MAKING SENSE OF TEACHING: A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHER REFLECTION ABOUT PRACTICE

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Dissertation Prepared for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH TEXAS

August 2009

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The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of reflection and document how a holistic approach to teacher reflection contributes to teachers’ understanding of, and improvement in their pedagogical practice. The investigation asked how classroom observations, when followed by a reflective dialogue, impact pedagogical practice. The particular focus included how teachers make sense of observational data during a post-observation, reflective dialogue; how teachers reflect on classroom observational data; and how the holistic reflection experience impacts teachers’ pedagogical practice.

Three research questions guided this study. How do teachers make sense of observational data during a post observation reflective dialogue? How do teachers reflect on classroom observational data? How might the holistic reflection experience impact teachers’ pedagogical practice? Findings from this study provide implications for incorporating the practice of teacher reflection and reflective dialogue as professional development and for educational research.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to extend my thanks to my committee, your patience and willingness to work with me was greatly appreciated. To my major professor, Dr. Ron Wilhelm, you were my guide and mentor on this journey. To the teachers who willingly gave of their time to share their practice with me, you each embody the qualities of a reflective practitioner. To my friends, you celebrated the joys and patiently listened to the frustrations I encountered during my doctoral work.

A heartfelt and special thank you to my family, your loving support and encouragement made this possible.

To my parents with love and gratitude, you taught me to think, gave me the courage to dream, and the determination to persevere.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

The way of teaching demands a long journey that does not have any easily identifiable destination … It is a journey that I believe must include a backward step into the self and it is a journey that is its own destination.

Tremmel

With the sound of the school bell, a new school day begins. This day is similar to yesterday and yet so different. The teacher is confronted with some of the same issues as yesterday: homework, attendance, morning classroom procedures. So what makes today different? Today is unique because each day new challenges arise in the life of a teacher. With about 24 students in a class, each with diverse learning strengths and challenges, and each on different levels, teaching is an exceedingly complex activity. At any one moment in time teachers are required to make decisions that not only respond to the individual student but also address the needs of the class. With all the activity in the classroom environment, there is little or no time for teachers to stop and think about the consequences of their responses to a particular problem. Due to the nature of a teacher’s day, conscious reflection may be a relatively rare occurrence (Eraut, 2002, 1985) and is unlikely to develop as professional practice in the busy, demanding, world of teacher’s work (Court, Fund, & Kramarski, 2002).
Yet, it is in reflecting on the events and decisions of the day that teachers can learn about what works in practice. More often than not, however, teachers need immediate solutions to situations that arise in the classroom. There is rarely time for a deliberate study of an occurrence or time to distance oneself from these situations before delivery of a solution. When situations arise during the course of the teaching day, teachers instantaneously provide responses to what has occurred. This response is at times, instinctive, automatic, and intuitive. Dewey would call this response “purely impulsive or purely routine” (1910/2005, p.13). Having delivered that response, they move on to the next situation. But have they gained valuable insights that will inform their thinking and actions should a similar situation occur? They likely have not, unless they have taken the time to consciously reflect on the event and the results of the decision made.

Reflection is a personal journey that informs thinking and action. Through reflection teachers can gain professional knowledge, personal knowledge, and change or improve teaching practices. Reflection can bring to light those unconscious, deep held beliefs that guide a teacher’s daily actions. Through reflection teachers can recognize the values, beliefs, attitudes, and underlying assumptions that impact their practice.

My Journey

My journey with reflection really began about two years into teaching when I started to question the practices of English as a second language (ESL) and bilingual programs. As an ESL teacher at the time, I grew concerned when I saw
second language learners sitting in classrooms totally disengaged from the learning and their teachers, who had little or no training in second language acquisition, feeling helpless and frustrated when confronted with students who did not speak their language. I, too, felt frustrated because it seemed that the only time these children were expected to do anything other than sit and be quiet, was for the 60 or 90 minutes they were in the ESL or bilingual classrooms. I viewed this situation as a very unproductive, ineffective use of both the teachers’ and students’ time. Out of my early experiences and reflection, a theory developed. I believed, at the time, that the needs of the second language learner would be better served in an inclusionary setting with an ESL certified teacher who had knowledge of second language acquisition theory, effective teaching strategies for language learners, and who had high expectations for all students in the classroom. Inclusionary settings for second language learners are more prevalent today than when I started my teaching career. It was a novel idea in my first teaching situation.

At this point, I want to make it clear that I do not intend for this to be a dialogue or debate about the merits of different bilingual and ESL programs because it is outside the scope of this study. However, after 22 years of working with second language learners, I have revisited and revised my theories on effective instructional practices for second language learners several times. I mention it here because it is where my reflective journey began. I developed a theory during my years as an ESL and bilingual teacher, which I was able to test
six years after my teaching career began. I was assigned a regular sixth grade class. In addition to monolingual English only students, I had all the ESL and bilingual students in an inclusionary classroom setting. I spent much of that year re-inventing my practice. Needless to say and I certainly echo the voices of many new teachers, it was a challenging year and reflecting back to that time, I had much to learn and I learned much. My journey continued when I accepted the position as a sixth grade teacher in a team teaching situation at a small, urban, private school in a predominately Latino working class neighborhood in a large city in north Texas.

At the time the school was transitioning to a community school model and during this transition the teachers were very much engaged in re-envisioning what school should be, and we worked as a collaborative team with our administration to create that vision. Rich reflective dialogues emerged as we discussed our philosophies and visions for a community school. These dialogues caused me to think about the world of school outside my classroom and what the function of school should be in a community and society.

One of my roles as a teacher at this community school was to develop an integrated, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)-based curriculum that would meet the needs of a predominately Latino population. The opportunity to create and teach a curriculum opened the door to reflection for me, once again. I was constantly in the process of creating, teaching, revisiting what worked and what didn’t, and evaluating my teaching practices. Not only was I able to look
inwardly at my practice, the nature of the team-teaching situation facilitated reflection with a peer as well. I had a teaching partner who was a trusted, critical friend; someone who was living and working through the same curriculum and teaching challenges that I was. She and I revised our teaching philosophies together as we worked to create a classroom built on respect and high expectations for our students and ourselves. We believed that we had as much to learn about teaching as our students had to learn about the content. The frequent discussions about our daily successes, challenges, surprises, and disappointments provided a process for reflection although I did not recognize it as such at the time. Looking back now, I readily acknowledge that it was through the continued dialogue with a peer that I really began to revisit and evaluate what I did in the classroom.

Participating in research was a part of our teaching duties and being involved in on-going research gave us objective data about our teaching practice. The research conducted in my classroom provided a wealth of data from which I could critically evaluate my teaching practices. I found that just the presentation of the data caused me to examine critically my instructional strategies, relationships with student, and interactions with colleagues. Sometimes the data were congruent with the beliefs I held about my teaching practices and sometimes it caused cognitive dissonance, forcing me to re-evaluate my attitudes, beliefs, and values.
From 2003-2005, a team of three professors from the University of North Texas conducted an ethnographic case study at our school that included classroom observations coupled with interviews. The four-part interview process was an interesting reflective journey for me. The interview questions forced me to think about and articulate my practice in a way that I had not done before. Too often as teachers, we never really articulate our attitudes, beliefs, values, and aspirations and yet they are so much a part of our lived experience in the classroom. At the end of each interview, I had as many questions as I did answers about my teaching practices and I approached my work with renewed thoughts, insights, and energy. It was quite illuminating to see my practice through the eyes of another.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experience of reflection and document how a holistic approach to teacher reflection contributes to teachers’ understanding of, and improvement in their pedagogical practice. Moreover, I intended to investigate how classroom observations, when followed by a reflective dialogue, impact pedagogical practice. The particular focus included: how teachers make sense of observational data during a post-observation, reflective dialogue; how teachers reflect on classroom observational data; and how might the holistic reflection experience impact teachers’ pedagogical practice.
Research Questions

1. How do teachers make sense of observational data during a post observation reflective dialogue?

2. How do teachers reflect on classroom observational data?

3. How might the holistic reflection experience impact teachers’ pedagogical practice?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is its connection between reflective practice and teaching. Effective teachers continually seek ways to hone their craft and reflection can provide the means. The study is timely because it addresses a gap in the research on reflection. The use of journals and portfolios dominate the research on reflection practices of classroom teachers. The value of this study lies in a holistic approach that includes the use of the observational data, dialogue, and journal writing as the vehicles for reflection. The Engagement Visit Tool, used to collect the observational data, provides teachers with a snapshot of their behaviors and the students’ responses. It offers concrete, objective classroom data from which teachers may study their practice. The observation is followed by reflective dialogue because “awareness of one’s own intuitive thinking usually grows out of practice in articulating it to others” (Schön, 1983, p. 243), and the journals provide the opportunity for teachers to reflect individually on their practice because “the place to begin with the reflective practice is with yourself” (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere & Montie, 2001, p. 43). The observational
data, the journals, and the reflective dialogue, constituted the processes the teachers used for their reflective journeys in this investigation.

Methodology

This study consisted of a multiple-case study design that included the ethnographic techniques, outlined by Wolcott (1988), of participant-observation and the analysis of written and non-written sources as data. I functioned as an observer during classroom instruction and as a participant in the reflective dialogues. Teacher participants’ reflective journals provided the written sources of data and transcribed audio recordings of our post-observation reflective dialogues provide non-written sources of data.

Assumptions

In this study, the following assumptions were necessary for the validity of the conclusions drawn from the data:

1. Participants were honest in writing their reflection journals.
2. Participants honestly responded to the questions during the reflection exchange dialogue.
3. Participants trusted me as the researcher.

Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions were used:

Reflective practice: “A deliberate pause to assume an open perspective, to allow for higher-level thinking processes. Practitioners use these processes for examining beliefs, goals, and practices, to gain new or deeper understanding that
lead to actions that improve learning for students. These actions could involve changes in behavior, skills, attitudes, or perspectives within an individual, partner, small group, or school” (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001 p. 6).

