THESIS

THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-REFLECTION ON STUDENTS' REVISION PRACTICES AND

WRITING

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ABSTRACT

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This teacher research investigation focused on the writing and revision practices of sixth grade students in a middle school setting, one where students would write, revise, reflect on their work, receive feedback, and then students would engage in self-evaluation. Throughout this year-long investigation, students had the opportunity to choose the work they wanted to write and revise, and by practicing specific revision skills, and having the opportunity to receive feedback on their writing and revision, students were able to grow as writers. Students improved their writing, but students were also able to critically examine how and why they were making specific choices as writers, critically examining their development as individual writers.

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The Influence of Self-Reflection on Students' Revision Practices and Writing

As a preservice teacher I took creative writing courses taught by a poet laureate, a novel-of-the-year winner, and a runner-up for a Pulitzer Prize that utilized the workshop model. After graduating, I accepted an elementary teaching position in sixth grade, teaching all subjects, including literacy. After seven years in the elementary classroom, I struggled with the advice I received from colleagues regarding how writing should be taught because their recommendations contradicted much of what I had learned in my teacher licensure courses and creative writing classes. Many teachers advocated for teaching students to use formulaic structures for writing, yet my education professors and creative writing teachers had argued that following scripted writing programs only reinforced restrictive structures that would reduce the amount of thinking students did and destroy their creativity. My teaching colleagues countered that not every student would be a creative writer, therefore writing instruction should be based solely on teaching them argumentative writing so they could learn to state an opinion, back it up with proof, and then return to their claims.

While there is value in teaching students how to write in academic forms, I am a poet and fiction writer, and the approach of privileging structure over ideas and encouraging students to follow a strict formula rather than their own intuitions as writers was something I could not do. In my seven years as an elementary teacher, I saw three different writing programs increase in popularity, and while I used pieces of these programs, I balked at relying on a standalone program that privileged form over content. While I did my best to teach students organizational techniques, I also encouraged them to be creative thinkers and to reflect on the decisions they were making as writers. After seven years I moved to a ninth-grade classroom to teach Speech, English, and Creative Writing courses. Although I was at first a little intimidated to teach junior

high students, after a few weeks, I noticed the same problem: students did not think when revising. Instead, most of the revisions they made were simple and superficial, more error correction than clarifying their thoughts. When the school district made the decision to transition junior highs into middle schools, I moved back to sixth grade, where I have taught English for the last five years. During this time, I have continued to try to understand more about teaching writing and revision and how to get students to be more conscious of the decisions they make as writers.

My interest in this topic actually began during my second year of teaching when I had a very bright group of students who were also very good writers. However, while teaching a poetry unit, I noticed that my students seemed to have no authority over their work. All of them wanted my permission for how to revise and improve their work, even after I modeled several different revision techniques. If a group of writers this talented could struggle, I knew other students would as well. I have since spent every year trying to get students to revise well, but also to allow them to gain ownership over their work. I want my students to make revisions that have purpose. Early in my Master's program here at Colorado State University, Professor Sarah Sloane asked me, "What are you really interested in when it comes to teaching writing?" It was at that point that I knew I wanted to focus on revision.

As a fiction writer and poet, I spend most of my time revising; I reread, make changes, cut and rewrite, often coming to a better understanding of my characters and my ideas in the process. For me, this is where "the truth" of good writing lives: I have to figure out how a character says something, what something looks or smells like in the scene, in order for the writing to be real to me, and also to my audience. Often, I will read my work aloud and listen to how something flows, or doesn't. For me, revision is like sanding a beautiful piece of wood: I am

trying to reveal the beauty underneath, and it takes multiple attempts and different techniques for the piece of work to reach its full potential. As my graduate studies progressed, I continued to think more about the revision process in reference to my own students. What would it take to help them learn to revise, and revise well? In my sixth grade English classroom, I did my best to do what the teaching educator Lucy Calkins recommends: "Don't teach writing. Teach the writer." I want my students to focus not just on improving their current piece, but also to improve as writers.

One way I pursued this goal in my own development as a writer was to become part of a writing group. We gathered on Saturday mornings, shared our work, gave each other feedback, and talked about our writing. We contemplated what our readers thought, what we thought, what we were trying to do, and how we could take the next step to improve as writers. One particular day, I heard each member of the group remark that this revision process required self-reflection and decision-making based on how other people saw their work. Only at that point did each writer have a better direction for how to proceed with their revisions. This direction wasn't just about making the *work* better, but also involved becoming better as a writer. As I left the coffee shop, I kept replaying this conversation in my head until I landed on this conclusion: self-reflection was key to one's writing development. This realization led to the research questions that have guided this study:

- What role does self-reflection play in the revision process?
- How can middle-school teachers scaffold students' decision-making processes about the texts they have written in ways that also will support their development as writers?

As I contemplated these questions, I only had hunches about how to move forward in my teaching. I needed to know what other educators had tried, learned, and written in order to move to the next step in my investigation.

Literature Review

The body of literature regarding revision in writing is vast. My initial search on the topic in Google Scholar revealed 849,000 results in less than six-tenths of a second. Yet five groups emerged as authorities on the subject: 1) educational theorists, 2) teachers (elementary, middle school, and high school), 3) prose writers, 4) poets, and 5) professors. Reviewing the commonalities and differences among their views provides insight into how revision is taught and the role that self-reflection plays in the revision process. Below, I review the main ideas and beliefs held by each group.

Educational Theorists' Views on Learning and Development

The work of Jerome Bruner, John Dewey, and Lev Vygotsky, though broadly focused on learning and instruction, also suggests implications for teaching revision in ways that support students' development as writers. In his book *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, Jerome Bruner (1971) explores the purpose of teaching and outlines the conditions he deems necessary for developmental growth to occur in the learner. Bruner defines growth as the development of student independence in different learning situations. Students who show growth do not merely memorize and repeat the knowledge gained, but also make inferences that allow them to apply what they have learned in different contexts. Teachers enable this kind of growth by working together with students on a regular and frequent basis, using a wide variety of instructional strategies. Students grow intellectually through this process because teachers are both delivering instruction at the students' level and pushing them to think about what they are learning while

they are learning it. As evidence of student growth, Bruner observed students producing more thoughtful responses and developing the analytical ability to justify their responses. Unlike students following a pattern or formula, students learning in supportive educational environments such as these are able to make intellectual leaps regarding the content and learning processes at hand.

Bruner also identified three different stages of development that students would progress through in their development. Enactive (representing the world through actions), Iconic (representing through concrete mental images), and Symbolic (representing the world through symbols). At the Enactive stage, which lasts until children are around one year old, children initially act things out (e.g. shaking a rattle to make noise) in order to communicate what they know at a very concrete or literal level. At the subsequent Iconic stage, students progress toward using words, not just to describe simple facts, but also to explain broader ideas, emotions, or concepts. In this stage of intellectual growth, students aren't just increasing their knowledge of language, but are also developing awareness of how language is used. They are able to identify and define a word *and* how to use the word in the proper context. This skill activates thought and leads to more complex thinking.

For example, if a student were learning the word "gawk" at the Iconic stage, he or she would be able to write, "He was gawking at the girl with an open mouth because she was so pretty." The student would also be able to use the word appropriately in different contexts: for instance, "The boy tried not to gawk when his friend fell down the stairs" and, "The boy gawked when he saw the video of a large bird carrying away the big dog." These examples show evidence of growth and complex thinking not just because the student modifies the ending of the

word, and not just because the word is used in grammatically correct ways, but also because he or she is able to use the word correctly in specific and differing situations.

Bruner went on to write that learners who exhibit intellectual growth in the Symbolic stage are able to create new models to aid in their understanding; furthermore, students do not limit their thinking to just one model. Having one model relies solely on imitation, whereas creating multiple models demonstrates new thinking to aid development. In respect to writing development, students at the Symbolic stage are able to use language to represent their interactions with the world. When students use only one model, they are confined to imitation rather than complex thinking and are unable to articulate what they are learning. In other words, they are unable to achieve metacognition through reflection.

Taken together, Bruner's theories suggest that the true goal of literacy education involves putting instructional structures in place that will allow students to use language in order to describe and make sense of their thoughts and experiences. Bruner also emphasizes that teachers must have a solid educational theory in place that is rooted in a deep knowledge base if they are to increase the intellectual development of students. If they do not, learning may not occur. Bruner's theories are applicable to the study of middle school writers' revision processes and teachers' instructional practices to support them. If students can attain a deeper level of thought by being more analytical with their writing, they can also create new models through experimentation. For example, students could demonstrate multiple ways to revise a sentence. Instead of falling back on simply adding adjectives, they could insert an appositive to add more detail, or a use a colon at the end of the sentence to explain and/or give details, or they could take one sentence and replace it with four sentences that slow down their writing to give more details or clarifying information. Teachers can help students learn to analyze and self-evaluate the

changes they make to their writing and to determine the effectiveness of these changes. If students can progress through all the stages of the process Bruner describes, they will not only achieve development as writers, but will also grow as learners.

John Dewey's work is also relevant to understanding student learning. In "The School and Social Progress," the first chapter from *The School and Society*, Dewey (1902) wrote that education should transcend the quick and easy "training" of students. Instead, it ought to bring around the meaningful change both students and society deserve. He emphasized that education is in need of a revolution for a society that is constantly changing; when schools focus only on the "duties" of life, however, students are not allowed to find intrinsic motivation, invest more energy, or learn more and at a deeper level. If schools were organized to produce citizens dedicated to service, students would become more self-directed learners who could improve the quality of life in a democracy.

Like Bruner's ideas, Dewey's theory has implications for how middle school teachers organize their instruction and learning activities. When middle school students are allowed to make choices as writers, investment in their learning will increase and they will do more than just function from a check-list. With intrinsic motivation in place, students might become more self-directed in their improvement efforts. By becoming problem solvers in revising their writing, students will also develop valuable skills they will need to function as productive members of society, which was Dewey's highest goal for education.

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) learning theories in *Mind in Society* extend beyond formal education but are still applicable to students' learning and social development. He made the assertion that from the first day of life, children begin learning and developing within the "zone of proximal development," (ZPD). In the ZPD, learners participate in activities that match a

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combination of their current ability with their learning potential. Learning activities are not based solely on what a student has done in the past independently, but also on what a child can do in collaboration with teachers or more advanced classmates. While developmental theorists like Bruner tend to focus on stages of learning (i.e., what a child has done in the past), the ZPD is oriented toward what a child will do in the future.

Vygotsky's idea of the ZPD emphasized his belief that learning was a social process, one where individuals learn from their surroundings and interactions to gain not just content knowledge, but also intelligence. Like Bruner, Vygotsky made the claim that when instruction focuses only on concrete thinking, students will not advance intellectually and will resort to imitation; when students are not presented with opportunities to engage in complex thinking or problem solving, they will not learn as much, or at the same depth. When teachers incorporate more abstract thought into learning experiences, however, students' development will increase because they will construct their own meanings while interacting in a learning environment.

Vygotsky's theories have implications for how middle school teachers structure writing instruction. By providing opportunities for middle school writers to participate in learning activities that are more open-ended and analytical, teachers increase the chances that they will discover more about themselves as writers. Also, by allowing students to share their work with others, be it with teachers or students, their development and thinking as writers can improve due to the social nature of learning. Challenging students to experiment as writers will push them beyond imitation; they can then analyze what they produced and decide if they were successful or not. When students are able to reflect on their writing, engage in problem-solving, and receive feedback from others, they can then become more self-directed writers and learners.

Bruner, Dewey, and Vygotsky's theories focus not only on the learning activities students participate in, but also on how students are asked to think in those activities. According to all three theorists, the depth of thinking students are asked to engage in increases the amount of learning and growth. In reference to higher levels of thinking, Bruner emphasized inference, Dewey focused on intrinsic motivation and Vygotsky stressed abstract thought. All three theorists, however, agreed that supporting deeper thinking allows learners to gain more than knowledge, but intelligence. By changing instructional design to focus on student growth, teachers position students to be more analytical learners. Writing instruction framed by these theories would be oriented toward self-directed learning; students would not wait to be told by teachers how they are doing as writers, but instead they would develop strategies to articulate how they are doing, explain how they were able to come to these conclusions, and determine where they need to go next in their work.

Teachers' Views on Students' Revision Practices and Writing Development

Themes emerging from the writing of classroom teachers echo the ideas of the above theorists by also focusing on reflection and self-evaluation, feedback, social interaction, and scaffolded instruction. High school English teacher Katie Greene sought to improve students' writing using strategies to increase their metacognition and critical thinking. Greene (2011) had three goals: 1) to help students examine their writing more deeply; 2) to increase a sense of ownership in their writing through the process of reflection; and 3) to increase the length of students' writing in order to alleviate their hesitancy to delete content during the revision process (p. 90). Greene reasoned that these goals would motivate students to engage deeply in the reflection process by choosing pieces of writing that meant something to them; in the process,

they would invest more time and energy as writers, improving not just the writing, but improving as writers.

While reading short stories in Greene's English class, students also began writing their own short stories, then selected one piece that they liked and felt they could also improve. Students engaged in metacognition through letter writing. Before beginning the revision process, they wrote an "Initial Reflection Letter" and then wrote an "After Writing Reflection Letter" after they completed their revisions. These letters allowed students to more deeply articulate the decisions they made as writers, both before and after composing their work. Students also received feedback from Greene throughout the revision process, and in writing conferences. During these conferences, students received short, informal feedback about their piece. Greene also wrote short letters to students, reminding them of specific literary devices they needed to employ before their final revisions in order to meet academic standards. Finally, Greene taught mini-lessons aligned with specific standards related to reflection. These lessons were intended to encourage a deeper level of critical thought about students' work.

