

2012

### Students' Journal Writing Practices and Opinions in a Music Methods Course

Dave S. Knowlton  
*Southern Illinois University Edwardsville*

David C. Sharp  
*University of Memphis*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Knowlton, Dave S. and Sharp, David C. (2012) "Students' Journal Writing Practices and Opinions in a Music Methods Course," *Visions of Research in Music Education*: Vol. 22 , Article 3.  
Available at: <https://opencommons.uconn.edu/vrme/vol22/iss1/3>

---

## Students' Journal Writing Practices and Opinions in a Music Methods Course

By

Dave S. Knowlton  
Southern Illinois University Edwardsville

David C. Sharp  
University of Memphis

### Abstract

*This article presents an empirical investigation of students' opinions about summary/reaction journals and their practices in writing those journals within a percussion methods course. An end-of-semester questionnaire was given to students as a means of measuring their perceptions about the journal component of the course. Findings indicate that students did refer to the assignment guidelines while preparing to write their journals. Furthermore, students claim that the journal requirement led them to review course content and prompted their learning about percussion. However, questions remain about the depth of that review and learning. Recommendations for pedagogy of music methods classes and future research are included.*

*Keywords:* summary/reaction journals, percussion methods, music methods pedagogy

Music methods courses often focus solely on performing techniques and teaching strategies. This focus is appropriate; after all, the future success of preservice teachers who take methods courses may well depend on these techniques and strategies. Still, this focus leaves a gap in methods students' abilities to the extent that performance techniques and teaching strategies take precedence over cognitive skills. Yet, cognitive skills are essential in the field of music education (Blocher, Greenwood, & Shellahamer, 1997) and, more specifically, in learning to play a percussion instrument (Knowlton, 2010; Mixon, 2002). To fill the gap, some professors of methods courses have shifted toward cognitive-based assignments (e.g., Barry, 1996; Conway, 1997; Shand, 1996). One example of such an assignment is the use of journal writing. This paper offers an empirical examination of students' opinions about writing summary/reaction journals within a percussion methods course.

### **The Value of Journals in College Music Courses**

Summary/reaction journals can provide students with opportunities to create their own learning (Knowlton, Eschmann, Fish, Heffren, & Voss, 2004). In general, summary/reaction journals support a view of writing as a tool that allows one to "analyze and understand experiences" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 131). Writing can be a type of "self-communication that brings order" and "gives the mind a disciplined means of expression" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008, p. 131). As students generate language within a journal, they discover their own ideas (Blackmore, 2002; Thomeczek, Knowlton, & Sharp, 2005). This type of discovery produces a more meaningful and thorough type of learning than would a less generative activity, as generating language requires students to engage in cognitive construction and reconstruction. Cognitive tasks are more durable than tasks in which students function as mental receptacles for already-constructed information (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000; Morrison & Guenther, 2000).

Because the act of writing summary/reaction journals promotes generative discovery by requiring students to create their own language and to make that language concrete, students use processes that will help them develop metacognition skills. That is, keeping journals can help students learn how to learn (Thomeczek et al., 2005).

The notion of students developing metacognitive skills through articulating their own ideas is particularly important within the process of becoming a professional educator (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). At its broadest theoretical levels, the value of summary/reaction journals in education courses originates from Schön (1987), who suggested that reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are essential skills for professionals to develop. These types of reflection allow future educators to learn from themselves (Garmon, 2001). As Apfelstadt (1996) noted, “[l]earning how to learn remains an essential ingredient of [a future teacher’s] educational preparation” (p. 5).

Even more directly related to the point of this paper, some evidence suggests that elaborating on ideas in writing can be useful within music courses (Knowlton, 2007). In essence, written elaborations lead to careful thinking and reflection within music study (Barry, 1996; Conway, 1997; Shand, 1996; Shiraishi, 1999). Both careful thinking and reflection are important to the study of music education, and journals can help students achieve both types of thinking (Elliott, 1995). In terms of careful thinking, music teachers must develop habits that allow them to think in intellectual and emotional ways (Shiraishi, 1999). They also must think in ways that allow for a type of aesthetic appreciation (Broudy, 1994). Brown (2009) found that journal writing can help musicians hone these types of thinking. Similarly, reflection is key to an innovative approach within music teacher education (Elliott, 1995; Shand, 1996). In music courses, reflective writings can broaden and deepen the types of learning that occur (Barney &

Mackinlay, 2010). Barry (1994, 1996) agreed and suggested that journal writing can promote reflection among preservice music teachers.

Indeed, the usefulness of journals as a learning tool has been well documented in academic literature. What is far less documented, however, is information about students' practices in journal writing and their opinions of journal writing. Do students experience the types of discovery that are claimed? Do they value the journal-writing process? Does their process allow the benefits of journals to flourish? The empirical study reported in the remainder of this paper reports information about students' practices and opinions in writing journals.

### **Context for this Study**

This paper reports a study that was conducted within an undergraduate-level percussion methods course at a Midwest university in the United States. Students in this course (N=15) were preservice teachers who were majoring in music education. Students were required to complete a weekly "attendance journal" in a summary/reaction format. On the first day of class, the course professors distributed assignment guidelines to help students understand and complete the journals (see Appendix). The use of such specific guidelines followed the advice of Barry (1994, 1996), who suggested that music methods students need guidelines that address both approaches to reflecting and strategies for writing the journal. Furthermore, the assignment guidelines were written to reflect Hiemstra's (2001) view that summary/reaction journals must be informal and allow for freedom such that students can generate personal connections to course content.