**Peer observation**: An observation conducted by a peer to provide the classroom teacher with objective data about his or her teaching practices.

**Reflective dialogue**: A reflective conversation between teaching colleagues that focuses on improving educational practice and student learning.

**Reflection journal**: A regular, written record of a teacher’s thoughts about his or her lived experiences, including practices, in the classroom and used to facilitate metacognitive reflection on the teaching experience.

Limitations of the Study

Reflection and making meaning from practice takes longer than the six weeks of this study. Pedagogical practices and philosophical changes are a result of a lifetime of experience and are dependent on each individual’s personality and life story, among other factors. The short duration of this investigation allowed for a limited insight into how teachers make meaning of their practice. The small number of participants in this multiple-case study prohibited generalization of the data. Within a qualitative framework individuals are studied in depth from multiple perspectives, using a variety of methodologies; therefore the study would need to be replicated to strengthen validity of the findings.
Another limitation is the prior relationship I had with the participants. My role prior to the study was one of peer or colleague. I taught alongside several of the teachers in the study and currently work closely with all the teachers to write, revise, and align their curriculum. This relationship may have influenced the study in some way if teachers did not distinguish my role as colleague from that of researcher.

**Delimitations**

This study built on the trusting relationship that was already been established between me as colleague and the participants. That established trust allowed me as researcher to engage in reflective dialogue with a colleague or critical friend and acknowledge that for honest conversations or dialogue about practice to occur there must be an established relationship of trust. The importance of trusting relationships has been well documented (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; and Sparks, 2006).

Trust is perhaps the essential condition needed to foster reflective practice in any environment. If the reflective process is going to flourish in an organizational setting, the participants must be confident that the information they disclose will not be used against them – in subtle or not so subtle ways (Kottkamp & Osterman, 1993, p. 45).

Reflection can be emotionally risky and uncomfortable for teachers as they scrutinize the values, beliefs, and feelings that are part of their teaching practice (Eby, Herrel, & Hicks, 2002) and it requires a trusting, safe, supportive
environment. The researcher taught with some of these teachers and now contributes to writing and revising their curriculum as a colleague. As a result of this an honest and trusting relationship has already been established with the participants and which may transfer to my relationship with them as the researcher. This relationship is essential for the open, honest communication required for critical reflection and may be a key component to getting to the heart of how these teachers reflect and derive meaning from practice.

Another delimitation in this study is the use of the Engagement Visit Tool, the Reflective Dialogue Protocol and the Reflective Journal Protocol. The Engagement Visit Tool was used in an effort to provide objective classroom data. The Reflective Dialogue Protocol and the Reflective Journal Protocol were use to provide a beginning point for reflection. I sought to understand reflection, a thinking process that can be elusive both the Reflective Dialogue Protocol and the Reflective Journal Protocol were the means to capture the teachers’ reflection. These are delimitations because they impact teacher reflections.

Summary

In seeking answers to the three research questions, (a) how do teachers make sense of observational data during a post observation conference, (b) how do teachers reflect on observational data, and (c) how might the holistic reflection experience impact practice, I conducted a multiple-case study that utilizes ethnographic techniques of participant-observation and the analysis of written and non-written sources as data, outlined by Wolcott (1988). Teachers' reflective
journeys were revealed through peer observations, peer dialogues and reflective journals. Chapter 2 discusses the literature related to reflection and presents the theoretical foundations of reflection, reflection as revealed by current educational practices and the research as it relates to the research questions. Chapter 3 presents a detailed discussion of the phenomenological methodology used to pursue the research questions. Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the findings as they relate to the research questions. Chapter 5 offers a discussion of the findings and the implications for reflective practice in education.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In Chapter 1, I discussed the value of a reflective practice in education and established a rational for documenting the reflective journeys of practicing classroom teachers; teachers who are participating in professional development that includes observations and reflective dialogue. In this chapter, in order to build a foundational knowledge of reflection and current reflection practices, I discuss in detail the theoretical framework of reflection, models of reflection, and reflection as it is viewed and implemented in current educational practices.

Reflection is derived from the Late Latin word *reflexio* meaning the act of bending back. Any search for the definition of reflection will reveal that reflection is defined in various disciplines, including physics and mathematics. In addition to the three entries of reflection, angle of reflection, and self-reflection, the long list of meanings for reflection in the Merriam and Webster Dictionary Online (2008) include: “the return of light or sound waves to the surface,” “the production of an image by or as if by a mirror,” “an often obscure or indirect criticism,” “a thought, idea, or opinion formed, or remark made as a result of meditation,” and “consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose.” But what application does reflection have for education? Valli (1997) suggests reflection or reflective practice in teaching occurs when teachers, “link theory to practice by using varied sources of information, examine their own practice and school polices in order to
become better teachers, analyze problems from multiple perspectives, and use new evidence to reassess decisions” (p. 70). For McAlpine and Weston (2000) reflection is an ongoing process that allows one to access prior knowledge and construct new knowledge from experience; a process that expands one’s knowledge and increases one’s ability to use reflection effectively and to develop as a teacher. “Reflection consists of those processes in which learners engage to recapture, notice and re-evaluate their experience, to work with their experience to turn it into learning” (Boud & Walker, 1993, p. 9). Reflection, as defined by Valverde (1982), is a process in which a teacher examines the effectiveness of his/her behavior and practices within his/her given teaching situation. Educators, who are reflective in their practice, continually analyze their actions and make modifications to meet the needs of the students (Reiman, 1999); and they also consider the value of their instructional strategies and revise them to advance their effectiveness.

Theoretical Framework

Reflective practice in education is not a new idea. John Dewey’s philosophical framework provides the foundation for the knowledge base on reflection and it continues to guide the current research on reflection in education. Reflective thought, as defined by Dewey, is “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and further conclusions to which it tends” (Dewey, 1910/2005, p. 7). This kind of intentional thought, according to Dewey, liberates
one from actions that are “purely impulsive or purely routine” (p.13). Reflecting, for Dewey, involves turning things over in the mind and hunting for additional evidence or new data, while reflective thinking involves suspending judgment during further inquiry. Reflective thought is a process in which “the ground or basis for a belief is deliberately sought and its adequacy to support the belief examined” (Dewey, 1910/2005, p. 3). In each reflective operation, Dewey identifies two sub-processes. The first of these sub-processes is a state of perplexity, hesitation, or doubt, and the second sub-process is the act of searching for additional facts which serve to substantiate or refute a given belief. Dewey contends, therefore, that the “demand for the solution of a perplexity is the steadying and guiding factor in the entire process of reflection” (p. 11). Seeking the answer to a puzzling situation may be the guiding factor for the process of reflection but there are other essential qualities that need to be present for reflection to occur. Dewey further identifies these three essential qualities or attributes as: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. Open-mindedness is the ability to give thought to more than one side of an issue, consider alternative viewpoints, and to acknowledge that even deeply held beliefs can be questioned. Responsibility implies not only the desire to actively seek the truth and apply the knowledge gained as a result of that search, but it also includes being in control of one’s actions and being aware of the consequences of those actions for others. Wholeheartedness describes an approach to learning and knowledge that is filled with eagerness, excitement and
an abiding commitment to open-mindedness and responsibility. Dewey (1910/2005) maintained that the business of education is:

To cultivate deep-seated and effective habits of discriminating tested beliefs from mere assertions, guesses, and opinions; to develop a lively, sincere, and open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded, and to ingrain into the individual’s working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to various problems that present themselves...The formation of these habits is the Training of Mind. (pp. 23-24)

Dewey believed teachers should develop these habits of mind to inform their instruction, and to cultivate these attitudes and habits in their students. This is done through reflection. Dewey recognized that reflecting on teaching experiences leads to greater learning therefore he advocated for experiential learning that fostered reflection on the experience and systematic testing of ideas (Dewey, 1916).

In The Reflective Practitioner (1983), Donald Schön expands on Dewey’s ideas of reflection valuing firsthand experience over any other form of knowledge. He identifies tacit knowledge as a central theme of his theory of reflective practice.

A practitioner’s reflection can serve as a corrective to over learning. 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)

According to Schön (1987), practitioners hold tacit knowledge that is natural; they know more than they can talk about. Therefore, Schön (1983, 1987) sets forth a model of reflection in which knowing and thinking are inextricably connected to action: identifying modes of reflection that include reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-for-action is the planning stages of instruction. It refers to the teacher's actions before instruction where the teacher analyzes the content to be taught and the needs of the students in order to plan the instructional strategies. Reflection-in-action can be described as thinking on your feet or learning by doing. This kind of reflection requires flexibility and creativity. Not only can a person think about doing something, but he or she can think about doing something while doing it. Reflection-in-action allows practitioner to respond creatively to new situations. Practitioners who reflect-in-action (Schön, 1983) are able to “describe their own intuitive understanding” (p. 276) and “question the definitions of their task, the theories-in-action that they brings to it, and the measures of performance by which they are controlled” (p. 337). Reflection-in-action is therefore “central to the art through which practitioners sometimes cope with the troublesome divergent situations of practice” (Schön, 1983, p. 62). A teacher is faced with dilemmas on a day-to-day basis; dilemmas with no definitive solution that force teachers to be flexible and adapt. It is this ability to adapt or change mid-stream, based on the
given situation or new information, that constitutes reflection-in-action. It is thinking about doing something when actions can still affect the outcome. Schön (1987) believes that while these decisions are intuitive and spontaneous, they are informed by and result from the teacher’s knowledge base and experience. Schön (1987) states:

An artful teacher sees a child’s difficulty in learning to read not as a defect in the child but as a defect of his own instruction. So he must do a piece of experimental research, then and there, in the classroom. He must be ready to invent new methods and must endeavor to develop in himself the ability of discovering them. (p. 66)

Reflection-on-action, on the other hand, occurs after the teaching episode has passed. It is intentionally thinking about the dilemma or incident after it has occurred in an effort to inform future practice. Reflection-on-action is an evaluation of sorts of one’s performance. This type of reflection is retrospective. Journaling and teacher portfolios are examples of reflection-on-action. Both these modes of reflection, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, are not developmental in nature or dependent on each other and may all occur during one single event. Schön (1983) posited that teaching is an action complicated by uncertainty and that it was only through reflection that teachers understand what occurs in the classroom. Romano (2006), tried to capture reflection-in-action by asking participants to identify bumpy moments or teaching incidents that required the teacher to stop and think before making an immediate decision on a course
of action. The study sought to determine what teachers consider to be bumpy moments, what they think about when they encounter a bumpy moment, what knowledge and beliefs they bring to bumpy moments, and what is the origin of their knowledge and beliefs. The bumpy moments the teachers identified were either related to management issues, time management, and lack of preparation for the lesson. Romano concludes, “Closer examination and more through reflection on ‘bumpy moments’ in teaching could provide practicing teachers with the opportunity to consider alternatives that may lead to changes in their teaching practice” (p. 984).

