2012).

Sarah mentions the focus of her journaling changes from a problem she identifies in her practice concerning low oral language scores and how this awareness develops over time to student absenteeism, becoming more critical in nature. She begins to see how her students’ home life shapes their experiences at school and critically reflects:

Because when you’re writing, you’re thinking about all of the other, all the factors that come into play. I’m seeing you know things that are happening at home with students or outside of school or the way they’re coming in the morning. And I feel like maybe for a long time I’ve been trying to control things I can’t control or trying to have more impact than I can reasonably have. (Sarah, interview, June 21, 2012)

Her journaling is at times descriptive. Sarah suggests, “the journaling was very directed at the kids. What I was observing during their interactions” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012). As she focused on oral language development, she notes “improvements in their [students’] oral language and interacting more” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012). She mentions that recording her students during small group work supports her efforts to journal about students’ oral language proficiency. She observes that recording students, “really got them talking” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012) and modifies her language to encourage them to speak more after transcribing her students’ conversations in her journal.

Sarah remarks that with time, the focus of her journaling changed as the year went on from observations about the students’ use of oral language to her teaching. She states,

“probably the biggest thing would be for my teaching was my language. The language I was using with the students” (Sarah, interview, January 16, 2012). She refers to using different words and being more aware of her word choices when encouraging students to speak. Her journal gives her a space to think more critically about the language she is using with the students who are struggling in her classroom and she is more open to her students’ perspectives about her language use. She moves her journal writing from descriptive accounts of what the children are saying to more critical reflections on her use of language in the classroom that hinders student learning.

She notes that her journal continues to be a place as well for strategies to try to help her students increase their oral language proficiency “[The journal] certainly helped me to see that you need to give them more time” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012). Other topics she considers are teacher wait times and absenteeism; she uses both critical space and descriptive space to reflect on her teaching and her students.

In the descriptive space in her journal, she records events of the day, plans for next steps in learning, and transcribes students’ conversations during lessons, her “on the fly observations” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012). In the critical space provided by her journal, Sarah writes about the connections she makes between student absenteeism and oral language development. Initial thinking about her language use and how it shapes learning rises to the level of criticality (Dart et al., 1998). She notes, “you think you know it and then but when you start tracking and you’re dating and you’re looking at so and so is away again and again...starting to see a real pattern” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012). Noticing a previously hidden pattern or connection demonstrates criticality in her

reflections whereas simply tracking and dating language use are considered primarily descriptive entries.

Shannon.

An early years' teacher, Shannon's journal supports her thinking about practice and students; her entries act as a catalyst to help her plan next steps for student learning. She jots down notes to add to her day plans and considers them a way of reflecting on her work as well as reminders about changes to lessons, "the notes that I take. They make me think" (Shannon, interview, May 17, 2012). Examples that she draws on from her practice are changes she needs to make to a turn and talk exercise. She mentions talking to families about concerns in the classroom or about particular children that need extra support in literacy or numeracy. Shannon uses an analogy to demonstrate how her writing supports her thinking; her ideas "stew" in her mind after she captures them on paper (Shannon, interview, May, 17, 2012).

While many of her entries are descriptive, she accesses critical space in her journal. This can be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on behaviour challenges, teaching strategies, and classroom activities. In the critical space provided by her journal, she reflects on relationships.

Lana.

Lana uses her journal to critically reflect on practice in relation to her action research project as well as to describe the day's events. The belief in possible change shapes her entries and demonstrates how she is accessing both critical space and descriptive space through her writing.

Journaling helps her to connect deeply with her classroom practice. “Tracking and journaling are two different things” (Lana, interview, April 30, 2012). She views tracking as a series of checklists while journaling, to her, is a reflective exercise. “It is really thinking about letting your thoughts roll with your writing and sort of clarifying as you write” (Lana, interview, April 30, 2012). She uses her writing to think about her classroom practice and to bring clarity to her teaching and learning. Her reflections are critical in nature as she clarifies her thinking and her emotions. She explains:

Half of it is like some of what it would be what my personal goals are. Some of it is just my thoughts. And there was a great feeling of satisfaction about being able to clarify some issues. I don’t want to say mentally, but almost emotionally.

(Lana, interview, April 30, 2012)

She includes observations of students and is interested in knowing more about how students view themselves as a community of writers. Her journal helps her to understand “how they felt about it, that sense of enjoyment for them and positive things” (Lana, interview, April 28, 2012). She includes some challenges that students shared in their writing, that “at the time didn’t seem significant but then when I read them [entries] it would have been the beginning of the thought process with them or connection that they grew” (Lana, interview, April 30, 2012). She points to many examples in her classroom practice of how her journal helps her to recall details about students’ learning and states, “it would just kind of trigger something like ‘oh I remember when Sally said that’ and a couple of weeks later she developed more expertise or her confidence grew after this happened” (Lana, interview, April 30, 2012). Her journal makes the students’ growth

more visible to her as a teacher. Lana notices patterns and relationships, moving from a descriptive level of reflection to more critical reflections.

Her journal allows her to see developing patterns in the students' responses both individually and as a class. One example concerns a new perspective on how leadership abilities are developing in her classroom through the creation of a classroom newspaper. At the beginning of the process, Lana is the primary decision maker and idea generator for the newspaper. As students become more confident with the writing process and the responsibilities involved with creating a newspaper, they begin to take on leadership roles. She reflects:

Then S would have a list and chart paper of the ideas and who's going to sign up for this article and this article. They chose the Editor of the Week. They would choose the articles and they would decide what article they would put in. They would decide who was going to write them. It was interesting, the sense of community was what I wanted so I also wanted to know not how they related so much to being a writer but how they related and responded to each other and whether they developed that sense of community and that we were a family.

(Lana, interview, April 30, 2012)

Through her critical reflections, journal entries illuminate key areas of interest such as how the students choose people for different positions on the newspaper and more importantly, how students support each other's learning. Lana's journal entries demonstrate how she accesses both critical space according to Dart et al. (1998) and descriptive space through her writing. The critical space can be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on particular classroom activities related to the

establishment of her class' newsletter and student writing. In the critical space provided by her journal, she reflects on developmentally and age-appropriate practices, relationships, and building community.

Laura.

I use my journal for critical reflections although there are descriptive entries that help me to plan for next steps for students. One example of a descriptive entry occurs as I plan for a music inquiry in the classroom. When considering a music inquiry in the classroom, I reflect on student interest in the project. "S and G would often take the blocks and use them with shorter blocks as violins. This imaginative play went on for several weeks" (Laura, journal entry, December 28, 2012). I consider how much interest there is in the classroom to begin an inquiry in music and in what direction an inquiry could take us in our learning.

I keep track of plans as well as observations about student learning. In a journal entry on December 29, 2012, I list steps for a music inquiry such as taking photos of students using familiar materials in new ways and making connections between our inquiry to the Kindergarten curriculum.

There are examples of critical reflection in my journal that explore how the classroom environment shapes learning and how the physical space in a classroom influences children's thinking. I write:

Other changes have been aesthetic such as shifting and reducing centres. The carpet is in the centre and there are fewer centres. The room is warm but not cluttered with furniture. There is artwork and writing up but it isn't overwhelming and over-stimulating. I still need to purge and reduce as I was at another school

yesterday for a workshop and noticed how sparse/minimal their 2 Kindergarten spaces are. I've brought in some more natural materials and taken out plastic when I can. Lots of tactile objects like polished rocks at the science centre for example. (Laura, journal entry, October 10, 2011)

I begin a year-long exploration of how changes to the physical environment of the classroom have a profound effect on children's ability to learn. The changes to the physical environment in my classroom are in keeping with the literature on early years' learning, self-regulation of students, and a Reggio Emilia approach in the classroom (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012). I reflect on changes in practice:

As for my teaching, I'm enjoying some of the changes I've made over the past few weeks. The daily schedule has a more Reggio-inspired flow and I'm looking for more opportunities to incorporate flow into the day. The morning runs really smoothly until after morning circle when sometimes it all falls apart. I have to have another think about this. (Laura, journal entry, November 5, 2011)

The entries are a mixture of observations about the day and reflections on what these observations mean to my practice and to my students' learning. I write:

The change to the light table has been interesting. I do need to sit with the children and write their conversations this week to see how I can deepen their play. I've removed the nature basket and added beautiful coloured stones and farm animals to play with after our visit to Belluz [Farm], trying to make this connection. (Laura, journal entry, November 5, 2011)

I reflect on how I could better understand the students' thinking if I listen more closely to their conversations. One of the key elements that I explore at the beginning of the year is

creating centres and learning experiences based on students' interests and thinking. By listening to the students' conversations as they engage with the new materials at the light table, I see what they know about fall, farm animals, changes in seasons, and their relationships with each other. We recently enjoyed a visit to a local farm to talk about harvest vegetables. Exploring relationships revealed by the children's conversations at the light table shows how I am moving beyond a description of the activity at the light table and trying to understand their thinking and theories in a more critical way according to Dart et al.'s (1998) description.

My journal is a forum to explore my practice. When my journal is used in this way, my reflections rise to the level of criticality that meets the hierarchy cited in Dart et al. (1998). I begin to explore different possibilities and outcomes in my work. I reflect on the growing pressures of learning how to teach differently as the school board embraces a new philosophy of learning in the early years and some of the resistance to the new changes. I write:

I need to remember that as the pressures begin to mount. Tomorrow is our staff meeting and next week a French Immersion meeting with SK-1 teachers. I'll need such support as I am quite alone in my views and values as to our primary job - helping kids develop self-regulation and tending to their social/emotional needs before their academic needs. Along the lines of Shanker's alert, calm, and focused to learn. And this includes learning a second language. (Laura, journal entry, November 17, 2011)

I use it to think about the pressures of being one of the only French Immersion teachers at the time to embrace the new approach to early years learning in my school board. I face

challenges from colleagues and administration about the new way that I am teaching and the changes that I am making to my practice. My journal helps me to make connections to what I am reading in the literature on play-based learning and my practice and illustrates the critical nature of the journal entry in line with Dart et al.'s (1998) use of criticality. At times, my journal entries rise to the level of Brookfield's (1995) view of critical reflection to include systemic changes to the French Immersion program that will more closely align it to new thinking about early years' learning. My journal provides a space to think about how attending to students' emotional and social needs are as important if not more important than their academic needs. Without a solid foundation of emotional and social skills, students will not be ready to learn a second language or meet curricular expectations.

My journal is a mix of descriptive and critical entries. The critical space can be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on behaviour challenges, next steps in our music inquiry, activities the students are engaged in, and materials needed at centres. In the critical space, I reflect on how the environment shapes learning, the importance of teaching social and emotional skills for self-regulation, and play-based learning.

Teresa.

Teresa uses her journal for descriptive purposes, critical reflection, and to track students' questions during her lessons. This helps her understand who she is calling on in class and how she is helping or hindering student voice, "I was trying to make a template that was meaningful in terms of trying to make it that every student has equal opportunities but at the same time I know that it's really challenging when you have

challenging classes” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). Her journal supports her understanding about providing equal opportunities for student voice in her classroom. This focus developed after participating in an action research project about how different genders learn science. When Teresa moves beyond tracking student responses to thinking more about how she chooses children to answer questions in class, her reflections change from descriptive to critical.

She explores multi-intelligence theory in relation to her science teaching, “to see if girls and boys were learning different via different types of learning experiences and we were journaling from it” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). She notes that her journal brings new awareness of her teaching practices:

I was supposed to be specifically looking at gender and it ended up that I wasn’t. I was actually looking at each student more individually whether it was a girl or a boy wasn’t really the focus. So then I had to go back in. (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012)

By reflecting on her practice, she finds that students like working in centres and moving about the classroom rather than sitting in desks completing paper and pencil tasks:

I have three Grade 4 classes I work with. And so as you do an activity with one and it works really well and it doesn’t work so well with another. So it’s interesting to write in the journal. I tend to write about things like that. Well, why would it work with one class but not another? And what were the factors that made it, what were the variables? I’d write about what I modified and whether that worked or how did I change a lesson. Did I do a different follow up with a different class? (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012)

She describes an event in her classroom where she read stories to the students, engaged them in discussions, and explained the follow up activity. She believes that the lesson is more successful with one class than the other. Unfortunately, Teresa does not elaborate on the types of variables or factors that shape the environment in the classroom during the lesson. Reflections about underlying reasons for the success or challenge of lessons might reveal whether her journal entries in this instance were critical or descriptive.

With the second class, she is unable to move beyond the story and introduction to the lesson; the lesson becomes focused on controlling behaviours rather than telling the story. She describes how her journal helps her make progress: “I write about things that I think might help me later or even with the next class I’m going to teach those kids” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). She explores changing the lesson, building on what students can do, or going back to the book and trying a different lesson, “I do a lot of questioning within my journal writing” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012) about her practice. She states that she does not always find the answer. The questions in her journal about her lessons lead to changes in her approach to her lesson. She notes that at times, her focus changes in her journal writing as her insights deepen and as she moves from a more descriptive account to a more critically reflective account. Teresa states, “whether it was a boy or girl wasn’t really the focus [anymore]. But I found it [journaling] very useful because I found that students actually really liked when I did a particular type of lesson” (Teresa, interview April 2, 2012).

Her journal helps her keep track of challenging behaviours and remains at a descriptive level:

I enter in my journal as something as documentation of something that happened in the past and then forward that on to the special education teacher or even the principal. And I'll remember 'oh I write about something about that in my journal' and I'll go back and say, 'on this date'. (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012)

While much of Teresa's journal entries are descriptive, she does access critical space in her journal. The critical space can be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on behaviour challenges, planning next steps, and classroom science activities. In the critical space provided by her journal, she reflects on gender as well as equity and inclusivity in the way she asks questions of her students.

May.

May uses her journal for descriptive purposes, to explore connections to her action research project on social justice, and to track how students are developing empathy as the year progresses: "I tried to [focus] my thoughts around specific questions that they may have had and that I wanted to address within the project itself" (May, interview, April 26, 2012). She gives an example such as "why so and so said this" as a typical entry in her journal:

At the beginning, I just thought back to different comments that I had heard, different situations I had seen in the classroom, so I would write that. And with different activities, then I would kind of write responses, reactions and maybe sometimes I would be surprised at a reaction so I'd write that. (May, interview, April 26, 2012)

Her initial entries are more descriptive than critical according to Dart et al. (1998). She focuses primarily on describing an event unfolding in her classroom. It was only later that

she shares her reactions and responses to events. These later entries are more critical as she imagines different outcomes and entertains new perspectives. Her journal entries and interactions with her students during her project cause her to wonder how the students' actions in the classroom are representative of their new thinking. Have they changed and are they more empathetic? These were the types of journal entries captured as well as feelings about responses, "the journal though really helped me see their development. This is what they said in the beginning, this is what they said later on" (May, interview, April 26, 2012).

So the trip has been cancelled. Not enough girls want to go. I can't believe it! I don't understand it! An overnight trip, what an opportunity! I wonder if it relates to their confidence issues. They seem not to be interested in anything they don't know. (May, journal entry, November 29, 2011)

She begins to view her journal as a critical space to explore the impact of self-esteem and confidence on students' learning and what they believe is an acceptable risk in learning. Although, her journal entries touch on important issues in her classroom, they are descriptive in nature. She writes, "what a blow up today! I knew we'd have some drama being an all-girls class...I need to show them who they can be" though did not continue to explore self-identity or student voice in her journal in a critical way (May, journal entry, November 10, 2011). One of the possible reasons for this may be May's view of herself as "not a big journaler" (May, interview, April 26, 2012) though she considers herself reflective.

She believes that her journal writing has changed her practice, "I've certainly increased the use of those sorts of issues [social justice] in my practice. It is part of who I

am. Reading the comments and just knowing that it really does work” (May, interview, April 26, 2012). She refers to how her notes provoke her thinking. During the day, she formulates specific questions that relate to her project, come from her practice, or events that took place in the classroom. Later she reviews her questions and seeks answers. May integrates real world situations into her lesson planning, ensuring that she ties what is happening around the world into her daily plans.

She often uses jot notes to capture key ideas or thoughts. Although brief, her journal entries help her to see teaching and students’ learning from a new perspective, demonstrating at times a more critical stance in her journal writing. When she rereads her notes from a visit to her classroom by a guest speaker, she comes to a different understanding of the impact of her guest’s words on her adolescent students. She states, “I just got a different perspective, you know reading it all. I [thought] ‘oh okay, you know what? It was fantastic’.... The journal though really helped me to see their development” (May, interview, April 26, 2012). She believes that her writing helps her to gain insights into her students’ learning and push her thinking about what her students are gaining from her lessons.

The critical space reflects on her students’ growing empathy can be differentiated from more descriptive entries that focus on classroom activities and student’s comments during lessons. In the critical space provided by her journal, she reflects on building empathy in her students.

Journal writing can support teachers’ growing understanding of their teaching and learning as they reflect on their classroom practice. In Theme 1, what critical space looks like has been identified in teachers’ journals. Along with descriptive entries in their

journals, the teachers in the study use their journals to create critical space primarily following Dart et al.'s (1998) conceptualization of critical reflection. There were a few instances of critical reflection according to Brookfield's (1995) definition. The teachers I interviewed frequently draw on their experiences to rethink and revisit their teaching and learning. This finding suggests that it is important for teachers to make meaningful connections in their work and re-examine these connections through their journal writing for their entries to move beyond descriptive accounts. The identification of critical space allows an examination of the barriers and facilitators that teachers face when using their journals in this way. It is interesting to note that very little has been written about the conditions under which journal writing becomes critical. The remaining four themes help us to better understand these conditions.

