

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE GRADING OF REFLECTIVE
JOURNALS AND STUDENT HONESTY IN REFLECTIVE JOURNAL
WRITING

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing Education

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Jo Anne Genua
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**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
HEALTH PROFESSIONS DIVISION
RON AND KATHY ASSAF COLLEGE OF NURSING**

This dissertation, written by Jo Anne Genua under direction of her Dissertation Committee, and approved by all of its members, has been presented and accepted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN NURSING

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE

Julia Aucoin, DNS, RN, BC, CNE
Chairperson of Dissertation Committee

Date

Timothy O'Connell, PhD, MEd, BSE
Dissertation Committee Member

Date

Dana Mills, PhD
Dissertation Committee Member

Date

**NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
HEALTH PROFESSIONS DIVISION
RON AND KATHY ASSAF COLLEGE OF NURSING**

Certification

We hereby certify that this dissertation, submitted by Jo Anne Genua, conforms to acceptable standards and is fully adequate in scope and quality to fulfill the dissertation requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing Education degree.

Approved:

Stefanie La Manna, PhD, ARNP, FNP-C
Director PhD & DNP Programs
Ron and Kathy Assaf College of Nursing

Date

Marcella Rutherford, PhD, MBA, MSN
Dean, Ron and Kathy Assaf College of Nursing

Date

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Abstract

Background: Journal writing is often used to gauge student skills and knowledge. There is disagreement as to whether journals should be graded because students may embellish experiences or write what the instructor wants to read. If students are not engaged in honest reflection, the benefit of reflective practice is reduced.

Purpose: The purpose of this correlational non-experimental study was to examine if a relationship exists between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical framework for this study was based on Schön's reflective practice theory. This theoretical framework is suitable as students participate in reflective journal writing learning from experience and response to the situation, scaffolding on previous knowledge with the application of new knowledge.

Methods: The correlational, non-experimental study was conducted at five Midwestern U.S. pre-licensure nursing programs. Data were collected using an anonymous survey. The non-probability sampling technique was used to examine the existence of a relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing.

Results: Findings indicated that a significant relationship exists between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty. The relationship between reflective journal writing and embellishment was negative and non-significant.

Conclusions: This study revealed that a relationship exists between graded reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing. Nurse educators and policy makers need to assess the process of reflection which involves critical thinking and

problem-solving instead of grading the written component; possibly, changing to a complete/incomplete grade.

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I would like to share this saying from John Dewey: “*We do not learn from experience. We learn from reflecting on experience.*”

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Chapter One

Problem and Domain of Inquiry

Reflective practice, acclaimed as a cornerstone in nursing curricula and a necessity in demonstrating critical thinking and problem-solving skills, is considered a valuable tool in nursing education (Kinsella, 2009; Mann, Gordon, & MacLeod, 2009). Reflection is an activity or cognitive process that emphasizes emotions, thoughts, and feelings as well as the analyses of the response to an experience or situation (Duffy, 2007; Kinsella, 2009; Rogers, 2001; Schön, 1983) leading to new learning and understandings (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Duffy, 2007; Kinsella, 2009; Padden, 2013). One of the techniques utilized for reflection is journal writing (Ryan & Ryan, 2012). In nursing, reflective journal writing is a means of engaging students in exerting ownership and involvement in the learning process and enabling self-empowerment, creativity, critical thinking, and professionalism (Boud, 2001; Dymont & O'Connell, 2011; Ryan & Ryan, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of the journal is to reflect on clinical experience, engage in critical thinking, and learn from the experience (Bagnato, Dimonte, & Garrino, 2013). Through reflective journaling, students demonstrate how experience transforms knowledge and reveal innermost feelings and emotions (Walker, 2006) while trying to make sense of what occurred and attach new meanings to the experiences (Boud, 2001; Dolphin, 2013; Holmes, 1997; Kennison, 2012). Educators often use journal writing as an assessment tool; in fact, many educational institutions assess reflective journal writing with a numeric mark or pass/fail grade (Hymas, 2010).

However, mixed feelings exist as to the grading of reflective practice and journal writing. Those in favor of grading report that the focus should be on the level of reflection, the outcomes, and the process of reflection (Kennison & Misselwitz, 2002; Ruland & Ahern, 2007) whereas others believe that grading reflective writing may hinder students from admitting that an error was committed and learning from it, a substantial feature of improving practice. McMullan et al. (2003) stated that students are unwilling to express feelings and thoughts honestly when being graded, writing only what the assessor wants to hear. Craft (2005) concurred with McMullan et al. (2003) stating that to get a passing grade, students may exaggerate their experience and write what they think the professor wants to read.

According to Crème (2005), in reflective journal writing students are asked to honestly admit their lack of knowledge and mistakes; however, being honest may be difficult as the writer may conceal what actually happened. Crème (2005) also stated that there could be multiple truths in that what is written may potentially omit or hide information, not relating the whole story. In an online survey of 34 students who participated in reflective writing, Maloney, Tai, Lo, Molloy, and Ilic (2013) reported that 68% of the students were truthful 80% of the time. In a study conducted by McMullan (2006), results indicated that it was difficult for students to be honest in reflective writing, especially if an authoritative figure was going to read the journal because students feared that the content might be used against them. Platzer, Blake, and Ashford (2000) revealed similar results, finding that students did not feel safe in revealing aspects of their practice until a sense of trust was developed because they were afraid of being judged and seen as unprofessional. However, according to McMullan (2006) and Maloney et al. (2013),

reflective writing needs to be completely honest to be an effective learning tool; students are encouraged to critically analyze and learn from reflecting on experience (Poole, Jones, & Whitfield, 2013). Otherwise, it is not conducive to learning. If students are not engaged in honest reflection, there is a reduction in the value and benefit of reflective practice (Maloney et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to study if the grading of reflective journal writing is a contributory or inhibiting factor to student learning.

Problem Statement

Faced with the issue of honesty as a potential inhibitive factor to reflective writing raises doubt about the meaningfulness and effectiveness of reflective practice in nursing education. Mixed feelings exist as to the grading of reflective practice and journal writing because students may not be willing to honestly express feelings and thoughts when being graded, writing only what the professor wants to read in order to obtain higher grades (Boud, 2001; Craft 2005; Maloney et al., 2013; McMullan, 2006; McMullan et al., 2003). Multiple authors have written about the assessment of journal writing; however, a limited number discussed students' honesty when reflective journals were graded. Therefore, it is important to study whether grading reflective journals is an inhibiting factor for students' writing the truth about the experience as this would affect learning outcomes.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine if a relationship exists between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. In their study, Carmichael and Kruger (2014) found that different types of deception and dishonesty exist within academic institutions because students want to maintain their academic standing. Their

study revealed that students felt that not being totally honest is acceptable as it is viewed as a victimless crime. Learning whether grading of reflective journals is an inhibitive factor for students' writing the truth about the experiences and situations incurred may affect learning outcomes and development of critical thinking/problem solving skills (Poole et al., 2013).

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To satisfy the purpose of the study, the following research question was used:

Research Question and Hypothesis

Research Question. What is the relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing?

Research Hypothesis. H_0 : There is no relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing. H_1 : There is a relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing.

Significance of the Study

Reflection empowers nurses to become self-aware and examine the care that they provide, systematically appraising events that occur in a given situation while learning from experience. When participating in reflective journal writing, nursing students recognize their learning needs and become self-directed learners (Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997).

Nursing Education

Determining whether a relationship exists between graded reflective journal writing and student honesty may have significance for nursing education. This study may

reveal that students embellish reflective journal writing to receive higher grades. If so, educators will need to reassess the grading of reflective journal writing with a possibility of grading the reflective process as opposed to what students write. Using completed/not completed as opposed to number grades will change student evaluation and how grades are assigned.

Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, and Day (2010) state that the goal of nursing education is to prepare students to have the capacity to respond quickly to diverse situations encountered by reflecting on their experience. As well, Epp (2008) stated that academia has embraced reflective practice as “the medium to nudge students from engaging in just basic thinking to critical inquiry” and that reflection is “a source of truth, knowledge and self regulation” (p. 1380).

Nursing Practice

This study may contribute to nursing practice and reveal that to become competent practitioners, students are encouraged to think critically about situations and challenges encountered. However, the grading of reflective journal writing may inhibit free thought and learning from experience. Consideration must be given to how honest the nursing student is to himself/herself when describing an experience and learning outcomes. Did new learning occur? How will the experience influence future practice if a similar situation is encountered?

Teekman (2000) stated that evaluation of reflective thinking “enables practitioners to monitor their personal and professional performance” (p. 1133); if the students reflect honestly, they are empowered to take control and apply acquired knowledge from the experience to other situations encountered. Patient outcomes will

undoubtedly be affected because as stated by Gustafsson and Fagerberg (2004), reflection and professional development result in better patient care. When students engage in dishonest acts, this affects their professional practice which can potentially prove to be harmful to patients (Gaberson, 1997; Gaberson & Oermann, 1999; Hoyer, Booth, Spelman, & Richardson, 1991). This issue must be addressed as cheating in class and may potentially lead to unsafe clinical practices such as failing to report medication errors, an omission which can have serious repercussions (Gaberson, 1997).

In the clinical environment, grading of reflective journal writing may be considered to be controversial because grading may impact what students write; this cannot be the sole means of determining if students have attained the skills necessary to be a reflective practitioner (Plack & Greenberg, 2005). In practice, student honesty in reflective journal writing is also questionable because what is written may potentially be subpoenaed by a court of law (Ghaye, 2007). Therefore, strategies need to be implemented that explore options in assessing students' learning in the clinical setting as students may not be prepared to discuss aspects of their practice out of fear of being judged (Platzer, Blake, & Ashford, 2000).

Nursing Research

There is a gap regarding the existence of a relationship between grading reflective journal writing and student truthfulness. This study may lessen the gap and demonstrate that students may disclose elements of dishonesty during a research study. Also, attempts to conducting nursing research at a program with unionized faculty can thwart data collection during an active study, requiring aborting the effort. If findings indicate that a relationship exists between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty,

future studies need to be done to find out if the process of reflective journal writing should be graded instead of the actual content.

Public Policy

This study may alter policy in educational institutions where reflective journal writing is practiced. Evaluation methods need to be reassessed to determine if grading of reflective journals should continue or not. As well, if the process of reflecting is going to be graded instead of grading what the student writes, then marking rubrics need to be adjusted or developed to reflect this. This could involve making changes to curriculum and documents (e.g., course syllabi).

The guidelines and policy of professional regulatory bodies would also need to be taken into consideration to ensure that the curriculum meets standards and guidelines. As stated by Ladyshefsky and Gardner (2008), regulatory professional bodies, professional associations, and healthcare and educational facilities have vested interests in the development of qualified healthcare providers. If students are embellishing their experiences and outcomes to get higher grades, then diverse strategies that prevent this from happening and increase capacity of healthcare providers must be employed.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The philosophical underpinnings for this study are based on the assumptions of constructivism. Crotty (2012) defines constructivism as the belief that all knowledge is contingent on human practices and interaction between people. Constructivism stems from the ideas of philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who stated that all understanding happens because of the interaction between the world and the mind resulting in a meaningful experience (Young & Patterson, 2007). Psychologist Jean

Piaget (1896-1980) refined Kant's work regarding constructivism, demonstrating that understanding occurs through interactions with problems, previous knowledge, experiences, and beliefs and that students can be actively involved in their own learning (Young & Patterson, 2007). Vygotsky's theoretical framework regarding sociocultural theory contributes to the constructivist underpinnings because he theorized that social interactions influence thinking and interpretation of environment with individual cognition occurring (Jaramillo, 1996; Yilmaz, 2008).

The constructivist viewpoint is descriptive and does not adhere to inflexible guidelines or rules especially in learning curricula (Wasson, 1996 as cited by Yilmaz, 2008). In fact, Kinsella (2006) reports that people construct their own worldviews with personal meanings through the process of reflection, continuously transforming their knowledge and practice. As per Schön (1987), professional practitioners are engaged in *worldmaking*, setting boundaries, taking control of their own knowledge, and making sense of experiences. Learners are encouraged to focus on being self-directed, scaffolding onto previous learning with new knowledge (Kala, Isaramalai & Pohthong, 2010) because learning is a constructed, active building process (Legg, Adelman, & Levitt, 2009; Tam, 2000) and students learn and are motivated if they control what they learn (Maypole & Davies, 2001). Therefore, learning is student driven and the role of the instructor is that of mediator/facilitator between curriculum and learner (Legg et al., 2009; Maypole & Davies, 2001; Peters, 2000), thus encouraging autonomy. Thompson and Pascal (2012) and Muirhead (2006) state that the student is not filled with knowledge because learning is an active process with hands-on activities. Gilbert Ryle's (1900-1976) work related to dualistic thinking contributes to the philosophical underpinnings of

reflective theory (Kinsella, 2007a, 2007b). Ryle links mind and body, stating the two are integrated. Schön (1983) agrees with Ryle that doing and thinking complement each other and cannot be separated.

The above philosophical underpinnings have implications for reflective practice theory and its application in advancement of professional knowledge. The influences of Kant, Dewey, Goodman, Polyani, and Ryle contributed to the conception of the philosophical underpinnings of reflective practice theory as developed by Schön.

Theoretical Framework

According to Teekman (2000), one of the first philosophers to investigate the process of reflective thinking was Dewey. He stated that there are two thought processes; one is uncontrolled, and the other is controlled and focused. The controlled thought patterns were defined as reflective thinking that stimulated reasoning and learning from past experiences (Teekman, 2000). Simpson, Jackson, and Aycock (2005) discuss Dewey's reflective thinking process taken from his middle works collection (1899-1924, Vol. 7, pp. 283-284) stating that Dewey's reflective thinking process has five main steps as follows:

1. identification of a situation or experience that piques interests
2. identification of problems/obstacles that prevent goals from being met
3. development of plans to meet goal(s)
4. implementation of the plan of action
5. comparison of actual outcomes with proposed outcomes

Schön (1983) also advanced Dewey's thinking process related to reflection and based his reflective practice theory on Dewey's concept of reflective thinking. This is the

theoretical framework of choice for this study because Schön's theory of reflective practice is pivotal to nursing (Sigma Theta Tau International, 2005).