Commenting on Schön’s work, Dyke (2006) offered that “critical thinking and reflection are sharpened by dialogue with others” and that “perhaps Schön’s account requires greater consideration of ‘reflection for action’” (p.114). Professionals learning from their primary experience and the experience of others through shared dialogue constitute reflection for actions. According to Dyke, the idea of reflection for action is based on the “assumption that we can make more knowledgeable decisions about how to act in the world if we reflect on our experience and engage with others” (p.114). Dyke adds that “informed decisions require thoughtful action that is sensitive and responsive to the context, to primary experience and the experience of others; which includes formal theory and research based knowledge” and cautions that the “consequences of asserting the value of practitioner experience …can empower the practitioner but also result in a lack of openness to learning from others” (p. 114). Here Dyke
connects with Dewey’s idea that reflection requires open-mindedness. In this case open-mindedness refers to being open to the ideas and experiences of others and using these ideas and experiences to inform one’s thinking and actions.

Models of Reflection

Unlike Schön, Van Manen (1977) believes that reflection is hierarchical and sequential with critical reflection as the deepest level of reflectivity. He proposed three distinct levels of reflection: technical rationality, practical reflection, and critical reflection and believed that a reflective practitioner addresses the needs of each level before proceeding to the next. The first level, technical rationality is concerned with and confined to analyzing the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategies used in the classroom. This level “refers to the technical application of educational knowledge and of basic curriculum principles for the purpose of attaining a given end” (p. 226). The effective application of skills and technical knowledge in the classroom setting is of value here. However, “in the face of an abundance of theories, principles, and views…the need for a higher level of deliberative rationality becomes apparent” (p. 226). This gives way to the second level of reflectivity indentified in the literature as practical reflection. This level focuses on the learning experience of the student and is concerned with the assumptions underlying classroom practices and the consequences of those educational practices on student learning.
The practical then refers to the process of analyzing and clarifying individual and cultural experiences, meanings, perceptions, assumptions, prejudgments, and presuppositions, for the purpose of orienting practical actions. Curriculum and teaching-learning are seen as processes of establishing communication and common understandings. At this level of the practical, the focus is on an interpretive understanding both of the nature and quality of educational experience, and of making practical choices. (pp. 226-227)

Van Manen (1977) believes that a still higher level of reflective rationality is needed in order to determine the value of educational goals and experiences. On the highest level, critical reflection looks at “the question of the worth of knowledge and to the nature of the social conditions necessary for raising the question of worthwhileness” and “involves a constant critique of domination, of institutions, and of repressive forms of authority” (p. 227). There is a focus on the value of knowledge and for whom knowledge has value. This level calls for consideration of the moral and ethical dilemmas that relate directly or indirectly to the classroom. Implied in Van Manen’s work on the levels of reflection is the idea that when educators engage in all three levels of reflection, they maximize their professional growth and learning.

Van Manen (1991) detailed three types of reflection that are consistent with Schön’s reflection-for-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-on-action. Defined as the planning stage, anticipatory reflection is the point where a teacher
deliberates about alternatives and possible courses of action. Anticipatory reflection is future oriented and “helps us to approach situations and other people in an organized, decision-making, prepared way” (p.101). Similar to Schön’s reflection-in-action, Van Manen’s active or interactive reflection happens when teachers are faced with a situation that requires them to stop and think in the midst of action. However, Van Manen believes this type of reflection, which is grounded in the present, is difficult in the context of a teacher’s hectic pace. “While we are interacting we usually do not have time or opportunity to reflect on our experience as it is happening” (p. 101). The third type, re-collective or retrospective reflection is past oriented and occurs when the teacher takes time after the fact to make sense of the experience to gain insights into what occurred, why it occurred, and if follow-up action is required. Both Van Manen and Schön see reflection as a continual process moving from one type of reflection to the other.

Supporting Van Manen’s idea that reflection is hierarchical, Mezirow (1991), whose work has also contributed to the understanding of reflective thinking and critical reflection, developed a taxonomy in his Transformational Learning Theory. In this Transformational Learning Theory, premise reflection constitutes the deepest level of reflection. Premise reflection is defined by other theorists as critical reflection. Mezirow’s taxonomy of reflection includes three levels of thinking. The first level, non-reflection action is sub-divided into habitual action, which includes learned actions that are preformed with little conscious
thought; thoughtful action, which includes access to prior knowledge but doesn’t examine it critically; and introspection, which is an awareness of the feelings connected with the learned action. This first level of thinking or reflection is very superficial and is almost non-reflective because these actions are indicative of those routines, procedures, and mandated methods that are performed automatically. The second level is reflective action, also sub-divided, and consists of: content reflection, which is reflection on one’s thoughts, feelings, or perceptions; process reflection, which is reflection on how one perceives, thinks, feels, or acts; and content and process reflection, which combines both content and process reflections. The final level is premise reflection, which is the awareness of the reasons underlying one’s perceptions, thoughts, feelings and actions. This is the deepest level because it refers to reflections that lead to the transformation of those beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that limit the way an individual thinks and learns.

Connecting to the works of both Van Manen (1977) and Mezirow (1991), Valli (1997) supports the idea that reflection may be hierarchical and acknowledges that certain types of reflection may be prerequisites to others. For example “A basic grasp of technical knowledge and skill might be needed for deliberative reflection” (p. 72). After an extensive review of the literature, Valli identifies five different types of reflection and labels these five types of reflection as: technical reflection, reflection-in and on-action, deliberative reflection, personalistic reflection, and critical reflection. Valli believes all five types “... can
help teachers consider different types of decisions that need to be made, different sources of information for good decision making, and different ways of relating those sources to teaching practice” (p. 74).

Valli (1997) defines technical reflection, in a manner that is consistent with Van Manen’s idea of technical rationality, stating that it occurs within narrow, pre-established boundaries and is rules governed. With this type of reflection teachers think about their teaching performance on the basis of externally determined criteria and try to match their teaching behaviors with the research findings on good teaching. Borrowing from Schön’s (1983) work on reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action to inform her work on the second type of reflection, Valli states that “reflection-in and on-action values practical, craft knowledge” and “the teacher’s voice is regarded as the expert rather than the researcher’s” (p. 76). Reflective action is guided by “each teacher’s values, beliefs, classroom context, and students” and “judged by the teacher’s ability to make and justify good decisions based on his or her own situation and experience” (p. 76). Deliberative reflection, the third type of reflection identified by Valli, is “based on a variety of sources: research, experience, the advice of teachers, personal beliefs and values and so forth” (p. 77). With the variety of sources, teachers will be confronted with conflicting information. Deliberative reflection comes about from considering all the information and making the best decision in light of conflicting view points. Weighing alternative perspectives and providing reasons for the decisions made are a result of deliberative reflection.
Personal growth and relational issues are at the heart of the fourth type of reflection. Personalistic reflection occurs when teachers reflecting in a personal way consciously link their personal and professional lives. Valli explained, “Teachers who reflect in a personalistic way would be caretakers, not just information dispensers” and “the quality of their reflection would be determined by the ability to empathize” (p. 78). The goal of critical reflection, the fifth and last type of reflection outlined by Valli, is “not just understanding, but improving the quality of life of disadvantaged groups” (p. 78). Critical reflection leads to changing the “teaching practices and school structures that foster injustices and inequality” (p. 79). Valli suggests that the various approaches to reflection should be used in combination with each other in order to balance the deficits in each; however, “critical reflection is ultimately more important than technical reflection” (p. 82).

The idea that reflection is hierarchical (Van Manen, 1977; Mezirow, 1991; Valli, 1997) does not go uncontested. Zeichner (1994) challenges the existing hierarchical models charging that these frameworks “devalue technical skill and the everyday world of teachers which is of necessity dominated by reflection at the level of action” (p. 217). Hierarchical models also lend themselves to the underlying assumption that once the highest level is attained, no other growth is necessary. This does not account for the ever-changing nature of the classroom and the complexities of teaching and seems to move away from Dewey
(1910/2005) and Schön (1983) and the idea that reflection is a continual inquiry by which one learns from critically looking back on practice.

The model of reflection developed by Korthagen (2001) would appear to be more consistent with the idea that there is not a final destination for reflection but a process of continual growth and learning (Dewey 1910/2005; Schön 1983). The reflective process as defined by Korthagen is “the mental process of trying to structure or restructure an experience, a problem, or existing knowledge or insights” (p. 58). The characteristics and attributes of reflective teachers identified by Korthagen and Wubbels (1991) include:

a. Reflective teachers are capable and believe it important to structure situations.

b. Reflective teachers ask standard questions to structure experiences.

c. Reflective teachers are able to articulate what they want to know or learn.

d. Reflective teachers describe and analyze how they function in interpersonal relationships.