Based on her observations of students' work, Greene concluded that these structures increased students' reflective skills and encouraged them to be intentional about their decisions as writers. By using meta-cognitive strategies and receiving feedback on their work from the teacher and peers, students became more experimental, viewed their work more critically, produced more purposeful revisions, and improved their writing.

Similar conclusions were reached by five female teachers, levels first grade to university, who formed their own writing group after completing a National Writing Project summer institute: the summer institute is professional development experience for teachers who gather over several weeks of the summer as they build confidence and competence in their writing,

leadership abilities, and inquiry practices; this model is designed to build communities of support for teachers both during and after the institute. In "Our Writing, Ourselves," Cotich, Dixon, Nelson, Shapiro and Yeager (1994) describe how they met monthly at the conclusion of the summer institute for the purposes of improving their personal writing and determining the impact of the writing group on their development as writers.

In order to establish a solid foundation and learn more about one another, the group engaged in free writing activities at the first meeting. Every member of the group wrote about themselves, one another, and what they needed from the group. This exercise allowed the members to make individual needs clear, which was important given the variety in writing styles and genres the group members produced. Establishing a solid foundation of respect validated this diversity and increased the teachers' comfort levels with their writing and with one another.

Subsequent meetings began with time for the group to socialize while enjoying food together, then one member led the group in a free writing activity. Afterwards, group members shared and responded to one another's work, offering positive comments, specific suggestions about a piece of writing, or more general feedback. While group members could bring work to share, this was not a requirement. The sense of community created by the group allowed the writers to view their work from different perspectives and helped one another guide revision conversation. Like the students described in Greene's article, the teachers strived not just to improve their work, but also to improve as writers.

This article suggests that all writers, including middle school students, would likewise benefit from the time to meet and talk with each other about their work. By developing a rapport as writers, writing groups might allow students to hear the opinions of other writers and to talk specifically about the revisions they've made and the purposes behind those revisions. Further

revisions based on peer feedback could support middle school students' learning and writing development.

In "Written Reflection," high school English teacher Dawn Swartzendruber-Putnam (2010) describes three different assignments she used in her classroom to help students individually reflect on their work through writing. Students wrote in their Writer's Log once per week to critically analyze revisions they had made and the purpose behind those revisions. The second step in this process, the "Draft Letter," was completed at the conclusion of a unit. In this letter, students assessed their strengths and weaknesses in the writing process. The "Writer's Log" nor the "Draft Letter" were graded for completion only, and Swartzendruber-Putnam used them as data to inform her feedback to students. In a final "Portfolio Letter," students analyzed their work, assessed quality, reflected on their problem-solving, and indicated the depth of their understanding. Swartzendruber-Putnam concluded that the reflective assignments, and the instruction for how to be more critical of their writing, in her writing workshop were necessary ingredients for students to be "better writers and thinkers" (2010, p. 93). She wrote that it did take time, but students were more aware of where they were in the writing process, and how they learned best. She drew these conclusions by comparing the quality of the work students produced before and after writing their reflection assignments. Although the author used these strategies with high school writers, her findings suggest that with careful scaffolding, middle school writers might also develop the practice of metacognitive thinking, becoming more active in their writing development. By gaining insight into students' thinking, middle school teachers could individualize instruction based on students' needs, supporting greater growth.

All three articles offered metacognitive strategies writers can use to become more experimental writers who revise their work effectively based on critical self-reflection and

teacher and peer feedback. In all three cases, increasing the frequency of these practices

positively changed the writers' problem-solving skills. These positive results suggest that the

methods and assignments would be worthwhile for implementation in the middle school

classroom.

<u>Prose Writers' Views on Revision</u>

One of the themes that emerged among professional prose writers was that regular

writing and revision increases writers' reflective skills and allows them to hone their craft.

Novelist Ben Percy (2010) details the process of transforming his novel during the revision

process in an article for *Poets & Writers*. His descriptions provide insight into the sheer volume

of work involved in the revision process and the amount of self-reflection necessary for

improving drafts for publication. In addition, Percy demonstrates the difficulties of revision by

describing the varied revision processes writers use. While revision methods are different for

beginning and professional writers, he asserts that by writing more and writing more often, all

writers will be able to be more critical of their work due to the volume of work produced. Percy

also recommends that writing teachers share revision techniques they have used, teach students

how to use them, and then allow them to discover what works best for them as individual writers.

This self-evaluation can allow students to be more self-directed as writers. While his audience is

professional writers and novice writers who want to improve their work, middle school teachers

might draw on this Percy's conclusions to explain the difficulties of revision to students, and

how it is necessary for both the writing and the writer. Many of the revision techniques he

describes would also be worthwhile for students to try and could help them improve as writers.

In an article for *Poets & Writers*, novelist David Long (2003) examines what makes

figurative language in writing successful or unsuccessful by collecting the published work of

other writers and analyzing how and why certain writing was effective or ineffective. Long concludes that in order to use figurative language well, writers must find the appropriate balance of making their readers think and analyze what they are reading, while avoiding over-analysis. Long concludes that the further away a reader is pulled from the writing to understand the piece of figurative language, the less effective that figurative language will be. Although the article is aimed at adult writers, Long's claim is relevant to middle school students as well. Middle school writers tend to make changes out of obligation as directed by the teacher, and those changes tend to be more of a simple repair or details added for the sake of adding details. Long affirms, however, that all writers, even professionals, need to learn to revise and revise often, examining and reflecting on the changes they make, and the impact those changes have on their work.

Although Percy and Long were less explicit than Greene and Swartzendruber-Putnam about the reflection strategies and assignments they used with their university and adult students, both writers made themselves vulnerable by telling their personal revision stories. These stories not only allowed their readers to connect through common struggles, but also to feel inspired to *want* to slow down and engage in critical self-reflection to improve their work, and their skills as writers. By using the principles and strategies for self-reflection and self-evaluation suggested by Percy and Long, middle school writers can also engage in the metacognition necessary for growth and continued development.

One Poet's Views on Revision

Poet and teacher Jeffery Skinner (2002) emphasized the importance of being reflective throughout the writing process in his article for *Poets & Writers*. More so, writers should not be focused on the single piece they are writing, but on their overall development as writers; he used the metaphor of Tai-Chi to explain the balance writers need to find. Drawing from past

experiences as a poet and teacher for the last twenty-five years, Skinner analyzed his motivations, successes, and failures as a writer. He explains that "writing *is* revision" (p. 47) and that most writers struggle with some level of insecurity about their work. Consequently, it is the job of writing teachers to help students find the aforementioned balance. According to Skinner, teachers help writers find this balance by being writers themselves and teaching revision so students feel supported throughout the process. If writers can find a greater comfort level, their focus will shift to improving their work, not their feelings of inadequacy. By learning patience and reflecting as they go through the revision process, students can craft their best revision and grow as writers.

While Skinner's target audience is adults, this article pertains to middle school writers in that every writer is different. The idea that a student in the role of "the writer" is more important than a single piece of writing is also instructive to middle school teachers as they consider how to teach revision. Middle school writers may resist revision, like writers of any age, but learning to find the balance Skinner recommends can support their writing development.

Professors' and Researchers' Views on Teaching Revision

Whether they were investigating college students' writing development or analyzing how students as young as nine grew as writers, college writing teachers emphasized the themes of reflection, feedback, experimentation and self-evaluation. Co-author's Bardine and Fulton (2008) examined how their college students engaged differently in the writing process as a result of writing memos about the revisions made to their writing in an article for *The Clearing House*, a journal that focuses on publishing educational strategies. These memos were a gateway to students' critical reflection about the revisions made to their work and the purpose behind their changes. These writers concluded that through reflection, students understood more about

themselves as writers. This metacognition allowed students to contemplate the purpose of their revisions and if the impact of the revisions on the quality of their writing. Similar to high school English teachers Greene and Swartzendruber-Putnam, the college professors provided feedback based on their students' memos, which focused on students' thinking, not mistakes in their writing. This feedback allowed students to benefit from a different viewpoint on their work. The explicit structure of memos to facilitate reflection would also benefit middle school writers in practicing metacognition. Students could explain a specific revision, analyze its purpose, and reflect on whether or not they had achieved their goal. With time to reflect, middle school writers could craft more purposeful revisions.

In a study of college writers, Cho and MacArthur (2010) examined how different types of peer feedback affected the types of revision college writers made to their work in an article for *Learning and Instruction*. The types of feedback students received were categorized (directive, non-directive, criticism, praise, summary, and off-task), and the types of revision students made after receiving feedback were also categorized (simple repair, complex repair, extended content, new content, and organization). Cho and MacArthur examined the work twenty-eight students completed and collected online, and used a rubric to accurately measure student progress with each revision. By counting the different types of feedback students received, the frequency of feedback received, and then examining the changes of scores from draft to draft, Cho and MacArthur concluded that students who received more non-directive feedback than other types, and those who received feedback from multiple peers created more complex revisions which resulted in better writing. Students who received more feedback from peers were also more likely to make revisions to their writing that improved the overall quality of their work.

These conclusions demonstrate that writers benefit from peer feedback to improve their work. Middle-school teachers might bear in mind that students who receive more non-directive feedback will also need to engage in more metacognition in order to contemplate the purpose behind their decisions as writers. If middle school teachers want to analyze the kinds of revisions students make, Cho and MacArthur's categories would be beneficial.

In a similar study, researchers Duijnhouwer, Prins, and Stokking (2012) investigated if feedback and improvement strategies changed the writing process of their graduate students. They examined the overall quality of work produced and the level of motivation and self-esteem of students as writers. The class was divided into experimental and control and each group had a different task. Both groups received teacher feedback on their work, but the students in the experimental group also learned strategies for how to improve their work, while the control group did not. Feedback came in the form of questions and statements about what teachers found effective in students' writing, and was given to bring students closer to meeting writing standards. All students completed a reflection assignment after their first draft and another reflection assignment after submitting their revised drafts. Student reflections included information on the kinds of feedback they received, the impact of the feedback on the improvements they made to their work. At the beginning and end of this study, students also took surveys to rate themselves on their performance, motivation to write, and self-esteem as writers.

Duijnhouwer, Prins, and Stokking presented several conclusions from their study. First of all, students who reflect on their work are able to think about the purpose behind their writing and their revisions and to produce better writing as a result. Unlike Cho and MacArthur, however, they found that students need specific feedback in order to see the connection between their work and the improvements recommended. Duijnhouwer, Prins, and Stokking also

determined that students can get overwhelmed with too much feedback, leaving them unable to make the revisions necessary to improve. Students who only received one type of response improved more than their peers who received multiple types of responses from teachers (i.e., feedback on the piece of writing and the reflection assignment, plus suggestions for specific revisions). Lastly, the researchers were surprised to find that students who received feedback in the form of improvement strategies did not make revisions that consistently improved their work. They attributed this to the fact that students were not required to self-reflect on their changes; this omission inhibited their development as writers.

These conclusions hold implications for the types of feedback that will benefit middle school students and the degree of metacognition they should apply to their writing. If students receive too much feedback, they may not be as critical in making revisions because their efforts may feel divided. Also, the feedback students receive needs to be specific so they can understand the connection between the suggestions and the revisions they should make. By contemplating the purpose behind their revisions, students can improve their writing, and improve as writers.

When considering what students need in order to successfully revise their work, Mark Farrington (1999) generated four principles gleaned from his long teaching career and views on revision from award-winning writers. Writers must: 1) believe there is some good in the original piece; 2) feel confident that the writing can be made better; 3) have some reason to make it better; and 4) devise some plan for figuring out how to make it better (pp. 1-3). Farrington stresses that writers must care about their work, that techniques of revision must be taught, and that the revision should feel like "play" in order to minimize the anxiety students can feel when revising.

Researchers Fisher and Pifarre (2011) examined how wikis impacted the writing development of students ages nine and ten. These researchers used wikis with the intention of expanding the experience young writers had when using technology to compose, revise, and collaborate with their writing. These researchers hypothesized that when students move from writing that is "knowledge telling" to "knowledge transformation," they experience significant cognitive growth that distinguishes the immature writer from the experienced writer.

Students participating in the study were assigned the task of planning what would be critical in setting up a colony on Mars. Students used a wiki which that had a "negotiation space" where students proposed ideas and collaborated to determine how their work would appear in the published portion of the wiki known as the "Group page." The negotiation space allowed students to reflect on their writing while composing. Because the wiki recorded all changes made to the documents student produced, researchers were able to analyze the level of revisions students made, using two main categories—Surface Changes and Text-Based Changes. Surface Changes were further broken down into two categories: Formal Changes, which focused on spelling and punctuation, and Meaning-Preserving Changes, which focused on additions, deletions, substitutions, restructuring, or reversions. Text-Based Changes were also broken down into two different categories: Micro and Macro Structure. While Text-Based Changes also focused on additions, deletions, substitutions, restructuring, or reversions, Micro changes did not change the overall message of the text. Analysis demonstrated that wikis did provide an opportunity for students to improve as writers by allowing them to reflect (both on what was written, and if the work was appropriate to their purpose and audience) and also to collaborate while composing and revising. Given the age group of the participants, this study has direct implications for middle-school writers, suggesting

they would benefit from using technology to increase collaboration in order to make better revisions and to reflect on changes made to their writing.