Theme 2: The Role of Audience on Teachers' Journal Writing

The role of audience in journal writing surfaced from interviews and emails. Teachers view both potential and real audience as concerns when they write about their practice. They are concerned about who might read their journals. Except for three teachers, all kept a private journal. This reluctance is a key challenge for the study, and a key finding. For most in the study, if they thought their journals would be read they might not write at all, let alone write critically. Some of the teachers who were willing to talk about their journals decided to share excerpts. The role of audience was a factor affecting whether teachers' journals contained critical space. Table 4.4 highlights how the role of audience impacts the teachers' use of journaling and if they consider their journals public or private documents. Most of the teachers in the study view their journals as private

documents with the exceptions of Lisa and Brenda who wrote in a shared journal and Lana who wrote about classroom successes in a shared journal with colleagues.

Table 4.4.

Role of Audience in Journal Writing

Name	Role of Audience
Paula	Journal is a private space not to be shared with others
Amanda	“personal record” used to reflect on her teaching
Teresa	Private document; shares with those she is comfortable with but only entries she chooses
Lisa and Brenda	Shared journal left in the classroom; shared with others as data in a research project
Lana	Shared journal with colleagues based on successes in the classroom; private journal about her own teaching practices

Participant Examples – Role of Audience

Paula.

Paula is very concerned about others reading her journal and feels that it is a private document that should only be viewed by her. After an email requesting her participation in the study, she responds:

A true teaching journal is a private document. Keeping a journal private allows the space to fret, whine, rant, and write about all the amazing and difficult things being a teacher allows. A private journal is also important should you write about any concerns you have with particular students, parents or colleagues. These

entries need never see the light of day in their raw form, and keeping them that way protects me and my students. (Paula, email correspondence, April 10, 2012)

Her view that journals are private is echoed by all the teachers who believe that journal writing is for their “purposes” (Paula, email to author, April 10, 2012); for example, “they are my reflections so I consider them private” (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012); and “it’s meant to be very private” (Karen, interview, January 17, 2012).

Amanda.

Amanda states that her journal is a personal record. Her teaching journal is like her personal journal, “a personal record that serves as record for me if I want to look back and see what happened in terms of the information. It’s mostly in terms of reflecting to see what I need to change or what went well” (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). She writes about her teaching and learning to loop back later and reflect on how to improve her practice.

Teresa.

Teresa views her journal as a private document though at times in her career she did share excerpts. She was a participant in a doctoral study concerning exemplary science teachers. The researcher used portions of her journal to showcase her classroom work. Teresa was comfortable sharing journal excerpts that she had chosen under these circumstances: “I went through and I pulled some entries that I felt I would like to share with somebody” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). She views sharing her journal with the researcher as an opportunity to reflect deeply on her daily work but only when she is comfortable sharing journal entries of her own choosing. Teresa states, “it was a really

useful procedure for me too because it gave you a different perspective when somebody else read it” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012).

Teresa points out that she uses codes, short forms, and symbols in her journal to quickly capture ideas and thoughts while teaching or afterwards. Teachers mention concerns about grammar and sentence structure as a reason why their journals are private documents rather than public documents.

Lisa and Brenda.

Lisa and Brenda view their journal as a document to share with each other as well as other teachers. They are exceptions to the belief that journals are private documents among the participants in the study. They communicate with each other through their shared journal about the events of the day, student learning, and new ideas to try in the classroom. There is an expectation that the other team member will read the journal as part of their classroom work and contribute to their on-going conversation. They believe it is helpful to keep the journal in a central place in the classroom to capture their thoughts and ask each other questions, make observations, and record their thoughts and ideas in relation to their teaching and learning about the early years.

They share their written reflections about effective questioning strategies to push their thinking and make changes in their teaching practice. They keep a record of the questions they are using at the centres in the classroom to understand the relationships that students are building with the materials at the centres and how these materials might support students’ learning:

We reflect upon how that has gone and that’s when we discuss, okay well what are we going to add? Is there material we can add? Is there a common theme that

we can work towards with them? We may jot some questions that we think may bring the students that way. (Brenda & Lisa, interview, May 22, 2012)

They wonder how to use students' interests and curiosity to create learning experiences and to meet curricular expectations. New to inquiry-based learning, they consider the goals they set in light of their school's focus on inquiry in the Early Years. They reflect through their journal writing, teasing out how to bring inquiry learning into their classroom. Lisa states, "because we were documenting, but it seemed piecemeal. And then everyone's talking about reflective journals. Oh I can do that. We went back and started to think what did we change and what made us think about that? And so we started to document that" (Lisa & Brenda, interview, May 22, 2012).

Their journal is a product of their shared teaching responsibilities. As colleagues who work in the same classroom and support the same students, their journal serves to support their teaching partnership. Lisa and Brenda enjoy a long working relationship together at the same school. They often present together about their partnership and teaching at Early Years workshops.

They are participants in a research project with their school board and their shared journal is a part of data collection and analysis. They bring their journal to the meetings as evidence of their work and research in the classroom. Brenda and Lisa know that their journal will be shared with a larger group of Kindergarten teachers, administration, and Ontario Ministry of Education staff as part of the research project. The entries they shared with me focus on new learning about the project, how it impacts their practice, and next steps for the project. They would like to rewrite their journal excerpts before sharing them with me as they are either hastily written in the moment or illegibly written.

They are an exception to the notion that journals are private documents. At the same time, they are not an exception to the rule that privacy encourages teachers to journal more critically. Their journal entries remain primarily descriptive. Lisa and Brenda write in their journals with an understanding that other teachers will read their entries or that they will share information collected in their journals with a wider audience.

Lana.

Lana shares a journal with colleagues and writes in a second journal that she uses for her reflections in her classroom. “I think about audience or possible people who would read it. Just being sensitive to them”, comments Lana (Lana, interview April 30, 2012). She works with a group at her school who agreed to write in a shared journal about successful moments of teaching; they set boundaries about what could be included in their shared journal. For example, they do not use the journal to share challenges or obstacles to their practice. A journal is kept in a public space in the school, convenient to all the teachers participating in this activity. Any teacher who writes in this journal can read the other entries. The collaborative journaling experience becomes a way to celebrate and share the many positive initiatives undertaken by teachers and a way to counter some of the negative feelings about teaching that are prevalent in her school at the time.

Potential and real audience shape the participants’ use of journals to access critical space. Audience plays a role in either facilitating or acting as a barrier to critical space in teachers’ journals. In the two cases where the journals are shared, the teachers are aware that others will read the entries. In one instance, the journal is a place to share

classroom successes and in the second its purpose is to collect data for a research project to be shared with other teachers, administration, and the Ministry of Education. Teachers edit their words and thoughts, knowing that there is a possibility of others reading their journals through invitation or by accident. If they share, they are more comfortable choosing the excerpts that others may read. A seeming contradiction between the private and public nature of journals appears. However, this problem disappears after they use their journals to reflect initially and are then ready to share their reflections with others.

Theme 3: Time and Place Constraints Shape Teachers' Efforts to Journal

Although journaling is one way of reflecting on daily work, teachers find it to be time-consuming. Nine participants indicate that writing is very time consuming and most find it difficult to find the time to write at school or at home. Journaling takes away time from other obligations and this is a reason that teachers do not write more often.

Although all appreciate the reflective quality of journal writing and the positive impact it has on their teaching and learning, the time it takes to journal is a barrier to sustaining this practice. A second but related challenge is finding a quiet, safe, and comfortable place to write. Time and place constrain teachers' abilities to use their journals generally but according to the data from this study this is especially important for creating critical space in journals. Table 4.5 illustrates how time and place shape the teachers' journal writing and critical reflections. The teachers generally feel that there is little time to journal during the school day and those that do journal use jot notes or an electronic device to journal to make time for journaling. Only one teacher, Karen, mentions that school is not a safe place to journal because of the lack of privacy. Other teachers such as Lana and Sarah note that when challenges of time occurred, they stop journaling.

Table 4.5.

Time and Place

Name	Time and Place
Karen	Competing priorities; journals at home; has a schedule for journaling; classroom is not a safe place to journal
May	Writing in her journal is at times overwhelming; has little time and energy left to journal at the end of the school day
Teresa	Journaling can be onerous; has tried different formats to make journaling easier for herself such as a template on her dayplan; tries to journal soon after a classroom event or question of practice
Lisa and Brenda	Viewed as an additional task; journal at school; leave each other comments and questions in the journal
Amanda	Time is the greatest factor; uses an electronic journal to save time; journals during her planning time in the staffroom
Avery	Doesn't have a specific time or place to journal as an occasional teacher; lost enthusiasm for journaling without a support system of colleagues
Shannon	Uses jot notes while teaching to capture thoughts; connects time to journal with making changes to her practice
Lana	Would like to take more time to journal; often doesn't journal

	when she lacks time; feels journaling is a priority although time is a challenge
Sarah	Time to write in her journal is equated with the ability to reflect critically; when time is short, she puts her journal aside
Laura	Difficult to find the time to journal even when it is a priority; journals at home

Participant Examples – Time and Place

Karen.

Karen refers to competing priorities that pull her in different directions. At times, she finds herself unable to commit to journaling because of work and school responsibilities. “never at school. I don’t have an actually comfortable place to work. Nothing is secure” (Karen, interview, January 17, 2012). She often journals at home, finding the space at school does not support her writing. In contrast to the others, Karen has a set time and place at home to reflect in her journal.

May.

May describes how tired she finds herself at the end of a school day and believes that, “it’s hard to get [ideas] on paper. Writing is sometimes overwhelming” (May, interview, April 26, 2012).

Teresa.

Teresa notes that she has little time to journal, even when she uses a template on her day plan specifically meant for journaling. “At first I found it really time consuming,

not a waste of time in a sense but just very time consuming” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). She remarks that carving out time to journal presents a challenge for her, “if I felt comfortable with a person, I would share it but often there’s not time as teachers to get to another teacher to share things like that and I do not feel there’s a time for it” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). She notes, “if there’s something I really want to write about, I try to write it as soon after the event happened. But again, that’s not necessarily like right away because there’s so many other things going on” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). She often writes after an event takes place as time is an issue.

She describes her journal as a thought-holder, to look back on to see what is working and what practices need to be revisited, “then you go back. That worked out really well so maybe I’ll try that again with another group of kids. It is nice to revisit our successes because sometimes, nobody else sees them” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). She returns to her journal to read the entries, noting that it was reaffirming to go back and read about her successes. It is interesting to note her journal supports her critique of practice by serving as a record of her teaching and a place to hold her thoughts until she can revisit her entries. Finding time to both write and revisit her journal is a concern expressed by Teresa.

Lisa and Brenda.

For Lisa and Brenda journal writing is the first thing to be discarded if there is not enough time to accomplish everything that needs to be done that day. When writing in their journal is a precursor or a part of a meeting or planning time, they find time to write. The lack of time is a factor in their journaling, “we find it challenging to write formal journals with all of our increased documentation of student learning” (Brenda & Lisa,

interview, May 22, 2012). Journaling is an additional writing task to be completed. They mention using quickly jotted notes of ideas and questions when time pressures increase rather than critical reflections that involve alternative outcomes or multiple perspectives.

Amanda.

Time is a factor that shapes Amanda's journal writing. Amanda writes:

I don't know what I was doing the last couple of weeks but I didn't write anything in here. I did write detailed notes about specific students and I suppose that was all the time I had for. My biggest challenge is time during the day and then lack of energy after school to go back and reflect. It [journaling] hasn't made the cut so to speak when it comes to my time and energy lately. (Amanda, journal entry, April 30, 2012)

She notes that she has only had time to write down or track her observations about students in the classroom and has not had time to reflect critically on her practice. She talks about the difference between writing about "specific issues with specific kids" (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012) and how that is different from her critical reflections when she can "take a step back" (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012).

She tries to write in her journal several times a day and the length of her journal entries range from several sentences to one or two paragraphs. Amanda uses an iPad to journal and brings it with her to the staffroom or writes during her planning time. She discovers that it is less challenging to pick up the iPad at any point when she has a free moment. Sitting in the staffroom provides a comfortable space in which to write in her journal. Though at times, this presents challenges; "I spend my planning time in the staffroom and there is often lots going on" (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). She

believes a quiet workspace would support her efforts to journal and move beyond descriptions of events.

Amanda reiterates, “that’s happened a few times where I’m really seeing myself think of something different because I’ve taken the time to write and clear my head” (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). Amanda’s journal helps her to put aside her thinking about one challenge to focus on a new issue and make room figuratively for further reflection. This example demonstrates how Amanda’s journal supports her critique of her practice when she has time to write.

Her journal acts as a place to store ideas and reflections, clearing the way for her to see a different way to approach a challenge or tackle something new. Teachers, such as Amanda, freeze small moments on the pages of their journal until they are ready to reflect further on them though many of them do not go back to revisit entries. Amanda begins to use her journal to notice patterns in her work. She notes:

If the lesson didn’t go as well as I thought, it [journaling] really narrowed it, what part didn’t work out. It made way in my head to think about everything else...When I’m talking about the challenges and difficulties I’ve had and I’ve written all that out and I’ve kind of gotten home I feel like I’ve gotten that out...It just, you know, put it out there, if it’s on the paper, you let it go. Through the writing I think I’m thinking more about things or starting to see the patterns come out by thinking about them repeatedly. (Amanda, interview, June 21, 2012)

Once her reflections are in her journal, she creates critical space and has time to think about the patterns that are appearing in her classroom such as the underlying factors for children’s behaviours and how she can address them.

Avery.

Avery writes, “I do not necessarily need specific time set aside but as an occasional teacher I don’t have as much planning time” (Avery, email to author, May 14, 2012). She has less time as an occasional teacher and therefore, less time to write in her journal. The support of like-minded colleagues helps sustain her journal writing practice. “I find that I have lost some of the enthusiasm in the past year because I do not have the same access to colleagues, research, debate, and engagement” (Avery, email to author, May 14, 2012).

Shannon.

Shannon writes jot notes each day at school that act as a reminder for action to be taken or plans to be made for the next day’s learning, “I just put the point forms as sort of my stem. A stem for thinking and then I stew over it” (Shannon, interview, May 17, 2012). She makes a connection between having the time to reflect in a journal and embedding change in practice. Without taking the time to think about our teaching practice, she notes that it is difficult to bring about change in the way she does her work.

Sarah.

Sarah reiterates that it is a matter of “carving out time and space and energy and the busier it gets, the more difficult it is to decide that it [journaling] is a priority” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012). When work and life become busy, the teachers, such as Sarah, sometimes stop journaling. Sarah notes that her teaching is better when she journals:

Okay, what did I do? What should I do, maybe could I have done? What I want to do next time. It’s that whole ‘keeping the wheel’s going’. It’s the journaling. It’s

an important part of reflective practice. I don't do it all the time, but I know when I do my planning is clearer. (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012)

Her journal helps her to revisit events from the day. She believes that by capturing the moment in her journal, she has more time and energy to focus on the next puzzle or task at hand like Amanda. "Just by writing, I was kind of putting it aside, so I felt when I was at work and when I was at home, I wasn't so frustrated by this one area and I was still seeing the big picture" (Sarah, interview, June 21, 2012). It is not necessarily the content of the writing that supports her learning but the time she takes to reflect critically and then write about larger concerns in her classroom. She parks her thoughts and then concentrates on a next challenge. At times, her journal helps her to shift her focus to larger issues of absenteeism or poverty rather than on the day-to-day mechanics of teaching such as strategies to increase oral language use.

Further, Sarah believes it was the process of writing about events or emotions in her journal that clears the way for more reflection. She states, "it was just the process that made it possible for me to see the bigger picture outside what I wrote and just got it out of the way.... Helps me to see how it did open that up. I guess because what I thought was the problem turned out not to be the problem" (Sarah, interview, June 21, 2012). In this way, journaling helps teachers to think about their daily work and classroom practice by opening up a reflective space when they have time to critically reflect. She observes that some of the concerns that she deals with in her classroom are simply the symptoms of larger issues. Her journal supports this clearer understanding of what shapes her students' learning.

Sarah writes about an event or reflect on her students' learning, setting aside her observations in her journal. These examples from Sarah's journal support an understanding as well of how journals help teachers to critique and challenge their practice. In Sarah's case, she uses her journal to "clear the way for more" thinking to gain a new perspective or take advantage of an openness to view her teaching differently (Sarah, interview, May 16, 2012). In addition, she notes that her journal "made way in her head" for new thinking (Sarah, interview, June 21, 2012) when she took the time to journal.

Lana.

Lana does not take the time she needs to write in her journal. She believes that journaling is an important part of her teaching practice and would like to journal more. Finding time to journal is a barrier to using writing as a reflective tool for most of the teachers in the study and lack of time is a recurring theme in the interviews. Lana suggests, "you can make connections to previous things that you've done in your life. The implications and consequences. And then come up with other choices, other alternatives. So I don't know why I don't do this more" (Lana, interview, April 22, 2012). In times of stress, Lana comes back to journal writing to work through challenges. She relates difficult times in her life to being in open water and highlights, "this is what happened. So I'm making the connection that when I go out there it does not turn out well so I stay here [close to shore]. So you know that the clarifying happens with journaling" (Lana, interview, April 22, 2012). Lana suggests taking the time to journal is linked to making connections, clarifying challenging situations, and leads to critical reflection.

Laura.

I struggle with carving out time to reflect in my journal:

Back to the journal today. I've been very neglectful. I can certainly appreciate it when teachers say they don't have time to journal. It has been very busy with report cards, work, projects, and research. We've also had our Professional Learning Community (PLC) that involves making plans for our language block.