Korthagen and Wubbels (1991) also identify unique personal qualities that correlate with being a reflective practitioner. These include: reflective practitioners build better relationships with students and colleagues, have strong feelings of efficacy and a high degree of job satisfaction, encourage and foster inquiry in their students, and are able to easily articulate about their experience. The model of reflection put forth by Korthagen (1985) is a systematic, rational,
decision-making process. It describes reflection as a cycle of thinking and acting. Korthagen identifies five phases in this cyclical process: (a) action, (b) looking back on the action, (c) awareness of essential aspects, (d) creating alternative methods of action, and (e) trial, which itself is a new action and, therefore, the starting point of a new cycle. This five phase model is called the \textit{ALACT model} (after the first letters of the five phases). Korthagen's model of reflection is consistent with both Dewey's and Schön's work because it connects reflection to action and views action as an essential component of reflection.

Connecting the perspectives of Dewey(1910/2005), Van Manen (1977), Zeichner (1994), and Schön (1983), and drawing from their own work, York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2001) offer a comprehensive definition of reflective practice and the one adopted for this study.

Reflective practice is a deliberate pause to assume an open perspective, to allow for higher-level thinking processes. Practitioners use these processes for examining beliefs, goals, and practices, to gain new or deeper understanding that lead to actions that improve learning for students. Actions may involve changes in behavior, skills, attitudes, or perspectives within an individual, partner, small group, or school. (p. 6)

This definition takes into account the thinking of Dewey(1910/2005), Van Manen (1977), Zeichner (1994), and Schön (1983) and the idea of systematically looking at action as a way to inform thinking and further action.
Rodgers (2002) attempts to clarify the meaning of reflection by revisiting the roots of reflection in Dewey’s work because she feels the meaning of reflection can be lost in the current literature. She attributes four problems to the lack of a clear definition:

a. How is systematic reflection different from other types of thought?

b. How do you assess a skill when it is vaguely defined and what exactly are we looking for as evidence of reflections?

c. Because there is no common language, the term reflection is used interchangeably with terms that have overlapping meanings such as: inquiry, critical thinking, and metacognition.

d. Because there is no clarity in what is meant by reflection, it is difficult to research. (p. 843).

Rodgers (2002) offers four distinct criteria that characterize Dewey’s view of reflective thought in an effort to provide common ground from which to teach, learn, discuss, and research reflection. These four criteria include:

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process that moves a learner from one experience into the next with deeper understanding of its relationships with and connection to other experience and ideas. It is the thread that makes continuity of learning possible, and ensures the progress of the individual and, ultimately, society. It is a means to essentially moral ends.
2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry.

3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others.

4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. (p. 845)

Therefore, Rodgers believes that reflection is a systematic way of thinking, based on scientific inquiry and can be defined, practiced, assessed, perfected and researched.

Reflection in Teacher Education

This study looked deeply at the idea of reflection as critical thinking about practice and though it is not the scope of the current study, it is important to mention that the idea of reflection has been adopted by teacher preparation programs with the intent to develop and foster the skills pre-service teachers need to be reflective practitioners when they enter the classroom. However, although reflection “has become part of the language of teacher education” in such a way that teacher education programs are currently purchasing more reflective teaching materials than in years past (Gore, 1987, p. 33), the way to encourage and develop reflective practitioners varies widely in each university program. This is a manifestation of the varied theories and models of reflection in the literature. Some programs view reflection through the technical reflection lens and focus on the act of teaching itself. This is in line with Van Manen’s (1977) and Valli’s (1997) technical rationality and the effective application of teaching
skills. Reflection is limited to the application of technical teaching skill and by what happens in the classroom. This technical skill is then evaluated by effective teaching strategies and best practices.

Other programs are more inquiry-oriented and reflection encompasses “complexities inescapably linked with education issues” (Hartnett & Nash, 1980, p. 269). Developing reflective practitioners in these programs is more involved and means more than the effective application of technical skill. The aim of these programs is the “critical reflection” that is widely discussed in the literature (Mezirow, 1991; Valli, 1997; Van Manen, 1977). Although what constitutes reflective practice in teacher education programs differs, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) promotes reflective practice as an important component of teacher education programs. To this end, teacher education programs have sought to incorporate reflection into their course work and give pre-service teachers some tools and strategies that will develop the habits of mind Dewey described: the habits of mind that will aid them in critically thinking about their work and making meaning from practice. Risko, Roskos, and Vukelich (2002) explain:

Requesting future teachers to engage in reflective thought within the context of their coursework provides them with an opportunity to generate connections between theory and practice, come to deeper understandings about their personal beliefs while adopting new perspectives, and learn how to use reflective inquiry to inform their instructional decisions. (p. 149)
Much of the research on reflection in pre-service teachers, including those by Francis (1995), Hoover (1994), Wibel (1991), and Zeichner and Liston (1987) has focused on writing as the vehicle for reflection and discuss various forms of reflective writing such as logs, journal, diaries, and portfolios. However, though these strategies have the potential to encourage reflection there is little research to show that reflection is actually being achieved (Hatton & Smith, 1995) and there is some ongoing debate about whether pre-service teachers have sufficient content knowledge and experience in their profession upon which to reflect. Some studies have revealed that student teachers struggle to engage in reflection or that their reflections are superficial in nature (Calderhead, 1987; Galvez-Martin, 1998). Reflection is a learned behavior (Danielson, 2007) that requires time to develop. Universities that include reflection in their teacher preparation programs are attempting to build the foundation to cultivate these habits of mind and incorporate reflection as a naturally occurring teacher practice.

Reflection as Professional Development for Practicing Classroom Teachers

Though there has been considerable attention on the value of reflection in teacher preparation programs (Tabachnick & Zeichner, 1991), there is a need to further study the reflective practices of professional teachers. Research on effective teaching indicates the more effective teachers are more often reflective thinkers (Eby, 1992). Arguably reflective thinkers are more effective teachers
because they continually strive to improve their practice. York-Barr et al. (2001) believe a reflective educator is:

one who is committed to continuous improvement, assumes responsibility for his or her own learning, demonstrates awareness of self, others, and the surrounding context, develops the thinking skills for effective inquiry, and takes action that aligns with new understandings. (p. 10)

Although reflections are a common occurrence in the day to day life of a teacher (Norlander-Case, Reagan, Campbell, & Case, 1998), the types or levels of reflection that impact practice may not be occurring. It is essential that teachers reflect when they are confronted with a new situation or problem that requires critical, thoughtful consideration and careful judgment (Valli 1997) because reflection is the on-going process that leads a teacher to change, adapt, or modify his or her practices as they relate to the given situation. Reflective practice in education requires teachers to think systematically about their work and to “use logical, rational, step-by-step analyses of their own teaching and the contexts in which that teaching takes place” (Korthagen, 1993, p. 317). This leads to change and further reflection. MacLeod and Cowieson (2001) contend that by reflecting:

We become aware of what we are doing. Being able to function competently in our external actions while being able to monitor those actions at a conscious, intellectual level is a professional skill…Things believed, values and guiding principles, and things read, done and thought
all come under scrutiny. Professional knowledge is reshaped through this process of reflection. (p. 242)

The benefits that result through this reflective process are outlined by Dieker and Monda-Amaya (1995). First, reflection equips teachers with a tool for making methodical changes in the instructional environment. Second, through reflection a teacher can evaluate the purpose and effectiveness of their instruction. Third, reflection is a process for thinking about how to relate content and past classroom experiences to make changes in instruction. Lastly, reflection becomes the process for systematically evaluating challenges in the teaching/learning transaction to initiate positive solutions. According to Lester (1998) teachers who reflect on their teaching practice not only improve their existing pedagogical skills, but are also equipped to be lifelong learners themselves. According to York-Barr et al. (2001), not only do reflective educators build bridges between theory and practice and develop new knowledge and understandings, their “efficacy increases as they see the positive effects on their own context generated solutions” (p. 9) and they develop a greater sense of empowerment as they recognize and tap into their own internal capacities.

Although it is widely accepted that reflection on practice is an essential component of a teacher's professional development as seen by its inclusion in national standards, such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) and the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), reflection in practice can be challenging due to the immediacy of the classroom
and the current conditions of many of our schools. Large class sizes, high-stakes accountability, and curriculum demands may make it difficult for teachers to be truly reflective in their practice. Too often the reality is that teachers rarely examine their teaching practices and how they impact student success. If, as Danielson (2007) states, reflection is a learned behavior, working teachers may not have developed the ability to reflect critically on their practice. Many teachers, instead of looking critically at their practice, discuss low achievement in terms of outside factors, such as lack of parental involvement, student apathy, and/or low socio-economic status. Lack of time in the teaching day is also a major teacher complaint. The normal role of the teacher is grounded in the present and in practical action, while reflection is considered to be more of an academic pursuit (McNamara, 1990); something that is done if one is seeking a higher degree in education or national board certification. Perhaps many teachers may not see the value in reflection because they may think it takes time away from the day-to-day business of the classroom. The challenge for administrators and school officials then is to create time and a system for job embedded reflection so that teachers see the relevance that reflection has on practice and connect reflection to their professional growth and student success.

The literature on the reflectivity of practicing classroom teachers indicates that some teachers are engaged in reflection and reveals that current reflective practices are both individual and collective. Whether through individual practices or shared reflections, some classroom teachers see value in engaging in
reflection as a way to make meaning from practice. Journals, teacher narratives, teacher portfolios, action research, and coaching are some of the processes and strategies being used by teachers as vehicles to understand and improve practice. What follows is a description of these practices and research connected to these practices.