In order to understand why students revised their work in certain ways and to encourage them to "re-see" their work, college instructor Melanie Hammer (1986) interviewed four of her undergraduate writing students, asking questions about their writing process and the decisions they made as writers. In her class, students worked in writing groups to get feedback and revise their writing. Her interviews revealed, however, that working in writing groups was helpful, but not the biggest factor in students' development as writers. Students revised their work based on multiple factors: mental images, emotions, and audience awareness. As students learned more about themselves as writers and determined which strategies were suitable to their personal style, they gained more authority to follow their intuitions about what to revise. They also revised with less hesitation and could explain the purpose behind their revisions. Hammer concluded that each writer is different, so the revision decisions they make will also be different.

If they are given opportunities to receive feedback from peers as well as the time to reflect on their decisions as writers, middle school students might also be able to clearly articulate why and how they revise and to produce better writing as a result.

Synthesizing the Research

All five groups reviewed above—theorists, teachers, prose writers, poets, and professors—spoke of the importance of reflection, feedback, experimentation, and self-evaluation in student learning and writing. However, they did not provide a series of steps students must move through to improve as writers. While all four components are essential in the revision process, they may occur at different points and in different contexts according to the needs of each individual writer. As Hammer (1986) noted, "Essentially, each student finds her

own way" (p. 12). Even so, useful teaching recommendations emerged in the work reviewed above. All noted the value of metacognition to the revision process. High school English teachers designed assignments for students to practice reflection, while prose writers and poets emphasized that writers need to find "balance" in their work and to think about how or why something worked in their writing. Encouraging students to provide a large amount of writing can lessen the anxiety they feel about revising and increase experimentation. Students also benefit from writing revision memos and receiving peer and teacher feedback to view their work from a different perspective.

Although most of the literature reviewed above did not focus on middle school writers, the four themes that emerged—reflection, experimentation, feedback, and self-evaluation—are important components for middle school writers as well. Middle school writers need to reflect on their work to determine if it is meeting their desired purpose. They also need opportunities to experiment with their revisions and to receive feedback from teachers and peers. With enough practice and support, middle school writers can then self-evaluate their work. Like four different colors of silk woven into a beautiful tapestry, each of these four components works together to determine the outcome of the final product. Removing even one component would make it impossible to produce the same fabric. Each *one* is necessary, and each contributes to the beauty of the final piece.

<u>Context of Study</u>

This investigation took place at Gerald Middle School (GMS), a school in northern Colorado, located in a university town with a population of approximately 150,000 people. Eighty-four percent of the student population at GMS is Caucasian, 9% is Hispanic, 3% is Asian, and other minority groups each count for less than 1%. GMS is on the south end of town, serves

grades six through eight, has a total population of approximately 810 students, 14% of which qualify for free and/or reduced price for lunch. On the school accountability report, issued by the Colorado Department of Education, GMS met or exceeded all growth ratings in reading, writing and math, and is considered by many to be a good school; as evidence, when several families' School of Choice form (a form that allows families to choose a school outside of their attendance area) were denied attendance to GMS by the school district, those families bought homes in the attendance area so their children could attend GMS.

GMS uses a modified schedule; students are scheduled into ten classes, but students have all of their even-numbered courses on "even days," and odd-numbered courses on "odd days." All sixth grade Language Arts and Math courses are "double blocked," which means Language Arts and Math teachers see their students every day. As a sixth grade teacher at the time of this study, I taught three 72-minute sections of Language Arts daily, as well as two 40-minute elective courses—one in creative writing and one study hall. These elective classes alternated, so I saw these students every other day. The average class size was 33 students with a wide variety of learning needs, including those who qualified for special education and had been designated as Gifted and Talented.

For this investigation I focus on my English Language Arts courses, where I used all of the instructional routines and learning activities described below. The three focal students I selected were all in the same class, which was at the end of the day. This class was also my "rowdy" group; there were many outspoken and strong-willed students who didn't always follow directions or take "no" for an answer.

Student Profiles

I chose three students, all of them native English speakers for this year-long investigation: one white male student who had a diagnosed learning disability; one white female who was identified Gift and Talented; and one male, who was an African-American, who was partially proficient on the state reading and writing assessment. (I created pseudonyms for each student in order to protect their identity.) This variety was intentional to represent the great variety of needs that occur in classrooms on a consistent basis. While I analyzed data from only three students, I used the same instructional strategies and routines for all of my classes. All three students attended my class for the entire year.

Stan was a white male student who had a 504 education plan because of dyslexia. He scored partially proficient on the state standardized assessment in both reading and writing the previous year. He was a very social young man and had a good sense of humor, but he struggled to put his thoughts into words when it came to writing. He regarded writing as a chore, and he was usually looking to do the least amount of work possible.

Victoria was a white female student who was somewhat shy. However, once she felt comfortable in one-on-one situations or in small groups, she had a lot to say. She readily considered herself a writer, enjoyed writing, and was identified as Gifted and Talented based on her grades and the district assessments the prior year. She was a student who appeared motivated to work hard, sometimes on the task assigned, yet sometimes she would not follow directions because she was more invested in her work than at following directions.

Jamal was an African-American student who scored partially proficient on the state standardized assessment in both reading and writing the previous year. He wrote simply at the beginning of the year, but also showed flashes of creativity. He was a quiet student, someone

who was not usually motivated to invest a lot of energy, unless he liked what he was writing. On those occasions, the change in effort and quality of his work were noticeably different.

While each of these students was different in social background and ability, all students were reluctant to revise their writing. In the beginning of the year, when they did revise, they appeared to do so more out of obligation rather than desire to improve their work: they were revising because the teacher asked them to do so, and because it was part of their grade in the class. I tried very hard to provide structure and routine for all students and hoped that by practicing reflection, and sharing thinking, these three students would be able think more critically about their development as writers.

Methods: Teaching and Research

As described in the Introduction, I began this study by reflecting on the role of revision in my own writing and by writing and revising my own work regularly with the assistance of a writing group. Those positive experiences along with the research reviewed in the previous sections intentionally shaped the following teaching methods I used with students in the classroom in order to maximize their development as writers. I resolved to:

- teach revision one specific skill/device at a time and provide repeated opportunities for application to allow for greater depth in student learning.
- use mentor texts as models for students and to facilitate guided, inquiry-based discussions in which students shared the stylistic features they noticed and wondered about. Students would write-to-learn about these mentor texts as well in order to experience firsthand how writing can lead to personal discovery. In both discussion and writing, I would ask students to contemplate why writers employed specific skills and devices. During revision of their own writing, I would require students to experiment

with these techniques. I reasoned that this approach would allow students to think in a more critical and intentional sense in regard to the texts they were reading and producing.

- give students repeated opportunities to take risks in their writing, even if they resulted in "mistakes." By writing about what they noticed and wondered about in their own writing, students would learn from these mistakes. Again, this strategy would allow them to write to learn and pull them deeper into the process.

- ask students to reflect on the changes they made to their writing, allowing them to engage in metacognition. Students would write about the differences they noticed in their writing, both before and after revisions in order to reflect on how the changes they made affected their work.

- conference with students regularly. This one-on-one time would not only allow me to give more feedback, but would also allow me to gather data about what I noticed. Any themes or patterns I observed emerging in student work could lead to whole-class lessons, small-group lessons, and individual instruction. These structures would allow me to push students' thinking as writers through direct instruction. Additionally, by asking students to talk about their processes, they and I could learn more about the decisions they made as writers, as well as the assumptions that guided those decisions.

- let students meet with each other to share and talk about what they wrote and revised and why. By providing students the chance to talk about their thinking, they would learn from and with each other about the specific decisions they were making as writers. Additionally, they could provide feedback on each other's work.

By using these instructional methods, I hoped to meet my ultimate goal as a writing teacher: to let students write, think, and play with words and language like writers do—for the joy of creation and the fun of manipulating words, emotions, and experiences. I wanted them to realize that writing could serve as a reflection of their fantastic minds.

These teaching methods allowed me to gain insight into students' revision processes and to determine the effectiveness of my writing instruction. In order to use what I had learned from my Literature Review, I set out trying to inform my instruction based on the four themes that had emerged in my research (reflection, feedback, experimentation, and self-evaluation), but to also include other pieces of wisdom by other writers. Specifically, I used Farrington's principles of revision (1999); allowed students to work in writing groups as did the authors from "Our Writing, Ourselves" (Cotich, Dixon, Nelson, Shapiro, Yeager, 1994); asked students to engage in critical thought and problem solving, as suggested by Bruner (1971), Dewey (1902), and Vygotsky (1978); and had students reflect in writing in order to learn about their own learning (Swartzendruber-Putnam, 2010). By using these principles and practices, I was able to step back and examine what was happening and why in each students' writing on a regular basis and to simultaneously learn more about each writer. Two crucial instructional routines were using mentor texts as models for student writing and asking students to reflect on those texts.

Themed Mentor Texts

Themed "mentor texts" (short pieces of text that serve as a model for a specific writing technique, such as similes or appositives, one that students will begin to practice) served as a part of the structure of our writing routines (Anderson, 2005). Each of these mentor texts helped students begin discussing writing in a more critical way, share observations, and develop revision skills based on the techniques they saw professional writers using. Using those models

helped students be more successful when experimenting with their writing. For instance, after examining how James Galvin used similes in *The Meadow*, students attempted to emulate his style while revising their work.

Reflection on Themed Mentor Texts

Reflection on mentor texts was another consistent writing routine. Students reflected, sometimes aloud, sometimes in writing, on different mentor texts in order to engage in more critical thought. By sharing their reflections, whether verbal or written, students learned from one another and gained practice in articulating their thinking. While reflection was a large focus of this investigation, I ultimately decided against using student reflections on the mentor texts as part of the data I chose to analyze because they consisted only of short phrases, which would have been difficult to accurately put into context and analyze.

Data Sources and Methods of Collection

The teaching methods described above resulted in the kinds of data teacher researchers typically collect, that is, work produced by students and teachers based on close observations of students' literacy practices and interactions (Hubbard & Power, 2012). In the book, *Inquiry as Stance*, researchers Cochran-Smith and Lytle wrote that "Most forms of practitioner research share the feature of systematicity and intentionality." to improve in their craft of teaching, but also to share their findings with other teacher researchers who would be interested in their findings (p.56, 2009). Teacher inquiry falls under the umbrella of qualitative research, with methods of data collection including observations of students working, written fieldnotes, collection of student work, and informal surveys. Some forms of analysis that teacher researchers use include reflection on fieldnotes (often in a teacher research journal), comparison of different forms of data by the same student, examination of data from an entire class of students, and/or

comparison of different classes of students against each other. No matter how teacher researchers examine data, they look for patterns related to their research questions, which can lead to both conclusions and to more research questions. These research methods and data analyses can inform short and long-term instructional decisions, allowing teachers to improve their craft and enhance students' learning.

Following the tradition of teacher research, the data I collected from students was mostly from their writing notebooks. This was where students wrote their responses to "daily pages" and also practiced the revision themes on their "daily pages." Students also responded to writing exercises in their writing notebooks and wrote "revision reflections" as described in detail below. Revision reflections, however, were not recorded in writing notebooks, but were handed in as separate assignments. I also recorded data in my fieldnotes journal based on my observations of students in their writing groups, and I recorded my writing conference with students. Each of these sources represented important writing routines in our class and provided insight into the development of students as writers.

In August, I began collecting multiple forms of data from each of the focal students, the largest being students' writing notebooks. Using these notebooks, I had multiple conferences with students about their writing. I also observed what students wrote for daily pages, looked at how they revised, and examined the other writing students produced. Conversations during conferences were recorded on my iPod touch, and listened to later, usually while I was doing cardio at the gym. Throughout the year, I also observed students' interactions in their writing groups. I felt it would be too intrusive to record these conversations, but instead listened in on their conversations from several feet away and took fieldnotes on what I heard.

After examining writing notebooks and listening to the conversations from conferences and writing groups, I reflected regularly in my fieldnotes. My fieldnotes entries helped me organize my observations, reflect on the data, and record other observations that impacted instructional planning. As the year went on, and I used writing exercises and revision reflection assignments, I began to realize that I was going to have more data than I could analyze if I collected every piece of writing students produced. Thus I decided to pick samples from all three students at regular intervals throughout the year. This method allowed me to examine patterns among those three students at a particular data point, and then to examine patterns for each individual student over the school year.

Writing Notebooks

Writing notebooks served as the major source of my data, as I was focusing on students' development over the course of the year. In writing notebooks, students wrote responses to daily pages prompts, the themed revisions for that day, and also their writing exercises. The daily pages prompts are a considerable portion of the data used in this investigation. Following in the tradition of Julia Cameron's (2002) "morning pages," I asked students to write daily pages for five minutes at the beginning of class, two to three times a week. Students had the option of writing to a prompt that I provided or could choose their own subjects as long as they were writing for the entire length of time. Daily pages gave students the necessary practice of putting their thoughts in words on a routine basis in order to develop fluency in their writing.

In addition to daily pages, students wrote in their writing notebooks two to three times a week. This writing included first drafts, revision themes based on the specific revision strategy students were practicing, observations about mentor texts, and responses to writing exercises. Of this material, revision themes emerged as my most valuable form of data because they gave me

insight into how students were reflecting, gathering feedback, experimenting, and engaging in self-analysis throughout the writing process. I distinguish between reflection and self-analysis because both require learners to look at themselves in different ways. Reflection requires students to look more generally at their work overall, but self-analysis requires the learner to be much more critical of a particular piece of writing, assess the level of value, and then make a decision that allows the learner to move forward with greater insight.

Writing exercises were a method of guided instruction with writing. Unlike revision themes, where students were allowed to independently practice one specific revision technique (i.e. students would practice inserting a simile into their writing when the revision theme was similes), writing exercises required students to revise a specific sentence that I provided, and to do so with much more teacher direction (i.e. revising the sentence, "The old man walked down the down" in order to practice the technique of landscape).