(Laura, journal entry, November 5, 2011)

I face a time crunch as deadlines and work commitments take away the time I set aside to journal. I write, "first day of writing in my journal. I've thought about doing it often but haven't found the time to actually take pen to paper" (Laura, journal entry, October 10, 2012). I experience that pressure of a busy schedule at the beginning of the school year and I am unable to find time to journal.

Teachers find it difficult to maintain journal writing to reflect on their work despite positive experiences with journaling and their commitment to reflective practice. Time can act as either a barrier or a facilitator to the use of journals as critical space. The lack of time means that they are writing less as well as making fewer connections as in Lana's case or missing the larger picture as in Sarah's case. Amanda contends that a lack of time to journal results in her tracking of students rather than reflecting more critically on her practice. There are instances where a lack of a secure place to write inhibits the teachers' efforts to journal though to a lesser degree than the barrier of time. Amanda and Karen mention challenges of finding a place to write in their journals as an impediment.

Theme 4: Reflection is Dependent on a Belief that Change is Possible

For journaling to create critical space, teachers need privacy, time, and place. Whether they use their journaling for critical reflection is influenced by a belief that change is possible. The teachers in the study who used their journals for critical reflection demonstrate that they believe it is possible to change and improve some aspect of the educational system by altering their practice. Those teachers who are concerned about improving the education system through changes to their practice are more likely to use journaling for critical reflection rather than for other purposes such as record keeping or tracking student progress. Teachers journal about the changes they make to their practice based on their critical reflections or initial thinking in their journals. Interviews, journals, and email correspondence from teachers help to clarify thinking about the relationship between reflection and action.

Table 4.6 illustrates gaps in knowledge that the teachers identify in their practices and the areas of interest they explore. Each of the teachers notice that they need either more tools or more information about areas of pedagogy to support student learning. They use their journals to critically reflect on their own growth and how they might make changes to their practice to address these gaps or areas of interest.

Table 4.6.

Change is Possible

Name	Participant
Avery	Explores gradual release of responsibility, student engagement, and the creation of partnerships with her students

Amanda	Studies self-regulation and how helping young learners identify emotions impacts classroom routines
Lisa and Brenda	Formats a new portfolio page to rethink how they document student learning; questions about their practice in relation to early years learning and inquiry-based learning
Sarah	Uses a writing structure to help her reflect; What, So what, What now, What next?
Karen	Reflects on how to either increase or decrease support to students to support their learning
Shannon	Writes down her reflections about turn and talk and how to break down the steps for student success
Laura	Reflects on classroom environment, transition times, and slowing down the pace of learning to be more intentional

Participant Examples – Change is Possible

Avery.

Avery reflects, “I may need to ask students how I can help them succeed/learn or what they need from me. These students are seeking attention so I can give them attention one-on-one and place some of the responsibility for learning on them” (Avery, journal entry, February 23, 2012). Her insight regarding students’ ownership of and responsibility for learning provides an opportunity for her to explore how changes in her

practice support the gradual release of responsibility for learning or the creation of partnerships in learning with her students. This demonstrates a gap that she identifies in her professional knowledge and an area of possible growth.

Avery is open to new learning and opportunities about supporting children's efforts to set the learning agenda. She believes that a change in the educational system that would allow children to set their learning agenda and take ownership of their learning is possible and uses her journal to think through her ideas. Her role as an occasional teacher makes this transition from reflection to action more challenging as she is often in a different classroom each day and may not have the opportunity to implement specific changes that respond to classrooms or students. "Keep firm control but let them know you are there to help. Can ignore behaviours or provide them with one-on-one attention" (Avery, journal entry, February 23, 2012). This insight into different ways to address challenging behaviours demonstrates that she reflects on managing behaviour, student engagement, and responding to students. She explains:

I read back over the entries after a few weeks and am able to see what strategies are consistently most effective and also what problems are arising consistently. I am then able to develop new strategies for future classes. (Avery, email to author, April 17, 2012)

If she supports students' efforts to self-regulate and set their learning agenda within the challenges that exist as an occasional teacher, she finds that there are fewer behavioural issues and she can focus more on engaging students in their learning.

Avery reflects on engagement by providing one-on-one support to students rather than managing behaviour. This shift in her thinking demonstrates her reflections on the

difference between engagement and management. It helps to clarify how she is using her journal to recognize areas of growth in her learning and subsequently address these gaps in knowledge. She writes about developing new strategies that she can implement and believes that her practice can change to incorporate her new thinking. Avery develops a rating system for different classroom management strategies that she tries and uses this system to determine what changes to make to her practice when she revisits the classroom. Her critical reflections support her new thinking as well as she reflects more deeply on the issue of management versus engagement of children. It is her belief in change that encourages and enables her critical reflection.

Amanda.

Amanda refers to the changes in her practice to support her growing awareness of her students' needs. She makes significant changes in her practice to support the teaching of emotions and feelings to her Kindergarten students based on the critical reflections in her journal and her belief that changing this aspect of her practice is possible and beneficial. This area of pedagogy, emotional and social learning, is one in which she needs support. She describes many different strategies she employs in response to events that unfold in her classroom. She writes:

From first thing in the morning he did complain of being tired. We have gone back to always asking him if he is hungry in the morning instead of expecting him to know because sometimes he just doesn't seem to know how to figure that out for himself. (Amanda, journal entry, March 29, 2012)

She asks one student each morning how he is feeling and if he is hungry. Attending to his need for breakfast helps him prepare for learning and engage more fully in the

Kindergarten program. In her journal, she reflects on the child's needs and how she can change her practice by setting aside time each morning when he arrives at school to check-in with him. This excerpt illustrates how Amanda's belief that change in her practice is possible stems from her critical reflections about this child's learning needs. It demonstrates her views about the importance of teaching social thinking to young children to support self-regulation and how larger changes in the educational system to support a focus on social thinking are possible, beginning with changes to her practice.

She notes some success with identifying feelings and emotions in her classroom: Students identified upwards of 16 different feelings to include on our list, compared with seven in the fall. This is before any of the additional teaching that we are starting about specific feelings and strategies. We do help them to name and express feelings and I suppose that without any extra direct instruction they are becoming more aware and able to do that. (Amanda, journal entry, March 26, 2012)

She explains how her visual check-in is supporting students' self-regulation:

Before I even started the idea of a visual check in I realized that I cannot just give each child one name to place besides a feeling. When M was having a bad day and we asked her how she was feeling she said that she was feeling 'tired, grumpy, and silly'. Funny, because that would have been my guess and it's an odd combination. (Amanda, journal entry, March 27, 2012)

She describes how she uses an 'I am feeling' sentence starter during circle time to check on students' feelings and how this strategy is less and less successful as time progresses. Her reflections in her journal highlight her growing understanding of the need to change

her practice to allow children to show and identify the wide variety of emotions they are feeling. Her reflections help her sort through her reasons for changing her circle time and develop a new way to help children identify their emotions. She tries a ring with emotions cards for students to hold up and uses a book series to discuss feelings. The class generates a list of things that make them happy and sad; these ideas are catalysts to conversations students have about feelings and how their bodies might feel. She writes:

Today we read the first of four books in a series, *Everyone Feels Happy*. It talks about what happy looks like and feels like. Some students shared ideas about what makes them happy: my mom, being excited because I might be getting a pet bird, and holding my dog. (Amanda, journal entry, March 26, 2012)

Other ideas Amanda explores are creating posters and feeling cards when participating in different activities, as well as strategies to help children problem-solve. She uses her circle time to check-in with students and understand their feelings as they start school. She journals about some of the challenges of having students wait through a circle time activity before being able to share how they are feeling and how this wait time impacts their behaviour and learning. Amanda believes that these changes to her practice that she has written about in her journal will help students identify their emotions and to self-regulate. Her critical reflections about children's behaviour are followed by ideas and new strategies that she implements in her classroom.

Amanda uses her journal to make connections in her practice that can lead to change as she explains in her journal entry, "I am wondering at this point how much I should direct and control the spectrum of play through what I allow to be available versus how much I should just observe and guide the play of the students" (Amanda, journal

entry, September 12-16, 2011). She decides what space, time, and resources are needed to support play in her classroom after she makes this reflection in her journal. Should she plan for time and resources, and how should the physical space of her room be organized to scaffold the play of her students? Her journal entry touches on some initial thinking about control of play and letting students set the learning agenda. She reflects on how her practice might need to change, for example, with less time set aside for modeling how to use resources placed at centres, in response to the needs of her new class and more time making observations to plan for next steps and guide instruction. Amanda reflects, “they are using materials differently and seem to be generally ahead of where I am used to seeing students at the beginning of SK” (Amanda, journal entry, September 7, 2012).

She explores puzzling classroom situations that involve her whole class and/or a few students. She notes that journal writing helps her to take a step back and tease out meaning for all the students involved while still attending to individual students. In the interview, she argues, “I don’t just talk about specific issues with specific kids [in my journal]. I can kind of take a step back and look at the class as a whole so it is serving two purposes” (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). Her journal provides an opportunity to look at individual students within the context of the whole class dynamic such as the student who needs to up-regulate for circle time and how circle time routines shape whole class learning. She states, “I know the reason for this person’s behaviour and the reason behind that person’s behaviour. What can I change at this time of day to address all of it?” (Amanda, journal entry, May 16, 2012). She suggests:

I put more energy into thinking about what all those other kids need and it’s helped that way. Then you feel more positive about your day. You’re looking at

the good things that happened instead of just writing notes about all the things that went wrong and figuring out how to solve it. I've had years where you feel like that's all you do and I don't want to do it that way anymore. Put less focus on the negative behaviour and really focus on the learning and the strengths. (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012)

She mentions some of the successes that she writes about in her journal such as painting with the students and writing books.

Brenda and Lisa.

In the interview, Brenda states:

I like to have a journal, because if you write it out, you discuss it, you're really going to work on those goals. Like having it written makes it (a focus). You focus more on what you've written and looking back to see if you actually accomplished those or reach those goals or why didn't you reach them. (Brenda & Lisa, interview, May 22, 2012).

Lisa concurs and adds, "you write it out; you make it happen" (Brenda & Lisa, interview, May 22, 2012). Writing her thoughts means acting on those thoughts. They write about the changes they would like to make to their practice in their journal and believe that by writing their ideas they commit to acting on their reflections. They believe that the changes they describe in their journal pages are possible like setting a goal. It is therefore the belief in change that provokes their desire to reflect critically.

They reflect on how to create a portfolio page to help them document student learning. At the same time, they want to ensure that the portfolio page includes curriculum expectations. They write about their plans:

We wanted to ensure our samples had a clear link to the curriculum. After coming across another school's portfolio sheet format, we wrote that we'd like to make something similar. We jotted that we'd like to add specific expectations to our portfolio sheet. When time permitted, we reflected on our notes and made our portfolio sheet. (Lisa & Brenda, email to author, June 2, 2012)

They revisit the entries to develop a portfolio sheet that meets their needs and showcases student learning. Lisa and Brenda believe that changes to the way they document children's learning are possible and they use their journal to think through how these changes might look in practice.

Another example of a change in practice they describe is the way in which they document learning. Their teaching journal supports their efforts to make changes to their documentation. Lisa states:

I think our big focus was about how we're going to document. Because we were documenting, but it would seem piecemeal. Like we document about this, document about that. And then, how are we going to document? We started with the panel and I liked that process they had on one of the videos, kind of steps and path routes so that was really helpful, kind of wrapping our heads around going deeper. We kind of went back and started thinking. Okay, well what did we change and what made us think about that? (Brenda & Lisa, interview, May 22, 2012)

Lisa notes that the shared journal supports their teaching by providing them with an opportunity to review the journal entry, decide whether to use specific teaching strategies, or change their teaching direction, and how they might deepen their

documentation of student learning using the portfolio sheet. They use their journal for critical reflection to rethink the way they document student learning and the underlying reasons for the changes they have made.

Sarah.

Sarah uses a framework that helps her reflect on her teaching and learning to make changes to her practice based on her reflections. She used what?, so what?, what now? And what next? This helps her to focus her thoughts on the changes she wants to make to her practice. She believes, “journaling made me go back and really reflect on what it was that I was doing and how the kids were responding. The reflection became more of “Okay, what did I do? Then what and then what else?” (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012). Her journal becomes a space to revisit and reframe her words and actions in the classroom using a writing structure to capture her ideas. Sarah’s belief in change supports her reflections about her actions and the children’s actions.

Karen.

Karen revisits her practice when she rereads her journal entries:

I use my journal as a problem-solving method and to try to puzzle out what I can change. I have learned how to manage some difficult students better by analyzing their interactions in classrooms they were placed in and their behaviours in my class. I have changed my practice by giving one of them less attention than was previously given and helped another through a difficult time by providing some additional supports. (Karen, email to author, June 29, 2012)

Her entries help her to gain clarity about certain classroom behaviours and try a different way of approaching this challenge. She believes that her journal is a place for her to write

critically about the changes that she makes to her practice to address students' learning needs. Karen refers to how her belief in change supports her critical reflections.

Shannon.

Shannon's entries help her to think about her lessons and change the way she structures certain learning experiences such as a "turn and talk". As part of a focus on accountable talk in her classroom, she explains:

I showed them a picture and asked them to turn and talk to members of their group. I jotted a quick note on a sticky and spent some time at the end of the day evaluating what happened and then thinking about the steps I needed to put into place. (Shannon, interview, May 14, 2012)

Her jot notes support her reflections on the turn and talk activity and help her to make the necessary changes to the teaching strategy. She reflects on what went well, what went wrong, and how to teach the students to use the strategy more effectively. Shannon explores possible changes to her teaching strategy, revisiting the idea that literacy strategies such as a "turn and talk" need to be explicitly taught step-by-step for children to use them effectively to support learning.

Laura.

I think through changes that I make to align my teaching practice closer to my beliefs and values about how young students learn. I reflect, "I've changed the flow of the day to reduce the transition times. This helps build longer blocks of time into the day's plan. I don't feel as frantic and am more present with the students" (Laura, journal entry, October 10, 2011). My problem of practice involves how to better meet the needs of my students by planning extended periods of play. More time to play allows the

students' time to deepen their learning and stay engaged. My journal becomes a critical space for me to reflect on changes to my practice that are needed to engage children in play.

I write, "I'm beginning to have more faith in how an aesthetically beautiful room can encourage and improve creativity when the materials children access are intentionally selected" (Laura, journal entry, November 20, 2012). This directly relates to the work I had been involved in with my Kindergarten Specialist certification and my readings about the Reggio Emilia approach to Early Years learning. I want to achieve a very calm and natural feeling in the classroom, as it will help the students feel calm and peaceful at school. I journal:

In fact, I feel that the changes have helped me slow down. Less stimulus in the room. I've focused this week on making observations and finding some sparks for our next inquiry project. M has also shared how she feels about fewer activities that are teacher planned and directed and more play time. We seem to be mirroring each other. We've had some good blocks of play this week and some interesting things have happened. (Laura, journal entry, November 17, 2012)

I describe how a group of students create a camping area in the block centre and how they use materials. I notice them take charge of the materials and begin to negotiate rules and roles for play. Because of their ownership of their learning, they remain deeply engaged throughout playtime. I believe that there is a link between a belief in change and critical reflection. If I did not think that change was possible in my practice, I would not believe that there was a reason to reflect critically. For critical reflection to occur in my journal, I need to believe that my reflections will lead to generative changes. Critical

reflection supports my need to fill a gap in knowledge, to search for underlying assumptions, or to encourage multiple perspectives. Without one of these reasons to provoke change, my reflections would not bring about transformation.

The teachers in the study reflect critically about changes to their practice. They believe that changes are possible and explore this through their critical reflections. After reflecting in their journals, they make changes to their practice.

The teachers use their journals to critically reflect such as Amanda's journal entries about how she might teach social thinking using emotion rings during her circle time or Shannon's realization that explicit step-by-step instructions are needed to support her children's use of a "turn and talk" strategy. Teacher's belief in change facilitates their use of journals as critical space. The critical space in the teachers' journals supports their belief that the changes they make to their practice are possible. Brenda and Lisa's critical reflections on the use of portfolios sheets to document students' learning demonstrates that they believe there is a better way to assess learning and share that learning with the children, administration, and families. Sarah begins to use a framework to structure her critical reflections when she considers how to grow her students' oral language skills by making changes to her language use in the classroom. The teachers who believe in change are more likely to use their journals for critical reflection about the changes to their practice. There is link between teachers' belief in change and their use of the journals as critical space.

Theme 5: Reflection is Dependent on Teachers' Beliefs that Journaling Supports Their Efforts to Develop as Teaching Professionals

In addition to audience, time, place, and a belief in change, teachers assert that reflections in their journals help them develop as teaching professionals. Teachers use their journals to record data from their practice, participate in action research projects, or engage with literature, thereby growing as professionals and learning new ways of teaching. Through their journal writing and by reflecting on their practice, they are testing their theories about how their students learn, how their teaching is shaping the learning environment, and how their thinking is aligned with the literature and curricular visions of school boards and the Ministry of Education.

Table 4.7 illustrates how the teachers in the study are using their journals to develop as professionals and engage with the literature on play-based learning and inquiry-based learning, with more knowledgeable colleagues, or reflect on their learning during action research projects. The journals act as a critical space allowing teachers to rethink old ideas and replace old thinking with new practices.

Table 4.7.