Three concepts are the basis for Schön's reflective practice theory (see Figure 1): awareness, critical analysis, and new perspectives (Schön, 1987). Awareness is an antecedent and occurs at the beginning of the reflective process; it is the "cornerstone of reflection" (Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997, p. 1139; Rogers, 2001). The premise is that events experienced trigger reflection and the ability to examine the occurrence with new knowledge and manner of responding to a similar situation in the future (Mann, Gordon & MacLeod, 2009). Mezirow (1981) states that awareness is the first phase of reflection, which triggers uneasy feelings and thoughts that the knowledge and actions applied were not sufficient in the situation. Atkins and Murphy (1993) suggest that awareness is an effect of uncomfortable feelings or thoughts caused by a lack of knowledge and not being able to explain the occurrence.

The second phase of reflection, critical analysis (antecedent), examines current understanding and the need for new information (Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997). By means of critical analysis one can peer into the working day to identify and evaluate occurrences, exploring what was done well and what needs to be improved. However, exploration of feelings may reveal one's vulnerability (Rich & Parker, 1995). Scanlon and Chernomas (1997) stated that during the critical analysis phase, students are assisted in the application of new knowledge with the understanding of how it relates to practice, taking current knowledge into consideration (Thorpe, 2004).

The third concept is new perspectives and is an outcome resultant from application of reflection and analysis. This is indicative of new learning and

understanding (Atkins & Murphy, 1993; Scanlon & Chernomas, 1997; Thorpe, 2004). Koole et al. (2011) added that new perspectives and outcomes include reaching solid conclusions, developing solid learning goals, and future action plans.

Learning is one of the major outcomes of reflection. Mezirow (1981) stated that reflection may result in transformative learning, enabling new meanings enhancing overall effectiveness. Other outcomes include new viewpoints derived from experience, behavioral changes, application, and commitment to action. Emotional outcomes such as attitudes, values, and feelings were also identified (Boud, Keogh, & Walker as cited by Rogers, 2001). Dewey added that learning involves retention and comprehension of information which occurs through reflection (Rogers, 2001).

Reflective theory has been used in diverse settings including teacher/professional education and early childhood education (Cornish & Cantor, 2008; Eraut, 1995); nursing (Pierson, 1998; Riley-Doucet & Wilson, 1997); social work (Thompson & Pascal, 2012); and management, clinical supervision, and preceptorship (Duffy, 2007). According to Schön (1983):

a practitioner's reflection can serve as a corrective to overlearning.

Through reflection, he can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which he may allow himself to experience. (p. 61)

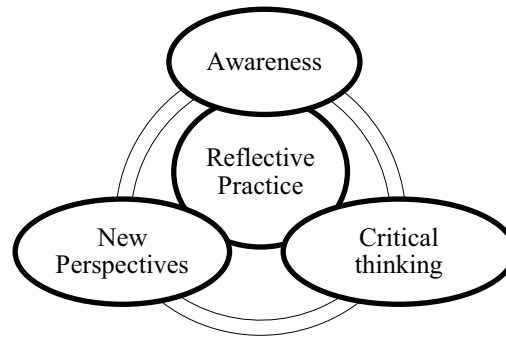


Figure 1. Schön's Phases of Reflective Practice

Schön's reflective theory discusses 'reflection-in-practice' and 'reflection-on-practice' (1983, 1987). As described by Schön, reflection-in-practice refers to reflecting or thinking about the experience and behavior as it is happening, *on the spot*; whereas reflection-on-practice is thinking back on the situation after occurrence, 'what happened' – this includes reviewing analyzing and evaluation the experience (1983). Schön believes by reflecting—either in-practice or on-practice—solutions to difficult problems will surface (1987).

Reflective practice emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, not relying on the traditional approach to learning (Thompson & Pascal, 2012). As per Rogers (2001), reflective practice: 1) requires active participation; 2) is elicited by unusual and puzzling experiences; 3) involves self-scrutiny of the way a situation was handled; and 4) is conducive to the application of new knowledge. Reflection leads to new experiences, and learning resulting in a transformation of new meanings and viewpoints (Rogers, 2001).

An indicator of reflective practice is the use of journal writing as a tool (Rich & Parker, 1995; Schön, 1992). Barney and Mackinlay (2010) reported that through

reflective journal writing, students can discuss feelings and emotions, what was learned, and what still needs to be learned. It is a method of dealing with what makes one feel uncomfortable. Research conducted by O'Connell and Dymont (2013) indicates that reflective journal writing facilitates student learning as can focus on the holistic approach of learning; using reflective journal writing as an adjunct to learning empowers students to take control of their learning.

The reflective framework is suitable for reflective practice and the grading of reflective journals (see Figure 2) because students who participate in reflective journal writing learn from the experience and from their response to the situation, scaffolding on previous knowledge and the application of new knowledge. Students are encouraged to take control of their knowledge and ownership of their learning experiences through reflective practice and journal writing (Maypole & Davis, 2001; Peters, 2000).

Theoretical Assumptions

Scanlan and Chernomas (1997) report that reflective practice theory has five assumptions as follows:

1. Reflection is a mental process, used daily by everyone; it can be used in professional practice creating an awareness of feelings or thoughts leading to a new way of thinking;
2. Reflection is a valuable learning strategy which enhances the scaffolding of new knowledge upon what is already known and contributes to the resolution of encountered problems and issues;
3. Reflection improves learning; however, students choose the experiences that are significant;

4. Reflective journal writing develops reflective practitioners and critical thinking which is then transferred to action; and
5. Educators need to understand their own reflective thinking strategies to be able to facilitate students' learning from reflection.

A literature review conducted by Mann, Gordon, and MacLeod (2009) includes the assumption that reflection enhances competence, suggesting that learning occurs from reflecting on experiences and situations encountered.

Model Depicting Theoretical Concepts

The theoretical conceptual model proposed for this study is illustrated in Figure 3. The theoretical framework of the reflective practice theory—awareness, critical analysis, and new perspectives—focuses on students' reflecting honestly on the experience or learning situation encountered. This model also demonstrates psychological and physical limitations to honest reflection because of preconceived ideas or beliefs about what is expected and whether students have fears and feelings related to honest reflection. The physical limitations related to honest reflection include things such as the grading of reflective journal writing, accurately recalling the situation or experience, and clinical experiences that do not lend themselves to honest reflection. This conceptual model demonstrates the relationship between honesty and reflective journal writing and was adapted with permission (see Appendix E) of Maloney et al. (2013).

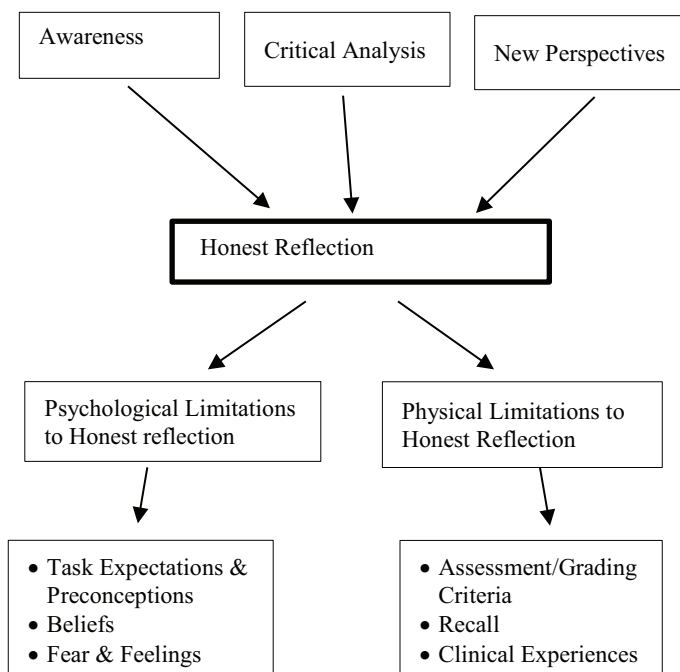


Figure 2. Conceptual Model: Honesty & Reflective Journal Writing

Definition of Terms

Reflection

Reflection is crucial to learning (O’Connell & Dymont, 2013) and an accepted practice for lifelong learners and professional practice (Ryan & Ryan, 2012). Literature indicates that reflection is defined as a cognitive process or activity (Boud et al., 1985; Rogers, 2001; Schön, 1983) as evidenced in reflective journal writing. Oluwatoyin (2015) states that reflection involves the analysis of one’s actions and opinions, concentrating on interactions with others to “better understand themselves to be able to build on existing strengths and take appropriate future action” (p. 28).

Reflective Journal Writing

Reflective journal writing is not a diary or a journal filled with secrets of juicy details or gossip (O’Connell & Dymont, 2013). While there are many types of journals,

the focus for this study is the learning journal as a pedagogical tool; Tsingos-Lucas, Bosnic-Anticevich, and Smith (2014) stated that health professions such as nursing, medicine, and allied health disciplines use journal writing to promote reflection, where students focus on the *what* is being learned and *how* they are learning it. Students are encouraged to reflect on the experience and write about it in a systematic manner, highlighting the experience, thoughts, feelings, and outcomes (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013; Pierson, 1998).

Honesty

Harrington (1979) states that honesty means “avoiding one-sidedness, misleading evidence, exaggeration, and minimization, but also half-truths, evasiveness and vagueness” (p. 182). Honesty (dependent variable) has two aspects, a positive and a negative meaning. The positive aspect of honesty indicates that the writer wants to understand the problem by getting to the important aspect and by investigating all aspects of data; the negative aspect of honesty is providing information that is misleading, minimized, or exaggerated or providing half-truths. To measure honesty in this study, there are 6 questions (Items 15, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25) directly asking about honesty and one optional question which asks participants if they have always been honest in their reflective journal writing. There are five questions about embellishment (Items 22, 23, 26, 29, and 31) and its acceptability in reflective journal writing.

Grade(ing)

According to Rom (2011), grading is an indicator of student achievement and “reflects a student’s performance” (p. 210). Zoeckler (2007) reports that “grades are seen as measures of merit” (p. 85). Grading (independent variable) is the assessment of how

the student performed on an assignment represented either by a number or letter grade.

The Reflective Journaling Instrument contains 5 questions (Items 16, 17, 28, 35, and 36) about grading of reflective journals.

Embellishment

The literature review revealed that students write for the teacher in order to obtain approval (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013) and that students embellish their experience and performance to receive higher grades (Craft, 2005; Kennison, 2012). For the purpose of this study, embellishment refers to making up or elaborating on an experience or performance to achieve a higher grade.

Feelings

In reflective journal writing, students describe their feelings—what they felt mentally and emotionally during the experience because as stated by Bagnato et al. (2013), feelings play an important role in reflection. As stated by Hargreaves (2004), students explore their own thoughts and feelings and demonstrate awareness. Poole et al. (2013) added that emotion is an appraisal of self rather than performance. The present study accepts the above views for the meaning of feelings.

Chapter Summary

Reflective journal writing is a means used by instructors to evaluate the level of critical thinking and problem-solving skills employed by students, indicative of the depth of learning and knowledge gained. The journal is a means that students use in which to write about personal experiences (Kallaith & Coghlan, 2001) with an in-depth analysis of the experience encountered (Pavlovich, Collins, & Jones, 2007). Through reflective journal writing, students are encouraged to become self-directed learners by determining

the focus of their own learning experience scaffolding onto previous learning with new knowledge (Kala et al., 2010). This is in keeping with the philosophical underpinnings of the reflective practice theory which is guided by the constructivist thought where the practitioner takes control of their own knowledge while making sense of experiences (Schön, 1987). Schön's reflective practice theory consists of three phases of reflection: awareness, critical analysis, and new perspectives; this model is used in many healthcare professions as a framework for journal writing.

For many students, reflective journal writing can be challenging because they are being asked to actually voice personal thoughts and experiences through written work. Research indicates that students are not always forthcoming in expressing innermost feelings and thoughts resultant of reflecting on the situation experienced and the response. There are those who believe that students are not entirely honest in reflective journal writing when what they write is being graded/marked. It is further believed that students embellish their experiences and how they handled the situation, writing what the instructor wants to read in order to get a higher grade.

As stated, the purpose of reflective journal writing is to promote professional growth and accountability (Langley & Brown, 2010). Students are encouraged to critically analyze and learn from reflecting on experience (Poole et al., 2013). However, if students are not honest in reflection and reflective journal writing, it is important to assess if professional growth occurs. Therefore, it is important to assess if a relationship exists between grading reflective journal writing and student honesty.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

The objective of a literature review is to provide an overview of the topic being researched including a summary of what has been written related to the chosen topic. Rodgers and Knafl (2000) highlighted that scaffolding on the knowledge and works of others results in a profound understanding of the subject. This should be done early in the project as this determines what already has been researched (Trochim & Donnolly, 2008).

This chapter is a synthesis of the literature specific to the topics of reflective practice in nursing, reflective journal writing, grading of reflective assignments, and student honesty. Literature used for this review was selected using many electronic databases including CINAHL, ProQuest, OVID, EBSCO, PubMed, Google Scholar, references cited in journals, articles from colleagues and professors, and textbooks. Searches were limited to articles that were peer-reviewed, full text, and written in English.

Keywords used were academic dishonesty, honesty, truthfulness, reflection, reflective journals, journal writing, reflective writing, reflective practice, assessment, evaluating, grading, feedback, journal grading, nursing students, health professions, and education. Words were used singularly and in combination. Results obtained were staggering; therefore, to narrow the search Boolean terms such as AND or NOT were used while the term OR was used to broaden the search. The sign \$ was used to include derivatives of words with the same stem (Wakefield, 2014). This narrowed the search down to 70

articles that included original studies, articles, and literature reviews; from this search, 37 original research studies and articles ranging from 1995 to 2017 as well as content specific books dated 1983-2013 were used for this literature review.

Review of Literature

To evaluate the relationship between reflective practice in nursing, reflective journal writing, grading of reflective assignments, and student honesty in reflective journal writing, the following themes that emerged from the literature review were reflective practice, honesty and truthfulness in reflective writing, and grading of reflective journals.

Reflective Practice

Schön's reflective practice theory stems from Dewey's ideas that reflection is necessary for problem-solving with the end result of learning from the experience (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Simpson, Jackson & Aycock, 2005). Schön (1983) discusses two ways of reflecting: in-action and on-action. Reflection-in-action is to reflect on behavior as it is happening, the immediate thinking of actions taken, and on the spot thinking. Reflection-on-action is to reflect on the past, after the fact of an experience by reviewing, analyzing, and evaluating the situation. Schön (1987) stated that reflection is conducive to "on-the-spot-experiment" (p. 28) where the learner examines the occurrence, potentially understands what happened, and endeavors to make changes from what was learned.