Because the journals were written and submitted asynchronously via email, they rarely were discussed during class. The journals became an assignment that ran parallel to—albeit separate from—other course assignments and activities. At various points during the semester, the course professors gave two additional resources to the students in an attempt to scaffold their

abilities to write journals. The professors provided both of these resources at the students' request, and each resource was related specifically to the content of the week during which students received it. One of these resources was an example journal written by the researcher at the end of the sixth week of the course. As a second resource, the researcher presented students with a list of suggested reaction topics at the end of week nine of the course.

### **Method**

This paper focuses on students' opinions about summary/reaction journals as well as their practices writing the journals. Therefore, data collection and analysis were designed to illuminate students' perceptions. Both collection and analysis also were designed to allow for connections between students' practices and the value of journal writing as reported in the literature.

### **Data Collection**

At the semester's end, the researcher distributed a questionnaire to students following their final exam—the last activity of the course. The questionnaire consisted of 19 items that were designed to collect data about students' (a) preparation for writing the journals, (b) processes of writing, (c) perceived outcomes, and (d) general attitudes toward the journals. The last item on the questionnaire was open-ended and read as follows: "Please use the space below to make any comments or share any thoughts that you have about the journals in this course." The first 18 items were five-point Likert-scale items ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

Likert-scale items may not seem to be as statistically robust as other potential item types, but their use had two distinct advantages within the context of this study. One advantage was based simply upon student familiarity with Likert-scales. Students commonly encounter them on end-of-semester evaluations in college courses. Since the main purpose of this study was to

gauge students' opinions and practices through self-reported results, the common use of these items allowed students to better focus on reporting their opinions and practices, as opposed to deciphering an unfamiliar questionnaire format. A second advantage also was connected to the fact that Likert-scales are commonly used on end-of-semester evaluations. Scholarship of teaching and learning literature suggests that it is important for pedagogical practices and empirical research to coexist in ways that allow pedagogy to be translated into research and research to be translated into pedagogy. Doing so better will allow research about teaching and learning to contribute to faculty members' dossiers (Sorcinelli, 2005). Using Likert-scale items allowed this to occur in ways that less-commonly-used items would not have allowed.

While the questionnaire served as the main source of data, additional data that provided insight into students' opinions and practices presented itself. For example, the journals came up as a topic within the journals themselves. That is, a type of metajournaling occasionally occurred. In these cases, the researcher simply saved those journal entries, allowing those entries to become data for this study. In addition, journals came up as topics for discussion both within various class sessions and in conversations with the researcher, who served as an assistant to the course's professor-of-record, outside of class. When these conversations occurred via email, the researcher kept the email as data; when these conversations were in a non-written form (e.g., during class discussion or one-on-one conversations during the researcher's office hours), the researcher kept field notes that summarized key elements of the conversation. These field notes were meant to document any insights that the researcher gained regarding students' opinions and perceptions of the journals.

## Data Analysis

The first 18 items on the questionnaire were coded quantitatively. Specifically, “strongly agree” was coded as a 2; “strongly disagree” was coded as a -2. This approach allowed the middle choice in the scale—“N = Not sure (neutral)”—to be coded as a 0. With this quantification in place, the researcher analyzed the first 18 items by frequency distributions. In addition, chi-square probabilities were calculated. A variety of summary statistics also were calculated. These statistics included mode, mean, standard deviation, and t-test.

The qualitative data were analyzed in two different ways. First, the responses to the qualitative item on the questionnaire were coded using a type of constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Specifically, the researcher constantly compared one response to other responses; furthermore, the researcher considered the responses in light of quantitative results. This approach allowed the possibility for the open-ended questionnaire responses to coalesce into categories and concepts that could serve as support or refutation to other analyzed data.

Second, the researcher used Van Manen's (1990) "Thematic Analysis" to initially analyze episodes of metajournaling, email exchanges with the researcher, and the researcher's field notes. The goal of this analysis was to recover the themes "embodied ...in the evolving meaning of the work" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 78). The researcher then synthesized themes into narratives that would allow the qualitative data to be reported in anecdotal form. Such an approach was consistent with the advice of both Van Manen (1990) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

## Findings

This section begins by reporting the quantitative findings from the questionnaires that students returned (N=14). Then, findings from qualitative data are included.



## Quantitative Results

Table 1 shows the frequency distributions and chi-square results for the 18 quantitative items from the questionnaire. In terms of the chi-square results, only one item yielded statistically significant results at the 99% confidence level. This item, number 1, read as follows: “I would read the assignment guidelines when preparing to write my journal.”