Teacher Journals

Developing a reflective practice begins with the individual. Zeichner (1993) states that “the process of understanding and improving one’s own teaching must start from reflection on one’s own experience” (p. 8). Keeping a journal is one way to reflect on one’s own experience. Journal writing and professional dialogue are the best venues for honing the skills necessary to be a reflective practitioner (Danielson, 2007) and can be the means to acquire and improve reflective thinking. Killion (2004) describes the process of journaling as thinking in writing, adding that journals are “a permanent record of thinking and reflecting” and “are active ways of engaging learners in ongoing thinking, constructing meaning, and clarifying understanding” (p.133). Recording life experiences in journals as a way of making meaning is not new but is now being used widely in education as a means to reflect on practice. Journal writing can be a useful tool to develop critical thinking skills (Dyment & O’Connell, 2003) if teachers use them to analyze challenging issues that occur in the classroom and to look for alternative solutions. “Journaling makes the invisible thoughts visible” and provides a way of describing practice and identifying and clarifying beliefs, perspectives,
challenges, and hopes for practice (York-Barr et al., 2002, p. 52) and journals can:

- deepen the quality of learning in the form of critical thinking or developing a questioning attitude;
- enable learners to understand their own learning processes;
- increase active involvement in learning and personal ownership of learning;
- enhance professional practice or the professional self in practice;
- enhance the personal valuing of self toward empowerment;
- enhance creativity by making better use of intuitive understandings;
- free-up writing and the representation of learning;
- provide an alternative ‘voice’ for those not good at expressing themselves;
- foster reflective and creative interaction in a group (Moon as cited in Alterio, 2004, p. 322)

The “benefits of journaling have been identified as expanding awareness, understanding, and insights about teaching practice; making connections between theory and practice; and generating new hypotheses for action” (Taggart & Wilson as cited in York-Barr et al., 2002, pp. 52-53).

In an autoethnographic study, Attard (2005) kept a reflective diary throughout his first year of teaching that shed light on the thoughts, feelings, and learning experiences he had as a new teacher implementing new curriculum.
Attard and Armour (2005) believe reflective journaling helped him to understand particular situations, to avoid mistakes or learn from them when avoidance was not possible, and to value learning, reflecting, and thinking critically on his actions. This reflective writing process, Attard thought, gave him insights he would not have learned otherwise and allowed him to ask himself “some simple but important questions” (p. 198). Attard continued, “I learned to value reflecting, conversing with myself and the hard work needed to think critically on my actions” (p. 204) and “reflection helped me to understand myself better” (p. 205). Through the reflective journal, Attard not only began to understand and grow as a professional but also to question beliefs and practices.

Alterio’s (2004) study revealed that reflective journaling does not have to be an individual activity. Alterio states:

When we use reflective processes to learn with and from others, we create opportunities to enhance our interpersonal relationships and gain multiple perspectives. As we construct new knowledge collectively we learn about others and ourselves in ways that enable us to critically reflect on and critique our experiences and examine what shaped our perspectives. (p. 322)

Collaborative journaling as a professional development tool was the focus of Alterio’s study. This is a unique way to approach journaling because journal writing is normally viewed as an individual activity. Nine participants from four different professions contributed to a collaborative journal. Analysis of the
collaborative journal showed that the contributors used the journal to connect with one another, pose questions, discuss ideas, share stories, and advance understanding. From the entries, four key themes emerged: practice related learning, professional philosophies, personal learning and growth, and reflective practices. Alterio (2004) explained, participants in the study “felt that actively engaging in a collaborative journaling experience provided them with constructive opportunities to increase their understanding of self and practice from multiple perspectives and bring about thoughtful change” (p. 330). Articulating their thoughts and ideas to others enriched the learning and reflections of the participants.

Teacher Narratives

Teacher narratives are also being used in education as a way to understand and learn from practice. Colton and Sparks-Langer (1991) define teacher narrative inquiry as “stories written by and about teachers” (p. 42) and add that narrative inquiry can reveal the motivation behind teachers’ actions, the intricacies of teaching and insights into the teachers themselves. “In a narrative orientation to teacher development, it is acknowledged that teachers hold their professional knowledge in a personal and practical manner rather than in theoretical modes” (Beattie, Dobson, Hegge, & Thornton, 2007, p. 120). Through story telling teachers are making meaning from their personal and professional experience. Much of thinking on narrative inquiry in education comes from the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2006), who wrote:
Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead stories lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. (p. 477)

A recent study done by Coulter, Michael, and Poynor (2007) examined data collected from two teachers from the time they attended their first language arts methods course, through student teaching and their first year of classroom experience. The study examined how the use of narrative research methods can serve as pedagogical strategies and how these two teachers reflected on, questioned, and learned from their experiences. A thorough analysis of the data gathered, which included reflections written weekly during the study participants’ final university courses and during their student teaching semester, revealed that the two teachers “experienced new pedagogical understandings by participating in the study” and that “engaging in ongoing dialogic through narrative inquiry turns story telling into pedagogy allowing pre-service teachers and practicing teachers to problematize and change the nature of teaching and learning” (Coulter et al., 2007, pp. 120-121).
Beattie, Dobson, Hegge and Thornton (2007) used narrative inquiry to study the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of the lifelong learning practices of eight experienced teachers. They reported,

Since teachers understand their classroom practices as enactments of identity and since the spiritual and aesthetic realms are aspects of identity resonant with meaning, the study of the aesthetic and spiritual dimensions of professional knowledge can provide insight into significant characteristics of teacher practice and development. (pp. 120-121)

The participants, through the interaction of the narratives in their lives, explored possibilities, considered their ways of knowing and being, rethought their understandings, and transformed the ways in which they enacted themselves in the world. The research findings reveal “that while lifelong learning may well include the acquisition of skills and knowledge, such learning is made meaningful when experienced as an ongoing transformation of self” (p. 139). Reflection, therefore leads to a deeper understanding of self as well as practice.

Narrative inquiry in the form of case story is currently being used in professional development. Ackerman, Maslin-Ostrowski and Christensen (1996) write about how one public school system is using case story as a sense-making tool for educators. The premise underlying the use of case story is that the process of writing their own stories helps teachers to understand better and to share theories of practice and dilemmas, and explore possibilities and alternatives with each other. In this case story model, practitioners write stories
based on their experience, then share and discuss the stories with colleagues.

During the process of this case story and through the dialogue model, participants’ thinking became less self-centered and more critical because they are challenged to think more deeply about their practice.

Teacher Portfolios

Professional teaching portfolios have become more common as a way to document and learn from teaching practice. It is also becoming a more standard practice to include teacher portfolios as a component of teacher assessment and evaluation systems. Portfolios are described by Brown and Wolfe-Quintero as “a purposeful collection of any aspect of a teachers’ work that tells the story of a teachers’ efforts, skills, abilities, achievements, contributions to students, colleagues, institution, academic discipline, or community” (as cited in York-Barr et al., 2001, p. 54) and can include, goal statements, sample lesson plans, evidence of student learning, and evidence of teacher growth. If portfolios are used thoughtfully, they can be the basis for rich conversations, reflections, inquires, and observations about the work in schools (Dietz, 2004). York-Barr et al. (2001) discuss ways that portfolios add to the reflection process: teachers are engaged in the reflective process when they review and select items to include in the portfolio; teaching and its effects are displayed in varied ways in portfolios; teaching portfolios both document the nature of one’s teaching in a given period of time and can be the means for a teacher to realize their professional grow over a period of time. However, Berrill and Whalen (2007) argue that without a valid,
relevant use for portfolios, teachers find them too time consuming to produce. Berrill and Whalen also state that it is essential for the teachers to hold ownership of both the process and the product if they are to remain engaged in portfolio construction and that teaching portfolios must be student-centered. Orland-Barak (2005) adds to the growing body of research on portfolios as evidence of reflective practice by cautioning that critical levels of reflection are not automatically achieved by the mere construction of a professional teaching portfolio.

Action Research

Teacher action research can be a powerful tool for making meaning from practice because it is practical, relevant, and grounded in the daily work of the teacher and the lived world of the classroom. It is systematic self-critical inquiry (Stenhouse, 1985) and a way to ask questions and look for answers in one’s practice in a disciplined way (McNiff 2002) with a goal that self-critical inquiry will lead to improved teaching practices. Reflection is critical in teacher action research because for teachers to make sense of the data, they need to think critically about the actions that yielded those results. Through action research, practitioners are involved in a critically reflective cycle that incorporates questioning, assessing, investigating, collaborating, analyzing, and refining practice: a cycle that empowers teachers in their daily practice and professional development. (Schoen, 2007; Sela & Smith, 2005). Schoen (2007) and Sela and Smith’s (2005) idea for action research as an ongoing cycle is consistent with
Sagor’s (2000) seven step action research process because they collectively address the idea of using inquiry into practice as a way to refine practice. Sagor’s seven-step process by which inquiring teachers can conduct action research include: (a) selecting a focus, (b) clarifying theories, (c) identifying research questions, (d) collecting data, (e) analyzing data, (f) reporting results, and (g) taking informed action. Caro-Bruce (2004) acknowledges that this last step is not the end but the beginning of the cycle. While conducting this systematic type of action research in the classroom, teachers are challenged to reflect on how they think and to explore alternative strategies with purposeful determination. Action research is job-embedded learning and it is widely accepted that evidence from action research can inform teacher practice and that teachers become more reflective, critical, and analytical about their teaching behaviors (Sela & Smith, 2005, p. 297) when participating in action research.

Notably teachers do not always make use of research evidence in their practice. In a recent study, conducted by Coles and Williams (2007), that sought to understand the diffusion of research in the teaching profession, analysis of survey data revealed that while teachers were motivated toward the use of research evidence, the actual use of this evidence was limited. Lack of time and lack of ready access to sources were considered to be the major barriers to teacher use of research information.