Fieldnotes Journal

As is the case with many teacher researchers (Maclean & Mohr, 1999), my fieldnotes journal was an important way for me to grow as a teacher. With so many different events and student interactions that happen in a school day, I found it beneficial to take time every few days to sit and write about what I was doing as a teacher and what my students were doing as learners. Because the writing development of my students was my focus, I did not analyze actual segments of my fieldnotes journal. I mention it here, however, because it was a reflective space where I could think through the writing conferences I held with individual students as well as their participation in writing groups. Writing conferences were and are a central routine in my classroom because they allow me to listen to what students have to say about the decisions they had made as writers. They also provide time for individualized direct instruction. Writing groups

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are another important routine because they broaden students' audiences beyond me as their

teacher and allow them to gain different perspectives from their peers.

Although I had initially planned to include recordings from conferences and writing

groups in the study, I ultimately decided to simply reflect on them in my fieldnotes journal

because a) I lost the recordings of the conferences when I attempted to transfer them to my

laptop, and b) the interactions from writing groups could have been a separate study itself.

Revision Reflections

So that students had the necessary practice of reflecting on the revisions made to their

writing, they selected different revisions they had made and explained why those revisions were

made twice per quarter, or eight times per year. These reflections at first started as an informal

process on sticky notes, one where students would explain the purpose behind one or two

changes they made in their writing. As the year went on, I asked students to provide more

specific information. I lengthened the revision reflections after determining that students needed

more practice reflecting on their writing in this way before they were able to produce something

that was an accurate indicator of their development. Additionally at the end of the year, I asked

students to produce an extended reflection to more fully demonstrate their growth in self-

evaluation.

Data Analysis

To analyze the student-produced data described above, I used a process of constant

comparison (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg & Coleman, 2000). This method is often used by teacher

researchers (Shagoury & Power, 2012; Maclean & Mohr, 1999), so I also used it in my study.

Constant comparison allows teacher researchers to make immediate adjustments to their practice

for the benefit of student learning based on the patterns that emerge from student work. The

primary tool I used to analyze students' writing during each of these periods was the "first-pass coding sheet" developed by Cindy O'Donnell-Allen (2011) for use in her graduate research methods course at Colorado State University. Informed by the method of constant comparison, this tool requires the researcher to make specific, initial observations about pieces of data and reflect on their significance in ways that will guide future data collection and will direct subsequent "passes" through the data. Prompts included on the first-pass coding sheet are as follows:

Context

- What is it [the piece of data being analyzed]?

- When was it produced?

- Who produced it?

- Why was it produced?

- What other important details about context will I want to remember later?

First Thoughts

- As I hold my research question up next to this piece of data, what strikes me is…

Other Data to Cross Reference or Collect

- [These were listed here.]

Emerging Patterns

- What patterns seem to be emerging?

- What is this piece of data an example of?

New Hunches or Questions/Things to Think About Later

- What does this piece of data have in common with my other data?

- How does this piece of data differ from my other data? How can I pay attention to and account for these differences? By expanding this theme? By creating a new theme?

- What else do I need to note?

- What do I need to ask/do next?

For each piece of data in this study, I completed a first-pass coding sheet using the above categories. Once I completed a first-pass coding sheet for each student in a particular round, I looked for trends and patterns for individual students across multiple rounds of data. Within each round, I also compared first-pass coding sheets based on data collected from the three students against one another, looking for trends and patterns. I repeated this practice throughout the length of this study.

I pulled nine rounds of data (for a total of 31 student samples). Each round represents at least one piece of data per student, with the exception of November, where I pulled an extra sample for Jamal. I gathered two rounds of data in August; one round each in September and October; two rounds in November; and one round each for the months of February, April and May. I compared each new sample of writing to the previous sample and observed what kinds of changes a student made to her or his writing from month to month. Collecting data at regular intervals allowed me to observe when writing growth was steady and when it occurred in spurts. For instance, Victoria routinely revised her work by adding phrases and changing language to be more precise; however, it wasn't until about halfway through the year when she started cutting words, phrases and sentences from her work that she took the next step forward in her development. Collecting and analyzing data at regular intervals also allowed me to look at growth in all four academic quarters of school, and also provided time for students to develop.

I did not use broad categories to describe the degrees and types of changes all students were making to their writing (e.g. no revision, small revisions, un-purposeful revisions, large revisions, etc.) because these categories proved to be too generic. Instead, I traced the changes each writer made over time and analyzed why those changes were important in the context of the individual's development. Once I identified how one writer was changing and growing, I could then look to see if those same trends were occurring for the other writers as well.

The data presented below is organized in chronological order. I present the data in the nine rounds described above, organized by date, to represent each of the data collection periods. In each round, I include at least one piece of data from each student so that conclusions can be drawn from each writer round by round, but also by comparing writers to each another. I examine data for one writer at a time, and then detail similarities and differences between the different writers.

First Round of Data Analysis: August 26th, 2010

The first two rounds of data collected in August serve as a baseline for where each writer is developmentally. During the first round of data collection, the revision theme focused on detail and imagery. The following excerpts are from daily pages entries in each students' writing notebooks during the second week of school.

Stan

The strikethroughs in the following sample represent what Stan cut from his piece, and the parentheses represent the revisions he inserted. (Note: In order to present the data as authentically as possible, I preserve the original spelling, grammar, and conventions students used rather than editing it for correctness.) The following excerpt is from Stan's writing notebook, one where he was writing to the daily pages prompt, "What do you notice when you

are out wandering hallways, stores, streets and such? What specific things stand out in your mind?" This was a "free choice" prompt, meaning students could choose to follow the prompt or write about something else that interested them instead. Students produced this writing to gain more fluency as writers. In the following example, the revision theme was detail and imagery, so when students were revising, they were looking to add better or more details to create a more precise image. Stan revised one of his sentences as follows: *"I thought man mom is going to be made (feeras) about (when she sees) that."* At first glance, Stan's revisions seem only to be functional, but they do clarify the content of his writing. By changing "mad" (spelled, "made") to "furious" (spelled, "feeras") and "about" to "when she sees," he makes the writing clearer and more descriptive. For this revision theme, I required students to make at least two revisions, which Stan did. As a baseline for how Stan was thinking and producing as a writer, these simple changes (i.e., bumping up the adjective choice, and revising to add a little more clarity) qualify as revisions, but don't require a lot of critical thought.

Victoria

In following excerpt from her writing notebook, Victoria was also writing to the same daily pages prompt as Stan (i.e., "What do you notice when you are out wandering hallways, stores, streets and such? What specific things stand out in your mind?") The parentheses represent the revisions she inserted:

> *(Ash) Bow slung over should, dragon wings streached in back, giving a fill*
>
> *display to the audience, I remided myself that this was justier. Maybe not the*
>
> *exact kind I hoped for, a true court rather than a sports man like (however much*
>
> *brutal) contest, but it was close enough. After a lifetime of serching, a lifetime of*
>
> *training, (A lifetime of hoping, wishing,) this was it. A contest to the death.*

Jackala was grim-faced and pale, his (tainted Gold) yellow eyes darting left to

right like they were seperated from his face.

All four of Victoria's revisions appear to be focused on creating clearer images for her readers by changing words and adding phrases. She uses the word "Ash" to describe the bow, and the phrases "however much brutal," "A lifetime of hoping, wishing," and "tainted gold," to provide more precise details than her original version. As a baseline for where Victoria was thinking and producing as a writer, these changes (i.e., adding adjectives to increase description, adding descriptive phrases to increase clarity) qualify as revisions, and while these revisions don't require a lot of critical thought, they do add more purposeful detail to her work.

Jamal

The following excerpt is from Jamal's writing notebook in reference to the same prompt listed above. The parentheses represent what he added as a revision:

I don't know what year it was but I bought a dog and she was white and her name

was Bella. The people we bought her from said she had all her shots, so when we

took her back home we bought another shcnouzer they were both black and white

and they would chase each other around. Then three years later she died & oh

our black dogs name was Eli. Then we found out she didn't have one shot, and

after that we were taking her to the vet she died right there on my lap. (& I Also

felt her spirit leave her Body.)

Rather than refining what he had written, the only change Jamal to his work was extending it by a single sentence. As a baseline, this change suggests that revision may be something Jamal is reluctant to do. Instead of making deeper changes, he is only willing to extend his piece at this point in the year.

In these baseline excerpts, Stan and Victoria demonstrate a willingness to make changes at the level of word choice by substituting or adding a word or phrase in order to increase clarity or the precision of the images. While Stan does not go beyond the assigned number of revisions, Victoria revises more extensively. Jamal did not revise the existing content of his piece, but simply extended it by one sentence. The differing degrees of revision suggested the need to encourage more experimentation and risk-taking in subsequent instruction to the whole class while also supporting each individual student's particular needs in the revision process.

Second Round Data Analysis: August 31st, 2010

The following excerpts were all taken from students' writing notebooks when the revision theme was focused on using appositives to add more purposeful detail to their writing.

Stan

The following excerpt is from Stan's writing notebook, one where he was writing to the daily pages prompt, "What strange people always enter your thoughts?" This was also a free-choice prompt designed to allow students to gain more fluency as writers. The revision theme was appositives, so when students were revising, they were looking to add phrases, separated with commas or other punctuation, to add meaningful detail to their work. Parentheses indicate the revisions Stan inserted: *"When I meat people I imagen them doing som very strange things like, will they do the robot and sing michal Jackson, I also wonder if they are a (,bigfot bully, who eats peanut butter for breakfast) bully."* Stan did make one revision, inserting a phrase that modified what he thought about people, in this case, someone being a "bigfoot bully who eats peanut butter for breakfast." Unlike in his first revision, Stan did more than is simply change or add a single word. Making a more substantial change required him to pause in order to imagine,

or examine what he had already imagined, so he could include more details and refine what he had initially written. Although the text is short, it demonstrates progress in Stan's revision practices.

<u>Victoria</u>

The following excerpt is from Victoria's writing notebook, also to the same free-choice prompt. Parentheses indicate the revisions Victoria inserted:

One strange person that enters my thoughts is myself. or an altered version of me, at least. I like to write about me doing things, (incedentaly I put my friends in that word too) that I do not get to do in real life, such as flying or talking to animals.

At this point in the year, I typically ask students to make more complex revisions; because the level of difficulty is higher, some students struggle to show progress. Although it is too early to declare any definitive patterns, I do not see Victoria taking any substantive risks in her revision practices during this time period. While she undoubtedly needed more practice time, my hunch was that she and other students might need the chance to talk more about the decisions they were making in their writing so that they could learn more from one another. Providing these opportunities would reflect the social nature of writing and learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

<u>Jamal</u>

The following excerpt from Jamal's writing notebook was also written to the same prompt. Parentheses indicate the revisions he inserted:

I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write. I don't know what to write.

I I I I I I I don't don't don't don't don't don't don't know know know know know know know what what what what what what what to to to to to to to write write write write write write write.

I required students to write for the entire time allotted to daily pages. By writing, "I don't know what to write" twelve times, and then repeating each word from that sentence seven times before moving onto the next word, Jamal was following a method I encouraged students to use when they felt stuck in their writing. I have found that simply repeating the phrase "I don't know what to write" often prompts students to think of something they actually *can* write about without disrupting the flow of their writing. While Jamal may be struggling to generate ideas in this example, at least he is able to gain practice putting pencil to paper. For his last sentence, where each word is repeated seven times before moving on to the next word, I assume he is trying to entertain. This is at least a step toward making his reader react. In a subsequent conference with Jamal about this piece, I determined to let him know he made me laugh. I reasoned that understanding a reader's human reaction to his work could make learning more comfortable for Jamal. By increasing his comfort level, I hoped to also increase his growth as a writer.

<u>Observations across Students</u>

I was able to draw a number of conclusions by comparing the work of all three writers that suggested the direction of subsequent instruction. Although Stan wrote only small amounts of text (perhaps due to his learning disability), he did show determination to revise his work. The quality of Victoria's writing continued to be good, though she was taking few, if any, risks with revision. Finally, although Jamal did not revise at all and sometimes felt stuck as a writer during

this round of data collection, he was willing to try the "I don't know what to write" method and to take a risk in other ways by injecting some humor into his writing.

None of the students made great experimentations in their revision processes, but this made sense at this point in the year when they were still trying to get to know me as a teacher, just as I was trying to get to know them. An increased comfort level might result in more risks and experimentation in their work. Also, revision is hard, even for experienced writers, because it takes time to stop, think, consider, and change perspectives. Developing these habits takes time and patience and is hard for novice writers, especially those who are not proficient. I decided that the best course of action on my part as a teacher was to be patient with them, just as they were learning patience as writers. I trusted that an increased comfort level would help students take more risks in their revisions and learn more as writers.

Third Round Data Analysis: September 16th & 17th, 2010

This round of data came from mid-September, and at this time, all students were focusing on the revision theme of adding landscape (a rich description of setting) to their narratives. All of the following excerpts were taken from students' writing notebooks.

Stan

In this piece of writing, Stan was responding to the free-choice daily pages prompt, "Imagine yourself walking through a neighborhood, be it poor, rich, common, or classy. Take your audience through this neighborhood, pausing to show them parts of this area that make it come to life on the page." I do not use parentheses to indicate where Stan revised this excerpt because he had written his revisions in the margins, and it is not clear exactly where he intended to insert this revision in his writing.

then I just realized something flukeeys sister who knows what her name is dose

not have the same acsent flukey dose it was a American voice and now that I think

at the dose not have that dark or sineather So, I asked "Where were you guys

born" "india said futes said in a small elienen village then his siter spoke up

America sandieago california"" flukeey said "you see."