Findings for this review indicate that reflection is an increasingly valuable tool in nursing education and for healthcare professionals, with reflective journal writing as a means of expressing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Chirema, 2007; Dymont

& O'Connell, 2010; Garrity, 2013; Maloney et al., 2013; McMullan, 2006; Sutton, Townend & Wright, 2007). In fact, Clouder (2010) stated that reflection is a strategic approach coping with practice and workplace demands.

Mackintosh (1998) stated that it is wrong to assume that all nurses and nursing students can reflect in a meaningful way as they may lack the ability to recall accurately and that in ten years' time, reflective practice would be a trend of the past in nursing. Chirema (2007) and Clouder (2010) stated that reflective practice is not the only way to develop and improve skills or to improve professional performance. Ruth-Sahd (2003) and Power (2012) highlighted that it is best not to presume that students automatically know how to reflect but should be guided because learning is not always an outcome of reflective practice. A study conducted by Richardson and Maltby (1995) revealed that 94% of journal entries written by year two undergraduate nursing students demonstrated lower levels of reflection with only 6% reflecting at a higher level. However, 73% of students (22 out of 30) wrote at the highest level of reflection. This study demonstrates that while student journal entries indicated a lower level reflectivity students were able to reflect at a higher level.

Reflection assists students in the development of professional skills, enhances learning, and positively impacts the learning process and decision-making skills (Fernandez, Chelliah, & Halim, 2015; Hymas 2010). Reflection is a valuable addition to the clinical education of healthcare professionals (Maloney et al., 2013). Gustafsson and Fagerberg (2004) examined the experience of reflection in four registered nurses, and results indicated that these nurses attributed professional growth and development to reflective practice. The research of Tsingos-Lucas, Bosnic-Anticevich, Schneider, and

Smith (2016) on the effectiveness of reflective practice activities in pharmacy curriculum revealed that when reflective thinking is practised, there is an improvement in reflective thinking ability with capacity to influence practice.

Journal Writing. One of the methods promoted to track reflective practice is through journal writing which is focal to student learning (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). Landeen, Byrne, and Brown (1995) evaluated the use of journal writing by 18 third year students in clinical practice to assess learning needs. Results indicated that while students both struggled and learned from their clinical experiences, journal writing was a medium that provided students with a structure to write about experiences encountered and through which they could reflect and review experiences.

Sutton et al. (2007) concluded that journals are beneficial as they are a place where students can express thoughts and feelings, thus enabling self-awareness. A qualitative study conducted by Chirema (2007) examined 42 reflective journals to determine if journal writing promoted reflection on experience. Results indicated a range of positive and negative comments where some found writing experiences useful whereas others preferred to talk about an experience instead of putting it in writing. O'Connell and Dymont (2013) stated that journals facilitate student learning and personal growth because students write about experiences using critical thinking skills and self-expression.

Journal Writing Frameworks. Journal writing is a written record of events and experiences that a person encounters, not a mere diary or journal in which one casually writes about these experiences and events (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). Fernandez, Celliah, and Halim (2015) conducted a qualitative experimental study with 16 third year

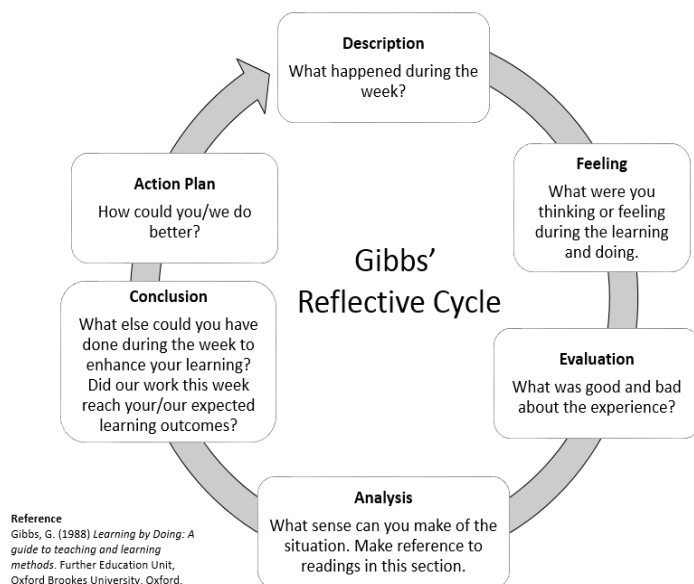
undergraduate medical imaging students at the University of Malaysia to find out if reflection improved clinical practice. One of the study questions asked if there are any benefits to journal writing. Results indicated that 93.8% (15 students) stated that journal writing was beneficial and improved learning. To provide structure and to guide students so that they write a reflective journal, frameworks and guidelines have been developed to guide students through this process. Varner and Peck (2003) added that students who use learning journals experience new learning, are able to problem-solve, and are self-directed and focused on learning. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) reported the use of case records, a structured and written format to guide reflective journal writing. This structured format describes the situation or experience, the desired goals and objectives, alternative actions taken to solve the issues, strategies that were employed to achieve the goals and objectives, the results of strategies employed, and the assessment or evaluation of the plan. Pugach and Johnson (1990) described a four-step structured interaction as a guide in the development of reflective practice. In step one the student identifies and clarifies the problem; in step two the problem is summarized; step three discusses the solutions/plans to the problem and predicts outcomes when these solutions/plans are implemented; and step four considers the outcomes and evaluates the success of solutions/plans.

Varner and Peck (2003) examined various types of learning journals and their use in adult learners in the MBA organizational behavioral courses. Discussion related to the benefits and challenges of reflective journal writing revealed a five-step model to guide reflective writing which includes the description of what happened; identification of theory or concepts and its application to the experience or occurrence; analysis of the

situation/what happened; summary of the experience and support conclusions; and, future actions/plans based on conclusions.

A reflective analysis conducted by Garrity (2013) used the LEARN format for reflective journal writing in a baccalaureate leadership course at a university in Ontario, Canada. The acronym stands for Look back, that is describe the situation/experience; Elaborate is a subjective/objective recall of details; Analyze what happened; New Perspective refers to future recommendations, that is if the same situation was encountered in future events, would it be handled the same or differently? Garrity (2013) reviewed the journals of 80 students using the LEARN template as the structural design for journal writing. A five-point Likert scale was used to evaluate students' responses. One of the questions asked was if using the template was helpful in the organization of journal writing. Results indicated that 24 students ($n = 80$) agreed that the template was useful whereas 15% strongly agreed to its usefulness.

The Gibbs framework (see Figure 3) is also used as a model to guide students in reflective journal writing. As stated by Finlay (2008), Gibbs model suggests basic questions to guide students in reflective journal writing. Kitchen (1999) reported that the Gibb's reflective cycle is too basic and should be used by practitioners who are not expert in reflective journal writing.



*Figure 3. Gibbs' reflective cycle. Reproduced from Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods*. Further Education Unit. Oxford Polytechnic: Oxford. By permission of the copyright holder Oxford Brookes University.*

Reflective practice is an important method utilized to promote problem solving and critical thinking skills with the goal of becoming a competent practitioner. One methodology used to achieve this goal is reflective journal writing. However, while this is a valuable tool, students and practitioners encounter challenges and benefits. As stated in the research, it is best not to assume that all nurses and nursing students know how to reflect (Mackintosh, 1998). Students should be guided on how to reflect through the use of reflective journal writing (Landeem et al., 1995; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). Journal writing frameworks and guidelines were developed and found to be useful in providing students with guidance in journal writing.

Honesty and Truthfulness in Reflective Writing

The themes discussed in this section relate to students' honesty and truthfulness in the sharing of their feelings and thoughts through reflective writing. There is also the

potential that students embellish or fabricate their experiences or situations encountered rather than write about their personal feelings.

Honesty encompasses presenting information or data in a truthful manner (Johnson, Haigh, & Yates-Bolton, 2007) and avoiding misleading or exaggerated information and half-truths (Harrington, 1979). Of the 36 studies and articles reviewed for this study, five studies mentioned honesty, and, of these five, only two studies (Maloney et al., 2013; McMullan, 2006) conducted research related to student honesty and grading of reflective journal writing.

McMullan (2006) conducted a quantitative study with two open-ended questions to determine students' opinion in using portfolios for assessment. McMullan developed a questionnaire which was completed by 90 first year and 84 third year students. This questionnaire had two questions related to honest reflective writing and summative/formative assessment. Results indicated that a large percentage of students were not honest in reflective writing: 49% when a summative assessment was used and 41% for a formative assessment. As well, data revealed that students thought it was statistically significantly more challenging ($p = 0.011$) to be honest when reflective writing was assessed summatively compared to formatively. Findings of this study revealed that students felt they could not be completely honest in reflective journaling; to be a valuable learning tool, reflective journal writing must be entirely honest.

The only study found that examined the level of student honesty in reflection and reflective essays was conducted by Maloney et al. (2013). This mixed method study involved 34 third year undergraduate physiotherapy students who participated in an anonymous online survey; students were asked to self-rate their honesty. Results

indicated that the degree of honesty ranged from 10% to 100% (0% not honest to 100% completely honest) with 68% of students being honest 80% of the time. The findings of this study revealed that students were not entirely honest/truthful in reflective journaling with only 20% stating that they had been completely honest. In addition, the value of reflective practice can be reduced through dishonest reflective writing.

A longitudinal study conducted by Stewart and Richardson (2000) to examine the experiences of undergraduate physiotherapy and occupational therapist students related to the assessment of reflection revealed that it was difficult for students to be completely honest because they felt vulnerable and cautious as to what was put in writing. One student commented that being totally honest in what is written can impact how they are viewed by others. In addition, to promote honesty, a trusting and supportive environment is a necessity as this promotes sharing of information via reflective journal writing.

Crème (2005) addressed the question of honesty in learning journals and in what students write, reiterating that students find it difficult to be truthful because students feel they are being judged by what they write. Similarly, Poole et al. (2013) reiterated that reflective journal writing must be accurate and honest but added that environmental conditions conducive to learning may promote honest reflective journal writing.

Uncomfortable Sharing Thoughts and Feelings. Feelings and emotions affect the learning process and what is written (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). Poole and colleagues (2013) added that reflection is affected by emotions which requires open-mindedness by the learner because reflection could be swayed by negative emotions. Sharing of feelings, thoughts, and emotions is the second step in Schön's phases of reflective practice (see Figure 2) where the student critically analyzes and evaluates what

occurred and the feelings involved. Reflective journal writing is a process that encourages students to examine their emotions, thoughts, and feelings related to an experience or situation encountered; emotional response can be either negative or positive (Asselin, 2011; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993) and may range from insecurity, mistrust, and anxiety to openness, trust, and accomplishment (Asselin, 2011). However, for reflective practice and reflective journal writing to be successful, students need to be open-minded and self-aware while critically analyzing their feelings and thoughts. Nevertheless, students may feel uncomfortable about sharing emotions, thoughts, and feelings with teachers in writing (Richardson & Maltby, 1995).

Platzer et al. (2000) conducted a qualitative study interviewing 30 nurses enrolled in a nursing program for nurses and midwives at a college in southern England. This study examined the learning experiences resultant of learning through reflection and revealed that barriers to reflection also exist. Platzer et al. (2000) found that students did not feel safe in revealing aspects of their practice until a sense of trust was developed. Other students stated that they did not want to share thoughts and feelings because they were afraid of being judged and seen as unprofessional and did not want to expose themselves to criticism. This study also revealed aspects of uncertainty where students found it difficult to admit to their lack of knowledge in clinical practice; one student voiced that it is challenging to admit what is not known while another student stated that it felt like being on trial. Asselin (2011) concurred with Platzer et al. (2000) as to students' being uncomfortable about sharing their thoughts and feelings as such was evident in the findings of the study conducted to explore if use of reflection facilitated knowledge transfer in clinical practice. This qualitative study involved ten registered

nurses enrolled in a baccalaureate nursing program. Data analysis revealed that emotional responses to clinical situations produced anxiety, mistrust, and insecurity as well as feelings of achievement and satisfaction. Students reported that reflective journal writing precipitated closure of clinical experiences that occurred in the past which made them feel better and promoted changes in critical thinking and skills.

Research conducted by Fernandez et al. (2015) asked the question if students experienced difficulty writing about feelings. Ten students responded to this question, and results indicated that 31.3% felt uneasy writing about feelings which they thought were personal and felt embarrassed that someone else would be reading about their personal feelings; 50% of students had no problems expressing their feelings in writing. The qualitative study conducted by Sutton et al. (2007) to examine if reflective journal writing improved reflection reported that reflective journal writing was a cathartic experience as personal thoughts and feelings were explored. Students reported that putting thoughts and feelings into writing helped them to understand themselves and others. McMullan (2006) administered a 33-item questionnaire survey related to the use of portfolios with 90 year one and 84 year three diploma nursing students in the United Kingdom. The objective of this study was to determine if the portfolio can be used both as a learning tool and as method of student evaluation. McMullan (2006) reported that reflection played a major role in portfolio development as a learning tool; however, 64% of students agreed/strongly agreed that portfolios were a source of anxiety; 37% reported good reflective writing skills. A statistically significant negative correlation was reported between perceived reflective writing skills and anxiety attributed to portfolios.

Maloney et al. (2013) conducted a qualitative study examining the honesty of students in reflection as well as barriers to being truthful. Physiotherapy students in year three had the possibility to participate ($n = 48$) and 34 (71%) responded. Students were reassured that data would be reviewed after final marks were given. Data collected anonymously online were analyzed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In answer to the question if students found it difficult to express feelings and thoughts, results indicated that four students or 11.8% deemed it uncomfortable to write about emotions because they did not want to be viewed as unprofessional or in a negative manner.

Embellishment. Research indicated that students embellish, exaggerate, and/or fabricate what they write to reflect what the professor wants to read so as to receive higher grades. According to Boud and Walker (1998), a higher education workshop that explored reflection and its influence on learning stated that students try to hide what they do not know, wanting to be seen as knowledgeable, which defeats the purpose of reflective journal writing. O'Connell and Dymont (2013) highlighted that educators need to be cognizant that students may want to please the professor by writing what they think the teacher wants to read and that when students embellish what they write, it negatively influences reflection and the journal writing process.