In another study, teachers were engaged in action research in their induction year. During this year novice teachers were involved in a Teacher as
Researcher project. The objective was to equip novice teachers with reflective tools that would allow them to examine systematically their work as teachers. During their internship, students enrolled in a course on action research, kept personal diaries and responded to a questionnaire. Sela and Smith (2005) concluded that action research engaged the new teachers in a professional development process that they hoped would last their entire careers. Moreover, the authors believed the participants were more confident, better equipped for their careers, and benefited from the experience of conducting and writing an action research project.

Swain (1998) found that after teachers participated in reflective action research, they came to value themselves as reflective practitioners and valued reflections of others, whether they were in the form of insight or inquiry. The study participants were involved in classroom observation, were interviewed, and kept journals in which they responded to professional readings, described interactions among students, raised questions and concerns about their teaching practices, and described their classroom successes and issues. The journal entries were analyzed and entries that showed a change in teacher attitude and teacher instruction were documented. Swain concluded that participants achieved an awareness that allowed them to recognize and revere their own growth. Additionally, the participants achieved a sense of community in which they affirmed and celebrated the transformations of each other.
Coaching

Major contributions to the research on coaching come from Joyce and Showers’s (1995) work on teacher staff development. They found that fewer than 10% of the participants in traditional staff development implemented what they learned. However, when coaching was added with follow-up support, implementation on new instructional strategies increased significantly. Joyce and Showers suggest that teachers learn from each other in the process of planning for instruction, observing each other work, and thinking about the impact their practices have on the students.

Research indicates that the reflective process is helped by engaging in dialogue with a colleague in a way that encourages discussion or questioning (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Coaching has been used as a way to encourage the reflective process with a colleague and may occur in many forms. These forms of coaching, as identified by Harrison and Killion (2006), include: challenge coaching, Cognitive Coaching, collegial coaching, content-focused coaching, instructional coaching, mentoring, peer coaching, and technical coaching. Robbins (1991) defines coaching as two professional colleagues engaging in a confidential process in which they work together to reflect on teaching practices, share ideas, refine or expand current practices, build new skills, share ideas, learn from one another, or solve problems. “Coaching is a way to expand the thinking capacity of individuals so they create their own best ways to address issues” (York-Barr et al. 2001, p. 68). Peer coaching represents a
nonjudgmental, developmental model for conversations about planning, reflecting, or problem solving (Costa & Garmston, 2002, pp. 5-6). Reflection is a major component of the Cognitive Coaching model developed by Costa and Garmston because it creates opportunities for teachers to engage in conversations that cause them to think about their instructional practice. It is self-directed learning because the role of the coach is to ask the questions that will lead the teachers to develop theories or make sense of their practice.

Throughout the literature the benefits of a reflective practice for professionals consists of the ability to analyze and learn from their practice and to identify their own learning needs and be self directed in their continuing professional development (York-Barr et al., 2001; Griffin, 2003). However, there are some cautions in the literature as well. “Reflection with no experience is sterile and generally leads to unworkable conclusions, while experience with no reflection is shallow and at best leads to superficial knowledge” (Posner, 1989, p. 22). Zeichner (1990) argues that teachers’ actions are not necessarily better because they are more deliberate and intentional. Teachers may be reflective but there is a wide range of areas in which reflection can occur. This could be something as simple as thinking about ways to make lunch procedures run more smoothly to what instructional strategies are more effective for this particular group of students. All are not equally important. Zeichner (1990) thinks it is first essential to establish clear priorities for reflection that arise from reasoned educational and social philosophy. Establishing clear priorities and encouraging
the types of reflection supported by Dewey (1910/2005), Schön (1983), Van Manen (1977), Mezirow (1991), and Valli (1997) can produce implications for impacting teacher practice and are well documented throughout the literature.

Summary

The opening section of this chapter described the theoretical framework for and the value of a reflective practice as a way to lay the foundation for this study. The second section described models of reflection and the cyclical nature of reflection to lend support to the multiple observations, dialogues, and journal entries used to pursue the research questions. The third section discussed the methods used to develop reflective practices in pre-service teachers. Although pre-service and novice teachers are not the focus of this study, some of the reflective practices of practicing teachers are being fostered in pre-service teachers. The studies that reveal the challenges pre-service and novice teachers face with reflection justify the sample population of experienced teachers. The final section details reflection practices seen today among educators. The literature reveals that reflective practitioners are more intentional about what they do in the classroom and are concerned with how their practice impacts student learning and growth. By using observational data, the reflective exchange dialogues, and the reflective journals, the current study combined aspects of the reflective practices of action research, coaching, journals, and narratives to investigate the reflection experience in a more holistic manner than the approaches found in previous research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This multiple-case descriptive study examined the lived experience of how teachers make sense of observational data during a post-observational reflective dialogue, how teachers reflect on observational data, and how a holistic reflection experience might impact subsequent practice. Transcripts of the reflective dialogues and teachers' reflective journals were analyzed to gain insights into the participants' lived experience of reflecting on their practice as documented by the researcher. In addition, the study described how a holistic reflective approach resulted in subsequent changes in the participants’ pedagogical practice.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology seeks to understand social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved about their lived experience with those phenomena. Understanding the lived experience of reflection from the teachers' perspective was the focus of this study. I was interested in understanding how reflection impacts practice because of a deep personal belief that it is through systematic reflection that experienced teachers continue to develop their pedagogy. Although this study is not phenomenological in the truest sense, the study design incorporates some elements of a phenomenological study. Phenomenology has its origins in the writings of Husserl (1969), who defined phenomenology as “a descriptive analysis of the essence of pure
consciousness” (p. 133). It is an exploration of the essence of the lived experience and is both the “description of the lived-through quality of lived experience and the description of the expressions of lived experience” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 25). Phenomenological research design centers on how meaning is constructed from everyday experiences. This type of research design aims to describe the phenomenon under investigation as accurately as possible without preconceptions or a theoretical framework. However, this study design deviated from a traditional phenomenological design in which the researcher attempts to understand a phenomenon by setting aside any preconceptions. My design used frameworks to elicit information and to code the generated data. Because I sought to understand reflection, a thinking process that can be elusive, teachers were given a journal prompt, the Reflective Journal Protocol, as a way to capture their thinking. Also for observations of classroom instruction, I used the Engagement Visit Tool, which imposed yet another theoretical framework on the data generated. A third deviation from pure phenomenological research was the use of Van Manen’s (1990) levels of reflection, rather than a more deductive coding process, for coding the dialogues and journals.

Observation, dialogue, and journaling were the techniques utilized to capture teachers’ lived reflective journeys. My basic assumption was that a detailed examination of the journals and reflective dialogues would reveal “essential themes which characterize the phenomenon” (Van Manen, 1990, p. 30). Writing and reviewing field notes from observations and reflective dialogues
were used to describe the phenomenon. Rereading the journal writing and focusing on the teachers' lived experiences through their writing helped maintain the pedagogical relation to the phenomenon. Finally, studying in-depth each part of the reflection experience, including the observations, reflective dialogue, and reflective journals, and then reflecting on the teachers' experiences as a whole helped balance the context of the research.

This study utilized dialogue and writing in journals as vehicles to pursue the research questions. Both are essential to this study because they reveal an individual's thoughts and experience in unique ways. While writing in journals is a personal and private experience that gives the writer a concrete way to view thoughts, dialogue provides the opportunity to share those cognitive processes. For this study, writing in a journal allowed teachers “to construct meaning visibly and to reflect on experiences” and “enjoy the safety of revealing his or her thinking and to reflect without others commenting” (Killion, 2004, p.129). Dialogue is conversation and a collaborative process that allowed the teachers in this study to become aware of their own intuitive thinking through articulation with another. Gadamer (1979) defines conversation:

A process of two people understanding each other. Thus it is a characteristic of every true conversation that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other to such an extent that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says. The thing that has to be grasped is
the objective rightness or otherwise of his opinion, so that they can agree with each other on a subject. (p. 347)

For Knight (2007) a dialogue occurs when people engage in conversations that encourage them to speak their minds and they listen authentically to understand fully what the other is saying. If two people are engaged in this type of conversation, “they begin to think together” (p. 25) and are engaged in a dialogue. The reflective dialogue component of this study allowed the participants to articulate their beliefs and theories about their practice. Both reflective journals and reflective dialogues were critical to this holistic study.

Case Study

The type of inquiry used in this study is determined by the nature of the research questions. A qualitative research design was selected because qualitative research approaches its subject matter in an interpretive, naturalistic way (Denzin & Lincoln 2000) and “qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate detail about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (Corbin & Strauss, 1998, p.11). For LeCompte, Preissle, and Tesch (1993), case study analysis is appropriate for focused, comprehensive examination of one or a small facet of a given phenomenon. Qualitative methodologies are best able to give insights into the thought processes required by reflection and are therefore appropriate for this study. Case studies as described by Yin (1993) are based on either single or multiple cases and can be
exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. This study is descriptive in nature because it seeks to describe how teachers use reflection to make sense of practice. The attributes of descriptive studies lend themselves to the educational setting. "The analysis of descriptive case studies ground and illustrate how abstract principles of learning and instruction look and operate in context, that is, in particular situations rather than in the mythical average situation" (Clark & Lampert, 1986, p. 29). For Stake (1994) "The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is and what it does" (p. 8). Case studies allow the researcher to observe the lived experience of the participants in a natural setting. Along with the multiple case study design, ethnographic techniques, outlined by Wolcott (1988), which include participant-observation and the analysis of written sources as data, were also utilized.