In the margins of his work, Stan had written, *"She was also wearing ripped jeans with white t-shirt that said, I <3 NY."* Stan is thus making revisions, but they are very basic and general and reflect the kinds of revision I see a lot of novice writers make: defaulting to physical description, such as clothes, height, weight, hair color, etc. I categorize this type of character description as more of a "mug shot" than a detailed sketch. Moving forward from this exercise, my hope is that Stan's revisions will eventually provide insight into the characters he was creating. But this is a start, and Stan is trying to be more detailed and specific. Furthermore, at this point in the year, Stan was considered a partially proficient writer; this level of revision is what I would expect to see from a writer of his ability level.

Victoria

In this piece of writing, Victoria was responding to the same free-choice daily pages prompt described above:

I shook, and shook. Water, clean, fresh, seawater, was pouring into the sides of

the valley in wich my town, peaceful and silent, laid. The butcher's and alchemists

shops went first. While the flood washed them away, the buildings knocked the

Quildegg feild to pices, the funnel splintering. Screams, from the village folk, then

the rushing flood overtook them. As I watched, my house, just a small cottage,

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was flooded. I was then underwater, but I could breathe. A clear, crisp voice

shook the water.

"You did not know?"

I turned to face a river dragon, aqua scales gleaming, The green eyes gleaming,

full of intelligence and wisdom. Wisdom and intelligence are not absolutely good

things, and because I knew, and had experience with it, I backed up, and ran into

a coral wall that had not been there previously.

While the writing Victoria produced was very good and extremely detailed compared to that produced by other students in the class, she made the decision not to revise this entry. Judging by the volume of work she produced, it appears that she chose to extend, rather than revise her piece. When students complete a daily pages entry, I ask them to draw a line that shows where the entry originally ends. This allows me to see how much students are able to write in the five minutes of designated writing time, and also to see the revisions they make after the time is up. Victoria did not follow directions and draw a line across the bottom of her work after five minutes. Instead, she extended her piece during revision time, and at the end of the revision time, that is when she drew a line underneath the bottom of her work.

Despite the quality of her writing, Victoria has not yet engaged in refining her thinking, which is a crucial skill in writing development. Her reluctance prompted the following questions in my mind: Was Victoria feeling so attached to her work that she was not willing to make changes and try new things? Maybe Victoria was more motivated to get her ideas down before she lost them and that is why she was not revising? Maybe revising with appositives wasn't where she wanted to grow as a writer. To encourage more risk-taking, I made a note to ask about her reluctance to revise in a future writing conference with her.

Jamal

In this piece of writing, Jamal was responding to daily pages prompt on a different day from the one described above with Stan and Victoria. On this day, I asked students to "[i]magine you are in a room, either real or unreal, and describe it so well that your audience feels that they are in this room as well. Focus on specific detail." Again, students had the freedom of choice to respond to the prompt or write about a different topic of their choice:

> *One day a long time ago my mom was walking a a pitbull was attacking her*
>
> *because she was trying to protect a dog named abby, when the pitbull went to*
>
> *attack abby my mom was trying to throw herself and abby over a fence then this*
>
> *big buff black guy with red bloodshoot eyes grabbed the pitbull up really high and*
>
> *slammed the pittbull on the concrete like 20 times and when he stopped the*
>
> *pittbull was chasing two three year old boys down the street without getting hit,*
>
> *then the pitbull ran out there and got hit. Then the man that owned the pittbull*
>
> *came over & told my mom's mom & she just wanted to jump and strangle the guy*
>
> *that's why she sat across from him instead of beside him.*

Jamal wrote a considerable amount in this entry, but he did not revise. On this day I met with him because I wanted to talk with him, or more accurately, get him talking about his writing and how to revise. This was a chance for me to explicitly teach this one writer, and use his own work to do so.

When I called Jamal back to the conference table to discuss his writing, as I do with all students, I asked him to read his work to me and to point out where he wanted to add more detail. He said he could write more description about the dog, and I selected the phrase, "when the pitbull went to attack abby," then asked Jamal to describe the dog, and I wrote what he said,

"The dog was ~~a disgusting mess~~ (drooling bits of white slobber", and was dragging the back leg." The strikethroughs represent where I showed Jamal how to cut a piece of writing, and the parentheses for how to add something more descriptive in its place. The "drooling bits of white slobber" was his response to the question I asked, "What does a disgusting mess look like? Pick something specific to mention." We then discussed how to pick one thing, and slow down and find something small and/or something important to write about. I told him, "This is how we make our writing match what we are imagining."

During that conference, I saw something change in Jamal's face when talking about revision and explaining how writers slow down to add details that make the writing stand out. However, at the conclusion of this conversation, class was two minutes away from ending, so Jamal did not have a chance to immediately apply this advice to his writing. Still, he learned how to use a specific technique in revising his own work.

Observations across Students

One pattern that emerged for Stan was that he was revising. While the quality of his writing was not yet proficient, he was developing the practice of revision. Jamal and Victoria, however, were not revising much, if at all. The only conclusion I was able to draw at this point was that they needed more time to figure how they could best revise. What I didn't want was for revision to feel like forced penance. Based on these observations, I decided to provide some direct instruction on how to use appositives (such as, providing students with a simple sentence like, "The girl went to the store," then allowing students to try out different appositives within that sentence). I also determined that I needed to meet more regularly with students to get them talking about their writing so that they would gain a greater comfort level with their work. Based on my successful conference with Jamal, my hope was that I would be able to individualize my

feedback by learning specifically how students talked about their work. These changes to my instruction had the potential to help all students experiment more with revision, grow more comfortable with their writing, and as a result improve their work and process.

Fourth Round Data Analysis: October 14th & 18th, 2010

At this point in my investigation, students' work on mentor texts focused on making speculations about the writer's intent and determining the impact of the writer's work on them as a reader and fellow writer. Students had two months practicing the routines of thinking, questioning, and wondering regarding the mentor texts, and had continued to increase their comfort level with writing. In the examples below, the instructional focus of the revision theme was on the usage of colons and lists as a stylistic technique. I wanted students to use this technique in order to provide detail and information in their work in an effective manner. All excerpts were taken from daily pages entries in students' writing notebooks, and students were writing to different prompts on different days. The prompt each student was writing to is listed for that particular student.

<u>Stan</u>

In this excerpt, Stan is writing to the free-choice daily pages prompt, "What things in life have you not figured out, but you continue to do anyway?" The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Stan inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

> *"boom" as the next viniger and baking soda bomb went off that was a big One"*
>
> *(Yelled my littel kindergarden fried He was petty lound and abnotious but still*
>
> *cool) "yep" I said Pictin up the next one and thering it careessiey not reallizing*
>
> *the car. it hit the cars wind sheid and exploded the car swerved and hit a house.*

By revising his writing to include the new phrases, Stan's work directly reflected what we had been studying: how to give details about characters that represent their personality. In our study of colons and lists, we had discussed how to give a lot of information in a short space. In the addition above, Stan did not default to the height, hair color or clothing of the character as he had earlier in the year, but rather focused on the personality of the character. While his spelling still needs editing, his content includes more specifics than ever before. I decided not to focus on spelling with Stan (most students with dyslexia struggle with spelling), but to continue writing conferences with him, with an emphasis on helping him reflect on his work.

Victoria

In this excerpt, Victoria was writing to same prompt as Stan. The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Victoria inserted after reviewing her initial draft: *"Inhaling deeply, taking in the scent, Charlina ~~spread her newfound wings and dove~~ (jumped with complete faith in her fariey flight) for another balcony not 50 feet down, still ~~skipping~~ prancing in mid~~air~~(flight)."* Victoria's revisions in this passage differ significantly from excerpts I examined in previous rounds of data collection. Her decision to cut the line "spread her newfound wings and dove" and replace it with "jumped with complete faith in her fairy flight" involves more than a simple exchange of words. Rather, it demonstrates that she is taking to the time to stop, think, and reflect on her work, this time in respect to the character and the character's motivation, thoughts, and feelings.

Furthermore, her changes of "skipping" to "prancing" and "midair" to "midflight" directly reflect a prior conference I had had with a small group of students, Victoria included, who were all writing at a high level. In this conversation the week before, I had emphasized that the students needed to step out of the role of writer and really *be* the character for a moment. I

gave students the option of what they wanted to work on, and each student indentified the focus

for her or his revisions based on the following choices: character development, word choice,

editing, or another feature of their choice. The main focus of the character development group

was not on being "the writer" but on being the character and really thinking about what a

particular character needed. I also shared some advice I heard the young adult writer Todd

Mitchell (2006) give to students at a summer writing workshop: write a letter to the author from

the perspective of a character, explaining how the character has been misunderstood by the

writer. At the conclusion of my conversation with the students, I left them to talk about their

characters and what those characters needed.

This conference as well as Victoria's conversations in writing groups began to have an

impact on the revisions she made to her writing. In these revisions, I saw more evidence that she

was stopping to think and reflect on her work. As a result, she began changing her perspective to

understand her character more, something I had not previously seen in her writing. As a writing

teacher, this is what I am after: growth for the writer.

Jamal

In this excerpt, Jamal is writing to the free-choice daily pages prompt, "What do you see

looking out the windows of your house? School? Car?" The parentheses in the following

passage represent the revision Jamal inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

> *When I look out the window of any house: I see people walking, talking, playing,*
>
> *or just having fun. When I look out of the school window I see houses tree people*
>
> *and a mustang GT out in the parking lot. When I look out my car I see big, small,*
>
> *skinny, or fat people in cars that sit, dance, eat healthy or just eats.*

Although Jamal has not revised this passage, he uses a colon in his first sentence, which was the revision theme we were practicing. I was encouraged to see evidence that he was applying recent instruction, but I did ask myself, how hard should I push for Jamal to revise, and how hard is too hard? In the end, I remembered that my guiding goal was to be the coach, and Jamal was the player. I did not want him to shut down and make revisions only out of obligation, rather than doing so to learn and grow as a writer. I needed to continue to get Jamal talking about his work and building his comfort level with writing and revision.

<u>Observations across Students</u>

At this point in the year, all three writers were changing to some extent. Stan had begun slowing down to give important character details in his writing, while Victoria had begun the practice of refining her thinking from draft to draft. While Jamal still was not revising, he was experimenting with the revision theme as he composed his first draft. From these changes, I concluded that my instruction had been effective in allowing students time to practice new revision techniques, get feedback from me and others, and then wrestle with the decisions they were making. In the process, they were becoming more comfortable with revision.

Fifth Round Data Analysis: November 8th, 16th, 18th & 23rd, 2010

The instructional focus at this point in the semester was using the revision theme of "dialogue extras" by adding character action, character detail, landscape, internal thought of a character, speech tags, or a dialogue interrupter (i.e., interrupting the dialogue in order to give clarifying information for the reader). In an effort to encourage experimentation, I allowed students to choose to write dialogue or to incorporate the extras into existing dialogue in their work.

<u>Stan</u>

In this excerpt, Stan is writing to the daily pages prompt, "What strange memories do you have from your childhood that still stick with you, puzzle you, still appear in your mind?" The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Stan inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

> *"dude go get me a soda" the ergen see in his voice sounded like it was a life of*
>
> *death situation (his face was as red as a tomato). "uh ok" I said dummly ~~a~~ I began*
>
> *to walk down the stairs I grabbed a soda out of the friger where I thought to*
>
> *myself (hay) Every body deseves a good laugh (every now and again.) so I began*
>
> *to shake the cherry coke ~~can~~ as hard as I can. I ~~got~~ started up stairs and gave it*

These revisions show Stan's decision to make changes based on how his work sounds in this scene of his writing. The revisions both clarify and improve the overall flow of his work and demonstrate that his comfort level with revision has increased: he is revising more, and his revisions are bringing greater clarity to his work.

<u>Victoria</u>

In this excerpt, Victoria is writing to the daily pages prompt, "Who do you know that acts better than everyone else, like they are entitled to something more? Write this scene using dialogue. (Remember, that you can tell the truth, or you can make it up, so write what need to be written. Just don't share out loud if you are using the names of real people.)" The parentheses below in the following passage represent the revision Victoria inserted after reviewing her initial draft:

> *I heard Lily's ID (beeping 52813! 552813! ~~In my head.~~ in my head). What*
>
> *happened? In ~~her usual~~ Telepathic texts were a fairly new invention, replacing*

obsolete phones. (I heard an acusing tone.) The only catch was that they were 100

dracna, (then of course the 20+ to install it) a hugely expencive fad. But I had

gotten mine at a thrift store for a "bargain" price of 50+. (It had still depleated

most of my text savings.) And to think you can't even use it in class.

In this example, Victoria uses the dialogue extra of internal thought in the first two

revisions above. Her ability to reflect on relevant details, ones that are specific, is an

improvement for her writing. Her addition of the phrase "then of course the 20+ to install it"

gives the reader more information by including more character development. She also describes

the character's frame of mind and provides more insight into the character's life by adding the

phrase "It had still depleated most of my text savings." The variety of revisions Victoria is using

have improved her work. I determined to allow more choice in future assignments in the kinds of

revision options she could choose from, sensing that this flexibility could allow for continued

growth.

Jamal

I have included two excerpts from Jamal in this round to show the difference in his

revisions from November 8th to the 23rd. In the first excerpt, Jamal is writing to the daily pages

prompt, "What strange memories do you have from your childhood that still stick with you,

puzzle you, still appear in your mind?" The parentheses in the following passage represent the

revision Jamal inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

"There's one memory that me and my friends jumped the ~~mcdonalds character~~

(mcdonalds dude my friend said) in the play house thing then because he was freaky weird and

down right disturbing, I still don't know why I did that, that day."