Literature revealed that students embellish what they write or write what they think the professor wants to read. The study conducted by Maloney et al. (2013) reported that students wrote to fit instructor expectations. When asked the question related to embellishment or fabricating experiences, almost 68% of students stated they responded truthfully $\geq 80\%$ of the time. In fact, one student added that it is easier to write to fit the

marking criteria rather than being honest. Of note, students mentioned that the goal of reflective writing is to learn the process of reflection and that embellishment and fabrication of the experience contribute to the learning (Maloney et al., 2013). Results from a cross sectional descriptive study conducted by Chong (2009) revealed that 62.2% of participants felt that reflective process could be manipulated to emulate expected outcomes. In answer to the question of writing what is expected rather than what truly is felt, 59.1% agreed as opposed to 20.4% who disagreed. Based on these data, the perception is that students write what they think the instructor wants to read rather than what actually happened. This was also evident in the study conducted by Dymont and O'Connell (2003) which reported the results of a focus group discussion with nine students; results indicated that all nine students wrote for the instructor making assumptions as to what the instructor wants to read. This same theme of students writing what they thought the faculty wanted to read was also reported by Landeen et al. (1995) who examined the lived experience of 18 third year nursing students to evaluate the use of journals as an educational strategy.

Grading of Reflective Journals

This section of the literature review will discuss the grading of reflective journal writing and providing feedback, including challenges and benefits encountered. Grading is the assessment of how a student performed on an assignment represented either by a number or letter grade (Rom, 2011; Zoeckler, 2007). There are both challenges and benefits to the grading of reflective journals. An abundance of literature discusses grading of reflective journals. Chandler (1997) reported that grading of reflective journal writing is “dehumanizing,” that students write for the grade and what the teacher wants to

read; therefore, it is a “destructive” activity which “penalizes students for trying to think and learn” (p. 48). Boud (2001) argued this point as well stating that grading can potentially have an adverse effect on journal writing and learning which in turn can inhibit reflection because students want to demonstrate that they are knowledgeable and disguise what they do not know.

Crème (2005) conducted an ethnographic style research project where interviews were conducted with students and tutors, and journals were assessed. Results indicated that some students were not favorable to formal assessment of reflective journal writing; one student commented that the person reading what was written had no way of knowing what was happening in the writer’s mind. But at the same time, students stated that if the journals would not be read by anyone, then there is no purpose in writing. This was also reiterated by a focus study discussion conducted by Dymont and O’Connell (2003) where students ($n = 7$) reported that a grade for reflective journal writing was appreciated because, as one student commented, journals capture a lot of learning. Students involved in the study conducted by Sutton et al. (2007) agreed that while journal writing was cathartic and beneficial, it is not possible to assign a grade to what is written about personal feelings as they are subjective and cannot be marked objectively. This was also demonstrated in the fifth phase of the study conducted by O’Connell and Dymont (2006) that examined the use of journals in higher education and the appropriateness of grading journals. Faculty ($n = 8$) was the focus population sample and, in response to evaluation of journals, one faculty stated that it is difficult to evaluate subjective writings in an objective manner. In addition, study participants agreed that while it is important to provide feedback on what is written, this can be overwhelming and challenging in a large

class, making it difficult to provide meaningful feedback to 60 journals. Varner and Peck (2003) discussed that faculty has strong motives against grading of journals. As one faculty member stated, depending on class size, it takes approximately 50 to 70 hours to read and evaluate learning journals.

Grades are a motivator to persevere in journal writing (Dyment & O'Connell, 2010; Power, 2012). Kessler and Lund (2004) reported on distance learning and journal writing. Nineteen students participated in the completion of assessment tools evaluating critical thinking, communication, and therapeutic nursing interventions. A three-point Likert scale was used to rate the responses. In addition, students were asked to complete a questionnaire related to reflective journaling as a learning tool. Results pertaining to the grading of reflective journals revealed that 94% of students felt that the grading of reflective journal writing would not make a difference in their writing. However, students involved in the experimental study conducted by Fernandez et al., (2015) found that five students (31.3%) indicated that they were concerned about receiving low marks for what they wrote, especially in relation to negative feelings.

McMullan (2006) reported that assessment of portfolios rendered them less effective. In response to the question related to the use of the portfolio as an assessment tool, 24% agreed/strongly agreed with its use. When asked which type of assessment would contribute to greater learning, 21% agreed/strongly agreed to summative only, 12% formative, and, 24% both summative and formative. And students stated that if the contents of the portfolio were to be graded, then the summative only assessment was preferred (mean 2.82, SD = 0.858).

Feedback. There are many benefits and challenges in providing meaningful feedback to reflective journal writing. As stated by O'Connell and Dymont (2013) meaningful feedback not only motivates students to persevere in journaling but also encourages students to review what they wrote, examine the feedback, and apply the suggestions to future journal writing and learning. Garrity (2013) concurred with O'Connell and Dymont (2013) that by giving feedback, educators have the opportunity to encourage students as well as provide recommendations for improvement. Lasater and Nielson (2009) reported that by providing students with written feedback, they are encouraged to critically think about their practice.

Challenges in providing feedback on reflective journal writing include the issue that not all educators know how to provide meaningful responses to what students write and the workload implications in the time required to read, provide feedback, and return journals to students (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). As stated by Elbow (1997), providing feedback should be more than correcting grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure. Holmes (1997) added that students may lose sight of the reasons for reflective journal writing if they are focusing on grammar and sentence structure instead of learning from the experience. Lasater and Nielsen (2009) expressed an opposing view to the challenge that providing meaningful feedback to reflective journal writing greatly increases workload; instead feedback contributes to student awareness and discernment in the importance of learning. Another challenge stems from students themselves who may be overly critical or are disappointed in what the educator writes (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013).

Jackson and Marks (2016) conducted mixed-method research to evaluate if assessed reflections on feedback improved student use of feedback and performance. Participants were students in a one-year master's program who completed an anonymous questionnaire; 33 students participated in 2011 - 2012; 19 in 2012 - 2013; and 28 in 2013 - 2014. When asked the question if they read the feedback, results indicated the p value to be $p = 0.112$ for all sessions; in response to how carefully, the $p = 0.002$ for all sessions; and, for the question was it useful, the $p = 0.155$. The researchers stated that all classes appreciated feedback. One student reported that they were more likely to read positive feedback as opposed to negative comments; another student indicated that they would read negative comments as much as possible; whereas one student responded that it depended on the percentage of the grade for the overall assignment. According to the researchers of this study, the findings indicated that students valued the feedback received and they felt that overall their work improved because of feedback received (Jackson & Marks, 2016).

Chong (2009) conducted a quantitative cross-sectional descriptive study to examine student nurses' perception of reflective practice. Ninety-eight diploma nursing students participated in this study and completed a structured questionnaire. When answering the question related to the need for feedback on the reflective practice report, 84 participants (85.7%, mean = 4.24) agreed with this statement.

Mulliner and Tucker (2017) conducted research focused on the quality and preference of feedback. A questionnaire survey was administered to both students and academic staff at a university in Liverpool, UK. The wording in the questionnaire survey was amended; for students ($n = 194$; 15% response rate), the questions focused on what

they did with feedback while for the faculty (n = 26; 43% response rate), questions focused on what they believed students did with feedback. In the section about student engagement with feedback provided, when asked about reading feedback, 93% of students responded that they always read feedback provided; 35% of faculty agreed that students actually did this. When asked if students always act on feedback, 93% of students agreed whereas 4% of staff agreed with this response. Findings from this study revealed that the majority of students read and act on feedback and that faculty should not assume that they do not.

Gap in Literature

Research revealed a gap in literature that supported the relationship between student honesty and grading of reflective journal writing. Hymas (2010) stated that the marking of reflective journals should be scrupulously analyzed because reflective journaling is increasingly being used and accepted. The question as to the benefits of grading journals and if reflective journal writing produces competent practitioners needs further evaluation.

Another important gap in the literature relates to the legalities of reflective journal writing, if the student is disclosing sensitive information and how it relates to confidentiality and consent. In addition, if what was written proves to be detrimental to patient care, can the person reading the journal use this information without the student's consent? The ethical, moral, and legal obligations need to be researched (Rich & Parker, 1995) because under the *Freedom of Information Act* (2005), anything in writing can be subpoenaed in case of a lawsuit (Ghaye, 2007).

Summary

The literature review revealed that much is known about reflective journal writing. Literature findings revealed that reflective journal writing involves feelings, thoughts, emotions, and how experiences are handled. Although a component of reflective practice involves sharing of thoughts and feelings with professors and instructors, students are uncomfortable in doing so, not only because students may fear that they will be judged negatively but also because it is difficult to assign a grade to one's thoughts and feelings. Research also indicated that reflective journal writing encourages the development of critical thinking and professional skills. However, while this may be true, it was also demonstrated that students may embellish and fabricate experiences to get higher grades.

Chapter Three

Methods

Chapter three focuses on data collection methodology, research design, and research assumptions. The setting for the study, population, sample size, and recruitment are discussed as well as how collected data are stored to maintain privacy and confidentiality. The instrument for data collection is discussed in detail highlighting the validity and reliability of the instrument and how data were analyzed including threats to internal and external validity.

The purpose of this study is to determine if a relationship exists between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. The grading of reflective journal writing is a source of contention for educators; there is a division as to the benefit of assigning a grade to journal writing and student honesty in what is written. Some believe that students may not be willing to honestly express innermost thoughts and feelings when being graded, writing what the educator wants to read to get a higher grade (Boud, 2001; Craft, 2005; Maloney et al., 2013; McMullan, 2006; McMullan et al., 2003). However, for reflective practice to be considered an effective learning tool, students are encouraged to be completely honest and critically analyze and reflect on the learning experience (Poole et al., 2013). As per Maloney et al. (2013), there is a reduction in the value and benefit of reflective practice if students are not engaged in honest reflection. Therefore, it was important to determine if a relationship exists between student honesty and the grading of reflective journal writing.

Research Design

A correlational non-experimental research approach is selected for this study to examine the existence of a relationship among the variables honesty and reflective journal writing. A correlational study is the best choice to measure two variables to determine if they are related (Christensen, Johnson, & Turner, 2011; Creswell, 2009). Per Polit and Beck (2012), correlational studies reveal existent relationships among variables rather than imply cause and effect. Therefore, based on this information, this study examined if a relationship exists between the dependent variable honesty and independent variable reflective journal writing.

In a correlational design study, one of the limitations is that even though two variables are correlated, this does not indicate whether one causes the other (Trochim & Donnolly, 2008). As well, the investigator cannot control the independent variable (reflective writing) whereas in experimental studies, researchers are able to manipulate the variables (Polit & Beck, 2012). In a correlational design study, the researcher measures whether variables are related or not.

A distinguishing feature of quantitative research design is experimental or non-experimental. In an experimental design, the investigator is actively involved, can manipulate independent variables, and demonstrate cause and effect (Polit & Beck, 2012); non-experimental designs describe relationships between variables (Christensen et al., 2011). The reason for choosing a non-experimental correlational design for this study was to assess if a relationship exists between the two variables, honesty and grading of reflective journal writing.

A qualitative research study would not have been appropriate as qualitative studies look at the meaning or the lived experience of the research question. The qualitative researcher seeks to give meaning to the underlying patterns of what is being researched and not looking at the existence of a relationship between variables (Polit & Beck, 2012). Leedy and Ormrod (2005) reported that in correlational research the researcher looks at the possibility of a relationship but does not probe for underlying reasons. Trochim and Donnelly (2008) added that the goal of the qualitative researcher is to understand phenomena in order to develop new theories and to achieve a deeper understanding of the issues generating detailed information through storytelling. Therefore, based on this information, it is the opinion of this researcher that the quantitative research methodology is the more appropriate choice for this study in examining the possibility of an existing relationship between variables.

Research Assumptions

Polit and Beck (2012) stated that assumptions are principles or beliefs presumed to be true without exploration or investigation. This study was conducted based on the following research assumptions:

- The research instrument is a valid and reliable tool to assess the constructs as evidenced by results.
- Participants in this study understood the questionnaire and its completion instructions.
- Participants in this study accurately and truthfully answered assessment tool questions based on the information provided related to the reassurance of

anonymity, confidentiality, and with no possible repercussions for participating in this study.

- The research data obtained were equal to the participants' true ability plus some error. The error may be due to the assessment tool, the assessment facilitator, or the environment.

Setting

The population for this study was recruited from private, not-for-profit schools of nursing located in the Midwestern United States offering a baccalaureate degree in nursing. These colleges are accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and their nursing programs by the Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education. The focus for this study was students enrolled in the pre-licensure baccalaureate nursing program in either the traditional or accelerated options. The combined potential sample population from programs with self-reports of reflective journaling is approximately 1,249 students.

Sampling Plan

A sampling plan is necessary to obtain valid and reliable statistics. Sampling in quantitative research identifies the sampling strategy utilized in choosing the population and participants, selection criteria, and sample size (Polit & Beck, 2012). Christensen et al. (2011) stated that the quality of a study is dependent on the sampling methodologies used in the recruitment of participants.

Sampling Strategy

A non-probability sampling technique was used for this study. The target population included all students enrolled in the baccalaureate nursing program who are 19 years of age or older. Polit and Beck (2012) stated that quantitative studies have four

types of non-probability sampling strategies: convenience, quota, consecutive, and purposive. Convenience samples are readily accessible to the researcher, easily recruited, and comprised of people who meet the criteria (Christensen et al., 2011; Hulley, Cummings, Browner, Grady, Newman, 2007; Polit & Beck, 2012). Creswell (2009) added that in some studies only convenience sampling of already formed groups and volunteers is used. Thus, the convenience sampling technique was utilized in this study because all students in the target population were on location in the educational institution being used; they were readily accessible and easy to recruit.

Convenience sampling is simple to use, because of accessibility, but it is also the weakest form of sampling (Polit & Beck, 2012). The potential of researcher bias exists because investigators may lean towards recruiting individuals with whom they have a relationship, thus influencing outcomes. The participant may also feel obligated to participate out of fear of reprisal if he or she does not. In addition, convenience sampling is not representative of all students in the nursing program at the selected academic institution as it is geared towards a certain nursing program.

Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria include the characteristics of the target population and determine who may or may not participate in the study (Polit & Beck, 2012). This information is usually found in the demographic portion of the research instrument tool used (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

Inclusion criteria. To be included in this study, participants had to be enrolled in either the traditional or accelerated baccalaureate nursing program of the selected nursing

schools, participate in reflective journal writing, and had to be 19 years of age. Repeating students were also eligible to participate in this study.

Exclusion criteria. Students not enrolled in the baccalaureate nursing program, who did not participate in reflective journal writing, and were not 19 years of age or older were excluded from participating in this study.