Table 1

### *Frequency Distributions (N=14)*

#	Item	Frequencies					X <sup>2</sup> Prob
		Strongly Agree (2)	Agree (1)	Neutral (0)	Disagree (-1)	Strongly Disagree (-2)	
1	I would read the assignment guidelines when preparing to write my journal.	0	8	2	3	1	0.008 ***
2	I used the example journal as a guide for writing my own journal.	0	4	3	6	1	0.086 *
3	I used the list of suggestions of things worthy of reacting to (the week that I was sent one) to write my own journal.	2	6	3	3	0	0.152
4	I thought about what I would write in my next journal before I sat down at the computer to write it.	5	3	1	3	2	0.534
5	I would begin writing my journal not knowing what I was going to write. So, I just figured out what I wanted to say <i>while</i> writing my journal.	3	5	2	4	0	0.259
6	I would <i>read</i> my own journal before submitting it.	4	3	3	2	2	0.910
7	I would <i>revise and edit</i> my own journal before submitting it.	3	5	0	2	4	0.259
8	I wrote what I thought [the professors] wanted to “hear,” not what I really was thinking about the week’s activities.	0	4	3	5	2	0.259
9	I discovered important ideas or thoughts while writing my journal.	3	5	4	2	0	0.259
10	Writing the summary caused me to review content from the previous week’s class.	6	6	1	1	0	0.014 **
11	Writing journals helped me learn about percussion.	2	7	1	4	0	0.027 **
12	Writing journals helped me learn about myself as a learner, musician, future teacher, etc.	4	3	3	1	3	0.788
13	I let someone other than [the course professors] read my journals.	1	3	3	5	2	0.534
14	I thought that my own journals were of a high quality.	1	7	2	4	0	0.027 **
15	I thought about journals <i>during class</i> even when we weren’t discussing journals.	3	4	3	3	1	0.788
16	I treated journals seriously and as an important aspect of this course.	2	4	4	1	3	0.657
17	My attitude toward the value of the journals improved across the semester.	1	8	1	1	3	0.011 **
18	I found that written feedback from [the researcher] on the journals was educationally useful to me.	4	4	4	2	0	0.334

Notes:

- \*\*\* Statistically significant at  $\alpha = 0.01$ .
- \*\* Statistically significant at  $\alpha = 0.05$ .
- \* Statistically significant at  $\alpha = 0.10$ .

In addition, another four chi-square results yielded statistical significance at a 95% confidence level. As Table 1 shows, these were item numbers 10, 11, 14, and 17. Respectively, these items were worded as follows:

- Writing the summary caused me to review content from the previous week's class.
- Writing journals helped me learn about percussion.
- I thought that my own journals were of a high quality.
- My attitude toward the value of the journals improved across the semester.

Table 2 presents summary statistics for each of the 18 quantitative items. This table is ordered beginning with items that demonstrate the strongest positive consensus and ending with items that show the strongest negative consensus. None of the t-ratio values were statistically significant. Still, Table 2 adds value to our understanding of students' opinions by showing the type of consensus among the students.

### **Qualitative Results**

This section begins with findings from the questionnaire and metajournalings. Then, three anecdotes are presented. Names of students mentioned within the anecdotes are pseudonyms. Also, for ease of explication, the editorial "I" is employed to refer to the researcher within the anecdotes.

**Questionnaire and Metajournaling.** Item nineteen on the questionnaire resulted in six open-ended responses. Those responses are reported in Table 3. One common point made by two respondents was that of an attitude change. Notice that two open-ended comments indicated an early dislike or lack of being "sure" about the value of the journals, but that opinion changed to something more positive over the span of the semester. Several of the items alluded to the types

of thinking that the journals elicited. These included recall thinking, creative thinking, and expressing opinions about musicality.

Table 2

*Summary Statistics (questions ranked by t-ratio)*


#	Item	Mode	Mean	S.D.	t-ratio		
[a]	[b]	[c]	[d]	[e]	[f] = [d]/[e]		
10	Writing the summary caused me to review content from the previous week's class.	2	1.214	0.893	1.360	<p><b>Stronger Positive Consensus</b></p> 	
18	I found that written feedback from [the researcher] on the journals was educationally useful to me.	0	0.714	1.069	0.668		
9	I discovered important ideas or thoughts while writing my journal.	1	0.643	1.008	0.638		
3	I used the list of suggestions of things worthy of reacting to (the week that I was sent one) to write my own journal.	1	0.500	1.019	0.491		
11	Writing journals helped me learn about percussion.	1	0.500	1.092	0.458		
5	I would begin writing my journal not knowing what I was going to write. So, I just figured out what I wanted to say <i>while</i> writing my journal.	1	0.500	1.160	0.431		
14	I thought that my own journals were of a high quality.	1	0.357	1.008	0.354		
15	I thought about journals <i>during class</i> even when we weren't discussing journals.	1	0.357	1.277	0.280		
4	I thought about what I would write in my next journal before I sat down at the computer to write it.	2	0.429	1.555	0.276		
6	I would <i>read</i> my own journal before submitting it.	2	0.357	1.447	0.247		
1	I would read the assignment guidelines when preparing to write my journal.	1	0.214	1.051	0.204		
12	Writing journals helped me learn about myself as a learner, musician, future teacher, etc.	2	0.286	1.541	0.185		
17	My attitude toward the value of the journals improved across the semester.	1	0.214	1.369	0.157		
16	I treated journals seriously and as an important aspect of this course.	0	0.071	1.385	0.052		
7	I would <i>revise and edit</i> my own journal before submitting it.	1	0.071	1.639	0.044		
13	I let someone other than [the course professors] read my journals.	-1	-0.286	1.204	-0.237		
2	I used the example journal as a guide for writing my own journal.	-1	-0.286	0.994	-0.287		<p><b>Stronger Negative Consensus</b></p>
8	I wrote what I thought [the professors] wanted to "hear," not what I really was thinking about the week's activities.	-1	-0.357	1.082	-0.330		