This was one of the first times that Jamal revised his work. By changing "mcdonalds character" to "mcdonalds dude my friend said," Jamal inserts dialogue and includes a speech tag, part of our instruction for the week. While he has not been actively practicing revision, Jamal has been exposed to all of the conversations in class, which appear to have had an impact on his development. Learning about the dialogue extras have allowed him more options for *how* to revise, which can lead to increased writing development.

Two weeks later, Jamal wrote to the daily pages prompt, "Think of a person or character in…Literature…A book…A movie…Your real life…In your mind… And write about that character. Reveal what makes that character special, unique, different. Focus on what they say, do, look like." The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Jamal inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

> in 4th grade this boy came to school ~~sounding like a person on tv when you fast forward there voice~~. So he comes to school & he sucked up five ballons with heillium & everybody laughed. ~~He dressed raggedy & he wore plaid Shirts and had tiny hands & ears~~, Also he was shorter than a 2nd grader. And he was the size of a big husky's. (He sounded like a person when you fast-forward them, he had tiny hands & ears, he had shirts out of the trash & had no shoes)

Jamal cut phrases, something he had done only once before, and added phrases to match what he is imagining. Practicing reflection has allowed Jamal to experiment with revision, and that experimentation can lead to better writing. By cutting "sounding like a person on tv when you fast forward there Voice" and "He dressed raggedy & he wore plaid Shirts and had tiny hands & ears" Jamal has made a decision to change how the reader will see that character. His experimenting with character centered descriptions is an attempt to focus with greater clarity and

detail on his work. While cutting "raggedy" and "plaid shirts" may leave a less clear image of the character, it is more important for Jamal to engage in the process of refining his thinking and experimenting with his writing by trying describe the character in a different way. It is this practice which can lead to him improving as a writer that is my main focus, not one piece of writing.

Observations across Students

All three students had begun revising more independently, and Victoria was beginning to revise more frequently. This pattern across students suggested that the writing routines we had been using in class had made an impact; students were reflecting on their work more deeply and more often, leading to greater experimentation with their writing and improvement of their work.

Students had begun adding good specific details and making revisions focused on characters. These more frequent revisions suggested that students were becoming more confident with the process of revising, even though they were progressing at different paces. So that students would continue their writing development, I decided to add more options for experimentation and to provide more opportunities for students to reflect on the impact of their revisions. Doing so would allow them to become more critical of their work, and was likely to lead to more growth as a result.

Sixth Round Data Analysis: November 30th, 2010

This round of data comes from a writing exercise, written in students' writing notebooks. Previous instruction focused primarily on helping students to look at their own writing, reflect, and try to revise based on that reflection. This activity required students to create something spur-of-the-moment, but the focus was on revising one sentence, not a sequence of events. The purpose of this writing exercise was to practice revision using creativity: students need to not

"default" to adding adjectives, or any other strategy that doesn't involve critical thinking when revising; students need to reflect on specifics, allowing the image they create on the page to match the image in their mind.

I taught a specific revision lesson where students practiced revising the same sentence "The old man walked down the road" over and over, using different techniques with each revision. The idea for this exercise came from the book *Triggering Town*, by Richard Hugo (1979), that focused on ideas for writing and revising one's work. The different revision techniques I explained and demonstrated were adding landscape and/or character detail at the front of the sentence, from the back of the sentence, or in the middle of the sentence, I then required students to try combining two of more of the previously mentioned techniques. Overall, the purpose of this exercise was to encourage students to create an image in their mind, and then to craft a sentence that matched that image.

Stan

In this sample from his writing notebook, Stan is revising the sentence "The old man walked down the road" by adding details at the front of the sentence: *"The twon became quiter and darker as if the ruler of death was right in front of them as the old man walked down the road."* In addition to using the landscape technique (a rich description of setting), Stan also uses a simile to describe how the town acted as the old man walked down the road. His revision creates a little suspense regarding what else might be occurring in the narrative and prompts the reader's curiosity about whether or not the old man is the "ruler of death." The revision produced here represents a significant improvement in Stan's writing due to experimentation with a new technique.

In his second revision, Stan changes his sentence from the middle: *"The old man, small and fragial whith paper coler skin and hair, limped slowly down the road."* This revision adds character detail and character action, two components from previous lessons. His description of the man being both small and fragile, is good, but the specificity of "paper colored skin and hair" is more detailed than his previous work. By replacing the verb "walk" in the original sentence with "limped slowly down the road," these small specific details help provide a clearer image of the character.

These two samples are Stan's best work yet. He demonstrates that he is reflecting deeply on his writing and experimenting with different revision techniques. The more he can continue to reflect and experiment, the better his writing and writing development will get. The next step for Stan will be gathering feedback from other writers in order to examine his work more critically.

Victoria

In this sample, Victoria adds landscape to the beginning of the sentence: *"The new sunlight glistened of the morning dew sleeping on plums leaves, and the old man walked down the road, in the fading moon."* Victoria crafts an image with precision using "new" to describe the sunlight, an indication that it was morning. Additionally, the sunlight is used to describe the "morning dew" that is "sleeping" on the "plums leaves." The personification of the morning dew sleeping ties directly back to the "new" sunlight, which was "sleeping" all night. Her sentence ends when the old man "walked down the road, in the fading moon." Her ability to tie in five elements (new sunlight, morning dew sleeping, plum leaves, the old man walking down the road, and a fading moon) into one

sentence creates a vivid image. Victoria is more detailed here than in all of her previous work. By reflecting, she was able to focus on specifics and create exceptional work.

For her second attempt, Victoria revised her work from the front of the sentence: *"The giggles of children and the shocked mothers herding their children indoors at the sight of him hurt Morvolo plenaty, but he kept his statre and the old man walked down the road."* In this revision, the old man walking down the road becomes a small and additional part of the sentence. Victoria created a character that made children laugh, yet shocked mothers, so much that they herded their children indoors, away from him, leaving a feeling that borders on fear. Yet the man walking down the road maintains his "stature." The curiosity created in this sentence is based on specific character detail, mostly on character action.

Together, these examples show that narrowing the focus of the revision on a starter sentence Victoria had not written herself allowed her to revise more independently. Additionally, giving her to more choices and techniques for revision also increased her motivation to do so.

Jamal

In this sample, Jamal revises the sentence using the technique of landscape: *"The wind rose up, creating a cloud, & rocks that peppered his face, As the old man walked down the road."* Jamal not only incorporates a description of the wind and the cloud it created, but he also indicates that the strength of the wind was enough to "pepper" the old man in the face. His attention to verb choice is an improvement over previous work, and he is also creating images with greater precision of language. In addition to this exercise, the routines Jamal has been exposed to have helped him practice reflection and specific revision skills, leading to more experimentation and better writing.

In this second example, Jamal is revising his sentence from the middle: *"The old man walked with a nasty Scrooge look and down was a doll with the head cut off back down the road."* Although this sentence is somewhat unclear, Jamal is focusing on character details, a technique used earlier in the month. His description of the old man carrying a doll adds characterization that prompts a particular reaction by the reader; if the character was carrying a briefcase, for instance, the reader would be likely to make different assumptions about him. The tension created by the "Scrooge" look on the character's face and the doll with the head cut off, is also likely to prompt a reader's curiosity. By focusing his revision tightly on one sentence, Jamal was able to produce better writing. I determined that additional exercises would help him develop even further.

Observations across Students

By focusing on one sentence at a time, all three students produced creative revisions that were improvements over their previous writing. Stan's increased attention to word choice led him to create clearer images. The exercise also prompted Victoria to actually engage in revision and resulted in her best writing through the addition of tightly connected details. Jamal's attention to detail and word choice also improved, and his images were more precise than before. Students were also using what they learned from past revision themes: when revising from the front of their sentences, Stan, Victoria and Jamal used landscape to add more specific detail; and all three writers applied elements from the earlier revision theme focused on dialogue extras in their revisions from the middle and end of their sentences. These results prompted me to include more focused revision exercises in future instruction and to allow students more options for how they revised.

Seventh Round Data Analysis: February 11th & 18th, 2011

The following examples from all three students' writing notebooks focus on the revision theme of verb choice. The revision theme of verb choice was used as an instructional focus because students were writing well, but their choice of verbs when drafting and revising needed improvement. Because they were writing to different daily pages prompts, I have included each one below.

Stan

In this excerpt, Stan is writing to the daily pages prompt, "What comes to your mind when you see or are in fog? Mystery? An omen of things to come?" The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Stan inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

I ~~looked~~ (peered) but the windo peple om robes were ~~shufeling~~ (walking) down the could and icey street. they were all hodded and you could not see there eyes. It was a foul moon and I could sence something was bad (was) about to happen. as they ~~got~~ (crept) closer to my house and I could here them ~~chanting~~ (shoutingmurmuring) something. It wasnt in english though it was in a diferent language.

Stan is experimenting with verb choice with these four changes: specifically, he changes "looked" to "peered"; "shufeling" to "wlaking"; "got" to "crept"; and "chanting" to "shoutingmumring." This experimentation leads to more precise actions in his work in almost every case. The change from "looked" to "peered" is more specific, as is "got" to "crept." Both of these changes describe character action. The change from "chanting" to "shouting, murmuring" doubles up the verb, indicating that two things are going on at once and creating more action. Only the change from "shuffling" to "walked" decreases the specificity of the

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writing, but if I'm asking students to experiment, they need to have choice. Most importantly, Stan is experimenting, which was one of the goals at this point in the semester. In future instruction, my hope was that he would increase his ability to self-evaluate what was working and what wasn't in his writing, and then reflect on why this was the case.

<u>Victoria</u>

In this excerpt, Victoria is writing to the daily pages prompt, "What comes to your mind when you see or are in fog? Mystery? An omen of things to come?". The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Victoria inserted after reviewing her initial draft:

> *The night sky gleamed from the collective light of the heavenly bodies hanging*
>
> *limply within its grasp. The moon shone bright, but it seemed like a fake shine, a*
>
> *smile when you are really wanting to strangle somebody. The stars still glittered,*
>
> *but there seemed a falseness to it. (they seemed to be putting on a show, not real,*
>
> *but entertaining.) (Even the clouds were puffy and gray, the perfect type.) (Where*
>
> *the tattered rays of clouds were huddled) No one could really explain why the ~~felt~~*
>
> *~~this way~~ (the tingling in their brains warned them of something) until all the*
>
> *~~magical~~ astrolagl lights suddenly burned out.*

Victoria's first revision adds more context to her personification of the stars, adding more information to their false motivation for "glittering." Immediately following Victoria adds, "Even the clouds were puffy and gray, the perfect type." This change incorporates landscape, a previously learned revision theme, and more details for the reader. In her last revision, she cut the words "felt this way" and "magical" and added another phrase in order to create, "No one could really explain why the tingling in their brains warned them of something until all the astrolagl lights suddenly burned out." By focusing on the smaller details, Victoria appears to be

seeing her work as less fixed and more open to revision; she is focusing more on what needs to be written, rather than on what is already written. Victoria uses greater precision in her language, allowing readers to connect more fully to her work. I am encouraged to see that she is more willing to experiment with revision, and that she is revising more independently rather than just in response to what is required.

Jamal

In this excerpt, Jamal is writing to the daily pages prompt, "Write a scene of little kids on the playground." The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Jamal inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

> *There was this kid named lil Noah & I think tavelli has the second largest ~~in the~~*
>
> *~~county~~ (playground out of a lot of elementary schools) and he does a backflip*
>
> *(with a fan on while looking in the mirror) off of a 40 feet tall wall and lands it &*
>
> *goes in the school & I got double doggy dared to go down a open slide with ice on*
>
> *it & a wall of snow on the bottom*

Previously in the year, Jamal only revised his work by adding more words. Here, he cut one phrase, "in the county," and added two others. These changes add specificity and make his images clearer for his audience. He is also avoiding exaggeration, which was a common feature in his previous work, and crafting a scene that is more believable. With his addition of the phrase "with a fan on while looking in the mirror," Jamal slows the sentence down to focus on character action and landscape, two previous revision themes. These revisions not only reinforce the value of writing routines, but also demonstrate that when students practice reflection on a regular basis, they are able to experiment with their writing, producing better work. For Jamal to continue to

improve, he will need freedom of choice, so he may be more creative, to engage in reflection, and he will also need models so he may continue to see new ways to revise.

<u>Observations across Students</u>

In the above excerpts, all three students made revisions that increased precision in their writing. Stan's changes focused on word choice, and Victoria had not only begun revising, but was also cutting words and phrases. Jamal also showed an increased willingness to revise, and had begun to replace vague phrases more frequently. All three students had started adding more specific details and creating clearer images. The writing routines throughout the year have given students practice reflecting, getting feedback, and experimenting, and have resulted in more purposeful revisions. Consequently, I came to the conclusion that I could make future revision tasks more open-ended, allowing students to do more independent problem-solving and thinking about how they wanted to revise.

Eighth Round of Data Analysis: April 12th, 19th & 26th, 2011

During this round of data collection and analysis, the instructional focus of our revision theme was specificity. After using multiple themes throughout the year, I decided to return to the theme of detail and imagery, this time with less direction from me as the teacher. I made this decision in large part because of the pattern I saw emerging in Stan, Victoria, and Jamal's writing. They were ready to reflect more independently on their work in order to decide which details they wanted to add. The daily writing prompts I asked students to address in their writing notebooks required them to write and revise with specificity in mind so that they could create greater precision in their work.