Determination of Sample Size: Power Analysis

Polit and Beck (2012) recommended that it is best to use the largest sample to capture the essence of the population being researched; additionally, there is a lower chance of sampling error with a larger population. The sample size and power for this study were determined by using the correlation sample calculator (University of California, 2017). The threshold probability for rejecting the null hypothesis and preventing a Type I error, the alpha (α), was set at 0.05 level of significance. The probability of failure to reject the null hypothesis and commit a Type II error rate (β) was established at 0.100. The effect size (r) was set at 3.0. While the correlation coefficient (r) is not usually used to determine sample size calculation, it is important to this study as it is a measurement of strength of the relationship between the two variables (Hulley et al., 2007). Based on these data, the calculated sample size was 113 participants.

Protection of Human Subjects

Researchers have a responsibility to protect study participants and to ensure that protocols established by the institutional review board (IRB) are followed so that participants are not at risk for harm (Creswell, 2009). For this study, the researcher submitted applications to the IRB at Nova Southeastern University as well as to four of

the five study sites which required it. One site accepted the IRB determination as provided by Nova Southeastern University (see Appendix A).

To protect the privacy, confidentiality, and identity of the participants, generalized demographic information was collected. As per Polit and Beck (2012) collecting data anonymously is the most secure method to protect participants' confidentiality. Therefore, to ensure that anonymity is maintained and that no one can link the participants with the collected data (Trochim & Donnolly, 2008), this study collected data via an online survey (see Appendix B) using the secure website Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) developed and distributed by Vanderbilt.

Risks and Benefits of Participation

The risks of participating in this study were minimal as information that could potentially identify the participants was not collected; demographic information was aggregated and cannot be connected to individual participants.

Participants in this study may potentially benefit nursing education. Students will have an influential part on the use of reflective journal writing as part of the grading system while taking responsibility of their learning experience and what they want to share (Ghayee, 2007). Participants may be contributing to lessening the gap in nursing research related to the grading of reflective journal writing.

Data Storage

Data were stored in compliance with IRB requirements. Data without identifiers were stored on a password-protected laptop and desktop in the researcher's locked home office. The study institution states that the duration of storage is dependent on external requirements of any funding organizations. Since this study is non-funded, data will be

kept for a minimum of three years as indicated in the IRB guidelines of Nova Southeastern University (2011). After this time, all records, e-files, and survey will be deleted.

Recruitment

The methods used for recruiting study participants are important to the outcome of the study. Polit and Beck (2012) stated that the most successful method of recruitment is the face-to-face approach. Upon receipt of approval from the IRB, schools of nursing which participated in reflective journal writing were contacted to discuss the research project and the potential of having students who met the criteria participate in the study. Upon approval, the researcher provided an information letter for students explaining the study and the option to participate (see Appendix C) which was posted for students on the shared nursing learning management system. Along with this, a personal email using each college's email system was sent to all students by a local gatekeeper. The message included information about the study and the importance of participating, reassured potential participants about anonymity and confidentiality, and discussed consent. A reminder email was sent to students encouraging participation if they had not already done so (see Appendix D).

Instrumentation

In a quantitative study, data are collected in an organized, well-thought-out manner to safeguard the integrity of data collected. The instrument used for data collection is important to ensure the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell, 2009; Polit & Beck, 2012). It is the responsibility of the researcher to use the appropriate data collection instrument that addresses the study questions. The instrument should provide

clear directions with population-appropriate instructions, be easy to use, and not contain biased items (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014).

For this study, data were collected from participants via an anonymous online survey. Per Polit and Beck (2012), questionnaires have multiple benefits including the following: reduced costs related to time and administration as participants usually complete the questionnaire on their own time and via the Internet; the absence of interviewer biases; and, anonymity, as all identifying information can be generalized. A few of the barriers to questionnaires are as follows: the issue of clarity as the wording of the questions may not be succinct and to the point (Hulley et al., 2007); participants may not respond, may be slow to reply, or omit information as opposed to the face-to-face interview (Polit and Beck, 2012); and participants could potentially misinterpret the questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). To minimize or avoid barriers as mentioned above, the survey was submitted to content experts to review and provide feedback. To ensure that the survey was succinct and to the point as well as easy to understand, previous nursing students were invited to complete the survey and provide feedback. Edits were made accordingly, and the final tool is represented in Appendix B. Previous nursing students field tested the survey and reported that it took five to eight minutes to complete the survey.

Instrument: Reflective Journaling Instrument

Based on the adaptation of McMullan (2006) PNE instrument and Maloney et al. (2013), this investigator constructed the Reflective Journaling Instrument (RJI) as a 36-item survey which utilizes a five-point scale with indicators strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). This was used to measure

student honesty in reflective journal writing for this dissertation. As stated by Christensen et al. (2011) and Hulley et al. (2007) Likert scales are used to measure behaviours and attitudes, and participants choose the response that best ranks their choice. The RJI survey is divided into three sections: demographics, usefulness of reflective practice, and questions related to reflective journal writing looking at student feelings, grading, embellishment, and honesty/truthfulness. Study data were collected and managed using the Research Electronic Data Capture tool (REDCap) hosted at Nova Southeastern University. This is a secure website designed to support data capture for research studies providing 1) an intuitive interface for validated data entry; 2) audit trails for tracking data manipulation and export procedures; 3) automated export procedures for seamless data downloads to common statistical packages; and 4) procedures for importing data from external sources (Harris, Thielke, Payne, Gonzalez, & Conde, 2009). It took participants approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Demographics

The first part of the survey asks demographic data such as age, gender, and semester. To maintain anonymity, the participant has the choice of choosing the correct age range and to indicate that they are 19 years of age or older. These are only used to describe the sample and not for specific comparisons to each variable. No other descriptors were requested.

Reflective Practice

The second section concerns the process of reflective practice. There are seven questions in this section. Research conducted by Maloney et al. (2013) is the only study

found that directly examines the level of student honesty related to reflection. Permission was obtained from Dr. Maloney to use and adapt his survey scale and questions.

A section of the Maloney et al. (2013) survey had four items related to the following: understanding the purpose of reflection; whether the student received sufficient data and guidelines to write reflective essays; the importance of reflective practice for growth as a clinician; and the importance of reflective essays (journal writing) for growth as a clinician. A Likert scale was utilized from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) for this section. Validity and reliability for this survey instrument were not discussed. These four items were used in the RJI survey.

Student Honesty

The literature review did not locate an existing tool specifically capable of measuring student honesty and its relationship to the grading of reflective journal writing. However, literature revealed a questionnaire which included two items related to honesty, developed by McMullan (2006) as a research instrument looking at the use of portfolios as effective learning tools that promote critical analysis and reflective practice, encourage responsibility and accountability, and motivate students to self-reflect. Reflection is a key factor in the use of portfolios for helping students learn and become competent practitioners (Grant & Dornan, 2001). The literature review conducted by McMullan (2006) revealed that it could be controversial to use portfolios as a learning tool and assessment tool and that use could negatively affect learning outcomes. And, since reflective writing is key in portfolios, honesty in reflective journal writing could be affected by assessment (Gannon, Draper, Watson, Proctor, & Norman, 2001).

McMullan developed the Portfolios in Nursing Education (PNE) Questionnaire as a tool to gather data for her own research. This PNE instrument obtained data related to four sections focused on the following: personal development, professional development, the usefulness of the portfolio, and guidelines and direction on the use of portfolios. In addition, the PNE included a section with 10 general questions related to reflection. One of the general items allowed the students to elaborate on their choice by asking a why/why not type question. (McMullan, 2006). A Likert response scale was utilized—strongly disagree (5) to strongly agree (1). Therefore, this investigator contacted Dr. McMullan to request permission (see Appendix E) to adapt the PNE Questionnaire to assess the possible existence of a relationship between student honesty and reflective journal writing. Permission was granted. Items from the RJJ are numbers 5 to 11 and numbers 12 to 15 are from the PNE Questionnaire.

Research conducted by Maloney et al. (2013) specifically examined the level of student honesty related to reflection via an anonymous online survey asking students to rate how truthful they were in their reflective writing. In addition, questions related to student honesty and grading of reflective journal writing were constructed by this researcher based on literature reviewed (Jackson & Marks, 2016; Maloney et al., 2013; McMullen, 2006; O'Connell & Dymont, 2006; Ruth-Sahd, 2003). Therefore, based on this information, the Reflective Journaling Instrument survey was developed. A five-point Likert scale with indicators strongly agree (1), agree (2), neutral (3), disagree (4), and strongly disagree (5) was used to measure student honesty in reflective journal writing. As stated by Christensen et al. (2011) and Hulley et al. (2007), Likert scales are used to measure behaviours and attitudes, and participants choose the response that best

ranks their choice. Collected data were quantified using SPSS, examining if a correlation exists between the two variables, grading reflective journal writing and honesty.

Validity. It is important to establish face, content, criterion, and construct validity or accuracy of the data collection questionnaire (Hulley et al., 2007). Face validity refers to the extent to which the instrument appears to measure what it says it will; it is subjective in nature and not completely reliable (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). Content validity is concerned with the items on the questionnaire reflecting what is to be measured; that is, what is being asked refers to what is being measured. To establish content validity, sample items are developed, and content experts are consulted to review the instrument (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). Criterion validity exists when results of the new instrument correlate with existing measurements (Hulley et al., 2007; O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014).

The well-documented PNE Questionnaire established face and content validity through review by university educators and a pilot test by students not included in the study ($n = 56$) (McMullan, 2006). Thus, to establish validity for the Reflective Journaling Instrument survey, the instrument was submitted for feedback to a team of nursing professors and content experts—doctorate and master's prepared nurses—as well as to former baccalaureate nursing students. Adjustments were made based on feedback (Creswell, 2009; Greiman & Covington, 2007).

Reliability. The term reliability indicates that the results of a study are repeatable and consistent. No matter how many times a study is repeated, the outcome is the same as long as what is being measured does not change (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014; Trochim & Donnolly, 2008). There are two methodologies to ensure reliability: test and re-test and

internal consistency (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). McMullan (2006) established reliability for the PNE Questionnaire using a pilot test with nursing students ($n = 56$) not included in the study. Internal consistency for all four constructs of the PNE questionnaire was measured using Cronbach's alpha with the reliability analysis yielding coefficients of 0.9, 0.88, 0.86, and 0.89 respectively. A coefficient alpha of ≥ 0.70 is an acceptable indicator for a strong relationship (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Therefore, based on these results and because the Reflective Journaling Instrument (RJI) was used by adapting the PNE Questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the internal reliability. Part C of the RJI was manually subdivided into four components: honesty/truthfulness, thoughts/feelings, embellishment, and grading. The internal reliability for these four components was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Results are as follows: honesty/truthfulness $\alpha = .215$; thoughts/feelings $\alpha = .551$; embellishment $\alpha = .895$; and grading $\alpha = .115$.

Scoring. McMullan's PNE Questionnaire was scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from five (strongly agree) to one (strongly disagree). Constructs from each section were summed for a total score. Independent t-tests were used to calculate the difference between the mean score and between semesters, with Pearson's correlation test being used to assess the relationship between two variables (McMullan, 2006).

Field Review of Grading Reflective Journaling Instrument. To test content validity and clarity, the instrument was submitted for field review to content experts for review; feedback and comments provided were incorporated into the final survey (Creswell, 2009). Edits were made based on recommendations from the field review. Initially, the RJI followed the same style as McMullan's PNE Questionnaire regarding

the order of the Likert scale, evaluating items from strongly agree (5) and ending with strongly disagree (1). According to feedback, the order of appearance of the rating of items scale in the Reflective Journaling Instrument was changed; instead of starting with strongly agree (5) as per McMullan, the RJI started with strongly disagree (1) and ended with strongly agree (5). In addition, the word *portfolio* was changed to *reflective practice*; and the headings were changed to support reflective practice, reflective journal writing, and grading of journals. In Maloney et al. (2013), the word *essay* was changed to *journal writing*. Field testers provided suggestions on clarity and structure of questions which were applied to the survey. In addition, questions related to student honesty and grading of reflective journal writing were constructed by this researcher based on literature reviewed (Jackson & Marks, 2016; Maloney et al., 2013; McMullen, 2006; O'Connell & Dymont, 2006; Ruth-Sahd, 2003). Therefore, based on this information, the Reflective Journaling Instrument was developed (see Appendix B).

General Statistical Strategy

Data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Data were meticulously reviewed for errors. Parametric analysis was done to test assumptions of normal distribution and consistency of variance using t-tests (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). To determine if a correlation exists between the independent variable and the dependent variable, correlation coefficient and Pearson's r were used (Polit & Beck 2012). Results are reported using a scatterplot and descriptive statistics.

Participants were recruited from five universities and colleges in the Midwestern United States. To participate in this study, students had to be enrolled in the prelicensure

baccalaureate nursing program, either the traditional or accelerated option, had to be 19 years of age, and involved in reflective journal writing. A total of approximately 1,249 students were approached to participate in this study; of these, 53 accepted the invitation and completed the online survey.

Data Cleaning

Accuracy of data entered is imperative for the prevention of threats to validity of the study (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). There are a variety of reasons why data are missing or omitted. Participants may elect to not answer certain questions because of a lack of knowledge and motivation or choose not to go any further (Meyers et al., 2013). As per Polit and Beck (2012), the first step to take when data are missing is to examine the frequency of the occurrence one variable at a time, the percentage of missing values, and whether missing data are random. This study did not have any missing data nor outliers.

There are three ways of dealing with missing data: listwise deletion, pairwise deletion, and imputation (Meyers et al., 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). First, listwise deletion, also known as complete case analysis (Polit & Beck, 2012), eliminates all cases with missing data in the variables. Unfortunately, this method reduces the population sample size (Peugh & Enders, 2004) which decreases statistical analysis power and increases standard errors (Meyers et al., 2013). Second is pairwise deletion, also called available case analysis (Polit & Beck, 2012), in which the researcher examines each case individually and uses cases with missing data. In a case, if a variable has missing data, it will be deleted while variables with data will be used. This is the method used by SPSS (Meyers et al., 2013). Third, imputation or filling in (Polit & Beck, 2012) occurs when

the researcher guesses or estimates a value to the missing data using the mean of the variable (Meyers et al., 2013; Peugh & Enders, 2004). According to Polit and Beck (2012), this method does not risk statistical power because sample size is maintained, but it is not always the best method to use because mean imputation affects the variance statistical analysis. When substituting missing data by using the mean, Polit and Beck (2012) recommend using the mean of other similar items that have missing values because of the conjecture that people are “internally consistent across similar questions” (p. 468). This is known as case mean substitution and is an appropriate technique of item level imputation.