Table 3

*Open-Ended Responses*

- 
- ◆ I feel the journals greatly helped my teaching abilities. I was able to evaluate others in [my journals], and I learned to better express my opinion of their musicality.
  - ◆ I wasn't sure about the journals in the beginning and thought of them purely as an assignment, but I found them very useful once I took the time to delve into them and use them for me as well as the class grade. It did benefit me. I would continue this if I were teaching the class.
  - ◆ I think the original intent of the journals was changed...into something useless.
  - ◆ I did not like the journals at the beginning of the semester but I did come to actually like the journals. I think they do have some good points like getting students to "react" and think about music more. I will consider doing something like these in my classroom someday.
  - ◆ I often forgot about the journals, so it's a bummer that they actually impacted the grade. If you really want their idea spend the last five minutes of class having them write because it's fresh in their mind (more effective). It did help me think creatively about what we talked about in class.
  - ◆ I hated the journals. I did not find them useful at all other than helping me remember what we did that week. They were a waste of time.
- 

Throughout the entire semester, only eight episodes of metajournaling occurred.

Approximately half of these eight metajournaling episodes simply were apologies for the journals being too late or too short:

I'm really sorry this is late. I understand if you don't accept it, but I thought it was worth a shot anyway! I continually make note cards of what we do in class so [that I will] remember for my journal, but then I always forget to do the journal, and I was out of town for the weekend, so it wasn't on my mind.

Another type of metajournaling that occurred more than once demonstrated concern with the quality of the journals. With the submission of the first journal, for example, two students asked

specifically if their journal was “ok” or if it matched what I was “looking for.” Importantly, these excerpts from journals exclusively defined quality with a reference to the researcher’s judgment of the journals.

**Anecdote #1.** James, in particular, struggled to offer specifics within his journal. The first three journals that James wrote sometimes presented single-sentence summaries that contained no detail. My feedback consistently urged him to be more specific. During week four of the course, he wrote this in response to feedback:

Week after week I only look forward to some negative remark you will have for my journal entry.

I have looked at the questions that are presented on the sheet you gave on the first day of class and have tried to channel my thinking in light of the sample questions you present. However, week after week my reactions are always sub par according to your opinion.... So I am left with a feeling of frustration.

At various points throughout the semester, James approached me to discuss the value of journals and to question the reasonableness of my criticisms of his journals. He consistently noted that his opinion was that detailed summaries were not particularly useful to him. In fact, he noted that one-word summaries could help him recall the content from the previous week. Additional summary was, in his view, superfluous.

**Anecdote #2.** Anna had produced particularly strong and detailed journals during the first four weeks of the semester. During week five of the course, I solicited her opinion:

As you can see, my feedback to you on this journal indicates that you are doing exactly what the assignment asks you to do, and you are doing it well. That begs a question. Are you finding journals to be useful to you as a learning tool?

She responded and noted that they were useful, but she knew that others in the class did not feel the same way. I replied to this email by asking her what she would say to her classmates to help them see her perspective on their value. Anna replied:

Well, you can tell them that they may not think it is beneficial.... but if they put the right amount of effort into it they are bound to get something out of it.... [I]t is a chance for one on one help, or questions that they don't feel comfortable asking in class. And maybe just a way to think differently than they have been thinking. You get out of it what you put into it. If they think that it is easy and boring, tell them to delve deeper into learning about [percussion]. The summary is easy, you just write what you have learned throughout the week. The reaction is where they can talk about if they are understanding.... [I]n this journal they can get extra help, or...go deeper and learn more.... No matter which way they take it, it will better them in the long run, if they let it.

**Anecdote #3.** At the end of week six, one student brought up journals as a topic for discussion during the last five minutes of class. This student asked for an example journal from me. When I asked her why she thought that an example would be useful, another student responded by saying that several students felt as if they were “doing it wrong,” so an example might help get them back on the right track. I replied by asking the general question to the class, “What makes you believe that you are doing it wrong?” The general consensus among the class was that my feedback always seemed to be, in the words of one student, “pushing for more.” In an effort to help them develop an opinion that my feedback was not about “right” and “wrong,” I asked, “What is the point of writing journals?” “To allow you to do your research,” one student quipped. As a result of this during-class discussion, Edwin wrote about his view within the next journal:

Before I start my journal I need to get something off my chest. Thank you for attendance journals.

I think the attendance journal is a great idea. I like how they make you think for yourself and analyze what you learn. These are skills [that] we need to be a teacher, and I appreciate them.... I was really annoyed with the complaints on Thursday. It was hard for me to imagine why this was such a big deal. It's a paragraph a week over stuff we did. And even if we don't do it well enough you aren't going to e-mail us back saying, “Well, your summary wasn't good enough so I'm failing this attendance journal.” We always get credit. Maybe some people just have a problem with

constructive criticism. I know my journals aren't always perfect but you give me suggestions, I think about them and try to include them in my next journal.... I think a lot of people are treating attendance journals more like homework rather than a reflection. They think it is more important for you to give us a pat on the head rather than improve our ability to analyze and critically think about things we learn. So thanks for attendance journals. I appreciate a teacher who is more concerned about getting students to think rather than parrot back information.

### **Discussion**

This section of the paper puts the findings in a more functional context by focusing on students' preparations for writing the journals, their journal writing practices, and their perceptions of various outcomes of the journaling experience. Cumulatively, a discussion of each provides opportunity for better understanding of students' opinions and practices. Within the discussion of each, interpretations and possible explanations are offered.