Stan

      In this excerpt, Stan is writing to the daily pages prompt, "What stands out to you when you look at neighborhoods? What smells, sounds and such catch your attention?" The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Stan inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

> *"lets just say my neighbors are ~~verey~~ (some of the more) interesting people Ive ever met. my across the the street neighbor who was a marine in the vetinam war and retired cia agent (he always wants to know is going on)."*

      These revisions demonstrate that Stan is paying attention to phrasing and how things sound. He is also providing more context for his ideas by adding character details like "he always wants to know is going on" to his description of his next-door neighbor. These revisions are a step forward in his development because he is not only revising with the revision theme in mind, but he is also making independent decisions based on the goal of having his writing more closely reflect what is happening in his imagination. Based on this growth, I decided that the next step would be to expose Stan to other models of writing so that he could continue experimenting with different techniques for how to revise his work. Additionally, I predicted that Stan would also need support with self-evaluation, so that he could examine if he met the purpose he set, and to what degree.

Victoria

      In this excerpt, Victoria is writing to the daily pages prompt, "What do you think of when someone mentions the word "waterfall" to you? Does it conjure up images, sounds, thoughts of movies, books, the sensation of being wet and cold? Illustrate with words what this means to you." The parentheses show what she inserted reviewing her initial draft:

"Yeah, so I went to a waterfall..." Kallee droned on, but my mind as suddenly

consumed by ~~an image~~ a mirage. A figure, composed entirely of clear glass water,

plodding down a concrete sidewalk (~~We were surrounded by mossy rock, except~~

~~above~~ The sky was bright, the cloudless day light lit by the luminas ~~flame~~ glow of

the sun.) Then out of the blue a watery person (stumbled over and) tripped in a

pothole, (Arms flailing swooshing shriek sounding like the ocean on an autumn

day, they landed head first into the ~~hole~~ pit.) A tsnunami-wave exploded, blocking

my sight, and when it cleared, rain was falling, pattering on the ground.

Victoria's replacement of "an image" with "a mirage" provides context because it

clarifies that the waterfall exists only in the character's imagination. This small change also

illustrates greater understanding of the character. Her decision to cross out the phrase "We were

surrounded by mossy rock except above" demonstrates her realization that the image wasn't

what she wanted her writing to convey. I asked all of my students to use this strike-through

technique rather than erasing so I would be able to see the changes they made to their original

draft and any revisions they cut. In this example, Victoria shows two layers of revision; first, she

adds a phrase, as indicated by the parentheses, and then she cuts part of it. Finally, she appears to

see her work as being in a constant state of revision. She also wrote, "A figure, composed

entirely of clear glass water, plodding down a concrete sidewalk." then added, "The sky was

bright, the cloudless day lit by the luminas glow of the sun." In addition to using the landscape

technique, Victoria also pays attention to small details, adding more complex vocabulary to

accurately capture what she is imagining. Also, in her first draft she wrote, "Then out of the blue,

the watery person" and then added "stumbled over and" to what she already had, "tripped in a

pot hole." She also adds the sentence, "Arms flailing swooshing shriek sounding like the ocean

on an autumn day, they landed head first into the pit." She again uses the landscape technique to create a more precise image, adding to the dimension of character action. Victoria is slowing her scene down "heartbeat by heartbeat" (which is the phrase I asked students to consider while focusing on the revision theme of specificity), and reflecting independently on her writing to make revisions that resulted in some of her best work. Exposure to new techniques will help her continue to grow, but how she actually revises her work needs to be up to her. When given the opportunity to reflect on her writing, Victoria needs to choose how she wants to revise, and self-evaluate her success, so she will continue to experiment and develop as a writer.

Jamal

In this excerpt, Jamal is writing to the daily pages prompt, "Describe a beach (either one you've been to or one you haven't) and show your reader the sights, sounds, smells, feelings and tastes of the beach." The parentheses in the following passage represent the revision Jamal inserted after reviewing his initial draft:

> (Beautiful) ~~there's~~ sand, people ~~trying to get tans but they burn.~~ (people running
>
> on the beach having the time of their lives.)The water looking like a god's Bath,
>
> the soft soothing sand beetween your feet & that smell ~~was awesome,~~ (was like
>
> getting a mint chocolate icecream cone with sprinkles on top) It smelled like
>
> heaven & it just soothes you.

Jamal's replacement of "There's sand," with "Beautiful sand" adds description, while his replacement of the line "trying to get tans but they burn" with "people running on the beach having the time of their lives" makes the scene more active. He also replaces the phrase was awesome" with the line "was like getting a mint chocolate ice-cream cone with sprinkles on top." Here Jamal is showing, not just telling, about this experience. He is becoming more critical of his

work by making specific revisions related to details. As Jamal has revised the least out of his peers, he will benefit by seeing more models so that he can gain more ideas for how to revise. He will also need to keep practicing and experimenting with revision to determine if he is meeting the purpose he is setting for himself in his writing.

Observations across Students

I was pleased to see that all three students have grown in their ability to revise with purpose by focusing on their audiences' potential reactions. Stan has added character detail and background knowledge, and Victoria has focused on small specifics that allow an audience to connect more to her work. Jamal's additions of details have also clarified his writing for his audience. All three students were ready for less teacher direction for their revisions because they were able to reflect on what and how they want to write. Including more open-ended revision themes would support deeper reflection and self-evaluation in order to determine the effectiveness of those revisions.

Ninth Round of Data Analysis: May 17th, 2011

In the final round of data collection, the instructional focus was on helping students to engage in critical reflection about themselves as writers and self-evaluation to assess the level of their development. I asked students to compare the writing they produced at the beginning of the year with the writing they produced at the end of the year to see changes in their work and their approaches to revision. Students wrote about their mindset, not just what they produced. This Revision Reflection included four questions:

1) What goes through your mind when you revise your work? Be specific.

2) What is your goal when you revise your writing?

3) How do you revise differently from the beginning of the year? Be specific.

4) In your writing notebooks, look at some of the revisions you made during the first two months of school, and look at some of the revisions you made the last two months of school. What is different about these revisions? Be specific.

Each student received a worksheet with these questions, as well as lines on the page to record their answers. This last round of data allowed me to see students using self-evaluation with specificity, explaining the reasons behind their decisions as writers.

Stan

In response to the first question, "What goes through your mind when you revise your work?," Stan wrote: *"I think about changing words two otter words and adding more detail two the work."* As the year progressed, Stan developed his word choice and his attention to detail. He now set goals before revising, and actively worked toward those goals. For a student who struggled with writing, the specifics of his answer to this question indicate that he now knew how to improve his work without being told exactly what to do.

In response to the second question, "What is your goal when you revise your writing?," he wrote: *"My goal is to make the peice of writing ~~hear and~~ sound better. I also have a goal to make it flow better and have more detail when I am done."* Stan's answer itself demonstrates his ability to revise by using the strike-through method to cut two words from his original draft that he felt did not belong. This revision and the content of his response accurately reflected a pattern I saw in Stan's work throughout the school year in that he began paying more attention to how his work sounded in order to improve the flow of his writing.

In response to the third question, "How do you revise differently from the beginning of the year?," Stan wrote: *"When I first get started rievising in third grade I focused on spelling and grammar now I focus on being specific and geting two the why."* Stan's response reveals an

important developmental change. Rather than just focusing on grammar and spelling, he was now able to reflect on his writing and refine his thinking, a critical step in his development. By crafting better images and explaining how his ideas were connected, he has developed an awareness of audience. This shift marked an increase in self-evaluation to determine whether or not he had succeeded in this task.

Stan wrote the following in response to the fourth question, "Looking in your writing notebooks, look at some of the revisions you made from the first two months of school, and look at some of the revisions you made the last two months of school. What is different about these revisions?": *"Some of my revisions In the first part of the year in the later part of the year I made chages two words and added better detail."* It is unclear what Stan was trying to convey in this response. From his third response, I assume he means he made better decisions with word choice at the end of the year than at the beginning of the year. If this is the case, this response also represents growth. As writers make better decisions, through reflecting, getting feedback, experimenting and self-evaluating what they have produced, they are able to produce better work, but also to improve as writers.

Overall, Stan's development and his awareness of his growth is admirable. In August, he made only rudimentary, teacher-directed changes to his writing, but by May, he was willing to revise more substantively and independently. He can now set a purpose for how he will improve his work and can self-evaluate the writing he produces. Furthermore, he has developed revision strategies to improve the details in his work and the "flow" of his writing.

Victoria's Responses

In response to the first question, "What goes through your mind when you revise your work?," Victoria wrote: *"I imagine little red marks on my paper, blotting out my work,*

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especially with creative writing. I am very protective of my writing, and even if I know it won't be bad, I still dislike it." Although Victoria mentions "little red marks" on her work, I never use a red pen when giving students feedback. I'm not sure if her other teachers did, either. This response suggests that she viewed feedback as punitive. What also resonates with me here is that Victoria is "protective" of her work and continues to be resistant to change despite my yearlong instructional focus on revision. Her response reminds of an observation I heard a veteran teacher make during my second year of teaching. I can't remember the exact quote, but I can paraphrase: "Many bright kids resist revision because most of their lives everything they have done has been at a high level, and they aren't used to being told that it could be better. They struggle to revise because they have never had to rethink anything before." This observation seems accurate in Victoria's case. She is a talented writer who does not like revising her work. While she continues to resist the process, the data presented in this study suggests that the routines she learned throughout the school year have still helped her become a better writer.

Victoria responded to the second question, "What is your goal when you revise your writing?," as follows:

> *"My goal is to make my writing better and more accurate to the requirements. However hard that may be, I still try to do it. In fact, it is practicly impossible for me to write something bad and survive the process, so revision is a useful tool for me."*

Victoria's writing is obviously personal, and while she dislikes revision, she still feels the need to make sure her work is "perfect." Her response reaffirms how important it is for writing teachers to be patient as students move through the writing process, allowing the focus to be more on learning, less on the piece of writing.

In the next excerpt, Victoria is responding to the third question, "How do you revise differently from the beginning of the year?" The text inside parentheses were written by Victoria, but were not a revision, unlike how parentheses were used previously:

> *At the beginning of the year, I really despised revising. Now, I am only impartial to it. I think this is because I realized that either red was a good color, or that revising takes practice and many famous authors do it. (Probably the second option or both)"*

Although Victoria does not describe any differences in how she revised her work from the beginning of the year, she admits that revision is beneficial. If the data hasn't made it clear, I will: she is a little overdramatic, and it is difficult for her to change her opinion. Even now, she wants to make it clear how she feels about the revision process. Victoria's ego was bruised in that I had not done what other teachers did before (only praise her for what she had done), but asked her to be self-critical of herself as a writer. However, I do not think this will hamper her growth as a writer. Rather, I feel that this response is more of Victoria asserting her independence, something necessary for growth.

In the next excerpt, Victoria is responding to the fourth question, "Looking in your writing notebooks, look at some of the revisions you made from the first two months of school, and look at some of the revisions you made the last two months of school. What is different about these revisions? The text inside parentheses were written by Victoria, but were not a revision, unlike how parentheses were used previously:

> *"Well, in the first two months of school, I really didn't revise (see Question #1). However, I do revise now. Also, in Agust and September, I didn't cut out much, just added, whereas now I cut out as much as I add."*

Victoria's response provides some detail in regard to how her revision processes have changed, though these are minimal. She does not mention how the shift from cutting more details than she added earlier in the year has improved her writing, though in her third response above, she implied that revision may be helpful since "many famous authors do it."

Overall, this revision reflection communicated that she did not like the process of revision, no matter how necessary, but Victoria was slowly gaining an appreciation for the value it might bring to her work. However, her ability to clearly express her ideas about revision indicate that she has acquired the ability to self-evaluate her work, and now she is more able to identify what changes need to be made in order for her to improve.

<u>Jamal's Responses</u>

In response to the first question, "What goes through your mind when you revise your work?," Jamal wrote: *"Something that runs through my mind is how can I make this better, how can I make it more detailed, & specific. & how can I make it so people won't stop reading it."* Jamal's willingness to revise has resulted from his development of audience awareness and his goal to produce vivid writing that will engage his readers. This significant change requires reflecting on his work and reconsidering it from the point of view his readers; this is turn has provided Jamal with a more defined purpose while revising.

In this next excerpt, Jamal responds to the second question, "What is your goal when you revise your writing?," he wrote: *"My goal is when I revise is to make it the best I can to make it better so that one day one of my pieces would get published, & I win an award or something."* Again, Jamal's revising efforts are motivated by a focus on his audience in hopes of gaining readership and recognition for his work. He is also setting the bar high by expecting continued future growth as a writer. His ability to focus on deeper audience engagement marks a significant

gain for Jamal in the area of revision from the beginning of the year, one that requires him to self-evaluate his work so he knows if he is accomplishing this goal or not.

Jamal responded to the third question, "How do you revise differently from the beginning of the year?," by writing the following: *"I used to erase my mistakes & rewrite the word where I erased, & I used to just put things on the end that didn't make much sense to the story when I would add what I did to the story."* Jamal describes his revisions at the beginning of the year to be little more than tacking on. Although he wasn't sure how to revise, he was at least practicing. His willingness to experiment and learn from mistakes provided opportunity for growth. While he does not explain the differences in how he was revising by the end of the year in this response, he is able to self-evaluate the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of his revising practices from the beginning of the year.

Jamal wrote the following in response to the final question, "Looking in your writing notebooks, look at some of the revisions you made from the first two months of school, and look at some of the revisions you made the last two months of school. What is different about these revisions?":

> *The first two months I would just add extra to where now I would cross out thing*
>
> *then make a space to where I can write my revisions so I could make it better so*
>
> *there is a huge difference. To what I did then & what I did now.*

Jamal's response shows significant development in the area of self-evaluation to determine the effectiveness of his work. He can explain how his current revision process helps him craft his writing with greater precision compared to his work at the beginning of the year. Furthermore, his revision attempts are self-directed, Jamal's development of

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a critical lens he can use to view his work has led to more effective reflection that should enable his continued growth as a writer.