Journaling supports Teachers' Development as Professionals

Name	Development as Professionals
Amanda	Collecting data for her action research project on self-regulation; exploring how the flow of the day impacts learning
Lisa and Brenda	More observations of children during learning; providing

	opportunities for children to write about their learning; incorporating new ideas from Board workshops on inquiry into their practice
Avery	Classroom management strategies and creating a system to rate those that are successful
Sarah	How assessment and data impact teaching for next steps and improve her practices
Teresa	Journal serves as a record or “memoir” to her own growth as a teacher
Laura	Make connections between the literature on play based learning and my own classroom experiences; reflect on conversations with more knowledgeable peers and their impact on my teaching practices: e.g., transition periods

Participant Examples – Developing as Professionals

Amanda.

Amanda uses her journal as part of an action research project to explore her understanding and her students’ learning about emotional self-regulation. She notices that emotional self-regulation for young students is a struggle in her classroom. She probes deeply to better understand the needs of her students and asks herself questions about students’ learning. How do the students know how they are feeling? Do they have the words to express their feelings? Do they connect their feelings to their actions? What do they need to do to get ready to learn? Do they know what they need? She closely

examines her practice to discover how her actions and words as well as the classroom environment shape the learning in her classroom. She states:

When I was really able to kind of take a step back and maybe think of a different way of attacking things, when it stopped being just notes about something...I was able to go, 'ok, this is the pattern I am seeing'. (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012)

She wonders how the schedule or flow of the day influences behaviour and the development of self-regulation: "a few times in the last couple of weeks, we've had some stuff going on and I kind of wanted to think about maybe how I handled it or to have it to go back and look at" (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). She gains perspective and collects data for her action research project as the following example illustrates:

I'm not collecting data any other way yet, and I need to do something to collect data, so I'll start by journaling. Once I started getting in the habit of it, I really liked it and I found it did more than I thought. Like I started it just to reflect on what the strategies were that I was using, what the behaviour was that I was seeing with the kids. Really focused around the project and that's not what it is now. But I write about all kinds of other things too so it's very reflective.

(Amanda, journal entry, May 16, 2012)

She accesses the critical space in her journal to develop as a teaching professional. The data she collects for her action research project on self-regulation supports her efforts to produce knowledge and to add to what she knows about social and emotional learning. While her journal entries at the beginning of her action research project mainly contain reflections about the social and emotional learning of her students, she states later that

journaling supports her efforts to examine her practice more broadly to gain new insights into teaching and her classroom.

Lisa and Brenda.

Lisa and Brenda reflect through their writing, supporting each other's growth and development. They explore many ideas and challenges they face in the classroom. Their conversation guides them in their initial efforts to implement inquiry-based learning, reflect on new learning from professional development about play and inquiry, reading, and conversations, as well as fine tune their questioning skills and observations. Their journal provokes further thinking and good conversation between the educators.

They use their journals to write about new learning or revisit learning. Lisa writes:

This is an AHA moment for me. Brenda and I have been so focused on recording our prompts and the students' questions and dialogue that I have forgotten about letting them record in writing what they have learned and letting them share their learning with others. (Lisa, journal entry, January 16, 2012)

In a subsequent entry, they write:

We were surprised at all the discoveries we missed that Becky picked up on video. Brenda and I also discussed having one day a week to view our videos.

Every Wednesday after school we will try to view our videos and document their thinking. (Lisa & Brenda, journal entry, May 22, 2012)

This entry is written in response to a professional development opportunity in which they transcribe students' conversations while another colleague records the same learning. The three met to share their observations and data. They decide to set one day a week aside the following year to talk about their observations of student learning.

Their journal becomes a space to write reflections from professional development workshops provided by their school board. Lisa states, “the plan that we have is from the video clips so that’s something we reflected upon. And we actually have reflected upon ideas that we’d like to incorporate just from our inquiry meetings” (Lisa & Brenda, interview, May 22, 2012).

Other examples of changes they write about are the addition of a newsletter to encourage more parent engagement in students’ learning, sending home documentation binders for families, and using video to capture learning, “lots of discussion about things that people have brought up at those meetings” (Lisa & Brenda, interview, May 22, 2012). The discussions prompt Lisa to write about some of the ideas that she would like to try in her practice.

Lisa and Brenda use their journal for data collection as part of their research project with their school board and EPCI. Writing helps them to connect with their classroom practice and themselves in different ways as they explore a new teaching strategy and relay those experiences to the larger research group in their school board.

Avery.

Avery’s journal provides her with an opportunity to reflect on her teaching and learning. It helps to identify which classroom management strategies are effective. She reviews her journal every few weeks and appreciates how it reveals emerging trends and patterns in her teaching and believes her journal supports her growth as a reflective practitioner. Avery rates the strategies she uses each day to see which are effective in responding to challenges. She reflects:

I think for me the biggest practical use of my journals is my notes on what I did with a class, what I found challenging with a specific class and my observations of their needs. There can be gaps of months before I visit a class again so I will revisit my notes and I am able to remember my day with those students and reflect on what went well and what did not go well. I make notes on specific students if there is a need as it helps me to form relationships and meld more seamlessly into their classroom. (Avery, email to the author, May 14, 2012)

She reviews the strategies that she will use based on her last visit to the classroom. The reflections support her development as a teacher as she considers past teaching assignments to see what was effective in terms of her teaching and reflects on student learning needs. Her repertoire of strategies as a teacher grows with her journal entries. The observations that she revisits help her to prepare for teaching that day.

Sarah.

In an interview, Sarah points out:

When I signed up for ROP and decided to do my project on OLA (Oral Language Assessment) scores amongst my low scoring school children, I looked at what kind of data would I collect? How would I collect it? How do we use it so journaling became part of that because it really made sense in a way of how it made me go back and really reflect on what it was that I was doing. (Sarah, interview, January 15, 2012)

This supports students' development in oral language and enhances her understanding of how assessment and data from the classroom can be used to improve her practice. She reflects on how the oral language scores are reflective of underlying issues such as

poverty. Through her action research project, she adds to what she knows about the relationship between oral language, absenteeism, and poverty. She develops teaching strategies to support her students in language growth, growing her own skills and abilities as a language arts teacher.

Teresa.

Teresa notes, “what’s really useful to me is that you kind of see a growth, not only what your students do, but you know yourself as a teacher. It’s almost like I could turn around and make a memoir out of [it]” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). Her writing is deeper at this stage of her career:

I think that’s because of you know a lot more experiences not just with teaching but with PD [Professional Development]. I’ve done so much inquiry-based learning so there’s more reflection on that type of thing which I wasn’t doing originally because we weren’t really at that stage. (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012)

She uses her journal to record or observe her growth as she learns. She explains, “he [the researcher] gave me some ideas to use with the kids and so I tried those. It was really interesting because that was coming out of what I had written in my journal” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012). Her journal writing supports her efforts to reflect on her practice. She notes, “I was trying to use journaling to see if I could reflect on my own teaching practice” (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012).

Laura.

I puzzle through how to change the timetable in my classroom to have larger blocks of time for students to play. I use my journal to reflect on ideas, referring to the literature that I had read:

Back to the flow. I'm reading Ann Lewin-Benham book on *12 Best Practices* and am wondering how to incorporate more of a flow. I will give it more of a try on Monday, using first period to work with small groups (letters in their names, phonics sound dictionary, colours, ABCs, writing prompts) and then make observations and play at the centres with students in the afternoon. I like how she encourages teachers to set aside good blocks of time to deepen play. I've noticed how engaged some students can be when given time. H has often continued a project (self-initiated) when given the time. I have few students who flit from one centre to the next this year. (Laura, journal entry, November 5, 2012)

My reflections continue as I seek the help of colleagues:

The afternoons are what cause me concern, as there are two and sometimes three transition periods. B and I have talked about how to deal with this. We haven't come up with a solution yet. I spoke as well to N at the conference on Thursday to get some more ideas. (Laura, journal entry, November 5, 2012)

I ask for advice and ideas from my teaching partner that year and resource people from the Ministry of Education during workshops and conferences. My journal and critical reflections support my efforts to grow as a professional, identifying a problem of practice such as transition periods or student engagement in my journal and then making plans to

address it. I look for clarification and reflect on some of the literature that I read about Reggio-inspired classrooms.

I am interested in learning more about how changes in my classroom could support students' learning in new and different ways. As I read more about play-based learning and inquiry-based learning, I search for ideas in the literature. I use my journal to reflect on what I am reading and how I could incorporate my new thinking into my practice:

As I was writing the concept map I remembered the rock and roll poster that N and H had made in the fall. I will want to look for that for ideas as well as assessment purposes. It may also be worth revisiting so as to spark a literacy link to their interest in music. Wein (p. 100) also suggests that reviewing conversations or in this case work samples that represent their thinking may lead to a greater understanding of what the students can do and where their interests lie. More specifically it can reveal the students' living theories. I like the link between their thinking and how they develop living theories that shape their construction of knowledge. This might be an idea to explore further. For example, how students use inquiry-based learning to further develop their living theories.

(Laura, journal entry, December 29, 2011)

I begin to reflect on the purpose behind the learning experiences and provocations, focusing on what students are learning. My journal is a space for me to connect the ideas that I am reading about and my classroom experiences, adding to what I know about teaching.

Teachers use critical reflection in their journals to support their professional development. They write about changes to their practice that add to what they know about teaching and ways to become better teachers. Six teachers use their journals to collect data from their practice for an action research project, using their critical reflections to make changes to their practice and address gaps in their knowledge. In September, Amanda soon realizes that she needs to research social and emotional thinking after she identifies self-regulation as an issue in her classroom. Avery researches and documents teaching strategies that support student engagement, developmentally appropriate practice, and behaviour management as an occasional teacher. Sarah explores the link between low oral language scores, student absenteeism, and poverty while Brenda and Lisa document inquiry-based learning in their classroom. In my journal, I critically reflect on the classroom environment and deepening children's learning by extending play.

The critical space in the journals supports efforts to become better teachers as they grapple with new ideas, read literature on an identified area of new learning, and have conversations with colleagues about questions from their practice. Teachers' desires to grow professionally facilitates their use of critical space in their journals. Similar to the connection between teachers' belief in change and their access to critical space, there is link between teachers' belief in their professional development and their use of the journals to critically reflect.

Summary

The participants indicate they use journals not solely as a place for critical reflection, although critical reflection occurs in learning journals under certain conditions.

For many, journals are descriptive and used to list things to remember or support lesson planning. At the same time, the data show that critical space exists in journals and can be named. It illustrates that critical reflection becomes likely only under certain conditions which act as either facilitators or barriers. Facilitators include assurances of privacy or a trusting relationship with a potential reader of the journal, when time and space are available for journal writing, when there is a belief that change is possible, and when there is a belief that these changes can lead to professional development. Barriers exist when these conditions are absent.

Teachers tend to use journals for critical reflection when they are confident as to the audience. They mention the lack of time during the school day to reflect and write in a journal even though they all believe that journaling is an important part of their practice. For example, Lana notes she would like to have more time to reflect in her journal but her journaling is set aside when time constraints pose problems in her practice. Karen comments that writing in her journal is impossible at school because she lacks time and a secure place to write her thoughts. Shannon's journal entries are mainly sticky notes that she posts on her day plans throughout the day and consists of a word or two to remind her to follow up on an issue and try a new idea the next day. Amanda remarks in her journal that she has limited time to write about her practice while Teresa tries different methods of journaling to save time.

The change they reflected on is often related to practice or challenges to teaching and learning. Amanda considers how teaching her children to identify their emotions can lead to more positive interactions in the classroom. She believes that by identifying emotions and then teaching children how to recognize these feelings in themselves

children's self-regulation can be supported. After reflecting on her day, Shannon notes that to teach her children how to successfully navigate a turn and talk activity, she needs to go back, teach them the steps, and allow them to practice the strategy again. Karen considers how to engage students in the classroom by giving some of them more attention to support a deeper level of involvement.

Teachers choose the topics and stories to write about in their journals based on their experiences in the classroom. They believe journals are useful to their professional development, helping them to solve a problem of practice, fill a gap in knowledge, or make changes to their practice such as Amanda's change to her morning circle routine, her focus on teaching children about emotions, and Avery's classroom work related to building relationships with her students. Lisa and Brenda organize a new portfolio sheet to gather more documentation on their students that will support them in their planning of learning experiences and reporting to parents. These reflections are followed by change and this change helps them to become better teachers.

Chapter Five: Discussion of the Findings

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings are discussed in relation to the main research question and sub-questions and themes are identified.

There is research that indicates the importance of critical reflection for improving the ability of teachers to assist their students and advance pedagogy (Brookfield, 1995; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Is it reasonable to believe that teachers who reflect critically in their journals could use the journals to enhance their abilities to teach and improve their profession? The main research question was: what are the barriers and facilitators that teachers experience in accessing critical space in their journals? To answer this question, the following sub-questions were explored: what is the evidence that teachers use journals for critical space; what are the conditions that promote and limit teachers' use of journals for critical space; how can journals better help teachers to critique and challenge their practice; and how can teachers be supported as they use journals for teacher growth?

The findings suggest that teachers use their journals for a wide range of purposes but not all journal spaces used by teachers are critical. Many journal entries remain descriptive (e.g., lists of materials needed for teaching, an account of an event in the classroom, and assessment information). On the other hand, there are clear instances in which teachers use their journals as critical space.

Dart et al.'s (1998) work suggests that critical reflection occurs under certain conditions. This helps validate the assumption that underlay the research question—that journals are being used as critical space under certain conditions that act as facilitators, while other conditions present barriers and discourage this use. In short:

- Assurances of privacy and the impact of audience shape what teachers reflect on and write about in their journals;
- Time and place play a role in either hindering or helping teachers to use critical space;
- Teachers who believe that change is possible tend to use their journals as critical space, and
- Teachers who use their journals as critical space often believe that their journals support their growth as professionals.

Relationship of the Findings to the Research Questions

It is possible to identify critical space in journaling by instances where teachers use critical reflection to look for multiple perspectives, alternative outcomes and/or underlying reasons and assumptions (Brookfield, 1995). There were many more instances of the use of critical space related to practice in the teachers' journals (Dart et al., 1998). These examples of critical space were closely linked to their everyday teaching and learning. There were also a few examples of critical reflection in journal writing that were more in line with Brookfield's (1995) definition. These examples demonstrate how teachers are looking for the root causes of problems, power relations, and underlying assumptions related to the education system. In both cases, it has been shown that there are certain conditions that encourage critical space in journaling.

First Research Sub-question: What is the Evidence that Teachers Use Journals for Critical Space?

I was interested in finding out when journals were used by teachers as critical space and the barriers to, and facilitators of, using journals as critical space. The first task was to look for critical reflection in the journaling practices of teachers. The question is how to identify critical reflections in the journals of the participants to determine the barriers and facilitators teachers face.

As indicated earlier, the journal entries range from descriptive to critical and were often used for purposes other than critical reflection. Not all teachers use journals to think about their practice. However, there are instances where the journal writing is critical; where journals are a space to critique and challenge practice according to the notions of critical reflection seen in Dart et al. (1998) and even a few instances that met the criteria of criticality for Brookfield (1995). Dart et al. (1998) argue that being critical means describing an event, emotion, or idea, searching for a reason behind the occurrence or feeling, reconstructing the event, emotion, or idea to find a different solution, and finally unearthing assumptions to look at the event, emotion, or idea in a new light. By studying the circumstances surrounding their production, we can explore examples of teachers' use of critical space in their journals.

The sample highlights examples of participants who journal critically and others who do not use their journals in this way. An analysis of these two groups, those who use their journals for critical reflection and those who use their journals for more descriptive writing, helps to clarify the barriers and facilitators that help or hinder critical journal writing.

Descriptive Journal Entries.

For many participants, most entries contain a description of an event in the classroom or at school and go no further. Some explore a situation in more depth or reflect on possible connections between theory and practice. The journals recount events, emotions, or ideas, and at times, ask questions about practice, although the questions are not always critical. Some journals provide a space to record observations of student learning and teaching ideas, strategies, and tips. In the two cases, such as Lana as well as Brenda and Lisa where the journal is a shared or public document, entries tend to be descriptive. They do not highlight challenges or critiques of practice but focus on ideas for next steps, provide comments in support of new information, or a positive experience that unfolds in a classroom.

Kremenizter (2005) found that journal writing might be a way for teachers to explore their thoughts, feelings, and actions. This is evident in the data in the study, for example, when Lana writes about her students' feelings of community and sense of authorship and Avery explores her growing ideas about student engagement and relationship building. Amanda has a space to think about and act on supporting her students' emotional and social development; she writes about changes in her practice that will help their growth of self-regulation skills. These examples indicate that teachers use journals to think about many different topics.

Critical Journal Entries.

Critical reflection can be the unearthing of assumptions in a teacher's work and addressing challenges they face. Dart et al. (1998) note that critical reflection involves seeking alternative ways of working and multiple perspectives. Critical reflection allows

teachers to gain new understanding, see relationships between theory and practice, and use their knowledge to support learning in the classroom. Critical space is openness to change and new learning that occur in the gap when current practices are examined and future practices are imagined (Greene, 1986). Journaling can provide learning from experience by accessing critical space and exploring the gap.

My findings show that critical reflection exists in varying degrees according to conceptions of it in the literature (e.g., Bolton, 2010; Brookfield, 1995, Dart et al., 1998; Greene, 1986). Instances of critical reflection can be identified as occurring in the journals and that critical space in journaling is only accessed under certain conditions. There are several instances when teachers look beyond a teaching strategy and begin to examine underlying factors that shape the learning and their teaching or seek multiple perspectives, such as the case with oral language development in Sarah's class and the connections she makes between oral language skills, poor attendance, and poverty. Other examples are teachers who use journals as critical space to make connections to the literature and classroom practice about play-based learning and inquiry, problems of practice around teaching children how to self-regulate in a Kindergarten class, and the influence of classroom environment on student learning, building on the notion of classroom environment as third teacher (Wein, 2008).