#### **Students' Preparation for Writing Journals**

Several items on the questionnaire were designed to consider the students' methods of preparing to write the journal. Table 4 presents these items. Two inferences from this table are worthy of discussion.

The first point worthy of discussion is the fact that all of the means presented in Table 4 fall in a range between disagree and agree. In fact, the t-values in that table suggest that the means are not statistically different from 0, which indicates that the students were "not sure." In plain language, the t-values display preparation practices that perhaps fell below students' awareness of their approach to preparing to write the journals. This inference is bolstered by one of the students' answers to the open-ended questionnaire item. The student claimed to "often forget about the journals." That is, journals fell below this students' awareness.

Table 4

*Preparing to Write Journals*

#	Item	Mode	Mean	S.D.	t-ratio	$\chi^2$ Prob
1	I would read the assignment guidelines when preparing to write my journal.	1	0.214	1.051	0.204	0.008
2	I used the example journal as a guide for writing my own journal.	-1	-0.286	0.994	-0.287	0.086
3	I used the list of suggestions of things worthy of reacting to (the week that I was sent one) to write my own journal.	1	0.500	1.019	0.491	0.152
4	I thought about what I would write in my next journal before I sat down at the computer to write it.	2	0.429	1.555	0.276	0.534

This same student suggested using “the last five minutes of class having them write because it’s fresh in their mind.” If, in fact, students were “not sure” as to their own preparation practices, then certainly one could assume that students were not benefiting from journals as profoundly as they would through a more conscious process; a level of awareness of one’s own practices is needed in order for journal writing to have an impact on students’ learning. Particularly, if journals are to contribute to the types of metacognition that Apfelstadt (1996) and others (e.g., Knowlton et al., 2004) have described, then students need to be more fully aware of their preparations for writing the journals.

The second point from Table 4 that is worthy of discussion relates to the statistically significant ( $\alpha = 0.01$ ) chi-square probability (0.008) for item one on the questionnaire. This finding suggests an observed frequency that tended toward agreement that students read the assignment guidelines (see Appendix) when preparing to write their journals. As Table 1 shows, eight of the 14 respondents “agree” with the statement. The implications of the agreement on the use of the assignment guidelines combined with the lack of agreement regarding the use of the



example journal (item 2) and lists of suggestions for reactions (item 3) are, overall, positive. When students receive example journals, they often are tempted simply to provide journals that are closely modeled on the ideas in the example journal (Thomeczek et al., 2005). Similarly, when students base their reactions on a provided list of topics, they set aside their own authority to determine what is reaction worthy; instead, they simply are responding to the initiative of the professor. Therefore, if students tended to privilege the assignment guidelines over either an example journal or list of topics, then they retained authority to “ask themselves how who they are shapes what they know” (Takacs, 2003, p. 38). Such a question is an essential prelude to metacognitive thinking and the types of discovery that can come from journal writing.

### **Journal Writing Practices**

Another list of items from the questionnaire provided insight into students’ processes. Whereas Table 4 focused on preparing to write the journals, Table 5 focuses on the actual writing process. Table 5 shows item numbers 5, 6, 7, 8, and 13. As shown in Table 5, the t-values indicate that none of the means are statistically different from zero. Thus the means indicate that students were “not sure” of their own writing process. Furthermore, none of the chi-square probabilities are statistically significant, even at liberal alpha levels, and the standard deviations suggest lots of variety within students’ responses. In short, students’ writing practices varied and those practices seem to fall below students’ own level of awareness.

The idea that students were not aware of their own writing processes is similar to the argument made in the previous section where it was noted that students were not aware of their own preparation practices. In some ways, these inferences connecting a collective “not sure” to a lack of awareness in the process are supported by qualitative data.

Table 5

*Process of Writing Journals*

#	Item	Mode	Mean	S.D.	t-ratio	$\chi^2$ Prob
5	I would begin writing my journal not knowing what I was going to write. So, I just figured out what I wanted to say <i>while</i> writing my journal.	1	0.500	1.160	0.431	0.259217
6	I would <i>read</i> my own journal before submitting it.	2	0.357	1.447	0.247	0.909796
7	I would <i>revise and edit</i> my own journal before submitting it.	1	0.071	1.639	0.044	0.259217
8	I wrote what I thought [the professors] wanted to “hear,” not what I really was thinking about the week’s activities.	-1	-0.357	1.082	-0.330	0.259217
13	I let someone other than [the course professors] read my journals.	-1	-0.286	1.204	-0.237	0.53421

Because Anna believed that many of her classmates did not value journals, she urged them to “put the right amount of effort into it” as a remedy. Edwin seemed to have arrived at a similar conclusion: “I think a lot of people are treating attendance journals more like homework rather than a reflection. They think it is more important for you to give us a pat on the head rather than improve our ability to analyze and critically think about things we learn.”

Both Anna and Edwin seemed to suggest the need for a different mindset toward journals, if journals are to serve an educationally useful function. Why did students in this class seem to not have that mindset? To what can one attribute the variety and lack of awareness of their own processes? As noted earlier, journals rarely were discussed during class and were not integrated into the life cycle of the course. Therefore, students received little guidance on their

journals other than through the a priori assignment guidelines and the written feedback from the researcher. It is reasonable to conclude that the lack of integrating notions of journaling processes into the course hindered students' abilities to approach the process with learning integrity. Such a conclusion seems to reflect the ideas of Takacs (2003), who noted that when educators teach students the processes that will help them learn,

we help students sample the rigors and delights of the examined life. When we ask students to learn to think for themselves and to understand themselves as thinkers—rather than telling them what to think and have them recite it back—we help foster habits of introspection, analysis, and open, joyous communication. (p. 28)

These habits might enhance students' notions of preparatory and writing process within the journals.