To confirm accuracy, the researcher followed data cleaning measures by scrutinizing and proofreading data for potential coding problems before an analysis of data collected was started (Polit & Beck, 2012). To accomplish this, a visual examination of the raw data was done for accuracy. Upon completion, data were exported from REDCap to SPSS. Using the missing values analysis module, no missing data, typographical errors, or outliers were detected.

Descriptives

Descriptive statistics are characteristic data related to participants in the study (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). The collection of sociodemographic data allows the readers of the study to gain insight about the sample population (Plichta & Kelvin, 2013). For this study, sociodemographic data such as age, gender, and semester and program in which participants were enrolled was found at the beginning of the Reflective Journaling Instrument. Descriptive statistics also describe collected data (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005) and provide a summary about the measures, values, and distribution, thus simplifying a

large amount of information collected so that it could be easily understood (Plichta & Kelvin, 2013; Trochim & Donnolly, 2008).

A descriptive analysis is included in Chapter 4 of this study to summarize data and reveal potential correlations that are not evident in raw data (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). As part of the descriptive analysis, this researcher used frequency distributions, central tendencies, variability, correlations, and visual representations (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014; Trochim & Donnolly, 2008).

Reliability Testing

Cronbach's alpha was used to test for internal reliability of the survey. A coefficient $\alpha \geq 0.70$ is an acceptable indicator for a strong relationship (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). O'Dwyer and Bernauer (2014) agreed with Tavakol and Dennick (2011), stating that on a scale of zero to one, with zero equaling unreliability, a value of ≥ 0.70 is optimal. For this study, the reliability analysis was done using SPSS version 25; if the value is below 0.70, the items are individually examined. If the overall alpha value is exceptionally high, according to Polit and Beck (2012), it may be wise to delete the data and compare Cronbach's alpha with the item deleted. However, this may affect the internal consistency of the questionnaire. In addition to Cronbach's alpha, this researcher also used the correlation coefficient (with a range of .00 to 1.00) to assess the reliability of the instrument looking at the association—extent and direction—between variables (Polit & Beck, 2012). Cronbach's alpha for the RJI is .80. This indicates that the RJI is reliable.

RJI items were divided into subscales and scored in groups: feelings (items 12, 13, 14, 18, 25, 30, 32, 33, and 34); honesty (items 15, 19, 20, 21, 24, and 25); graded

(items 16, 17, 28, 35, and 36); embellishment (items 22, 23, 26, 29, and 31); and reflective journal writing (items 5-11). For individual group results of Cronbach's alpha, see Table 8.

Hypothesis Testing

Statistical hypothesis testing is an indicator as to whether collected data corroborate the hypothesis or not (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014; Plichta & Kelvin, 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). The hypothesis being tested is as follows:

H₀: There is no relationship between grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing.

H₁: There is a relationship between grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing.

For the threshold probability for rejecting the null hypothesis and preventing a Type I error, the alpha (α) was set at 0.05 level of significance. The probability of failure to reject the null hypothesis and commit a Type II error rate (β) was established at 0.100. The effect size (r) was set at 3.0. The p -value was calculated when data were assessed (Polit & Beck, 2012).

To determine if a correlation exists between the two variables, a bivariate correlational analysis was conducted. The measures of central tendency distribution (mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and range) were analyzed to assess the direction and strength of the distribution score and whether scores are skewed (Polit & Beck, 2013).

A two-tailed test was conducted to evaluate the direction of the relationship between variables: directional hypothesis is an indicator of a relationship and non-

directional indicates that there is a significant statistical relationship between variables, but not the direction (Polit & Beck, 2012). Pearson's correlation test was used to assess the relationship between two variables. A correlation close to zero is indicative of a weak or non-existent relationship (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014).

Limitations

Although research validity is essential in all studies, possible factors that may challenge validity of inferences exist (Christensen et al., 2011). To maintain the rigor of the research design, strategies to obtain valid results must be employed. O'Dwyer and Bernauer (2014) highlighted that threats exist in any type of research study and that the researcher must minimize these influences. A limitation for this study is the sample size. The survey was sent to a total of 1,249 prelicensure nursing students. The calculated sample size for this study was 113; however, only 53 students responded. For this study, internal and external validity to non-experimental correlational research are discussed.

Threats to Internal Validity

As stated by Trochim and Donnolly (2008), internal validity is important in studies looking at the existence of cause-effect relationships. Christensen et al. (2011) added that internal validity suggests that a relationship exists between independent and dependent variables. Internal validity can be affected by sample size and extraneous variables. In correlational study designs, the researcher competes with challenging explanations of the outcomes (Polit & Beck, 2012).

Threats to External Validity

External validity refers to the extent that study research findings are applicable to other people in general (Christensen et al., 2011). Replication of research is a valuable

aspect of external validity (Christensen et al., 2011; Polit & Beck, 2012). Potential external threats for this study included interaction between relationships and people (Polit & Beck, 2012). What this means is that it may be difficult to apply research findings to nurses in general because only prelicensure baccalaureate nursing students were used for this study.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the existence of a relationship between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. A non-experimental correlational research design was used for this study to measure the existence of a relationship between two variables, grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. Research assumptions were also discussed. The setting from which students were recruited and the sampling plan including strategy, eligibility criteria, sample size, and power analysis were also included. The sample population ($n = 53$) included prelicensure baccalaureate nursing students. For the protection of human subjects, approval from the IRB from NSU and from study sites was obtained before the research was started. Risks and benefits for participation, data storage, recruitment, and the measurement tool were reviewed in detail. The general statistical strategy highlighted that 1,249 were invited to participate in this study; however, data collected and analyzed by SPSS version 25 indicate that 53 responded to the survey. Data cleaning, descriptive statistics, reliability testing, hypothesis testing, and limitations related to internal and external validity were also considered in this chapter.

Chapter Four

Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if a relationship exists between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. The research question stated: what is the relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing? The total population approached to participate in this research was 1,249 prelicensure baccalaureate nursing students in traditional and accelerated nursing programs; of those, 53 accepted the invitation to participate.

Data Cleaning

To ensure the accuracy of data collected, a thorough visual analysis of the raw data was done looking for missing information. All of the returned surveys (n = 53) were used as there were no missing data. One participant chose strongly disagree (1) to all items of the survey. Since the survey items were not intended to get answers from both ends of the spectrum, it was decided not to reject this survey as it may reflect how the participant actually felt about reflective journal writing.

Descriptives

Description of the Sample

Prelicensure baccalaureate nursing students from five colleges and universities across the Midwestern United States were invited to participate. The majority of participants who completed the survey were females (50) compared to 3 males. Participants' ages ranged from 19 to 45 years: 40 students were in the 19 to 25 age group;

10 were in the 26 to 35 group; and 3 were in the 36 to 45 group (see Table 1). Seventeen students did not indicate in which program they were enrolled; however, only students in baccalaureate programs were approached. Twenty-one respondents indicated that they were in enrolled in the traditional option and 15 in the accelerated. Nine of the 53 participants did not indicate which semester they were in with the highest number of participants being in semester 7 (see Table 2).

Table 1

Population Demographics

Age			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	19 to 25	40	75.5
	26 to 35	10	17.3
	36 to 45	3	5.7
Total		53	100.0
Gender			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Female	50	94.3
	Male	3	5.7
	Total	53	100.0

Table 2

Program and Semester

	Frequency	Percent
Accelerated	15	28
Traditional	21	40
Semester 1	3	5.7
Semester 2	5	9.4
Semester 3	7	13.2
Semester 4	5	9.4
Semester 5	5	9.4
Semester 6	4	7.5
Semester 7	12	22.6
Semester 8	4	7.5
Valid N (listwise)	53	

Responses to the Measurements

The distribution provides a summation of the range of values for each variable illustrated with a frequency distribution. Values are displayed from the lowest to the highest indicating how many times each value was obtained (Trochim & Donnolly, 2008). A frequency distribution can be displayed visually either in a table format or a graph such as a histogram or bar chart, revealing abundant data quickly (Polit & Beck, 2012). A table format is used to present data displaying frequencies of values (Polit & Beck, 2012). A visual display of these data indicates the shape of the distribution, if discrepancies exist, and if there are outliers (Meyers et al., 2013; O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014; Plichta & Kelvin, 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012).

The central tendency of a distribution estimates the middle point of the value of the variable calculating the mode, mean, and median (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014). The mode is the most common score, a number that occurs most often; the mean is the mathematical average of all the scores; and the median is the middle score and the most used in central tendency (Polit & Beck, 2012). The measures of central tendency are also used to identify the existence of outliers and data set skewed in one direction or the other (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014; Trochim & Donnolly, 2008). This method was used for data collected in all sections of the survey.

The measures of variability refer to the data scores that describe the range, the standard deviation, and the variance of data collected (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014; Polit & Beck, 2012). The range refers to the distance between the lowest and the highest value. While range is the easiest way to measure variability of data, it is not reliable or stable as it can be affected by extremely high or low values (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2014; Plichta & Kelvin, 2013). Measures of variability were used for collected data related to reflective practice and reflective journal writing.

The standard deviation is a value that demonstrates the relationship of individual scores to the mean of a sample (Plichta & Kelvin, 2013). Standard deviation provides the extent of variance on a set of data; when data values are close to the mean, standard deviation is low, but when the values are spread out over a broader range, the standard deviation is higher (Polit & Beck, 2012). This is useful as it will identify outliers. Standard deviation values were useful in analyzing the items concerning reflective practice and reflective journal writing. The survey instrument Reflective Journaling Instrument was used. This survey is divided into three sections with 36 items and one

optional question with a yes/no answer. The items were scored using a 5-point Likert scale. The means and standard deviation for Section B are reported in Table 3 and for Part C in Tables 4 to 7.

Table 3

Frequencies: Reflective Journal Writing (n = 53)

The process of reflective journal practice helps me to:	Mean	Standard Deviation
link theory to practice	3.66	1.037
identify areas where my knowledge is good	3.83	0.995
identify areas where my skills are good	3.75	0.979
identify areas where my knowledge is weak	3.83	0.955
identify areas where my skills are weak	3.75	0.979
promote my critical thinking	3.53	1.137
enhance my reflective skills	3.87	1.075

Table 4

Frequencies: Feelings (n = 53)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
12. Reflective journal writing takes time to complete.	3.45	1.309
13. Reflective journal writing gives me a lot of anxiety.	2.74	1.288
14. My reflective writing skills are very good.	3.49	0.973
18. Reflective journal writing helps me to improve my nursing practice.	3.19	1.161
27. I am concerned that the professor will judge me because of what I write in my reflective journal.	3.47	1.310

30. Journals are too personal to be graded.	3.43	1.135
32. There are benefits to journal writing.	3.66	0.999
33. Guidelines provided for reflective journal writing were helpful.	3.62	1.113
34. It is difficult to write about feelings.	3.08	1.222

Table 5

Frequencies: Honesty (n = 53)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
15. It is difficult to be honest in reflective journal writing when it is going to be graded.	3.19	1.358
19. Truthfulness in reflective journal writing is dependent on grading.	2.92	1.064
20. Reflective journal writing is to learn the process of reflection and not always about truthfulness.	2.88	1.060
21. Honesty in reflective journal writing is important.	3.96	0.907
24. It is important to be truthful in reflective journal writing no matter the consequences.	3.50	1.180
25. I reflect on how honest I can be in what I write.	3.56	0.978

Table 6

Frequencies: Grading (n = 53)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
16. The percentage of the grade value affects my truthfulness of what is written.	3.09	1.275

17. Grading of journals improves my critical thinking skills.	2.62	1.042
28. The process of reflective journal writing should be graded and not the actual content.	3.68	1.070
35. I agree with the grading of reflective journal writing.	2.60	1.098
36. Grading of reflective journal writing is a tool to assess my learning.	2.83	1.252

Table 7

Frequencies: Embellishment (n = 53)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
22. It is acceptable to embellish (make-up) experiences to get a higher grade.	2.23	1.171
23. It is acceptable to make-up an experience to demonstrate behavioral changes even if it did not occur.	2.19	1.144
26. I have embellished experiences to get a higher grade.	2.49	1.393
29. There is nothing wrong to embellished journal writing because everyone embellishes.	2.02	0.888
31. There is nothing wrong with writing what the instructor wants to read.	2.47	1.170

Reliability Testing

Cronbach's Alpha was used for calculation of reliability. Reliability analysis was carried out using SPSS versions 25. Cronbach's Alpha measures the internal consistency of what is being tested and is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 (Tavakol &

Dennick, 2011). Table 8 indicates that Cronbach's Alpha for this instrument acceptable ranging from 0.115 to 0.917. These results are within the limits of 0 and 1 as indicated in Table 8.

Table 8

Reliability Statistics

	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
Feelings	0.551	9
Honesty	0.215	6
Grading	0.115	5
Embellishment	0.895	5
RJW*	0.917	7
*Reflective Journal Writing		

None of the survey items were deleted. The acceptable value of ≥ 0.70 is optimal for this research instrument. However, Cronbach's alpha for each variable indicates the instrument is reliable.

Hypothesis Testing

The alpha value to prevent Type I errors was set at 0.05 level of significance while the Type II error rate (β) established at 1.00. The effect size (r) was set at 3.0. The p-value is $p < 0.05$.

A correlation analysis utilizing a bivariate correlation 2-tailed Pearson's r was done (see Tables 9 and 10). A 2-tailed test was done to evaluate the direction of the relationship; directional hypothesis is an indicator of a relationship, while a non-directional indicates there is a significant statistical relationship between dependent

variables (feelings, honesty, grading, embellishment) and the independent variable (reflective journal writing), but not the direction (Polit & Beck, 2012). The 2-tailed test indicates that there is a relationship as indicated in Table 10

Table 9

Correlations: Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Standard Deviation
RJW total	3.7466	0.83752
Embellish total	2.2792	0.97692
Honesty total	3.2925	0.51256
Grading total	2.9660	0.54028
Feelings total	3.0063	0.49423
Valid N (listwise)	53	

The correlation (see Table 10) is significant at the 0.01 level and 0.05 level (2-tailed); correlations between RJW and honesty is (.322) and is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed); correlations between RJW with grading (.519) and feelings (.356) is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The correlation between honesty with grading (.375) and with feelings (.554) is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). The correlation between grading and feelings (.487) is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The correlation with embellishment and RJW (-0.241), honesty (0.146), grading (0.155), and feelings (0.225) is low and non-significant. These results indicate that a correlation exists between the independent variable RJW and the dependent variables honesty, grading, and feelings. In response to the optional question, I have always been honest in my reflective journal writing, 30 participants responded positively; 16 responded negatively; and 7 did not reply. These responses indicate that participants considered honesty to be an important

component of reflective journal writing and that perhaps there are some who are honest about their dishonesty.