Most researchers agree that journaling can be used for critical reflection. But the current findings contradict Yinger and Clark (1981) that all journaling is critical and differ from others such as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) who do not differentiate between critical and descriptive journal writing in teachers' journals.

This study adds to the literature by showing that teachers use journals to access critical space at different times in their practice. Teachers use them for a variety of reasons not only to access critical space. They are a space to place thoughts or to hold ideas and strong emotions to free up space for reflecting on new challenges, supporting the findings of Moon (2006) and York-Barr et al. (2005). Once reflections are in the journals, teachers find that they can move forward in their work. Revisiting or rereading journal excerpts is not essential to critical space as the work of Yinger and Clark (1981) and Zembylas and Barter (2002) suggests.

There are many reasons why journaling may not support reflection in the manner advocated by the literature to bring about change and growth. Brookfield (1995), Cochran-Smyth and Lytle (1993), and Ziechner (1993) argue that journal writing may sustain old thinking and practices if left unchallenged by others. This study contradicts these observations by showing that challenges by others are not one of the main conditions for critical reflection on current practices. Even if time, space, and audience are met, teachers do not necessarily journal critically but if these conditions are met, teachers are more likely to use their journals as critical space.

Dyment and O'Connell (2014) write that teachers' journals support different levels of learning, not only learning based on critical reflection. Findings from the current study mirror this as teachers reflect on a wide variety of skills as well as questions of pedagogy ranging from a turn and talk exercise with their young learners to the issues of student engagement versus controlling behaviours.

The analysis of participants' journals shows that although many of the entries are devoted to descriptive accounts, critical space is present; participants write statements

that fit Dart et al.'s (1998) notions of critical space. While they journal about many topics related to teaching, some write about topics that are of a critical nature.

Boud (2001) argues:

Learning is inherent in any process of expression, that is, in any way of giving form to the world as experienced. No matter what the reason is for which we write, the lens of learning is an important way of viewing writing. (p. 10)

Some teachers may not be ready to look deeply at their practice or address their assumptions about teaching and learning. Paula believes her journal allows her to do this: "I know that I've improved my teaching practice by constantly reflecting on and writing about it, trying to figure out what works, what does not, etcetera. My teaching journal is key to my success with this and benefits my students" (Paula, email to author, April 10, 2012). For her, writing in her journal and reflecting on opportunities for learning and challenges in her classroom means that she is looking deeply at her teaching practice based on her self-assessment.

Second Research Sub-question: What Are the Particular Conditions that Promote and Limit Teachers' Use of Journals for Critical Space?

Some teachers do use their journals as a critical space to challenge and critique their practice, and it is necessary to find out what are the particular conditions that promote and limit teachers' use of journals for critical space. The two major themes that impact this are the importance of audience on critical space (Theme 2), and the importance of time and place (Theme 3).

The Importance of Audience on Critical Space.

A key consideration to providing circumstances that would allow teachers to access critical space using their journals is to provide assurances of privacy or, failing that, by ensuring that there is a trusting relationship with the colleague with whom they are sharing their journal. I found that journal spaces need to be private to be critical and it is difficult to critique or challenge practice when the space is shared or open to others' views.

Audience shapes the writing and influences what teachers allow themselves to consider as a topic to be explored in their journals. They are aware of the possible reaction of others should the journals be read and the possible harm that could result if the information or comments are made public. If journals are shared, the writing changes and they are more likely to edit their thoughts and words. This concurs with existing research that refers to the influence of writing for an audience on journal reflections and suggests that who the audience of the journal is can be a motivating or inhibiting factor (Boud, 2001; O'Connell & Dymont, 2003).

Critical reflection is not dependent on privacy as many writers depend upon the existence of an audience to be critical or for feedback. Four interviewees participated, are still participating, or are currently involved in research in which others use their journal as data. For others, privacy helps to develop initial critical notions that can be shared with a wider audience later. By viewing journals as private, participants feel freer to write about what is occurring in their classrooms without concern for audience. They are more comfortable asking tough questions about students and relationships in their journals and may never share those thoughts with others.

The question of audience in relation to journal writing depends on the circumstance. For Lana, for example, audience is a motivating factor in thinking about classroom successes in a shared journal with other teachers from her school. The stories in a shared journal inspire and motivate the teachers as they write about successes. In her own learning journal, Lana notes, “my private one is private. I wouldn’t put anything hidden there that if anyone found it I would be embarrassed about” (Lana, personal correspondence, April 30, 2012). Thoughts of potential audience curb her reflections even though it is not for others to see or read.

Paula, on the other hand, expects no audience and believes that the privacy of her journal protects her and her students. Her journal affords her the freedom to write and reflect on her practice using the “raw material of experience” (Boud, 2001, p. 10). This affirms the findings of others who suggest that audience influences teachers’ writing in journals and those assurances of privacy are key to freely expressing thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Lauterbach & Hentz, 2005).

Even when journals are considered private, teachers continue to write with an audience in mind. Teachers in this study remark that they are cautious when considering what to write about in their journals in terms of their teaching and learning, students’ growth, and relationships with colleagues and administration if their journal is read. Both Boud (2001) and English (2001) point out that the inhibiting gaze of others restricts what may be written in the journal and even what might be considered as an appropriate topic for a journal entry.

Although Hiemstra (2001) suggests that journals provide a space for writers to express themselves freely, if teachers are concerned that others will read their journals,

the benefit of writing freely about challenges, gaps in knowledge, and critical understanding no longer applies and teachers' journal entries may remain at the descriptive level. According to Lauterbach and Hentz (2005), closely related to the benefit of writing in journals to express one's thoughts freely, is having a space to reflect that meets the individual needs of the teacher. If the journal is not considered to be a private document and does not contain critical reflections, it may no longer meet the needs of individual teachers as a reflective tool.

One teacher states, "then you censor yourself, you edit your language" (Sarah, interview, June 15, 2012). Knowing someone else could possibly read the journal can shape what is written and what is thought (Boud, 2001). It is understandable that people sharing journal entries with the Ministry of Education and other teachers might feel uncomfortable in questioning the system or taking a critical stance.

Some participants find that private space. For example, Paula notes: "consistent practice and honest reflection can create a rewarding and useful document that helps me plan for the rest of my teaching career" (Paula, email to author, April 10, 2012). When journal writing is viewed through the lens of learning (Boud, 2001), it is essential to respect teachers' rights to privacy.

The findings from this study show that to build on journals' potential for learning through reflective writing, privacy must be honoured; teachers must be able to write freely about their practice. English (2001) and Thorpe (2004) point out that critiquing one's practice can lead to discomfort as teachers call into question long-held beliefs and values about teaching and learning. If there are no assurances of privacy, teachers may be unwilling to reveal gaps in knowledge, view mistakes as opportunities to learn, and take a

risk in their learning. Similarly, Dymont and O'Connell (2014) argue that journal spaces need to be safe places to write reflections and think about changes to practice. Journals could be a critical space to think through a new idea, strategy, response to a situation, or a place to modulate emotions before sharing with colleagues or taking new learning to a more public forum. This study reaffirms Dymont and O'Connell's (2014) finding that teachers' use their journals as a space to try new strategies and write about the results of those strategies on their practice when journals are private. It illustrates that teachers are aware of the possibility that their journals could be discovered and shape their writing accordingly.

At some point, the learning assured by the private critical space could be shared with others. Yet except for the instance in which Lisa and Brenda had established a relationship where they feel comfortable sharing critical space, most of the teachers do not want others to read their journals and have not established a protocol of critiquing practices with colleagues.

Four teachers were willing to share journal excerpts with me, although at the beginning of the research process I had difficulty gathering the excerpts. Once I built a trusting relationship, they were more comfortable sharing their writing but the trusting relationship was essential before they would share their journals with me. Although discussion of a relationship of trust with the reader is not found extensively in the literature, this finding helps to bring into focus the dilemma that the private nature of journaling presents to teachers. If journals are to be used as a critical space, how can those learnings be shared with others (e.g., Garmon, 2001; Silva, 2002)?

Knowing that the journal will have an external audience might provoke positive feelings when entries are used to celebrate classroom events or to collect data for research. However, as Wheatley (2002) notes, without the challenge or critique to practice, new learning that results in changes in practice may be hindered. The teachers at Lana's school leave the journal in a public space for other teachers to access and to contribute. Their journal helps to reshape the school environment but this public sharing does not necessarily change practice either individually or collectively.

Boud (2001) argues that the more journals are used for critical reflection, the more that writers might feel hindered by audience. In this study, the shared entries focus mainly on positive experiences and do not contain critical questions or thoughts about practice. The concerns about privacy, confidentiality, and relationship building are reflected in the literature on journal writing. All teachers write with a potential audience in mind regardless of whether they have plans to share their journals with others. They are particularly concerned that no harm be done to students mentioned.

The impact of audience on teachers' efforts to journal hampers the critical quality of their reflections. Even when teachers are assured of privacy in that they are not sharing their journal with colleagues or administration, they still write with audience in mind and do not feel free to express themselves as Hiemstra (2001) asserts. Under these conditions, based on the analysis of the journal excerpts and the statements by participants of the contents of their journals, the reflections tend to be descriptive rather than critical. There will, however, be exceptions if there is a trusting relationship and teachers are more willing to share excerpts of their choosing.

Journal entries remain primarily descriptive when they are shared with a

colleague or a group of colleagues. There are few instances that challenge or critique practice when the teachers know that they will be sharing with a colleague, a group of teachers, or as part of a research project. Teachers often refer to editing their writing when faced with sharing their private entries. On the other hand, those who do not share their journals with others tend to reflect on the literature, pose questions, and write about challenges they face in the classroom unless they have developed trust with the other teacher reading the journal.

Literature points to the importance of having a safe and trusting environment in which to share reflections (e.g., Alterio, 2004; Boud, 2001; English, 2001; Humble & Sharp, 2012; Kok & Chabeli, 2002); my study shows that this aspect of journal writing is crucial for creating critical space. Teresa's comments highlight the importance of having a trusting relationship to a willingness to share, "most of it I would share with somebody I would feel comfortable with but... Well if I felt comfortable with a person, I would share it...but I do not know if I want to share it because I do not think it is the best writing" (Teresa, interview, April 2, 2012).

The importance of critical reflection and the issue of audience for practicing teachers has not been adequately addressed in the literature. Some suggest that privacy and a trusting relationship between the reader and writer of journals are essential aspects in journal writing for journals to be used for critical reflection and writers to freely express themselves (Epp, 2008; Kok & Chabeli, 2002; Minott, 2008). Dymont and O'Connell (2010) argue that students might write in a descriptive manner without revealing critical thinking unless they are assured of a safe place to share. However, two issues arise from this study: first that teachers are always aware of potential or real

audience and this knowledge shapes the use of journals as critical space. This inhibits what they write in their journals. Second is to unearth assumptions and reflect critically, others should have access to these reflections to push and extend the writer's thinking. In my study, there were only two instances of shared journaling: Lisa and Brenda and Lana. The study showed that in Lana's case, the shared journal is used to highlight classroom successes rather than critique practice and is not of a critical nature. Lisa and Brenda have few instances of critical reflection in their journal and for the most part, their writing remains descriptive. If teachers are not assured that their journals are private, they will be unwilling to reveal themselves and their vulnerabilities. Journals are no longer a critical space to challenge practice or freely explore their vulnerabilities.

The literature on reflective journal writing suggests the status quo may be maintained and reinforced if the ideas or emotions within the journal are not challenged or critiqued (Brookfield, 1995; Zeichner, 1993). This highlights a potential contradiction for journals as critical space. For teachers to replace old belief systems, they must challenge current practice (Fullan, 1985). If there is no opportunity to challenge practices written in their journals, ideas and actions remain unchanged. Under these circumstances, journals can help teachers to resist change or uphold outdated practices. Gitlin and Smyth (1989) note, "because most teachers do not have the opportunity to reflect critically on practice with others, the inadequacy [of] those practices often remains hidden" (p. 6). Brookfield (1995) points out that without support of interested colleagues, there is a tendency to reflect on strategies and techniques in teaching that can be resolved rather than on larger global issues that uphold teachers' assumptions.

Hatton and Smith (1995) contend that shared journaling supports efforts to be reflective as partners challenge and critique thinking. Humble and Sharp (2012) found this to be the case in their shared journaling study and state, “the journals provided us a safe place to share our musings, concerns, questions, triumphs, and disappointments”. Humble and Sharp (2012) stress the importance of creating that safe space to reflect openly and honestly to explore assumptions. York-Barr et al. (2005) note that partner, small group, and whole school reflections can be a powerful force of change when reflective practice is the norm and colleagues have trusting relationships.

This study confirms and builds on the work of York-Barr et al. (2005) and Humble and Sharp (2012) in regards to the importance of a trusting and safe environment in which to share critical reflections. This understanding is extended by demonstrating that having a safe and trusting environment does not always guarantee that teachers will write about concerns and questions about practice.

Despite literature regarding the many benefits of reflective practice and the use of interested colleagues to challenge practices, this study illustrates that critical space opened up by the teachers in their journals is private and that potential audience is an inhibiting factor in the criticality of their reflections. Teachers generally do not find schools to be a safe and trusting environment in which to share their journals with colleagues. For the teachers in Lana’s school who share teaching successes in a common journal, when they participate in a shared journaling experience, reflections remain descriptive and do not tend to challenge practice. This is evident in the challenge faced in gathering excerpts or journals from teachers. The exception is Lisa and Brenda’s shared journal. At times, they use their journal for critical space and reflect on making students’

learning visible, challenges of documentation, and insights about new education policies regarding early years' learning and at other times, their journal writing is descriptive.

Time and Place Constraints Shape Teachers' Efforts to Journal.

This study found that time and place are important since they limit teachers' abilities to write critically. Critical space exists when sufficient time and place are set aside to permit critical reflection. Teresa notes that she has very little time to write in a journal and has tried different ways to access critical space using a template on her day plans and journaling on the computer to carve out more time to journal. May believes that time constraints negatively impact her ability to reflect in her journal; she talks about being, at times, overwhelmed and too tired at the end of the day to take the time to journal about her day.

Lisa and Brenda face similar struggles in finding time to journal and note that their efforts to use their journal for critical space is made more difficult with expectations to change the way they document student learning in the classroom. They suggest the added pressure to write extensively about students during the day leaves little time to note their challenges to practice in their shared journal. When time pressures increase, they resort to jot notes similar to Shannon. Amanda refers to a lack of time at school to journal and like Teresa has begun to use technology to help her journal. Unlike the others, Karen focuses mainly on how space constrains her efforts to journal. She feels that there is not a safe place to journal at school and prefers to reflect critically at home. As well, she is the only participant who has a schedule for journaling.

When teachers do not have the time to journal when events are unfolding or they are experiencing feelings about a challenge or a positive experience, efforts to write in

their journal are either rushed or thwarted. This confirms the literature on the challenges of time in relation to teachers' efforts to journal about their practice shown by Fletcher (2006), Cole and Knowles (2000), and Dymont and O'Connell (2014). This supports Fletcher's (2006) findings that as more pressure is placed on teachers and less time is afforded to reflect on practice, teaching becomes programmatic and product-based as teachers struggle to cover curriculum, meet scheduling commitments and respond to standardized timetables that do not necessarily respect their pace of learning.

Cole and Knowles (2000) found that both time and a quiet place to journal are challenges that teachers face. Dymont and O'Connell (2014) note that burn out, time constraints, repetition, and perceived lack of meaningfulness of journal writing are reasons teachers stop using their journals as a reflective tool.

Those who feel rushed in their writing because of the myriad of responsibilities they attend to often write sparingly, use jot notes as reminders and entries are not of a critical nature. Rich details, links to the literature, conversations with colleagues that support or do not support their thinking, alternative actions or outcomes, or an analysis of the situation that goes beyond a description of the event become more difficult to scribe when time and a place to reflect are not found.

This study indicates that adding another task without providing adequate time, even if it helps teachers in their practice, impedes their ability to reflect critically in journals. When teachers have little time, and do not believe that they have a safe place in which to write, journal entries remain mostly descriptive. Three teachers refer to the need for support to maintain their practice of thinking through their writing in journals. They define support as more time to journal, a quiet place to write, and having a group of like-

minded colleagues rather than just encouragement to use reflection as is mentioned by the pre-service teachers in Killeavy and Maloney's (2011) study.

The call for more time appears frequently in the literature for pre-service and practicing teachers (e.g., O'Connell & Dymont, 2011; Otienoh, 2009, 2011) but there are few findings on how and why this is the case. This study provides a more detailed understanding of the way time and place constraints represent a barrier to critical reflection and the use of journaling as critical space.

The finding generally supports the literature on the importance of time and place for writing critically and accessing critical space by clarifying understanding of the importance of these two elements. According to York-Barr et al. (2005), "reflective practice requires a deliberate pause, a purposeful slowing of life to find time for reflection. To deliberately pause creates the psychological space and attention in which an open perspective can be held" (p. 6).