One could speculate that integrating journals into the course might have improved students' perceptions of journals as reported elsewhere in the questionnaire. For example, as Table 2 shows, collectively speaking, students did not tend to approach journals "seriously and as an important aspect of [the] course" (mode = 0, mean = 0.071). Would a less laissez-faire approach to journals during class have created stronger attitudes about the seriousness of journals? More related to Table 5 and this section of the paper, one could further speculate that stronger approaches to integrating journals into the life cycle of the class might have created statistically significant results on other items regarding the students' process. For example, might students have let others read their journals more readily and taken more chances in their writing processes if journals had been integrated into other elements of the course?

## Outcomes of Journals

A final area into which the data provide insight is the “outcomes” of the journals. Table 6 presents items that focus on outcomes. Specifically, items 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 17, and 18 are presented.

Table 6

### *Outcomes of Journals*

#	Item	Mode	Mean	S.D.	t-ratio	$\chi^2$ Prob
9	I discovered important ideas or thoughts while writing my journal.	1	0.643	1.008	0.638	0.2592
10	Writing the summary caused me to review content from the previous week's class.	2	1.214	0.893	1.360	0.0144
11	Writing journals helped me learn about percussion.	1	0.500	1.092	0.458	0.0266
12	Writing journals helped me learn about myself as a learner, musician, future teacher, etc.	2	0.286	1.541	0.185	0.7881
14	I thought that my own journals were of a high quality.	1	0.357	1.008	0.354	0.027
17	My attitude toward the value of the journals improved across the semester.	1	0.214	1.369	0.157	0.011
18	I found that written feedback from [the researcher] on the journals was educationally useful to me.	0	0.714	1.069	0.668	0.334

One of the research questions asked earlier in this paper concerned the degree to which students experienced the types of discovery that the literature suggested they would. Item 9 provides insight toward the answer. Superficially, the results may seem positive based on Table 1, as three students strongly agreed and another five agreed that they “discovered important ideas or thoughts while writing [the] journals.” In fact, the mean for that item was the third highest of all items. However, as Table 6 shows statistically, neither the t-values nor chi-square probabilities

were significant; students in the collective did not experience discovery of important ideas or thoughts while writing the journals.

Another item reported in Table 6 that garnered positive results dealt with feedback from the researcher. In fact, the mean for this item (0.714) was the second highest of all the means, with four students strongly agreeing and four agreeing that the feedback that they received on the journals was “educationally useful.” When examined in a larger context, this positive result is somewhat perfunctory because feedback from the researcher signaled the end of a journal cycle. In other words, once students received this feedback that many of them found useful, they were finished with the ideas in that particular journal and moved on to the next week’s journal. Perhaps it could be argued that each cycle ended as the students were starting to see the positive results of journaling. Journals can create an effective communication and feedback loop between professors and students (Blackmore, 2002; Garmon, 2001). However, in this case, perhaps the loop was not fully closed in ways that would allow for meaningful exchange of ideas.

As discussed in the findings section, four of the items shown throughout Table 6 (i.e., Items 10, 11, 14, and 17) show statistically significant chi-square probabilities ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). Most students reported that writing the summary caused them to review content from the previous week (6 strongly agrees, 6 agree) and that journals helped them to learn about percussion (2 strongly agrees, 7 agree). Even more certain is the statistically significant result that students’ attitudes about the value of journals improved across the semester (1 strongly agree, 8 agree). Perhaps the improved attitude was the result of learning gains about percussion. However, even though the chi-square probabilities on these items were statistically significant, the t-values were not. Thus, the means for each item indicate, in their collective, a finding that students were “not sure” of their own beliefs on these items.

More conceptually, both “reviewing” and “learning” did not provide insight into the level of cognition that occurred in conjunction with journal writing. Indeed, reviewing and learning might imply only very low types of cognitive activity—say “knowledge” or “comprehension” on Bloom’s Cognitive Taxonomy (Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). Recall that James noted that one-word summaries were meaningful enough to help him recall content. Notice, too, that Table 3 provides one student’s perception that journals were a “waste of time” because they only served to help that student remember what was done during class the previous week. The implication seems to be that much learning occurred only at the recall level. The lack of statistical significance of either chi-square probabilities or the t-ratios for item 12 also supports this more cautionary interpretation. Certainly, learning about the self and one’s own learning indicates higher levels of Bloom’s Cognitive taxonomy. Because students did not feel that these types of learning were achieved, it is reasonable to conclude that journaling about percussion and the previous week’s class resulted in learning on low and perfunctory levels.

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Both Barry (1996) and Conway (1997) implemented journals within music education courses. Each found that the results left something to be desired. In many ways, this study confirms their findings by illuminating shortcomings of the journals, though some positive aspects have been presented within this paper. This section discusses implications for the pedagogy of methods courses and directions for future research.