Table 10

Correlations: Bivariate (n=53)

		RJW total	Embellish total	Honesty total	Grading total	Feelings total
RJW total	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.241	.322*	.519**	.356**
	Sig. (2- tailed)		0.082	0.019	0.000	0.009
Embellish total	Pearson Correlation	- 0.241	1	0.146	0.155	0.225
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.082		0.296	0.267	0.106
Honesty total	Pearson Correlation	.322*	0.146	1	.375**	.554**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.019	0.296		0.006	0.000
Grading total	Pearson Correlation	.519**	0.155	.375**	1	.487**
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.000	0.267	0.006		0.000
Feelings total	Pearson Correlation	.356**	0.225	.554**	.487**	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	0.009	0.106	0.000	0.000	

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

c. Listwise N=53

The research hypothesis is as follows:

Ho: There is no relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing.

H1: There is a relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing

Statistical results obtained indicate that a significant positive relationship exists; correlations between honesty with grading is .375 with $p = 0.006$ and is statistically significant. A moderate positive correlation with statistical significance exists between reflective journal writing and grading ($r = .519$, $p = 0.000$); and a significant relationship exists between reflective journal writing and honesty ($r = .322$ and $p = 0.019$ at 0.05 level). Other interesting findings indicate that a positive relationship exists between reflective journal writing and feelings ($r = .356$ with a $p = 0.009$ at a 0.01 level); grading and feelings ($r = .487$ with $p = 0.000$); honesty and feelings ($r = .554$ with $p = 0.000$ at the 0.01 level).

Findings related to RJW and embellishment are indicative of a negative correlation ($r = -0.241$, $p = 0.082$ at 0.05 level); embellishment and honesty ($r = 0.146$, $p = 0.296$); and embellishment and grading ($r = 0.255$, $p = 0.106$). The results are low and non-significant.

The optional question asked participants if they have always been honest in reflective journal writing; 46 of the 53 students responded; 30 or 56.5% stated they have always been honest in reflective journal writing and 16 or 30.2% answered they have not.

Based on the findings of this study, the null hypothesis was rejected: there is a relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing.

Chapter Summary

This study focused on the grading of reflective journals and student honesty. A total of 53 students responded to the survey. A correlation analysis utilizing a bivariate correlation 2-tailed Pearson's r revealed that a relationship exists between variables. There was a significant relationship noted between grading of reflective journals and student honesty. The hypothesis testing revealed significant results; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in relation to RJW and grading, honesty, and feelings.

The next chapter provides a summary of findings with comparison to previous studies. The implications for nursing education, nursing practice, nursing research, and public policy are also addressed. Limitations of this study and recommendations for future studies are also discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Summary

The purpose of this quantitative, non-experimental, bivariate study was to examine if a relationship exists between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing. The theoretical framework for this study was based on Schön's reflective practice theory. This theoretical framework is suitable for reflective practice and the grading of reflective journals as students participate in reflective journal writing, learning from experience and their responses to the situation, scaffolding on previous knowledge with application of new knowledge. The philosophical underpinnings of the reflective practice theory are guided by the constructivist thought in which a practitioner takes control of his or her own knowledge while making sense of the experiences (Schön, 1987).

The theoretical framework of the reflective practice theory includes awareness, critical analysis, and new perspectives. It focuses on students' reflecting honestly on the experience or learning situation encountered. Psychological and physical limitations to honest reflection are due to preconceived ideas or beliefs about expectations and whether students have fears and feelings related to honest reflection. Physical limitations related to honest reflection include grading of reflective journals, accurately recalling the situation or experience, and clinical experiences that did not lend themselves to honest reflection. Results support the theoretical framework in that a significant relationship

exists between reflective journal writing, student honesty, grading of journals, and feelings. The relationship between reflective journal writing and embellishment is not statistically significant and not supported by the theoretical framework.

Summary of the Findings

The findings of this study confirm the existence of a relationship between grading reflective journals and student honesty. These results contribute to the literature and to the understanding that a gap exists between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. Results also demonstrated that feelings have bearing on reflective journal writing.

Integration of the Findings with Previous Literature

There is no shortage of literature discussing reflective practice and journal writing. Themes that emerged from the reviewed literature were reflective practice, honesty and truthfulness in reflective writing, grading of reflective journals, feelings, and embellishment. This section will provide a comparison of literature reviewed with findings from the present study.

Reflective Practice

Literature revealed that nursing education and healthcare professionals use reflective practice as a learning tool and as a strategic approach when coping with practice and workplace demands (Clouder, 2010). Reflection impacts the learning process and decision-making skills (Fernandez, Chelliah & Halim, 2015; Hymas 2010). Tsingos-Lucas et al. (2016) reported reflective thinking improves and influences practice. However, articles reviewed also revealed that not all nurses and nursing students are able to reflect in a meaningful way, lacking the ability to recall accurately (Mackintosh, 1998).

Articles revealed that reflective practice is not the only way to develop and improve skills or to improve professional performance (Chirema, 2007; Clouder, 2010) because learning is not always an outcome of reflective practice (Power, 2012; Ruth-Sahd, 2003). In this present study, findings indicate that students believe that the process of reflective journal writing helps them to promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills as well as identify areas of improvement related to knowledge and skills. Participants also revealed that the process of reflective journal writing enhances reflective skills.

Honesty in Reflective Writing

The review of literature revealed that while honesty is important in reflective journal writing (Johnson et al., 2007; Poole et al., 2013), students find it difficult to be honest because they feel they are being judged on what they write. Studies conducted by McMullan (2006) and Maloney et al. (2013) revealed that students felt they could not always be completely honest all of the time. These findings are in harmony with this present study as results indicated that there is a significant relationship between reflective journal writing and student honesty, especially when grading is involved.

Grading of Reflective Journals

Findings from the present study revealed that a significant relationship does exist between grading of journals and reflective journal writing. Similar results were reported in the study conducted by McMullan (2006) where students felt that assessment of portfolios rendered them less effective. The literature review conducted for this study revealed that students do not agree with assessment or grading of journals (Crème, 2005; Dymont & O'Connell, 2003; O'Connell & Dymont, 2006; Sutton et al., 2007).

Feelings and Embellishment

Students tend to have difficulty with reflective journal writing especially when feelings are involved. Literature revealed that emotions affect the learning process and what is written (Poole et al., 2013); students may feel uncomfortable in sharing thoughts in writing (Asselin, 2011; Fernandez et al., 2015; Platzer et al., 2000). These same findings were reported by McMullan (2006) who stated that students found reflective journal writing to be a source of anxiety. Findings from the present reflective journal writing study concur with the literature reviewed as results indicated that a significant relationship exists between reflective journal writing and student feelings.

Literature reviewed indicated that embellishment is also of concern in reflective journal writing and that students write what they think the professor wants to read in order to get better grades and please the professor. Studies reported that students write to fit instructor expectations by fabricating experiences (Maloney et al., 2013), manipulating the outcomes (Chong, 2009), and making assumptions by writing what faculty wants to read (O'Connell & Dymont, 2013). Results obtained from the current reflective journal writing study indicate that there is a negative relationship with reflective journal writing and embellishment, indicating that embellishment does not have a significant impact on reflective journal writing.

Implications of the Findings

The implications of the findings were significant for reflective journal writing and grading, honesty, and feelings. Findings for embellishment were not significant.

Implications for Nursing Education

This current study revealed that while students may fabricate or manipulate experiences, a relationship does not exist between reflective journal writing and embellishment in order to obtain higher grades. However, a relationship does exist between reflective journal writing and grading, honesty, and feelings. Currently, student evaluation and how grades are assigned is done through grading of reflective journals. These results indicate that grading of reflective journals needs to be reassessed to ensure that students are benefitting from honest reflection on the occurrence using critical thinking and problem-solving skills to augment learning instead of focusing on the grade received. This will allow students to focus on their learning needs and becoming self-directed learners.

Implications for Nursing Practice

Reflective journal writing is a large component in nursing practice. During clinical practice, nursing students are encouraged to think critically about their experiences, including challenges encountered, and to reflect and write about it following the reflective process. These journals are then read and graded by clinical faculty. In view of the results of the current study indicating that there is a significant relationship between reflective journals, grading, student honesty, and feelings, it is beneficial to review the grading of reflective journals. When students reflect honestly, they are empowered to take control of their acquired new knowledge and apply it to future learning experiences and situations encountered which will result in improved patient outcomes (Gustafsson & Fagerberg, 2004; Teekman, 2000). Unsafe clinical practices can lead to poor patient outcomes, especially if students are not honestly reflecting on their

experience. Therefore, grading of reflective journals needs to be reassessed in view of possible patient outcomes.

Implications for Nursing Research

The literature review did indicate that a gap exists between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. Findings from the current study reveal that a significant relationship does exist between these two variables. This indicates that further research is necessary; the process used to reflect is what should be graded instead of the actual content.

Implications for Public Policy

Reflective journal writing is practiced in many educational institutions. The current study revealed that a relationship does exist between grading of reflective journals and student honesty. This implies that changes need to be addressed via policy that reassess the process of assigning grades to reflective writing, possibly assigning complete or incomplete. If the decision is to continue to grade reflective journals, then detailed grading rubrics should be developed so that all faculty involved follow the same grading system, thus ensuring fairness. It is hoped that findings from this study will be a factor in future decisions as to whether to grade or not to grade reflective journals.

Limitations and Future Studies

The current study was not without limitations. One major limitation encountered was that a questionnaire/survey that addressed the relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty did not exist. The researcher found two questionnaires which had questions that could be incorporated into a new instrument. Based on these two questionnaires and literature, a new instrument was developed. Since

this was the first time that this researcher developed a survey instrument and because of inexperience, items in the survey were not grouped into subsections, so grouping had to be done manually during data analysis. A lack of good instruments for educational research suggests more instrument development studies are needed.

The population group chosen for the study was also a challenge. Just before data collection, a new population group needed to be found because of a lack of interest from the chosen initial population. While this was not a limitation, it was challenging to find colleges and university whose students participate in reflective journal writing.

The sample size of 53 participants is a limitation. According to Polit and Beck (2012), a small sample size affects the power of the study, producing less precise results and increasing the margin of error. This study was limited only to prelicensure nursing students which is also a limitation. Results obtained are not indicative of how students in other professions feel about the grading of reflective journal writing.

Future Studies

It is recommended that future studies be conducted using a larger population size and including students from other professions. It is also recommended that the Reflective Journal Instrument survey be reviewed and revised with subsections for ease and expediency in data analysis. Subsections will also make it easier for participants to complete the survey.

A qualitative study is also recommended to study the lived experience of participating in reflective journal writing, addressing the same variables of honesty, feelings, embellishment, and grading of reflective journals. Conducting a qualitative or a

mixed methods study will support or refute findings. Quantitative studies do not allow participants to voice opinions and reasons for their choices and thoughts.

Chapter Summary

The current study indicated that there is a significant relationship between the grading of reflective journals and student honesty in reflective journal writing. Findings also revealed that a relationship exists with feelings, honesty, and grading of reflective journals. However, a negative relationship exists between embellishment and the grading of reflective journals.

This chapter provided insight into the implications of findings as they relate to nursing education, nursing practice, nursing research, and public policy. Findings from this study indicated that it would be beneficial if nurse leaders and policy makers examine reflective journal writing and how it is graded, possibly giving a complete/not complete grade so that reflective journal writing does not affect a student's overall GPA. Grading the process instead of what is written was also discussed in this chapter.

Limitations and future studies recommendations were also addressed. It was recommended that future studies be done with a larger sample size including students from diverse populations. It was also recommended that it would be beneficial to conduct a qualitative study in which students can voice their thoughts and feelings, add their opinions, and provide reasons why questions were answered in a specific manner.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Documents



MEMORANDUM

To: **Jo Anne Genua**

From: 
Center Representative, Institutional Review Board

Date: **January 4, 2018**

Re: **IRB #: 2018-10; Title, "The Relationship Between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing"**

I have reviewed the above-referenced research protocol at the center level. Based on the information provided, I have determined that this study is exempt from further IRB review under **45 CFR 46.101(b) (Exempt Category 2)**. You may proceed with your study as described to the IRB. As principal investigator, you must adhere to the following requirements:

- 1) **CONSENT:** If recruitment procedures include consent forms, they must be obtained in such a manner that they are clearly understood by the subjects and the process affords subjects the opportunity to ask questions, obtain detailed answers from those directly involved in the research, and have sufficient time to consider their participation after they have been provided this information. The subjects must be given a copy of the signed consent document, and a copy must be placed in a secure file separate from de-identified participant information. Record of informed consent must be retained for a minimum of three years from the conclusion of the study.
- 2) **ADVERSE EVENTS/UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS:** The principal investigator is required to notify the IRB chair and me  of any adverse reactions or unanticipated events that may develop as a result of this study. Reactions or events may include, but are not limited to, injury, depression as a result of participation in the study, life-threatening situation, death, or loss of confidentiality/anonymity of subject. Approval may be withdrawn if the problem is serious.
- 3) **AMENDMENTS:** Any changes in the study (e.g., procedures, number or types of subjects, consent forms, investigators, etc.) must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Please be advised that changes in a study may require further review depending on the nature of the change. Please contact me with any questions regarding amendments or changes to your study.

The NSU IRB is in compliance with the requirements for the protection of human subjects prescribed in Part 46 of Title 45 of the Code of Federal Regulations (45 CFR 46) revised June 18, 1991.



From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, June 21, 2018 2:53 PM
To: [REDACTED] IRB <[REDACTED]>
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: [REDACTED] Institutional Cooperation

Dear Jo Anne Genua,

[REDACTED] is pleased to collaborate with you on your project "The Relationship Between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing".

We understand that the purpose of this study is to determine if a relationship exists between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. Data will be collected online via Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) which is a secure web site used by researchers. We understand that this study is anonymous and no identifying information is collected. Collected data will be used in fulfillment of your PhD dissertation requirement. The approximate timeframe for the project is 6/2018 to 12/2018. We had ample opportunities to discuss the project with you and to ask for clarification. The student and key personnel for this project will maintain confidentiality of all participant information in all phases of this project.