Dymont and O'Connell (2014) suggest that the stage of a teacher's career plays a role in how critical the writing in journals is and whether a journal is used as a reflective tool. My study suggests that for these teachers this is less important. The literature suggests that early career journals would be more critical as journaling addresses a need to reflect on their work, builds a foundation of knowledge, adds to the strategies and tools they have for teaching, and allows changes to practice. Although Dymont and O'Connell's study addresses the journaling habits of professors, their findings illustrate a difference in the reflective writing practices of teachers. My data did not illustrate that new teachers in the study wrote in their journals more critically than experienced teachers. The least experienced is Avery, an occasional teacher. Many of her entries are

descriptive. She uses her journal as a place to hold her thoughts until she has time to come back to reflect. When she returns, her clarifications are more critical in terms of making connections to the literature on Early Years learning.

In contrast, Amanda's entries are sometimes critical and other times, simply describe classroom events. She writes at length in her journal about her project on self-regulation; entries that are more descriptive tend to be found at the beginning of the school year before she had decided on a focus for her project or when she is pressed for time.

Lana is the most experienced teacher. She uses her journal as critical space to gather data for her research project on supporting the students' sense of belonging through the creation of a student newspaper. Her journal writing is critical. The literature suggests that her need to reflect critically in her journal might diminish as she gains teaching experience (Dyment & O'Connell, 2014), but hers was the most critical. This may be related to the specific project she was involved in. The findings in this study, though based on a small sample, suggest that Dyment and O'Connell's (2014) findings may be accurate with respect to trends, but do not hold for everyone.

These findings show that time and place can act as a barrier or facilitator in teachers' use of journaling to access critical space. They point to the need to create time and provide a place for teachers to use their journals for critical space at all stages of their teaching careers, according to individual needs. When they have time, they often do not have a safe place in which to write. To access critical space, a safe and trusting environment must be available for teachers to write. Time is a factor mentioned by all the teachers as a barrier to journaling.

Belief in Possible Change.

The third condition that acts as a barrier or facilitator to accessing critical space is when there is a belief that reflecting in journals can bring about change in practice.

Teachers in my study write about changes they make to their teaching or their initial thinking about a possible change. They believe that change is possible and will improve their practice. Table 5.1 highlights the supports that teachers require to journal. A belief in change to practice facilitates critical reflection in teachers' journals.

Table 5.1.

Name of Participants and Supports Needed

Name of	Supports Needed
Participants	
Shannon	Time to write and reflect, quiet space, resources provided to journal
Karen	No extra support needed
Avery	Support of colleagues and being with like-minded teachers, access to research, debate and engagement
Lisa and Brenda	Quiet space, time built into the day to journal

Change in personal teaching practices.

Change does not happen unless participants feel that there is a reason to bring about change. According to Wheatley (2002), having a measure of doubt and uncertainty about teaching practices can lead to generative change. Without some doubt about one's

efficacy in the classroom, there is little need for critique of practice and subsequent change.

Writing about challenges to practice can lead to changes. Doubts about efficacy support explorations of gaps in knowledge through journal writing. In many instances teachers identify areas where they have gaps in understanding about teaching strategies such as turn and talks, the use of play-based and inquiry-based learning, as well as links between theory and practice in terms of oral language development, absenteeism, and poverty.

A belief in change is a common thread in the journals. For example, Avery uses her journal to think through different strategies as an occasional teacher for classroom management. She often refers to ideas such as a “getting to know me” activity or the age plus two rule and demonstrates an openness to new learning as she begins to reflect on larger issues of engagement versus management and giving children responsibility for their learning (Avery, journal entry, February 7, 2012). The same belief in the need to change is in Amanda’s journal. Some entries describe new strategies related to self-regulation for Kindergarten students; she rethinks aspects of her practice as she highlights strategies she has tried, students’ responses to those strategies, and what her next steps will be. Amanda often adds her thinking about underlying factors, particularly later in the school year. For instance, she reflects on how modifying her time schedule will help students regulate as well as how she might change how she could use more time to observe and less to model how to use materials in the classroom.

When lessons do not go as planned, unexpected situations occur, or teachers experience strong emotions, they begin to think about alternative strategies. If they have

no doubt about their abilities to address challenges, fill a gap in knowledge, or a need to critique practice in light of new understandings, practices remain unchallenged (Wheatley, 2002). Transformation depends on disequilibrium in a teacher's view of their abilities to address new situations or learning needs, leaving room for growth and new thinking to replace old practices (Wheatley, 2002). Finding new strategies, beliefs, and ways of teaching help right the disequilibrium in practice. Avery searches for more appropriate classroom management strategies; Karen explores student engagement; Teresa plans for more hands-on learning in her science classes; and Lana reflects on how she can establish a community of authors in her classroom. A journal can be a critical space to work through this disequilibrium and begin the process of replacing old ideas with new thinking.

Teachers who are very confident may feel little need to reflect on practice or make changes to resolve new situations that arise in their practice. When there is an openness to new learning (Greene, 1986), they are more willing to entertain doubts about their practices and make changes to improve. Accessing critical space in journals to reflect on their teaching efficacy can lead to change.

Without some doubt about current practices introduced through critique and the challenge of assumptions about learning, change and teacher growth are unlikely to occur (Wheatley, 2002). Sharing positive scenarios and successes such as those in Lana's shared journal are not as valuable to teacher growth and development since practices are not challenged. Greene (1986) refers to opening a new space and cultivating openness to learning. This relates to a belief that changes to practice can lead to better teaching and a better way of working. Although at times uplifting, stories in journals that do not

challenge and critique practice whether they are success stories or descriptive accounts do not necessarily open a new space nor allow openness to trying new strategies or approaches to learning. Teresa notes, though, that revisiting her journal, the entries that describe successes, is reaffirming.

A climate of change.

School climate is an important factor in the willingness to share gaps in learning or challenges of practice (Wheatley, 2002); this relates to my study. Teachers believe that having a safe and trusting place to journal is one of the conditions that must be met for them to journal critically (Silva, 2002). Schools that encourage the development of a growth mindset and discussions about challenges, and adopt a teacher-as-learner stance, support the use of teachers' efficacy doubts as a vehicle to new learning (Wheatley, 2002).

The notion of establishing a positive school climate to encourage teachers to share insights resonates with the experiences of Lisa and Brenda as well as Lana. Shared journaling efforts are sparked by a negative school climate in Lana's case. Positive stories contained in the journal are used to counteract teachers' disengagement at the school. Lisa and Brenda began their shared journaling efforts as a research project; there was an expectation that data would be collected for the project through their journal. There is a positive climate that supports research in their classroom as well as a trusting relationship between the colleagues that supports Lisa's and Brenda's journaling efforts.

Belief in change is identified as a facilitator of teachers' use of journals to access critical space. This aspect of my study supports the work of Brookfield (1995), York-Barr et al. (2005), and Wheatley (2002) who argue that to bring about change, teachers must

believe that change is possible and one way to do this is to reflect critically. Brookfield (1995) found that the pace of learning unfolds in step with a teacher’s learning rhythm and, perhaps, a teacher’s readiness for critical reflection follows in a similar way. There is no evidence of a relationship between stage in career and critical reflection in my study as is found in Dymont and O’Connell’s (2014) work. Maimon (2005), a teacher researcher, reports finding a purpose in her teaching through her journal writing: “meaning that I make of my work through my writing is bounded by capacity to perceive as well as my capacity to believe” (as cited in Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2005, p. 228). My study helps to clarify this understanding as teachers begin to see how accessing critical space supports their beliefs that they are empowered to make changes to improve their learning and the learning of their students.

Teachers’ Beliefs that Journaling Supports their Efforts to Develop as Teaching Professionals.

Table 5.2 highlights how participants use their journals to push their thinking and the changes to practice they have made. One idea that surfaces is that teachers believe that change is possible and that journals are a space they can use to think about these changes. The changes to their practice supports their growth as teachers. Analysis shows that those teachers who believe that change is possible tend to be more reflective in their journals.

Table 5.2.

Does Your Journaling Push Your Thinking?, Changes to Practice

Name of	Does Your	Changes to Practice
Participants	Journaling	

Push Your Thinking?		
Shannon	Yes	<p>Turn and talk strategy for oral language</p> <p>“I discovered right away that I hadn’t trained the troops! I jotted a quick note on a sticky and spent some time at the end of the day evaluating what had happened and then thinking about what steps I needed to put into place before we tried that again.”</p>
Karen	Yes	<p>Meeting students’ individual needs</p> <p>“I have learned how to better manage some difficult students better by analyzing their interactions in my class. I have changed my practice by giving one of them less attention...and helped another through a difficult time by providing some additional supports.”</p>
Avery	Yes	<p>Way to evaluate her teaching as well as to refresh her memory about a class.</p> <p>“The journaling process has me reflect about myself as a teacher...biggest insights I have had is that I was too concerned with the students liking me...my rules are my rules.”</p>
Lisa and Brenda	Yes	<p>Developed a new portfolio format for documenting student learning</p>

“After coming across another schools’ portfolio sheet format, we wrote that we’d like to make something similar. We jotted that we’d like to add specific expectations to our portfolio sheet...we reflected on our notes and made our portfolio sheet.”

Teachers use journals as critical space with the belief that the changes they have reflected on support growth. The use of critical reflection in journaling supports the belief of teachers that reflections in their journals help them grow professionally. Among those participants who use their journals for critical space, there is the notion that they would become better teachers by making the changes explored in their critical reflections.

Journals support growth when they are linked to the belief that change is possible and teachers are empowered by their efforts in their classroom to bring about change through their critical reflections. May and Amanda would like to continue to reflect or to journal in the future provided conditions such as time and space are met. The reflections captured in their journals are sometimes followed by changes in practice and this helps them to grow as professionals. Amanda writes about the changes she has made to her practice based on her reflections. Lisa and Brenda describe the changes they made to the way they document student learning and have shared their new portfolio document sheet with their colleagues.

Fullan (1985) notes that change occurs in a teacher’s belief system before the change in thinking can result in new practice. When reflections are followed by changes in practice, teachers add to what they know about teaching and learning, helping them to

grow professionally. Writing critically is key to bringing about change in their belief system and their actions. There is no desire to delve more deeply into challenges if they do not feel that change is possible, necessary, or achievable. If no change occurs, development does not occur. According to Fullan (1985), educators need to believe that their reflections on practice will lead to change and further that these changes will support their growth as professionals.

For critical reflection to occur in journaling, teachers need to be certain that they can use reflections to become better teachers (Ruan & Beach, 2005). In my study, teachers believe that journals support their growth as professionals; journals help them to engage with new ideas and approaches in their teaching. All the teachers in the study appreciate journaling as a reflective tool in their practice despite the time constraints they face. But it must be noted that journaling is one of the first strategies that they let go if there is a lack of time.

Journals are useful to think through changes that support development. Reflection brings about change and change in practice is possible and beneficial. Sarah reflects on how low attendance in her classroom negatively impacts oral language development. Amanda believes that by teaching children about different emotions, they will be able to name their emotions and begin to work through them at school. May notes that by exposing children to social justice issues such as homelessness, her students develop empathy for others. Lisa and Brenda take more time to observe and document children throughout the week to better understand the children's learning. My study supports the importance of using journals as a critical space to develop as professionals in areas that are relevant and personal to the needs of the teacher. Critical space comes about when

teachers use their journals to explore challenges particular to their practice that result in making changes to the way they work.

According to Moon (2006), journals function as “knowledge-in-pieces” and she suggests that new learning can shape future practice (p. 71) in order to be better teachers. In my study, teachers who use journals for critical space are involved in researching their practice by challenging and evaluating their work. Critical journal entries support this, allowing growth of content knowledge and the idea that practices are shaped by the data they collect from classroom practice. For seven teachers, journaling is used as a method to collect and analyze data from their practice. Teachers critically reflect in their journals if they believe that it will help them, as individuals, become better teachers. Belief in professional development is, therefore, a facilitator of teachers’ critical reflections explored in their journals.

Third Research Sub-question: How Do Journals Better Help Teachers to Critique and Challenge their Practice?

Critical reflection occurs when journal writers have a belief in change and a belief that it makes them a better teacher. The identification of barriers and facilitators helps us better understand how teachers can use journals for critical reflection. It is important to consider how this understanding can help teachers use critical reflection to challenge and critique practice. This study shows that teachers who believe in change are the ones who tend to include critical reflection and that critical reflection tends to occur when the writer of a journal believes that such writing will assist her or him with professional development. Critical reflection is important but action taken brings about changes in

classroom practices. This sub-question is operationalized by asking how teachers translate critical reflection into changes to their practice.

Action Based on a Belief in Change.

In this study, there are many examples of teachers who look at challenges in practice and reflect on what changes need to take place to support student learning or develop their practice. The data show how some teachers use critical reflection to bring about change in their practice; they reflect on an event, idea, or emotion, and consider alternative ways to deal with a situation in their practice. For some, the new approach is then implemented. Not all the teachers in the study link action to their reflections from their journals, but many do.

Amanda makes changes because of her reflections in her journal such as teaching students to identify feelings, asking specific students if they are hungry or tired, and using literature through read-alouds to help students understand. She adds to her knowledge about self-regulation for her students to be ready for learning, and integrates sensory materials into the classroom to help students feel calm. Her journal entries illustrate how she uses her writing to connect the body of literature on play-based learning that she has been introduced to during professional development opportunities with the school board to her teaching experience (see also, Carter & Curtis, 2003; Fraser, 2002; Seitz, 2006; Wein, 2011).

Amanda begins to search for a way to change her circle routine to respond to the students' need to let her know their feelings. She writes about having a small set of cards with feelings shown on them and kept on a ring for the students to hold during the circle. Writing her thoughts in her journal is a way to hold onto these thoughts until she finds a

solution. Amanda uses her journal to think through her writing and comments during the interview that she can “reflect on the strategies I was using and what the behaviour was that I was seeing with the kids” in her journal (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012).

There are many examples that illustrate how reflecting in journals and accessing critical space supports efforts to make changes to practice. Teachers identify gaps in knowledge in their practice such as the need to learn more about self-regulation, how to better organize transitions, what the positive effects of rethinking transition times on learning are, and the importance of supporting children’s efforts to set their own learning goals. Journals provide a space to explore new ideas about student engagement as is seen in the example of Karen’s case where her journal is used to explore engagement with her older students. Using the critical space in journals supports a clearer understanding of some of the underlying challenges that children face such as when Amanda notices that the issue is not her circle routine but, in fact, a problem of timing combined with the need to teach self-regulation skills. She makes plans in her journal to change her practice to meet her students’ needs and then begins to use her journal to reflect on her students’ progress and her development.

Changes to practice are, at times, fundamental such as when Lisa and Brenda write about the way they are observing learning in the classroom, reflecting on their practice of documentation to make changes to align their practice more closely with the new expectations of the Early Years program in Ontario. They use their journal to think about the way they are capturing learning in the classroom, to set goals, and then to evaluate whether they have reached the goals. Lisa and Brenda’s reflections are put into action; once they write their thoughts in their journal, they commit to act. At times

changes are very small such as making a note to follow up on a lesson as in the case of Shannon, who explains that once her thoughts are put onto paper she acts.

Critical reflection in journals helps teachers to act by serving as placeholders. Journaling allows them to hold ideas that they can then come back to and revisit. By writing in a journal, their attention is freed up so they can move on to something else. Teresa refers to her journal as a thought-holder for her to come back later. Sarah and Amanda view their journals as places to put their reflections and to clear reflective space for new challenges. Amanda's journal supports her efforts to challenge her practice by "clearing her head" for her to see concerns more clearly (Amanda, interview, May 16, 2012). Sarah uses her journal to "make way in her head", reiterating that the process of writing in the journal rather than the actual words that she writes is of greater significance to her reflective process (Sarah, interview, June 21, 2012). Writing in the journal is important in this circumstance not based on what she is writing but that she has a tool which allows her to free up her thoughts so that she can then come back, reflect, and act.

Journals help free up thinking space during the day. Once the ideas, events, or emotions are written, teachers have more critical space to reflect on the next set of challenges and the next set of actions. Amanda writes reflections in her journal to clear her mind for other pressing issues that she deals with in the classroom. She comes back to the issue later and modifies her classroom management strategies.

Except for Teresa, the benefit of revisiting the journal entries is not the main point of writing in the journal. The idea of writing reflections in the journals allows teachers to move forward, concentrate on new challenges, and act. An example is when Amanda reflects on challenging behaviours and the need to teach self-regulation skills. She uses

her journal to think about what she observes in her classroom and how she might resolve the challenge while at the same time moving on quickly to other issues. She then comes back and changes her circle time routine.

It is important to underline that even though action may occur as a result of critical reflection in journals, this action may in fact reinforce the status quo. The literature on reflective journal writing suggests the status quo may be maintained and reinforced in journal writing if the ideas or emotions within the journal are not challenged or critiqued (Brookfield, 1995; Zeichner, 1993). This critique can be messy and emotional. Teachers may use their journals to “fret, whine, rant, and write” as Paula suggests, although may not take learning further after reflection (Paula, email to author, April 10, 2012).

I now examine how teachers translate critical reflection into changes in their practice. The act of writing may help teachers to revisit an event or to explore new ideas before acting. The private nature of journals supports this new learning as they explore ways of teaching and doing. There are many demonstrations of how teachers in this study use journals to think through and process new ideas which then allows them to move on to action. Amanda, Karen, Lisa, and Brenda show how the critical reflection contained in their journals helps them improve their day to day practices through action. For others, journals help translate critical reflection into changes in their practices by providing a placeholder for these ideas to which they can then come back. At the same time, the analysis has shown that while journals are used to translate reflection into action, this action is not always critical of the status quo.

Action based on a Belief in Professional Development.