#### **Pedagogy of Methods Courses**

The discussion section of this paper hypothesized that the lack of substantive integration of journals into the life cycle of the class hindered students’ perceptions of journals. Because the class focused on strategies and techniques, the types of thinking and reflection that journals

promote seemed out of place. Still, even if a methods course focuses solely on teaching strategies and performance techniques, this paper lends credence to journal use, as students did review course content to write their journals and claimed that the journals helped them learn about percussion. If, however, methods courses aim students toward metacognitive, aesthetic, emotional, and higher-order thinking, then pedagogy of methods courses must more fully embrace journals as integral to the class. Conservatively, educators could integrate journals by targeting specific in-class activities and ask students to summarize and react to these activities. Consider the possibility, for example, of asking students to summarize and react to their own performance of an etude or the performance of a classmate. Another conservative means for integrating journals might be to allow journals to become rough draft material for more substantial papers or written exams (Duke, 1987).

Less conservatively, journals could be used to take center stage within a methods course, such that many classroom activities, simulations, and discussions would flow out of students' summaries and reactions. Such an approach aligns itself with Bain's (2004) "Natural critical learning environment" (p. 99). Bain (2004) argued for an environment that positions students and their ideas in higher prominence than discipline or content. Such a place of prominence requires professors to ask students to "begin struggling with an issue from their own perspective" and "to articulate a position" (Bain, 2004, p. 110). This type of struggle and perspective-taking occurs "even before [students] know much about it" (Bain, 2004, p. 110). This type of shift in a methods classroom would better reflect the importance of the types of careful thinking that are described as journal benefits.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The authors have proffered several speculations and hypotheses throughout this paper, all of which could serve as the basis of future research. For example, it has been put forth that perhaps integrating journals more strongly into the life cycle of a class might improve students' attitudes and practices regarding journals. The discussion section also suggested that students' claims of learning might be based on a different perception of learning than what has been suggested in the literature. Research in these areas is necessary.

Absent from this study are descriptive statistics and identifiers of the students. Would such descriptions provide additional insights into students' opinions and practices? For example, might gender differences be evident in considering students' opinions about the value of journals? Do music education students who are earning certification in elementary school teaching view journals differently from, perhaps, students who are aiming to be high school band directors? Did percussion majors within the class have different opinions about journals than non-percussion majors? Descriptive data could add additional insights.

Some of the existing research has focused more on reflecting on performance than on reflecting on class sessions (e.g., Brown, 2009; Lebler, 2007). Would students' perceptions have been different if the course had been performance-based as opposed to methods-based? Research is needed to generalize this question and to determine what types of experiences need to be targeted as the basis for journals.



### References

- Apfelstadt, H. (1996). Teacher Education: A process of becoming. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 6(1), 4-5.
- Bain, K. (2004). *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Barney, K., & Mackinlay, E. (2010). Creating rainbows from words and transforming understandings: Enhancing student learning through reflective writing in an Aboriginal music course. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 15(2), 161-173.
- Barry, N. H. (1994, November). *Promoting reflective practice among undergraduate education majors in an elementary music methods course*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Nashville, TN.
- Barry, N. H. (1996). Promoting reflective practice in an elementary music methods course. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 5(2), 6-13.
- Blackmore, T. (2002). Play your cards right: A narrative of first-year students' reader-responses. *The Journal of General Education*, 5(1), 43-67.
- Blocher, L., Greenwood, R., & Shellahamer, B. (1997). Teaching behaviors of middle school and high school band directors during rehearsals. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 45(3), 457-469.
- Bloom, B., Englehart, M., Furst, E., Hill, W., & Krathwohl, O. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals: Handbook 1, The cognitive domain*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Broudy, H. S. (1994). *Enlightened cherishing: An essay on aesthetic education*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Brown, J. E. (2009). Reflective practice: A tool for measuring the development of generic skills in the training of professional musicians. *The International Journal of Music Education*, 27(4), 372-382.
- Conway, C. (1997). Authentic assessment in undergraduate brass methods class. *Journal of Music Teacher Education*, 7(1), 6-15.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2008). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

- Duke, C. B. (1987). Integrating reading, writing, and thinking skills into the music class. *Journal of Reading, 31*(2), 152-157.
- Elliott, D. J. (1995). *Music matters: A new philosophy of music education*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Fitzgerald, J., & Shanahan, T. (2000). Reading and writing relations and their development. *Educational Psychologist, 35*(1), 39-50.
- Garmon, M. (2001). The benefits of dialogue journals: What prospective teachers say. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 28*(4), 37-50.
- Glaser, B., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.
- Hiemstra, R. (2001). Uses and benefits of journal writing. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education, 90*, 19-26.
- Knowlton, D. S. (2007). An andragogical approach for reducing cognitive load within aural theory tasks. *Visions of Research in Music Education, 9/10*(1), 1-17. Retrieved from <http://www.rider.edu/~vrme/v9n1/vision/Knowlton%20Final.pdf>
- Knowlton, D. S. (2010). Cognitive strategies for teaching the marching percussion ensemble. *Percussive Arts Society Online Research Journal, 2010*. Retrieved from <http://www.pas.org/publications/onlineresearchjournal/DavidKnowlton.aspx>
- Knowlton, D. S., Eschmann, A., Fish, N., Heffren, B., & Voss, H. (2004). Processes and impact of journal writing in a graduate-level theory course: Students' experiences and reflections. *Teaching & Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry and Reflective Practice, 18*(2), 40-53. Retrieved from <http://www.und.nodak.edu/dept/ehd/journal/>
- Lebler, D. (2007). Student-as-master? Reflections on a learning innovation in popular music pedagogy. *International Journal of Music Education, 25*(3), 205-221.
- Mixon, K. A. (2002). Helping percussionists play musically. *Music Educators Journal, 88*(4), 53-56.
- Morrison, G. M., & Guenther, P. F. (2000). Designing instruction for learning in electronic classrooms. In R. E. Weiss, D. S. Knowlton, & B. W. Speck (Eds.), *Principles of effective teaching in the online classroom* (pp. 15-22). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schön, D. A. (1987). *Educating the reflective practitioner: Toward a new design for teaching and learning in the professions*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Shand, P. M. (1996). An innovative approach to music teacher education. *Journal of Music Teacher Education, 5*(2), 14-20.