Research Procedures

Each participant was (a) observed on three occasions for 20 minutes each, (b) participated in a reflection dialogue with the researcher after each observation, and (c) kept a reflective journal that focused on their lived experience of working with observational data, engaging in reflective dialogue, and how participation in this holistic reflection experience impacted their practice. During classroom observations, I used the Engagement Visit Tool, developed by the research department of the Salesmanship Club Youth and Family Centers in collaboration with the Institute for Excellence in Urban Education. A detailed
explanation of the Engagement Visit Tool is given in the section under Instrumentation. Teachers were given the opportunity to reflect on the observational data as they participated in a reflection dialogue with me after each observation. The reflection dialogue was conducted on the same day as the observation. See Appendix B for the Reflective Exchange Dialogue Protocol. Following each observation and reflective dialogue, participants documented their reflective journeys in a journal. Reflective Journal entries followed the four step reflection process outlined by Killion (2004) of description, analysis, new knowledge, and future action.

Population and Sample

All participants in this study were certified, experienced teachers who have taught in elementary classrooms for five or more years. All participants currently work at a private, community school in a large metropolitan area of north Texas but have also had experience in the public school system in Texas. Teachers at this particular school were asked to participate with either the Instructional Design Tool or the Engagement Visit Tool as part of their ongoing professional development. An invitation to participate in this study was issued to all 14 teachers who were interested in working with the Engagement Visit Tool as part of their on-going professional development. Of the 14, 5 volunteer teachers were selected to participate in this study. The choice to use volunteers for this study is consistent with Dewey’s belief that the qualities of open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility need to be present for reflection to occur.
Included in the study was one kindergarten teacher with 37 years of teaching experience, one first-grade teacher with 20 years of teaching experience, two fifth-grade teachers with 19 and 11 years of teaching experience respectively and one art teacher with 29 years teaching experience. The selection criteria included teachers who used the Engagement Visit Tool in their professional development and who volunteered for the study.

Teachers with five or more years of teaching experience were the focus for the study because teachers with fewer than five years experience are relatively new to the profession and are still developing their praxis. In the literature, there is some debate about whether pre-service or novice teachers have sufficient content knowledge and experience in their profession upon which to reflect. Some studies show student teachers struggle to engage in reflection or that their reflections are superficial in nature (Calderhead, 1987; Galvez-Martin, 1998). Novice teachers are still student teachers in the sense that they are still learning about the art and science of teaching and may be preoccupied with survival and self-oriented concerns. These survival and self-oriented concerns would indicate that novice teacher reflections would reside predominatly at Van Manen’s (1977) technical rationality level. Danielson (2007) states that accurate reflection is a learned skill that new teachers have not yet acquired. To control for the possibility that novice teachers have not learned the necessary skills for reflection, participation in the study was limited to teachers with five or more years of classroom experience.
Instrumentation

Observations were conducted using the Engagement Visit Tool, which is a classroom observational tool developed by the researchers at the J. Erik Jonsson Community School (JEJCS) in collaboration with the Institute for Excellence in Urban Education (IEUE). Both JEJCS and IEUE are programs within the Salesmanship Club of Dallas Youth and Family Centers. (See Appendix A for the Exchange Visit classroom observation tool.) The Engagement Visit Tool combines 15 positive teacher behaviors and actions drawn from the Teacher Expectation and Student Achievement (TESA) research with 10 student actions and behaviors compiled from the years of research done at JEJCS. The indicators drawn from the TESA research consisted of the teacher behaviors that positively correlate to student engagement. The Engagement Visit Tool is a way to document, through observation, positive teacher classroom behaviors and student actions as a result of these behaviors. The teacher behaviors documented on the instrument include: (a) call on student, (b) latency 5+, (c) help, (d) delve, (e) higher level questions and extensions, (f) affirmation, (g) specific praise, (h) listen, (i) accept feelings, (j) proximity to student (teacher initiated), (k) seek student ideas, thoughts, opinions, (l) courtesy, (m) personal interest or connection to the student, (n) touch, (o) desist. Student behaviors included on the Engagement Visit Tool: (a) raise hand, (b) ask the teacher a question, (c) answer teacher’s question, respond, (d) follow teacher’s directions,
(e) proximity to teacher (student initiated), (f) active listening to teacher (look at), (g) check in, (h) off task with a peer, (i) off task alone, (j) disrupting others.

At this point, it is important to clarify that although student response behaviors are captured by the Engagement Visit Tool, I am not reporting individual student data; the focus of this study was on the teachers’ behavior. I worked with a co-researcher to establish inter-rater reliability. An agreement of 95% was reached. Together, the co-researcher and I, conducted twenty percent of the observations, which equaled 3 observations and we applied a number of agreements divided by number of agreements plus disagreements formula to determine reliability.

Data Generation

Observational data were recorded on the Engagement Visit Tool and reflective dialogues were audio recorded. Each teacher determined his or her preferred method for journaling, whether hand written or electronic. Audio recorded reflection dialogues were transcribed to provide written documentation of the exact dialogue and to facilitate data analysis.

Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was an ongoing process that occurred during the study and after all the data had been generated. Due to the nature of the of this multiple-case study, analysis was conducted in two stages. A within-case analysis was performed first. Each case was analyzed individually. Then a cross-case analysis was conducted to determine common themes and variations based
on the lived experience of each of the participants. A cross case analysis is a process that yields “more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 172). Data from the reflective dialogues and journals were initially coded using Van Manen’s (1977) levels of reflectivity to determine the level of the teachers’ reflections. These were then compared and categorized across cases to determine whether common themes existed among participants’ lived experiences. This type of analysis is consistent with Van Manen’s (1990) third research step of “reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon” (p.30).

Summary

In order to investigate the research questions of how teachers make sense of observational data during a post observation reflective dialogue, how teachers reflect on observational data, and how the holistic reflection experience impacts practice, I used a multiple-case descriptive study research design to reveal teachers’ lived experiences with reflection. Observation, reflective dialogues, and reflective journals were the data collection methods used in this descriptive, multiple-case study. In Chapter 4, I present the findings in relation to the research questions of this study.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Using the methodology and data analysis procedures detailed in Chapter 3, Chapter 4 contains an analysis of the data collected in an effort to answer the research questions of the study listed below.

1. How do teachers make sense of observational data during a post observation reflective dialogue?
2. How do teachers reflect on classroom observational data?
3. How might the holistic reflection experience impact teachers’ pedagogical practice?

Included in the data were observational check lists, transcriptions of the audio taped exchange dialogues and reflective journals collected from all five participants. In Chapter 4 I first document each teacher’s reflective journey and, lived experience over the course of the study, and address the research questions through each teacher’s reflective journey. Secondly, I detail the themes and variations revealed from the cross-case analysis. Finally, I present my reflective journey of the phenomena of being a participant observer and an active witness to five teachers’ reflective journeys. All names used here are pseudonyms and all teachers teach at the same small private school in a predominately Latino working class neighborhood in a large city in north Texas.
Nancy’s Journey

Teaching is important to me. There are not many things that I feel like I do well, but I know I am a good teacher. I also like to learn new things to make me a better teacher. I hope to get better in my professional practice each year. I have also learned over the years how very important teachers are to the success and confidence of their students (Reflective Journal entry, April 28, 2009).

Nancy describes the beginning of her teaching journey as a lucky happenstance. Unsure of what to major in college, Nancy started taking education courses and that career choice was a natural fit. During the course of her 37 year career to date, Nancy has taught kindergarten, first grade, second grade, and third grade in several school districts, served on many varied district committees, written curriculum, and now teaches an early childhood grade and continues to serve on committees and write curriculum.

In thinking about the study Nancy expressed curiosity about her practice and hoped to gain some insights into her classroom instruction. She was interested in looking at how she engaged children during various times of the day, including science, “Morning Meeting,” and math. She also wondered if the students were more engaged with the content during any of these times. Therefore observations were conducted at each of these times and the data generated from each of these observations were used for the exchange conference.
First Exchange Dialogue and Reflective Journal

Nancy’s first observation with the Engagement Tool was during a science. Her objective for this lesson was a mini review and introduction to a new science essential question. The goals were to access students’ prior knowledge and solicit ideas from each student. At the onset of the exchange dialogue, and before viewing the data, Nancy discussed ways to make changes to the lesson. Though she thought the lesson achieved its major intent, she didn’t think the time was used as efficiently as possible. Nancy thought the mini review was unnecessary for this time because it did not add to or enhance the goals of the lesson. While acknowledging that students need movement, she thought moving to three different spots in the room many have been too much time for the time allocated and the age of the students.

After viewing the data and talking out aloud as she made sense of them, Nancy connected with several of the indicators on the Engagement Tool. She talked about her struggles with higher level questions and extensions, and wondered about the appropriateness of extensions for the age group she teaches. She expressed concern that extensions, as well as seeking students thoughts, ideas, and opinions may lead very young students down a divergent path. In her journal entry for this observation, Nancy outlined a plan to solicit students’ thoughts, ideas, and opinions. She also expressed some concern about the number of opportunities each student had to participate with the lesson and in her reflective journal discussed the need to encourage quiet students and
ensure they were not being overshadowed by the more gregarious students, again detailing a plan of action on how to ensure that all students had opportunities to share and participate with the lesson. Latency was an indicator that Nancy addressed and then dismissed by stating that five seconds was a long time for this particular age because they struggled with sitting for too long. She believed that a three second wait was long enough and thought that by telling students that she would come back to them, she was providing the opportunity for students to think before answering questions. Believing that some lessons are more suited to certain indicators on the Engagement Tool, Nancy was also curious to see whether the variety of lessons scheduled for observation would lend themselves to tally marks on different indicators. In reflection on the process, Nancy indicated that the data validated her intuitive feelings about certain students, but expressed some frustration at the limitations of the Engagement Tool and that it did not capture teacher behaviors with all students. Nancy commented that the observational data did not capture the whole picture since only four children are selected for each observational visit.