A belief in the impact of professional development is necessary for critical reflection to occur in journaling; this leads to the use of critical reflection to produce actions that critique and challenge teaching practices. Critical space is accessed when there is a belief that it will help teachers develop as professionals by gaining new perspectives, making and sharing in decisions, and becoming more specialized in what they know about learning (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1985). Ryan (2013b) notes, “educational language can cause misunderstanding and requires a great deal of probing via clarifying questions of self and others to realize meaning. Eventually, meaning becomes clearer, shared, understood, and leads to deep reflection and communal best praxes” (p. 6).

Brookfield (1995) suggests that “to become critically reflective, we need to find some lenses that reflect back to us stark and differently highlighted pictures of who we are and what we do” (p. 29). The teachers in my study use journals to reflect on their teaching. However, they use their journals for a wide variety of purposes, not all of which are critical. When they do use their journals as a critical “lens” (p. 29), they access critical space in which to challenge and critique their practice. He argues that critical reflection is an on-going process that follows the ebbs and flows of a teacher’s own learning path; it is fluid, recursive, and changing. The ebb and flow of the teachers’ use of journals is evident in this study. When they face challenges of time, they tend to use their journals in a descriptive way. Critical space is accessed when they are confronted by a gap in their knowledge, a challenging situation in the classroom, or engage with the literature. Their journal entries change with their learning needs and are a responsive tool for learning. In times of stress or challenge, the teachers access the space in their journals.

According to Brookfield (1995), “recognizing the discrepancy between what is and what should be is often the beginning of a critical journey” (p. 29). Teachers who use journal writing to research their practice are encouraged by the support their writing gives to their teaching and learning. All but one teacher uses her journal for research purposes to collect data from her practice. My own “critical journey” (p. 29, Brookfield, 1995) with journaling has highlighted the need for a way to access critical space to change practice and develop as a professional. I found that a moderate view of critical reflection aligned more closely with the changes to practice and growth as a teacher. Thinking about the connections of practice to theory and theory to practice (Dart et al., 1998) as a way of reflecting on learning to be a better teacher was a key part of my journal writing and helped propel me forward. The use of journals to collect data supports the view of teachers as knowledge producers rather than solely knowledge consumers (Clandinin & Connelley, 1986; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

Teachers nurture relationships with students and families, and so plan learning experiences that attend to individual needs of their students in their journals. This aspect of journal writing appears in the literature (e.g., Hatch, Ahmed, Lieberman, Faigenbaum, White, & Mace, 2005) and is related to the concept of professional development. My study provides examples of how teachers use journals to develop living theories and to test new understandings about learning in their journals. Five of the ten teachers use their journal for research projects while all ten of the teachers write about their practice in the journal to reflect.

Teachers must believe in the power to change and use their journal writing to support this change. Thessin (2015) suggests, “when data [are] . . . used as part of an

ongoing improvement cycle that involves regular collection and systematic analysis of evidence, teachers can change their instructional practice to improve” (p. 73). My journal is used to think about new practices and becomes a place for me to reflect on the changes that I make in the classroom and how they are shaping learning. Changes in my practice involve extending periods of time for exploration and play, removing commercial materials from the classroom space, and co-planning the learning agenda with the children. Avery writes about classroom events and adds her ideas about why a situation unfolded as it did, adding changes in action for the next time she is with those students. Teresa writes about her use of questions and their impact on learning in her science classes.

New thinking displaces old ways of knowing before action replaces current practice. If journal reflections do not challenge old ways of thinking, then teachers’ actions in the classroom tend to remain the same and no change occurs. When reflections stay at the descriptive level without critical thinking, replacing old ideas with new ways of thinking cannot occur and hence, no significant changes to practice result (Akinbode, 2013; Fullan, 1985; Wheatley, 2001). How does growth occur if reflections are descriptive and new thinking does not replace old ways of doing?

York-Barr et al. (2005) suggest, “reflective practice leads to improvement only when deepened understandings lead to action”, echoing Brookfield (1995) and Zeichner (1993) who argue that action needs to follow reflection for change and growth in practice to occur in a meaningful way. My study indicates that some teachers, such as Lisa and Brenda who at times access critical space in their journals, act on their reflections in contrast to the literature on arrested action where reflection is not followed by action

(Herr, 1999). These teachers consistently refer to their use of the journals to focus their work in the classroom and commit to changing practice. If they write about a specific change, they tend to adjust their practice accordingly. Accessing critical space supports teachers' efforts to grow as professionals by building their contextual or tacit knowledge to respond to situations in the classroom, their gaps in knowledge, or by exploring new ideas in the literature.

The use of journals as critical space empowers teachers to rely on their practice for learning rather than outside experts as well as allows their efficacy to grow. York-Barr et al. (2005) contend, "as the internal capacities of teachers are recognized and tapped, a greater sense of empowerment emerges" (p. 9). At times, some teachers use the critical space to research aspects of their practice. The findings of my study demonstrate that teachers reflect on changes to their practice and then believe they can make changes in their classrooms. They use their own tacit knowledge gained in the classroom to add to what they know rather than relying solely on in-service training or outside experts. According to York-Barr et al. (2005), reflection supports learning and improvements in practice as teachers turn to challenges in practice to build knowledge and capacity as professionals. My findings extend this aspect by demonstrating that the critical space found in teachers' journals is one way to personalize learning and to ensure that it is responsive to teachers' needs.

Summary

My research is an exploration of the circumstances under which teachers use journals for critical spaces. Journals are used for a variety of purposes; the reflections range from descriptive to critical. Although not all teachers use journals as a place to

critique and challenge practice, some do. There are certain barriers and facilitators that help or hinder the use of their journals to access critical space. An understanding of the barriers and facilitators to critical journal writing can be used to bring about change and to lead teachers to become better.

Critical space is found in journals though journals are used for purposes ranging from descriptive accounts of events, ideas, or emotions, to critical reflections that challenge and critique practice. Some descriptive accounts in journals involve lists of materials to be gathered, comments about the success or failure of a lesson plan, and book series for read-alouds. Some critical reflections include how the environment shapes learning, the importance of student engagement to learning, and the need to teach self-regulation skills to our youngest learners. There are clear instances of the use of critical space to reflect on practice.

The instances of critical space in journaling illustrate the conditions under which this critical space is accessed. One key facilitator for critical space is the expectation of privacy. Journals that are shared are often descriptive in nature rather than critical. However, when journals are shared and there is trust between colleagues, teachers are more likely to open up critical space for themselves and others. The absence of this expectation represents a barrier.

Two other facilitators that are essential for creating critical space are time and place. If these are provided, teachers believe that they can access critical space and that accessing critical space can bring about change. This process allows them to grow as professionals. When these essential conditions are met, teachers tend to use journals for

critical space. Many of the conditions do not exist or only exist in part for the participants in this study and act as barriers to critical reflection in teachers' journals.

Teachers use journals to challenge their practice in several ways. They explore ideas in private before taking their new learning public, think through their new learning before talking about it with colleagues or implementing it in their practice, and make room figuratively for more reflective thinking.

The participants have two views as to how this happens. Some use journals to hold ideas until they can reflect, while others use them as spaces to place reflections and then move on to the next challenge. Journals can help teachers to observe patterns and to take note of the larger picture, focusing not on surface level behaviours but the underlying issues that shape learning.

Once all conditions for using journaling have been met and teachers use journals to access critical space to explore their practice, supports are needed to sustain this reflective practice. Replacing old ways with new thinking supports the efforts to develop as professionals. These supports can be identified and some understanding of how journal writing can help teachers grow professionally can be examined. Those who write critically act and make changes to practice, and changes in practice lead to teacher growth for those in the study. The key findings in this study are:

- Teachers use journals for many different reasons, but critical reflection can be identified in teachers' journals under certain conditions.
- Teachers use journals for critical reflection when they are confident as to the audience. Privacy and/or trust is a facilitator.

- Both time and place are key facilitators in supporting teachers' use of journals to access critical space. Without sufficient time and a safe place to journals, reflections tend to remain descriptive. Time and place assist teachers in using critical space in their journals. The absence of time and place are barriers.
- Teachers must believe that change in their practice is possible and needed. This belief in change facilitates critical reflection.
- Teachers' belief that the change they make to their practice will support their growth as professionals. Belief in growth is a facilitator in critical reflection.

Chapter Six: Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Introduction

In this chapter the last research sub-question which asks: how does journaling help teachers to grow as professionals, is explored. The implications of the research findings are discussed. Critical reflection in teachers' journals occurs when certain conditions exist that facilitate it. A discussion of how to meet these conditions is presented. Next steps for further study concerning the use of journals to access critical space are provided.

Implications of the Findings for Contemporary Education

Reflection is an important aspect in teaching since it supports teachers' efforts to individualize learning, to respond to personal learning needs, and to bring about change in teaching practice based on their classroom experiences (Brookfield, 1995). The findings of this study point to ways of supporting teachers who use journals to access critical space and thus grow as professionals. Critical space is defined as a place to critique and challenge practice. Dart et al.'s (1998) use of critical reflection involves looking at classroom situations from different lenses and finding new approaches that lead to change in the classroom.

Some teachers use journals for a variety of reasons. Dewey (1934) reflects:

Each of us assimilates into himself something of the values and meanings contained in past experiences. But we do so in differing degrees and at differing

levels of selfhood. Some things sink deep, others stay on the surface and are easily displaced. (p.71)

However, the potential of journals as a reflective tool is not being reached. One way to encourage that journals be used as critical space would be to help teachers overcome the barriers identified in this study and to access the facilitators and have systems in place as part of a Professional Learning Community. This could be done by addressing the conditions identified in this study at the levels of the individual, the school, and the Ministry of Education, namely privacy, time, place, belief in change, and journals used to support professional growth. If these conditions are met, teachers could use critical space through their journals. It is important to acknowledge that at different times, teachers use their journals for critical space while at other times, the journals might serve other purposes such as ways to track progress and to keep appointments.

Audience and Privacy.

The issues of audience and privacy must be addressed. For teachers to write critically about their practice and to access critical space, they need to be assured of privacy or, if they are willing to share, to agree to do so with a trusted colleague or group of colleagues. As noted in this study, audience shapes what teachers write about and reflect on in critical space. This finding is in contrast with literature on journal writing that suggests that to critique practice and have this critique transform reflection into action, journals should be open to challenges and questions (Brookfield, 1995; Zeichner, 1993).

On an individual level, there is a fundamental difference between teachers' need to access journals to write freely about their practice and the need to open up practice for

others to critique and challenge practices. This difference raises several questions about writing for an audience as well as unearthing assumptions through reflective writing. The literature on reflective practice offers two lenses with which to consider the challenges as well as the possibilities for learning: a focus on writing with an audience in mind and how that shapes what is reflected upon, and sharing reflections with others to verify understanding of new or alternative ideas.

Teachers must be able to reflect and some teachers need to then share their thinking with others. Several teachers in this study use journals to work through ideas and challenges before making their thinking public. Although privacy is required at a certain stage in their thinking, reflection, and writing, there should be a way for them to safely make these new ideas public for others to critique and challenge. Keeping journals private could allow teachers to hold onto old ideas, maintain the status quo, or focus solely on more technical aspects of teaching (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Zeichner, 1993). Alternatively, teachers need to develop trusting relationships with colleagues to challenge each other, open up opportunities for new learning, work together to learn, and create an environment where teachers are learners by making it a practice to share vulnerabilities and gaps in knowledge.

At the school level, creating an environment that is open to learning as Greene (1986) suggests would help teachers share their classroom stories and welcome an opportunity to challenge thinking. Fullan and Langworthy (2014) note:

This dynamic view of a learning culture is one in which teachers ‘proactively learn alongside students’ and, in turn, administrators learn ‘alongside their students and teachers’. In both contexts, all contribute ‘their own ideas,

experiences and expertise to the learning process'. (as cited in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 2)

School administrators in Ontario are encouraged to share problems of practices and areas of further growth, have courageous conversations, and adopt a co-learner stance (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014), thereby opening up their reflections to their teaching staff. Eight teachers in my study believe that having a safe and secure place to share the thinking in their journals is essential. One mentions having a secure place to journal. Working with teaching colleagues and school administrators supports an environment where everyone is a learner and there is an acceptance that knowledge is produced within a school through reflections, actions, and engagement with new ideas. Like teachers, principals can harness the potential of journals to access critical space and challenge their practices. Because journal writing is individualized, it can respond to the learning needs of all those who use it regardless of their positions.

Ministries of Education could support educators' privacy by recognizing the importance of critical reflection, allocating time in the school day for teachers to reflect on their own, and with colleagues. This would support techniques to help teachers make their learning public and be active in building relationships between teachers as well as between teachers and school administrators. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat should continue to support efforts to view all education stakeholders as partners in learning as well as to promote initiatives for colleagues and administration to work together to share new thinking. Creating an environment that encourages openness to new learning and accessing critical space supports schools' efforts to critique and challenge practice and relates directly to the implications from the findings of this study. A focus on

challenging and critiquing practice through inquiry would support efforts to use critical space to improve teaching and help teachers to become better.

Time and Space.

For teachers, having time set aside to write in their journals as part of their planning time would support access and allow more use of critical space to ask questions about practice. Just as teachers document student learning throughout the day, they could take time to document their learning, reflections, and ideas. Teachers might feel more secure in writing about their practice knowing that it is supported, that they have built a trusting relationship with colleagues, and that the school is a safe place for all.

At the school level, allowing time for teachers to meet in voluntary communities of learning could allow them time to discuss their writing and share journals; this forum could sustain their writing and further support efforts to share the journal's stories. Communities of learning help teachers to engage in questioning their assumptions, beliefs, and values about teaching and learning in a safe environment.

Ministries of Education could formally recognize the need for reflection as an integral part of a teacher's day and provide adequate time.

Belief that Change is Possible.

The belief that change is possible and necessary is important when accessing critical space and using journals to support change and growth. If teachers do not believe that there is a need for change or that the school environment does not support efforts for educators to learn, there will be little motivation to access critical space.

Some teachers believe that they can bring about change and this belief supports their efforts to use critical space through their journals. This belief energizes and

motivates them to critique and challenge practice. Seeing the positive effects of the changes they have made because of critical space will help foster further change.

Teachers see themselves as contributing to what is known about teaching and learning.

Creating an environment that values educators' contributions to change is essential and will support their efforts to study their practice and make changes based on these reflections. Sharing research conducted by other teachers would send the message that teachers' critiques and challenges of their practice are key pieces of information that build capacity and promote change.

For Ministries of Education, adopting teaching practices researched by teachers as exemplars or models of practice would acknowledge that teachers learn from each other and from sharing their stories. In addition, the government can strengthen and continue to support policies that allow teachers to more effectively contribute to discussions that determine education policy.

Belief that Change Supports Teachers' Efforts to Grow Professionally.

Teachers who use journals to conduct research about a meaningful question related to their practice better understand what is unfolding in their classrooms. Provisional theories they explore through their writing include the relationship between low attendance and oral language development and the need for students to be able to name their emotions to develop self-regulation. To improve student learning, teachers should learn more about how to address the gaps in student learning. By focusing on gaps in knowledge and building teachers' capacity, student learning improves.

Teachers can use journals to research practice and rely on their own and their colleagues' tacit knowledge of teaching and learning to build capacity. Documenting their learning as they do students' learning could support growth as professionals.

Schools must be supportive of teachers' research of their practice and help them to connect their journal writing to areas of interest or growth. Assisting them to use their teaching practice for research by making connections between their learning and problems meaningful to their teaching should be supported at the school and school board levels. Identifying gaps in knowledge or problems of practice and accessing critical space to do research would allow the use of journals to gather data, critique and challenge practice, and act to make changes. Classroom research is an important source of new learning. This seems to be a direction in educational research in Ontario, as evidenced in the research undertaken through the Teacher Leadership and Learning Program and the publication of school board monographs based on research conducted through EPCI.

Faculties of Education can support teachers' use of critical space by teaching the skills pre-service and practicing teachers need to research practice and write critically, recognize that journals can be used as critical space at times to address learning needs and set a learning agenda. Constantino and De Lorenzo (2001) note that educators recognize the need to reflect to grow as a teacher. The use of journals as critical space to research practice, areas of strength, or gaps in knowledge would be supportive of teachers' professional growth in both pre-service and Additional Qualifications courses. Support to learn how to go beyond descriptive entries would be helpful for teachers to enable the use of journals as critical space such as Dart et al. (1998) suggest. Hatton and Smith (1995) provide an alternative model for writers to follow that includes descriptive

writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection. Humble and Sharp (2012) contend that including all levels of reflection in journal writing supports teachers' use of journals.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are five research areas that could help elaborate the findings of this study. Further research is needed to address each of the conditions under which teachers write critically in their journals.

Time and Space Are Key Elements for Assisting Teachers to Use Journals to for Critical Space.

For teachers who use journals for critical space, it will be important to provide the time and space needed to move from writing descriptively about their practice to reflecting critically about their daily work. At present, there is little acknowledgement of the role of reflection on practice in schools and of the benefits of using journals as critical space. If teachers are to use journals as tools to critique and challenge their practice, make changes, and grow as professionals, then time and space for journal writing must be an integral part of the teaching day. All levels of learning are important to a teacher's work, including fine tuning teaching strategies and techniques, but if generative change is the aim of schools then there is a strong need to focus on supporting teachers' efforts to critique and challenge practice and, thereby, to think more deeply about their work.

Potential research questions are:

- When could teachers use journals for critical space during their teaching day and what might that look like?

- Do female and male teachers of varying grade levels access critical space differently?