- Shiraishi, F. (1999). Calvin Brainerd Cady: Thought and feeling in the study of music. *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 47(2), 150-162.
- Sorcinelli, M. D. (2005). New conceptions of scholarship for a new generation of faculty members. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 90, 41-48.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. London, England: Sage.
- Takacs, D. (2003). How does your positionality bias your epistemology? *Thought & Action*, 29(1), 27-38.
- Thomeczek, M. A., Knowlton, D. S., & Sharp, D. C. (2005). Practical advice for supporting learning through the use of summary/reaction journals. *Across The Disciplines: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Language, Learning, and Academic Writing*, 2(1). Retrieved from [http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/thomeczek\\_knowlton\\_sharp2005.cfm](http://wac.colostate.edu/atd/articles/thomeczek_knowlton_sharp2005.cfm)
- Van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. New York, NY: State University Press.

## Appendix

### Attendance Journal

You will get some attendance credit by just showing up for class. Most of your credit for attendance, however, will come through your attendance journal. Your attendance journal is a weekly email that you send to [the course professor]. You have one attendance journal due each week. Your attendance journal should include a heading of “summary” and a heading of “reaction.”

#### Within Your Summary

Your summary should report the *highlights* of what we did in class that week—the topics covered that you found to be significant and/or activities that we did that you found to be the most meaningful. Your summary should include some *specifics and details* about what you learned about the topics and from the activities.

#### Within Your Reaction

Your reaction should go **beyond summary**. Your reactions will be judged in terms of whether you provide evidence of higher types of thinking and reflection. You certainly would not want to answer all of the following questions in your reaction (and feel free to ignore these questions altogether), but the following are meant to support your ability to write a good reaction:

- What was hard (or surprisingly easy) about what we did in class (either content or activities)? Why did you find it hard (or why do you think that it was easier than you had imagined)?
- How did the content or activities change your views about **yourself** (as a musician, teacher, learner)?
- How did the content or activities change your views about percussion or music?
- What connections can you make between what we did during class and your own experiences as a musician, teacher, learner, and/or music listener?
- What content and/or ideas and/or things said during class were uncomfortable to you, and so now you must “grapple” with them? What exactly made them uncomfortable?

**Deadlines:** [The professors] should receive your journal between the end of class on Thursday and Sunday night at 11:59 p.m. It is considered “late” after 11:59 p.m. on Sunday night.

The following bullet points offer **suggestions for maximizing the educational benefit** of your journals:

- Do not play it safe. Be honest. You will learn far less by telling [the course professors] what you think [they] want to hear than you will by exploring your own reactions to class content.
- Use feedback on previous journals to improve future ones. [One of the course professors] will always respond to your journal within 48 hours. He will sometimes make suggestions and give advice for improving your journal. Sometimes, journals might be discussed during class. Use these responses, suggestions, and discussions, to improve your future journals.
- Do **not** treat journals as formal essays that must be revised, edited, and polished. Length, grammar, spelling, and punctuation are all irrelevant! Simply “think on paper”—get your ideas “out there” in ways that show a clear summary and a thoughtful reaction.

**Dave S. Knowlton** (dknowlt@siue.edu), Ed.D., is Associate Professor of Instructional Technology at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His research interests focus on higher education pedagogy across disciplines, faculty development, online learning, and music education. For the past 25 years, Dr. Knowlton has worked in six different states as a percussion instructor, marching band show designer, and music clinician for middle schools, high schools, colleges, and drum and bugle corps. He judges nationally for USbands (usbands.org). In addition to his expertise in marching percussion, Dr. Knowlton actively studies West African, Cuban, Afro-Cuban, and Haitian drumming. He is a member of Music Educator's National Conference and the Percussive Arts Society. Dr. Knowlton has authored and co-authored over 50 professional articles that deal with strategies for helping students think in more substantive ways.

**David C. Sharp** (dcsharp@memphis.edu), Ph.D., is an economist and statistician as well as an amateur musician. Dr. Sharp is currently a member of the Graduate Research Faculty in the Department of Economics at the University of Memphis, as well as Managing Economist for Nathan Associates Inc., an economics and statistical consulting firm headquartered in the Washington, DC area. Dr. Sharp is formerly an Associate Professor of Economics and Business Advisory Council Research Professor at the University of Southern Mississippi. Dr. Sharp enjoys collaborating with his co-author, whom he befriended as a fellow musician and co-instructor for various musical ensembles during college and graduate school. Dr. Sharp's contributions draw upon his combined experiences as a statistician, an educator, and musician.