<u>Observations across Students</u>

Both Stan and Jamal were able to explain how different they were as writers from August to May. Stan referred specifically to his improved ability to pay attention to smaller details and the "flow" of his writing. Likewise, Jamal's ability to examine his process and set a purpose for his revisions was a huge step forward in his writing development. Victoria is far less specific in describing her overall development as a writer, though she does describe some differences in her revision process. Even though she remained resistant to revising, she is able to reflect on the reasons why by explaining that her writing was so personal to her, she was unable to leave her work until it was perfect. Although Victoria did not detail how revision made her work better, I saw improvement in her writing over the year, namely in her increased attention to detail in her work and her recognition of the changes she needed to make to improve it. These changes indicate that she was capable of self-analysis.

Overall, by the end of the year, these writers knew both how to improve their work and to independently make and carry out their plans for doing so. As a partially proficient writer who had a learning disability, Stan began the year doing no more than following teacher directions without thinking a great deal about the changes he made to his writing. Victoria, on the other hand, was a gifted and talented student who wrote at a high level, but was unwilling to change her writing and writing process. Jamal did not appear to be invested in growing as a writer and was unsure how to move forward, but did care about what people thought of his work, even in early in the year.

These students were unique, all with distinctly different needs as writers. Yet when I look at the revisions students made from August through May, I notice an increased attention to detail and more purposeful specificity in their writing as the year progressed. Students became more self-critical of their work and of themselves as writers and were able to articulate how they had grown. Through daily writing and frequent reflection, students gained an increased comfort level as writers. The feedback they received from me and their peers allowed them to consider different perspectives on their work and guided their revisions.

Consistent practice in revising is much like practicing dribbling a basketball: the more one can practice, the more opportunities one has to learn and refine her or his skills. Engaging in critical self-evaluation helps students make informed decisions about how to revise their work, such as cutting a word or phrase that feels out of place. Reflecting on their revision practices and themselves as writers also makes them more aware of their growth. This metacognition is likely to increase the chances that they will apply these strategies in the future.

As a teacher researcher, my own reflection on this study reaffirmed the value of writing routines for Stan, Victoria, and Jamal. It also reminded me to be patient with students' writing development, even when it seems uneven. By experiencing the writing and revision process multiple times, these three students increased their comfort level and discovered what they needed as writers. Time and practice allowed them to be more critical of their work, and with that critical lens, all three students, though they had very different needs, made gains in their development as writers.

Conclusion

This study was an investigation of the influence of self-reflection on students' revision practices and writing with the goal of determining the role self-reflection plays in the revision

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process. I was especially interested in discovering how middle-school teachers can scaffold students' decision-making processes about the texts they have written in ways that also will support their development as writers. After examining constructivist learning theories, instructional practices on revision, and professional writers' revision practices, four themes emerged: reflection, feedback, experimentation, and self-evaluation. These themes guided my teaching practices and data analysis methods, and confirmed my initial hunch that revision is a difficult part of the writing process for middle school students.

This difficulty is reflected in the definition of the word revision, with "re" meaning again, and "vision" referring to the power of sight. Revising at a high level requires all writers to gain greater insight into their work by seeing it again, and this can be very difficult for middle school students as developing writers. Some students, like Stan, will revise out of compliance (i.e., "the teacher told me to, so I will do it"), and some, like Victoria, won't revise at all because they don't *want* to revise. That lack of motivation can come from a preference to write something else, or an insistence that they like it way it is. Other students, like Jamal, won't revise because they initially aren't sure what to do or how to do it. For these students, it is easier to *not* do something and receive a bad grade than it is to take a risk, make oneself vulnerable, only to get a bad grade or receive scathing feedback.

To overcome these difficulties and improve as a writer, every student will need different support, and that difference may be slight or significant. This qualitative study was limited to three students in one classroom, and thus may not be generalizable to all students in every context. Yet it may still has value for two reasons: 1) Stan, Victoria, and Jamal share much in common with middle school students I have taught throughout the years; and 2) since there is so

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little research in the revising practices of middle school students, every study can add to what we are learning in this area.

In that vein, I have concluded that students like Stan need to be exposed to multiple models to gain more ideas for how to revise his work. His example shows that once they develop the practice of reflecting and get feedback on their work, these students are able to experiment with their writing and gain the ability to self-evaluate. Even advanced writers like Victoria can struggle with the revision process. They may dislike revising if they have never been made to reflect on their work and to consider how to improve it since it is likely to be so much better than their peers. Victoria's example shows that they can eventually advance in their revision skills' but their growth as writers may take more time due to a lack of experience in critically viewing their own work. Students like Jamal who initially struggle with the revision process because they are unsure how to revise also have potential for growth. Given time and patience, they can develop metacognitive skills and the confidence to experiment in their writing so they can critically evaluate their work. Middle school writers with needs as varied as these can improve given time, patience, and practice.

But the question still stands, "What can teachers do when students revise poorly or don't revise at all?" This experience has taught me that one single magic bullet does not exist to kill all ills. Thus what I have developed is more of an "ingredient list." I say "ingredients" because much as in cooking, these must be adjusted according to tastes (i.e., individual students' needs). Adding either too much or not enough of a particular ingredient can be ineffective. The list of recommendations below helped a male student who was had a learning disability, one who was significantly lower than his peers become a better writer. This list helped a female student who was advanced in reading and writing, and who was also very resistant to revise her work. This

list also helped an average male student who was also a minority, one who was resistant to revise because he wasn't sure *how* to revise. Recommended teaching methods include the following:

- Allow students to choose topics that are meaningful to them. As mentioned in my literature review, both college professors and teachers wrote specifically about how students must be invested in their work (Farrington, 1999; Swartzendruber-Putnam, 2010). Furthermore, the focus cannot be on a single piece of writing (Percy, 2010; Skinner, 2002). Students must learn from the writing process more individually to improve as writers.

- Require students to practice writing on a regular basis. In this investigation, students wrote two to three times a week in their writing notebooks, always warming up with a daily pages prompt, then practicing a revision skill (Greene, 2011; Percy, 2010; Skinner, 2002).

- Require students to produce a lot of writing. This was something teachers, prose writers and poets agreed would help students revise more: writers are more inclined to revise and make substantive changes to their work when they have produced a plethora of texts (Greene, 2011; Percy, 2010; Skinner, 2002).

- Give students practice revising throughout the school year. In this study, students examined one specific revision skill at a time, then practiced it for 2-3 weeks. Multiple opportunities to practice a skill allowed them to gain a greater level of comfort and proficiency with it. As recommended by prose writers and poets, students learned multiple revision strategies over the school year so they would have a repertoire they could choose from according to the demands of a particular piece of writing (Greene, 2011; Percy, 2010, Skinner, 2002; Swartzendruber-Putnam, 2010).

- Expose students to excerpts from multiple mentor texts (Anderson, 2005), across multiple genres. I used each mentor text to teach a specific writing/revision strategy. For students to understand their outcomes as writers, they need models. Learning from many models requires students to go beyond the act of mere imitation of a single text. According to constructivist theorists (Bruner, 1971; Dewey, 1902; Vygotsky, 1978), learners must also draw conclusions and apply what they've learned in order to experience cognitive growth. Learning from mentor texts allowed the students in this study to make observations and draw inferences about why the authors make particular decisions in their writing. This practice also allowed them to develop critical reading skills that were relevant to the texts they were writing.

- Allow students to write about and verbally share their observations, ideas and questions about mentor texts on a regular basis. By constructing meaning with peers in whole-class discussion and writing groups, students gain practice and support in critical analysis and evaluation (Cotich, Dixon, Nelson, Shapiro & Yeager, 1994; Cho & McArthur, 2010; Duijnhouwer, Prins & Stokking, 2012; Fisher & Pifarre, 2011). These skills can push students as individual writers to think in greater depth about the texts they are writing as well.

- Give students repeated opportunities to reflect on and critically examine their own work. This practice promotes learning and development by helping students engage in reflection and develop problem-solving skills (Hammer, 1986; Percy, 2010; Skinner, 2002; Swartzendruber-Putnam, 2010). When critical reflection becomes an expected part of the writing process, students are able to determine what is and is *not* working in a particular piece of writing and to learn more about themselves as writers as a result.

- Allow students the opportunity to receive feedback from the teacher and their peers about their writing. Both the professors and classroom teachers cited in my literature review describe the benefits writers gain from receiving feedback from others (Bardine & Fulton, 2008; Cho & McArthur, 2010; Duijnhouwer, Prins & Stokking, 2012; Fisher & Pifarre, 2011; Greene, 2011; Swartzendruber-Putnam, 2010). In this study, students experienced both kinds of feedback. By understanding others' perspectives on their work, writers gain greater insight into what is effective and ineffective. By reflecting on that feedback, they can then take the next step forward and make independent decisions about changes that will improve their writing.

- Give students the freedom to experiment with their work and revision practices throughout the school year. Many of the teachers and professors used assignments that required students to make purposeful changes in their writing, and students would explain the purpose behind those experimental changes (Bardine & Fulton, 2008; Cho & McArthur, 2010; Greene, 2011; Swartzendruber-Putnam, 2010). When teachers can structure experimental exercises and assignments that won't negatively affect students' grades, students will focus on developing as writers. Without students feeling the freedom to experiment, students will not fully develop as writers. Once Victoria started to experiment with her writing, this is when she began to develop and produce her best work.

- Encourage students to be patient with themselves as they are growing. I intentionally allowed the students in this study to struggle with their writing. There was support in the room to help writers, be it from me or their classmates, but writers were allowed to work their way through challenges so they could learn how to problem solve in their writing

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(Swartzendruber-Putnam, 2010). Patience, support, and lots of practice is required so that students can learn from both their successes and failures (Skinner, 2002).

- As a teacher, be patient as students find their way through the writing process. Students need ample time to develop the skills to reflect, use feedback, experiment, and improve their work. It is a teacher's job to facilitate learning, which requires knowing when to push students to take risks in their learning, when to offer help when they are struggling, when to allow them to problem-solve independently, and when to allow them to learn at their own pace. In this study, I had to be patient both with students like Stan who revised out of obligation, and those like Victoria and Jamal who didn't revise at all. As stated above, I could not use grading as a means of rewarding or punishing students: it would feel unfair to ask students to take risks and experiment with their writing, and then give a grade that evaluates the quality of their work. Instead, I continued to offer multiple opportunities for students to practice reading, writing, thinking, reflecting, revising, experimenting, and self-evaluating. Teachers must trust the writing routines they have put in place, and to allow students to get continuous feedback if they are to progress in their writing development. Also, because each student has different needs and moves at a different pace, teachers must be patient as each student made their way: if students are rushed, they will not be able to practice the critical thought and self-evaluation skills required to become self-directed learners. The journey is every bit as important as the destination.

- Require students the opportunity to engage in independent self-evaluation. By learning to carefully consider the decisions they are making in their writing, to receive feedback from others, then to evaluate if they have met their original goals, students are not put in

the position of waiting for someone else to tell them what to do. All of the theorists, teachers, prose writers, and poets in my literature review described the importance of self-direction and self-evaluation. By setting their own purposes, students employ higher-level thinking and the capacity to move forward as independent learners.

Because few studies focus directly on the revision practices of middle school writing, more research in this area would be helpful in determining whether or not the above list of "ingredients" is relevant to different students in different teaching contexts. Also, researchers, including teacher researchers, might address additional questions that arose for me by the conclusion of this study: How does a teacher best combine what a student wants to learn as a writer with what a teacher is teaching? What teaching methods work best for students who dislike the practice of revision?

I was reminded of these questions near the end of May, not in my classroom, but at my daughter Reagan's fifteen-month medical check-up. At this appointment the doctor was concerned because she wasn't walking yet. He said she was bright and healthy, but suffered from low muscle tone and would need physical therapy because she should be walking. For the previous four months, my wife and I had tried to get Reagan to walk by holding her hands and by getting her to use a large, wheeled train to hold herself up. For the most part, Reagan refused, dropping to her knees and then crawling away.

The day after the doctor's appointment, however, my daughter started using toys to help herself walk the distance of a few feet, rather than crawling. This was without prompting from anyone; she just did it. Six days later, while standing and holding onto a chair, Reagan took six steps, and then sat down. She then crawled to a pile of toys and began playing. In the previous four months, she had showed little interest or desire to walk because she had apparently liked

how she got around just fine. No matter how much teaching my wife and I did, she did not want to walk, and we could not make her. It was her choice, and when she was ready, she did it. We just had to be patient.

Reagan's experiences are relevant to this study because they serve as a reminder that students will ultimately develop as writers when they have the desire to do so. With Stan, Victoria, and Jamal, I provided models in the form of mentor texts, demonstrated writing strategies, and provided multiple writing exercises and activities, but it wasn't until revision mattered to them that they began to change and become more independent in their writing development. Like walking, sometimes the first signs of growth teachers see are baby steps. Sometimes those steps start early, and sometimes they come later. But once the desire to move forward is present, that is when change can happen. As a teacher, I have to be there to support each writer when they are ready, so all of them can find the path to revision that works best for them. While this path will be unique for every writer, the strategies offered in this study can help pave the way. Ironically, as I revised this thesis, I had to exercise this patience with myself. I had to re-learn and practice what I have been discovering in students' work: that revision is hard, is necessary, is messy, and is where learning takes place.

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