According to our agreement, project activities will be carried out as described in the project plan reviewed and approved by the [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board. Pending approval of your amendment to study #2018-10 by the IRB of [REDACTED], this letter provides permission for [REDACTED] nursing students to be invited to participate in your study.

We look forward to working with you. Please consider this communication the official documentation of our cooperation.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
 Dean & Professor, School of Nursing

[REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]
 [REDACTED]

This message and accompanying documents are covered by the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, 18 U.S.C. sections 2510-2521, and contain information intended for the specified individual(s) only. This information is confidential. If you are not the intended recipient or an agent responsible for delivering it to the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that you have received this document in error and that any review, dissemination, copying, or the taking of any action based on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please notify us immediately by e-mail, and delete the original message.

Human Research Protection Committee

Notification of New Human Research Proposal Approval

July 25, 2018

Ms. Jo Anne Genua

Proposal title: The Relationship between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing
Approved Proposal #: 0022-2018
Funding Source: Participating departments
IRB review date: 07/24/2018
Effective date: 07/25/2018
Expiration date: N/A
IRB review type: Exempt
IRB review Action: Approved

Dear Ms. Genua,

On behalf of the Human Research Protection Committee, I have reviewed your project proposal titled: "The Relationship between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing" dated 07/18/2018 and have concluded that your proposed project employs surveys that pose no more than minimal risk to the participants. The information will be obtained in such a way that one's responses will not be linked to one's identity or identifying information. Moreover, accidental disclosure of the participants' responses would not have the potential to harm to the person's reputation, employability, financial status, or legal standing. For these reasons, I have determined that your proposed study is exempt from further IRB review.

Your proposal was evaluated in terms of the federal regulations that govern the protection of human subjects. Specifically, 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) identifies studies that are exempt from IRB review, including: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Although it is not required, I have a recommendation for your survey/consent form. If you choose to make the change, you do not need to submit a request for modification.

[REDACTED] Human Research Protection Committee
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

- 1) If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I understand that I can contact the chairperson of the [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board, Dr. [REDACTED]

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please contact me at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]
Chair of Institutional Review Board
Assistant Professor of Biology
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 10, 2018

Jo Anne Genua, MN, RN, CCHNC
 IRB Exemption 3399.071018: A Study in Grading Reflective Journal Writing

Dear Jo Anne Genua, MN, RN, CCHNC,

The [REDACTED] Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under exemption category 46.101(b)(2), which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46.101(b):

- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
- (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any changes to your protocol must be reported to the [REDACTED] IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by submitting a change in protocol form or a new application to the IRB and referencing the above IRB Exemption number.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible changes to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [REDACTED]

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

[REDACTED]



June 26, 2018

Jo Anne Genua, MN, RN, CCHNC

[REDACTED]
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Dear Ms. Genua,

This letter is to formally notify you that your research study, *"The Relationship between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing"* IRB # **NMC1718_33 EXTERNAL** has been secondarily approved (Primary Approval granted by [REDACTED] on June 13, 2018) and given exempt status authorized by 45 CFR §46.

You are authorized to begin this study on June 26, 2018. You will need to notify the IRB in writing when the project is completed or discontinued. You can use [REDACTED] Final Report Form for this purpose. If any unanticipated risks to the participants occur, these should be reported to IRB. Any changes in protocol will require that you submit a new IRB document.

If you have any questions, please contact [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

IRB Chairperson

[REDACTED] Institutional Review Board



May 18, 2018

Jo Anne Genua
Doctoral Student

[REDACTED]
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

Dear Ms. Genua:

I have received counsel from [REDACTED] chair of the Nursing Program at [REDACTED] regarding your request to involve nursing students at [REDACTED] in your study entitled *The Relationship Between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing*.

Pending the approval of your amendment to study #2018-10 by the IRB of [REDACTED], this letter provides permission for [REDACTED] nursing students, age 19 and older, to be invited to participate as volunteer subjects in this study. In the state of Nebraska, the age of majority is 19.

Permission is based on my understanding that the data collected will remain entirely confidential, any quotes utilized will not be identifiable to an individual within our limited population, and only aggregate data will be published or presented.

Substantive changes to the protocol, of course, will require further review by myself and [REDACTED]

Best wishes for your research.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

cc: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Appendix B

Reflective Journaling Instrument

Confidential

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Reflective Journaling Instrument

Please complete the survey below.

Thank you!

- 1) I understand that my completing this survey is voluntary and that the information that I provide will not be linked to me in any manner. I also understand that the information analyzed for a dissertation research study will be presented in aggregate form. I consent to my data being used for analysis for a dissertation. I am 19 years of age or older.

☐ Yes ☐ No

- 2) Age (please check one box only)

☐ 19 to 25 years ☐ 26 to 35 years ☐ 36 to 45 years ☐ 46 to 55 years ☐ 56 years and over

- 3) Gender:

☐ Male: ☐ Female:

- 4) Semester:

☐ Semester 1 ☐ Semester 2 ☐ Semester 3 ☐ Semester 4 ☐ Semester 5 ☐ Semester 6
☐ Semester 7 ☐ Semester 8

Section B: The process of reflective practice helps me to:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
5) link theory to practice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6) identify areas where my knowledge is good	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7) identify areas where my skills are good	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8) identify areas where my knowledge is weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9) identify areas where my skills are weak	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10) promote my critical thinking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11) enhance my reflective skills	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section C: Reflective Journal Writing

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
12) Reflective journal writing takes a lot of time to complete.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13) Reflective journal writing gives me a lot of anxiety.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
14) My reflective writing skills are very good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
15)					

Confidential

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It is difficult to be honest in reflective journal writing when it is going to be graded.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
16) The percentage of the grade value affects my truthfulness of what is written.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17) Grading of journals improves my critical thinking skills.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18) Reflective journal writing helps to improve my nursing practice.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19) Truthfulness in reflective journal writing is dependent on grading.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
20) Reflective journal writing is to learn the process of reflection and not always of about truthfulness.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
21) Honesty in reflective journal writing is important.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
22) It is acceptable to embellish (make-up) experiences to get a higher grade.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
23) It is acceptable to make up an experience to demonstrate behavioral changes even if it did not occur.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24) It is important to be truthful in reflective journal writing no matter the consequences.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25) I reflect on how honest I can be in what I write.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26) I have embellished (made-up) experiences to get a higher grade.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
27) I am concerned that the professor will judge me because of what I write in my reflective journal.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
28) The process of reflective journal writing should be graded and not the actual content.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
29) There is nothing wrong to embellished journal writing because everyone embellishes.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
30) Journals are too personal to be graded.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
31) There is nothing wrong with writing what the instructor wants to read.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
32)					

Confidential

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- | | | | | | |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| There are benefits in reflective journal writing. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 33) Guidelines provided for reflective journal writing were helpful. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 34) It is difficult to write about feelings. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 35) I agree with the grading of reflective journal writing. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 36) Grading of reflective journal writing is a tool to assess my learning. | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
- 37) OPTIONAL: I have always been honest in my reflective journal writing.
- ☐ Yes ☐ No

Appendix C

Communication with Potential Study Participants

Jo Anne Genua, MSN, RN, CCHNC
PhD Student
Nova Southeastern University
Ft. Lauderdale, Florida



May 2018

A Study in Grading Reflective Journal Writing Information Letter

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to take part in the research project identified above which is being conducted by Jo Anne Genua, PhD Student; Jo Anne is being helped by [REDACTED] (Dissertation Chair) and [REDACTED] (Faculty Advisor) at the Health Professions Division -- College of Nursing, Nova Southeastern University, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, USA.

In nursing, reflective journal writing is a means of engaging students in exerting ownership and involvement in the learning process, enabling self-powerment, creativity, critical thinking, and professionalism. Through reflective journaling, students demonstrate how experience transforms knowledge, revealing innermost feelings and emotions while trying to make sense of what occurred and attach new meanings to the experiences. Educators often use journal writing as an assessment tool; in fact, in many institutions, reflective journal writing receives a numeric mark or pass/fail grade.

The purpose of this research project is to determine if a relationship exists between grading of reflective journal writing and student honest/truthfulness is what is written.

Who can participate in the research?

Students, **19 years of age or older**, enrolled in the Baccalaureate Nursing Program semesters 3 to 8 are invited to participate in this research study.

What choice do I have?

Participation is **entirely voluntary**. Since there is no identifying information on the survey once completed, the survey cannot be withdrawn as there is no way of knowing which one was yours. Please be aware that whether you decide to participate or not, your grades will not be affected in any way. Overall results will be shared with nursing educators through publications and presentations following completion of the dissertation process.

All information collected will be kept confidential. It will be stored securely with the researcher and kept for a period of three years by the researcher, as required by the Ethics Board.

What will I be asked to do?

To participate you will be asked to complete an on-line survey using a 5-point Likert Scale. The survey is divided into three sections: Section A includes: age group, gender, and semester that you are enrolled in. Section B has 7 questions related to the process of reflective practice; and, Section C has 25 questions related to reflective journal writing. You can complete the survey at your convenience; it should take approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete.

Since the survey is anonymous with no identifying information, you are not being asked to physically sign a consent form to further protect your identity. By completing the survey your consent is implied and that you are age 19 or older.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

There are no risks in your participation as all data collected is completely anonymous with no identifying information. By participating, you will be contributing to strategies that need to be implemented that explore options in assessing students' learning using graded reflective journal writing.

How will the information collected be used?

Data collected will be used in fulfillment of my PhD dissertation requirement. Once dissertation has been approved, study results will be disseminated via evidence-based journals. No identifying information will be provided – study is anonymous.

Data will be collected online via Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap), developed and distributed by Vanderbilt University. It is a secure web site used by researchers. Data uploaded to American servers is open to access by American regulatory bodies, under the Patriot's Act to maintain safety. However, since this study is anonymous and no identifying information is collected, information provided remains secure, confidential and anonymous.

What do I need to do to participate?

Please read this Information Letter and be sure you understand its contents before you complete the survey. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have any questions, please contact me [REDACTED]

Thank you for considering this invitation,

Jo Anne Genua

PhD Candidate, MSN, BScN, RN, CCHN-C

Invitation to Participate Message

Dear Student:

My name is Jo Anne Genua and I am completing my doctoral studies at Nova Southeastern University, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. I am researching if there is a relationship between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty.

Proponents of grading journal writing state that it is the process that should be graded and not the written words. Others believe students write only what the professor wants to read and embellish (make up) their experiences so that a higher grade is given.

If you are 19 years of age or older, I am inviting you to participate in my research study *The Relationship Between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing*. The study consists of an anonymous on-line questionnaire which should take you approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Participation is completely voluntary. To participate you must be enrolled in the Baccalaureate Nursing Program, semesters 3 to 8. No identifying information will be collected and all data will be anonymous and confidential.

Please consider volunteering to be part of this research project. If you have any questions regarding this research study, please feel free to call me [REDACTED]

To complete the survey please click on the following link:

<https://redcap.nova.edu/redcap/surveys/?s=KXC9AKYMMM>

Thank you kindly,

Jo Anne Genua, PhD(c), MSN, BScN, RN
Instructor
Principal Investigator

Appendix D

Reminder Email to Students

Reminder to Participate Message

Dear Student:

If you have not already done so, please consider participating in my research study which I am completing for my doctoral studies at Nova Southeastern University.

I am researching if there is a relationship between the grading of reflective journal writing and student honesty. Proponents of grading journal writing state that it is the process that should be graded and not the written words. Others believe students write only what the professor wants to read and embellish (make up) their experiences so that a higher grade is given.

The study consists of an anonymous on-line questionnaire which should take you approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Participation is completely voluntary. To participate you must be 19 years of age or older and must be enrolled in the baccalaureate nursing program, semesters 3 to 8. No identifying information will be collected and all data will be anonymous and confidential.

Please consider volunteering to be part of this research project. If you have any questions regarding this research study, please feel free to call me [REDACTED]

To complete the questionnaire, please click on the following link:

<https://redcap.nova.edu/redcap/surveys/?s=KXC9AKYMMM>

Thank you kindly,

Jo Anne Genua, PhD(c), MSN, RN
Instructor
Principal Investigator

Appendix E

Permission to Adapt Surveys

Stephen Maloney [REDACTED]

|
Thu 11/3/2016, 5:09 PM

Reflective Q.xlsx
9 KB

Download

Save to OneDrive - [REDACTED]

Hi Jo,

I've tracked-back through my old files (remembering the data was collected way back in 2009 I think), and unfortunately I can't find the actual formatted survey I gave out. (we destroy most of our research docs after 5 years). However, I did find an excel sheet that was prepared for analysing the incoming data that I think has the correct questions. I've attached it for you. Without the actual data now destroyed, I don't think I can forward you anything that will help directly with assessing the surveys reliability and validity. I should think though that you could potentially get an expert or two in the area to give an opinion on the face-validity of the survey questions for your purpose.

Keep me updated with how you go.

Kind regards,
Steve

Associate Professor Stephen Maloney



From: Miriam McMullan [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, November 17, 2016 4:46 AM
To: Genua, Jo Anne [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Article: Students' perceptions on use of portfolios...A questionnaire survey & Permission

Dear Jo Anne,

My apologies for my delay in responding to you and thank you for your interest in my article on the 'Students' perceptions on the use of portfolios in pre-registration nursing education: A questionnaire survey'.

It took me awhile to find my electronic copy of my questionnaire, which I have attached. I am happy for you to use it as long as you reference it accordingly. Regarding the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, those details are in the paper.

I hope the questionnaire is of use to you. Be interested to hear the results you are getting.

Good luck with your PhD and best wishes,

Miriam

Dr Miriam McMullan

[REDACTED]

Appendix F
Certification of Authorship

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

HEALTH PROFESSIONS DIVISION
COLLEGE OF NURSING

CERTIFICATION OF AUTHORSHIP

Submitted to (Chair's Name): Julia Aucoin, DNS, RN, BC, CNE

Student's Name: Jo Anne Genua

Title of Submission: The Relationship Between the Grading of Reflective Journals and Student Honesty in Reflective Journal Writing

Certification of Authorship: I hereby certify that I am the author of this document and that any assistance I received in its preparation is fully acknowledged and disclosed in the document. I have also cited all sources from which I obtained data, ideas, or words that are copied directly or paraphrased in the document. Sources are properly credited according to accepted standards for professional publications. I also certify that this paper was prepared by me for this purpose.

Student's Signature: Jo Anne Genua.

Date of Submission: March 24, 2019