O'Connell and Dymont (2003) and Peterson and Jones (2001) conducted some initial work in gender and journal writing of students. They found that women tend to use journal writing more often as a reflective tool in their studies for a variety of reasons such as experience of writing in a diary and social norms that women express emotions more easily (O'Connell & Dymont, 2003). Do their findings hold true for practicing teachers? If so, why? It would be beneficial to explore when teachers access critical space during the day at both elementary and secondary levels as well as how gender shapes journal writing.

Teachers Use Journals for Critical Reflection When They Are Confident as to the Audience.

Further research should focus on audience and privacy, recognizing that critical space is initially accessed when privacy is assured and when there is a trusting relationship. Future research could determine how school climate helps teachers and administrators to create conditions to be confident about the audience of journal reflections. Schools that encourage educators to critique their practice and challenge their assumptions about teaching and learning, are more likely to have staff who access critical space. Specific research questions are:

- How do schools create and nurture trusting relationships to support educators' efforts to critique and challenge practice?
- How do schools address the issues of audience to encourage teachers to share their new thinking?

- What mechanisms can schools put in place to support teachers' critique and challenge of practice individually as well as collectively?

Studying several schools that have a culture that promotes collaboration among educators would provide an exemplar or a model that other schools could adapt to their specific needs. Having a researcher work with a school willing to create an openness to learning or trusting relationships among colleagues in a Participatory Action Research would be of benefit to other schools, administrators and teachers, and would support researching practice.

Belief that Change is Possible.

There are three areas of possible research that relate to the finding that teachers must believe that change is possible to use their journals for critical space. The first area of future research interest is the use of journaling at Faculties of Education since the use of journals in pre-service education programs is well documented. A study could examine the use of journals by professors in their courses. It would be beneficial to know:

- Why and how journal writing for critical space is sustained once pre-service teachers are hired?
- Do new teachers choose a different method of reflection or do they not reflect at all?
- How can a clearer understanding of journaling support the work of Faculties of Education to encourage deeper thinking and critical reflection?

Narrative inquiry would be an appropriate methodology for the first research topic since it allows for new teachers' stories as lived experiences to shed light on their use of

journals as critical space. This methodology would illustrate if new teachers have decided to maintain the practice once they are hired as teachers in a school or if they have developed a different method of reflection. Their stories could inform professors in pre-service programs who use journaling in their courses to be more responsive to the needs of pre-service teachers. Instructors at Faculties of Education could use their experiences with teaching how to reflect using journals to focus attention on journals' potential as a reflective tool.

The characteristics of teachers who journal and those who do not is an interesting area of study. This would identify the conditions under which teachers are more likely to write critically to gain understanding of how outside factors such as audience, time, and place shape their work. Research on the common features of teachers who journal might include a study of how gender shapes teachers' use of journals for critical space. Further work in this area might be: What features do teachers share that lead them to this form of reflective practice?

A survey of teachers who use journals could provide insight about the characteristics of teachers who journal. With a large sample of teachers, a survey would paint a picture of which teachers use journaling and could lead to learning opportunities for schools to develop this in their staff.

Another research question related to the finding, a belief that change is possible, is: What are the reasons that teachers choose to journal and how might these reasons be used to encourage others to use their journals for critical space?

By understanding teachers' reasons for choosing journaling as a reflective tool over other methods of reflection on practice, schools could work towards creating

environments that encourage reflection on practice, in general, and the use of journals to reflect, in particular.

Belief that Change Leads to Professional Development.

There is a need to determine how professional development initiatives based on teachers' use of journals for critical space can respond to an educator's learning needs.

Research questions are:

- How can professional development be individualized using journals?
- What type of initiatives would support educators' use of critical space to individualize their professional learning?

In-service training does not always respond to individual teacher needs since the pace of learning, interests, and gaps in knowledge vary widely. Action research and teacher research initiatives that use journals to collect the data of practice are areas that could benefit teachers' growth and help to individualize learning.

Summary

Implications of this research involve supporting teachers' efforts to use journals for critical space by paying attention to what facilitates this usage. Several implications can be drawn from this study. The first is the dilemma between teachers' need for privacy to express themselves freely in their journals and the need to open up practice to critique and challenge. Without critique and challenge, teachers' practices may remain unchanged and new promising practices untested (Brookfield, 1995; Zeichner, 1993). Creating trusting relationships within schools and an environment of collaboration might support teachers' efforts to critique and challenge what they do.

I found that if teachers do not have privacy then they need a trusting relationship to access critical space. A further finding is that time during the school day is needed to permit teachers to journal. By acknowledging the importance of reflection and providing the option of journal writing for some teachers, administrators can support efforts to find time to journal during the school day. A belief that change is possible helps teachers to know that critically reflecting in their journals can motivate and inspire them in their daily work. They see themselves as contributing to the knowledge base at school and can feel valued for their contribution to change. Lastly, changes in practice can lead to improvement in teaching and thereby in students' learning. Researching their practice individualizes learning, unlike large-scale training sessions.

There are four areas of future research that could support a fuller understanding of how teachers use critical space and how its use supports efforts to develop. Recommendations for future research paths address the conditions that promote teachers' use of their journal for critical space. By focusing on the conditions, there is more opportunity to support their use of journals for critical space and raise awareness of the potential of journal writing to lead to change.

Potential research topics stemming from this study include focusing attention on issues of time and space and when teachers access critical space. The second is audience and privacy. The third topic relates to the need for teachers to believe that change is possible to access critical space. The final topic is the need to better support professional development that is individualized and responsive to the needs of the teacher.

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APPENDIX A: LETTER TO PARENTS

September 2011,
Dear Families and Friends,

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome you and your child to our classroom. Ours will be an exciting journey filled to the brim with wonderful learning experiences based on the interests of your child and the Kindergarten curriculum. As a classroom teacher, I am also interested in opportunities to improve my classroom practice and in turn, my students' learning.

I would like to formally ask permission for your child to participate in a research project I have designed. My research is focused on how teachers use journal writing to learn about and reflect on their daily work. Over the course of the school year, I will be keeping a teaching journal that will help me think about my teaching and learning. I hope to reflect on the day's events and puzzle through some of the challenges and successes of teaching young learners. Like many teachers, I keep a teaching journal and use it as a space to think about my teaching in the quiet hours after school.

This year, my teaching journal will also be used as a source of data for educational purposes only in my research work as a graduate student. I am in my 4th year of the Joint Ph.D in Educational Studies at Lakehead University. With the permission of my principal and the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University, I will begin a self-study teacher research initiative in my classroom. Information contained in my teaching journal will only be used to inform others about the challenges and opportunities for professional and personal growth that teachers' journals offer. The findings of my research will be shared with my thesis committee and will appear in my thesis report.

As part of my research, I will also be interviewing other teachers who use journal writing to think about their daily work. Excerpts from the journals will be reviewed. In addition, teachers will also be invited to talk about their journaling in a teacher inquiry group and asked to write a reflection about how journal writing helps them to meet their students' needs.

The confidentiality and privacy of my students, their families, and the school community is of utmost importance to me. If you give permission, it is important that you understand the following:

- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study. I would be happy to talk to you further about the study at any time.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.
- Your child's anonymity and privacy will be protected.

- A copy of my thesis will be available at the university library.
- The research proposal has been reviewed by my thesis committee.
- The data will be stored for five years.

If you do not wish to provide consent, your child will be treated no less favourably than if you do provide consent. If you are willing to give permission to have your child participate in the research study in our classroom, please sign below. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Hope Fennell at Lakehead University or my principal, Ms. Denise Baxter. This research has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or swright@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you,

Laura Hope Southcott

APPENDIX B: LETTER OF CONSENT

I have read the letter informing me of the research study which Laura Hope Southcott is conducting. I give my permission for my child to participate and understand the following:

- The study is about how teachers use journal writing to think about their teaching and learning.
- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study.
- I understand that the teacher will be keeping a teaching journal of classroom events and reflections.
- My child's anonymity and privacy will be protected.
- The data will be stored for five years.

I, _____ give permission for my child to participate in the research to be undertaken.

Date: _____ Parent /Guardian _____

APPENDIX C: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS (INTERVIEW & JOURNAL EXCERPT)

September 2011,

Dear Colleague,

I am in a student in the Joint Ph.D in Educational Studies at Lakehead University. My research interests are related to how practicing teachers use journal writing to think about the challenges and success of teaching and learning. Like many teachers, I keep a teaching journal and use it as a space to think about my teaching in the quiet hours after school. With the permission of my principal and the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University, I will begin a teacher research initiative in my classroom. I would like to ask you to participate in a research project I have designed to explore how teachers use journaling to think about their daily work.

I understand that you keep a teaching journal and would like to talk to you about how your journal helps to shape your teaching and learning. Your participation in this research study would involve an interview of approximately 45 minutes at a time and location convenient to you. I would also ask that you share some examples of your teaching journal. As such, I believe that it is important for me to do as I am asking of you. My teaching journal will also be used as a source of data for educational purposes only in my research work as a graduate student. Information contained in the excerpts of the teaching journals will only be used to inform others about the challenges and opportunities for professional and personal growth that teachers' journals offer. The confidentiality and privacy of the students, their families, and the school community is of utmost importance to me. If you give permission, it is important that you understand the following:

- Participants will be asked to remove any identifying information about students, school, or community in the journal excerpts they share with the researcher.
- Participants will be asked not to identify students, school, or community during the interviews and if any information does identify students, school, or community, it will be removed during the transcription process.
- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study. I would be happy to talk to you further about the study at any time.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.
- Your anonymity and privacy will be protected.

- A copy of my thesis will be available at the university library.
- The research proposal has been reviewed by my thesis committee.
- The data will be stored for five years.

The findings of my research will be shared with my thesis committee and will appear in my thesis report. In addition to conducting teacher interviews and reviewing teacher journal excerpts, I will also be inviting teachers to talk about their journal writing in a teacher inquiry group and write a reflection on how journaling helps them to better understand their teaching and learning. Lastly, I will be studying my practice of journal writing.

If you are willing to participate in the research study, please sign below. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Hope Fennell at Lakehead University. This research has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or swright@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you,

Laura Hope Southcott

APPENDIX D: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the letter informing me of the research study which Laura Hope Southcott is conducting. I am willing to participate in an interview as well as share excerpts from my teaching journal. I understand the following:

- The study is about how teachers use journal writing to think about their teaching and learning.
- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study.
- I understand that the teacher will be keeping a teaching journal of classroom events and reflections.
- My anonymity and privacy will be protected.
- The data will be stored for five years.

I, _____ give permission for an interview and excerpts of my choice to be used in the research study.

Date: _____ Participant _____

APPENDIX E: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS (FOLLOW UP MEETING)

September 2011,

Dear Colleague,

I am in a student in the Joint Ph.D in Educational Studies at Lakehead University. My research interests are related to how practicing teachers use journal writing to think about the challenges and success of teaching and learning. Like many teachers, I keep a teaching journal and use it as a space to think about my teaching in the quiet hours after school. With the permission of my principal and the Research Ethics Board at Lakehead University, I will begin a teacher research initiative in my classroom. I would like to ask you to participate in a research project I have designed to explore how teachers use journaling to think about their daily work.

I understand that you keep a teaching journal and would like to talk to you about how your journal helps to shape your teaching and learning. Your participation in this research study would involve meeting with other teachers who use journaling. The teacher inquiry group would last approximately 1 hour and take place at a time and location convenient to the teachers involved. Our conversation would be recorded and transcribed. I would send a copy of the transcriptions to you to verify them for accuracy.

Information contained in the transcriptions will only be used to inform others about the challenges and opportunities for professional and personal growth that teachers' journals offer. The confidentiality and privacy of the teachers, the students, their families, and the school community is of utmost importance to me. If you give permission, it is important that you understand the following:

- Participants will be asked not to identify students, school, or community during the interviews and if any information is reveal, it will be removed during the transcription process.
- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study. I would be happy to talk to you further about the study at any time.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.
- Your anonymity and privacy will be protected.
- A copy of my thesis will be available at the university library.
- The research proposal has been reviewed by my thesis committee.
- The data will be stored for five years.

The findings of my research will be shared with my thesis committee and will appear in my thesis report.

As well, I will be interviewing teachers who journal to better understand their practice. Teachers will also be asked to share excerpts of their choosing from their journal for review and write a reflection on how journaling helps them in their daily work. My journal will also be explored.

If you are willing to participate in the research study, please sign below. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Hope Fennell at Lakehead University. This research has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or swright@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you,

Laura Hope Southcott

APPENDIX F: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR THE FOLLOW UP MEETING

I have read the letter informing me of the research study which Laura Hope Southcott is conducting. I am willing to participate in a teacher inquiry group. I understand the following:

- The study is about how teachers use journal writing to think about their teaching and learning.
- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study.
- I understand that the teacher will be keeping a teaching journal of classroom events and reflections.
- My anonymity and privacy will be protected.
- The data will be stored for five years.

I, _____ am willing to participate in a teacher inquiry group for the purposes of this research study.

Date: _____ Participant _____

APPENDIX G: LETTER TO PRINCIPAL

September 2011,

Dear Denise,

I would like to formally ask permission to conduct a teacher research initiative in my classroom this year. It is an initiative that I have designed through my work as a graduate student in the Ph.D program at Lakehead University. My research is focused on how teachers use journal writing to learn about and reflect on their daily work. Over the course of the school year, I will be keeping a teaching journal that will help me think about my teaching and learning. I hope to reflect on the day's events and puzzle through some of the challenges and successes of teaching young learners. Like many teachers, I keep a teaching journal and use it as a space to think about my teaching in the quiet hours after school.

This year, my teaching journal will also be used as a source of data for educational purposes only in my research work as a graduate student. With your permission and the Ethics Review Board at Lakehead University, I will begin a self-study teacher research initiative in my classroom. Information contained in my teaching journal will only be used to inform others about the challenges and opportunities for professional and personal growth that teachers' journals offer. The findings of my research will be shared with my thesis committee and will appear in my thesis report.

As part of my research, I will also be interviewing other teachers who use journal writing to think about their daily work. Excerpts from the journals will be reviewed. In addition, teachers will also be invited to talk about their journaling in a teacher inquiry group and asked to write a reflection about how journal writing helps them to meet their students' needs.

The confidentiality and privacy of my students, their families, and the school community is of utmost importance to me. If you give permission, it is important that you understand the following:

- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study. I would be happy to talk to you further about the study at any time.
- You have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.
- My students', their families' and the school community's anonymity and privacy will be protected.
- A copy of my thesis will be available at the university library.
- The research proposal has been reviewed by my thesis committee.

- The data will be stored for five years.

If you are willing to give permission to have the research study take place in our classroom, please sign below. If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Dr. Hope Fennell at Lakehead University. This research has been approved by the Lakehead University Research Ethics Board. If you have any questions related to the ethics of the research and would like to speak to someone other than the researcher, please contact Sue Wright at the Research Ethics Board at 807-343-8283 or swright@lakeheadu.ca.

Thank you,

Laura Hope Southcott

APPENDIX H: LETTER OF CONSENT FOR PRINCIPAL

I have read the letter informing me of the research study which Laura Hope Southcott is conducting. I give my permission for the classroom research and understand the following:

- The study is about how teachers use journal writing to think about their teaching and learning.
- There are minimal risks involved to individuals participating in the study.
- I understand that the teacher will be keeping a teaching journal of classroom events and reflections.
- Students', families' and school community's anonymity and privacy will be protected.
- The data will be stored for five years.

I, _____ give permission for the research to be undertaken in the classroom.

Date: _____ Principal _____

1. APPENDIX I: PROBES USED FOR THE FOLLOW UP MEETING Tell us about your journaling experiences.
 - a. When did you begin to journal?
 - b. How did you learn to journal?
 - c. Where do you journal?
 - d. How important is journaling to your practice?
 - e. What role does journaling play in your practice?
 - f. How often do you write in your journal?
 - g. Do you have a length or time frame in mind when you journal?
 - h. When do you write in your journal?
 - i. Do you have different types of entries or use different writing strategies in your journal?
 - j. What is the nature of your journaling – professional, personal, political?
 - k. What are the topics that you explore in your journal?
 - l. Do you use your journal to make connections to practice, literature, or experiences?
 - m. Do you share your journal with colleagues or a critical friend?
 - n. Do you feel your journal is a private or public endeavour?
 - o. Who do you write for in your journal?
 - p. What do you use to journal – a bound book, computer program, loose paper?
 - q. Do you journal with a partner?
 - r. If so, what parameters have you established? How has journaling with a partner shaped your journaling?
 - s. How do you perceive journaling?
 - t. Do you go back and reread your journal?
 - u. If so, why?
 - v. Do you reflect in your journal?
 - w. Do you use your journal to research aspects of your practice?

2. What are the biggest supports to your journaling?
 - a. Do you talk about your journal with other colleagues?
 - b. Do you have time at school to journal?

3. What are the biggest drawbacks of journaling?
 - a. Do you have time to journal?
 - b. Do you have the resources to journal?
 - c. Do you feel that you know enough about journal?

4. What are your thoughts and feelings about being part of this classroom research study?

APPENDIX J: LIST OF NODES

Table A – 1 Nodes

Nodes	Nodes
Reflection	Journaling as Tedious
Self-awareness	Time Constraints
Classroom Practice	Format of Journaling
Planning Next Steps	Paper Bound Journal
Journaling as a Way to Celebrate Successes	Journal Template
Making Learning Visible	Journaling on Computer
Journaling About Negative Experiences	Free-style writing
Public document	Being Comfortable with Journaling
Private document	Journal Writing Comes with Experience