Second Exchange Dialogue and Reflection Journal

Morning Meeting was the setting for the second observation and what Nancy described as a routine lesson. Morning Meeting occurred every morning and is an opportunity for the students to gather for community building and academic review. Nancy believed this particular time was more suited to the “seeking students’ thoughts, ideas, and opinions” indicator. Nancy discussed
being purposeful in her selection of questions and her strategies for soliciting answers and believed students had opportunities to share their ideas. In reviewing the data, Nancy somewhat pleasantly surprised that the data were more balanced and revealed that she was asking more higher level questions, sought students ideas, and thoughts, and made personal connections with the students; but she was struck by fact that she was affirming but not providing specific praise. Nancy also mentioned that she was subconsciously working on wait time or latency and acknowledged that this work was reflected in the number of tally marks beside latency. She expressed an interest in continued work with higher level questions because it is something she struggled with and believed it was “a habit I have to remind myself of all the time because I am trying to get as much learning and lessons packed in the day” (Exchange Dialogue, April 20, 2009). Nancy stated that asking higher level questions and extension had implications for student thinking and reflection and she believed it was an important habit to develop as part of her curriculum writing endeavors and she recalled that it was one of the professional goals she set as part of her professional growth plan that she submitted to the principal. In her reflective journal entry for the second observation and exchange conference, Nancy expressed the desire to continue to work on asking higher level questions and also to work on providing specific praise to students as they worked on these questions. In reflecting on the data, Nancy mentioned ongoing conversations she was having with her teaching team mate and even her husband. She mentioned
that the tool helped her to recall and keep in mind effective teacher behaviors, even if they were not the ones she identified and focused on after the first observation and exchange dialogue.

Third Exchange Dialogue and Reflection Journal

In this math lesson on measurement, Nancy reviewed a higher level question students had responded to previously. She creating drawings that addressed the answer to the question, provided time for students to use a balance scale to weigh objects, and wrapped up the lesson with another higher level question. Nancy thought the students were successful with the first two objectives but struggled with responding to the last higher level question. Again, Nancy thought there was more active participation with students answering approximately the same amount of questions and that none of the students were being left out of the lesson. She believed the way the students were sitting contributed to this active participation because she could see immediately who was volunteering and was able to work to draw out the students that were holding back. The data confirmed her belief that students were actively participating and that questions were being distributed more evenly. In reviewing the observational data collected on the Engagement Tool, Nancy acknowledged that while she had more tallies on specific praise, it was not enough. “I think specific praise is very powerful to students. I try to give each of my students specific praise sometime during the school day. This, (referring to the tallies on the observational tool), was a good reminder to try to continue that practice”
(Reflective Journal entry, April 23, 2009). Again, Nancy remarked that the observational tool helped to remind her of good instructional strategies even if she had not selected those. At this point she was reflecting on increased tally marks on delving, latency, and personal connections. In reflecting on the experience Nancy stated:

It is really good especially for a very experienced teacher to keep these teacher behaviors and student behaviors always in the back of your mind. A lot of times we are trying to cover a whole lot in one day, we forget those important strategies that we need to make a lesson more successful.

(Exchange Dialogue, April 23, 2009)

In her final journal entry, Nancy expressed:

The process was a helpful reminder of how important teacher behaviors are to the success of students in a lesson. I liked having the freedom to assess the data and choose what skill I would focus on the next time. I felt it was a good way to improve my teaching and I had some control over the process. (Reflective Journal entry, April 28, 2009)

In looking at Nancy’s responses during the Exchange Dialogue and in the Reflection Journal through the lens of Van Manen’s (1977) levels of reflectivity, there were instances of all three levels of reflectivity. Nancy’s continued mention of effective instructional strategies provides evidence of the first level: Technical Rationality. The development of future action plans is evidence of the second level: Practical Action or Reflection. Her theory about higher level questions and
extensions, and specific praise and the need to ensure equality and fairness in the classroom are substantiation of critical reflection, the third and highest level of reflection. Nancy's reflective journey is consistent Dewey (1910/2005) and Schön's (1983) belief that reflection is continual inquiry and with Korthagen's (2001) cyclical model of reflection. Nancy's reflection on the observational data provided insights on action that lead her to create plans for future actions and further reflection.

Holly's Journey

I truly believe that people are born with “gifts” and I think that one of my gifts is teaching. I see myself as a compassionate and fair teacher and one that excites my students to want to learn more. I also see myself as a “facilitator” that steers them in the right direction but lets them make discoveries on their own. I not only want to provide information for my students, but also want to learn from them so I guess I see myself as a teacher that is a learner. (Reflective Journal entry, April 28, 2009)

Holly comes from a long line of teachers; both her mother and grandmother were teachers. Even though she changed majors several times in college, she always came back to her childhood dream of being a teacher and the education courses were a natural fit. Much of Holly’s 20 year career to date has been teaching first grade in a large suburban school district. She now teaches a primary grade.
Holly was excited to participate in the study because she believed it would help her be reflective about her classroom practices. She was particularly interested in the Engagement Tool because she thought it would reveal her true practice and bring to light the things she did and the things she thought she did but didn’t. Holly opined that any observation would be interesting and made her complete teaching schedule available to the researcher. Observation times were scheduled during Writer’s Workshop, word work, and math. Writer’s Workshop is an interdisciplinary way of teaching writing, building students’ fluency in writing by providing continuous experience with the process of writing. These observations would include both whole class and small group sessions because Holly was interested to see whether any differences existed in her engagement behaviors between whole group work times and small group work times.

First Exchange Dialogue and Reflection Journal

The first observation began during a whole group writer’s workshop mini lesson on adding descriptive words to student writings. The observation ended with Holly in a one-on-one writing conference with a student. During the time she was working with this individual student, she was also monitoring the other students in their work and responding to any individual student that approached her with a question. In thinking about how the lesson went, Holly immediately expressed concern that there was no way for her to know from their time together whether the students were adding descriptive words to their writing and talked about walking around the classroom after the observation to check on individual
student pieces. In hindsight, she stated that it would have been better to pull a small group over and have them work on just a few sentences. Something she decided to do as she was talking through her lesson during the exchange dialogue. She also talked about other strategies she would use to assess the students’ abilities to add descriptive words to their writing. This led Holly’s thinking to her own struggles as a writer, reflecting back on a rather unpleasant writing experience when she was a student. She also discussed how she had restructured the Writer’s Workshop time during the course of her career and her effort to “give something to everybody” (Exchange Dialogue, April 14, 2009), to be there in the right moment to catch when someone was heading in the wrong direction, to correct it, and then to move on. She acknowledged that, with everything that is occurring at once in the classroom, this is not always possible (Exchange Dialogue, April 14, 2004). In reviewing the data, Holly quickly remarked on the lack of tallies on the touch indicator and recognized that she used touch mostly as a “desist” behavior when words were not effective. She was saddened by this realization. In her reflection journal she remarked, “I always want to make sure that I am not just praising students with works but also with touch. Interestingly, I interpreted it that way, not the touch that goes with desisting behavior” (Reflection Journal entry, April 14, 2009). She speculated that this could be the reason her students were so clingy to her and wonder if she avoided touching students because she was concerned that it might send a
message of favoritism. Her concern for the lack of tallies in specific praise and touching indicators led her to a plan of action.

In the very near future, as soon as possible, I intend to be more aware of “catching” positive actions, not negative ones, recognize students with specific praise, and give myself permission to touch students as a way of affirming them. (Reflection Journal entry, April 14, 2009)

At the end of the Exchange Dialogue (April 14, 2009), Holly commented on how good it was to talk about the things the observation data revealed because it helped her to process at a deeper level causing her to think and be more reflective; something she felt she didn’t always do.

Second Exchange Dialogue and Reflection Journal

Holly started the Exchange Dialogue by reflecting on the school wide restructuring of the art, music, & physical education (P.E.) schedule, which has provided small group class time. During the P. E. time, half the class goes to P. E. for 30 minutes and the other half goes to P. E. immediately following the first group for 30 minutes. This allows each student to be a part of a small group for instruction on a daily basis. On this day, Holly used the time to work on spelling and word work. In reflecting on how the lesson went, Holly talked about the difference between the two groups, remarking that each small group can be so different in their attitudes, work ethic, and behavior and she talked about how she worked with each group. She also expressed concern about a particular student whose primary language is not English and is a very phonetic speller. Although
he is a strong reader, Holly expressed concern that he appeared lost most of the time and that he struggled with directions. So she generally turns her focus to him during word work time. In reflecting on the data, Holly focused once again on the specific praise indicator and not on the negative behaviors in the classroom. This led her to a discussion about how factors outside the classroom can impact the classroom. She stated that, at times in contemplating her actions, she wonders:

What is it that is going on externally, whether it is in this building or out of this building that is causing me to be more on edge...I don’t want to bring stuff from home in or stuff that is here in to the classroom because it is not fair to them. They can’t control that...I want kids to go home happy at the end of the day and not feeling bad because of something I said or did.

(Exchange Dialogue, April 20, 2009)

It has been Holly’s experience that specific praise can be a very effective strategy to use in the classroom and she wanted to be more aware of and consciously taking every opportunity to use specific praise in her classroom practice. In reflection, Holly thought the proximity of working with the small group on the floor allowed her to do the kinds of things she needed to do in a primary classroom. “The proximity of all the students is helpful in desisting behavior but also in giving praise.” (Reflection Journal entry, April 20, 2009). By sitting on the floor she felt more connected to the students and to the learning and added that the increased tally marks on the touch and affirmation indicators were indicative
of the small group work, whereas the previous observation, conducted during a whole group lesson, may not have lent itself to those indicators.

Third Exchange Dialogue and Reflection Journal

Holly talked about the difficulty her students had with really listening as she began the Exchange Dialogue and stated that lessons such as the one on this day were important for students, even those who were not auditory learners. This was a whole group math lesson and though Holly considered the lesson to be a good one, she thought it would be more beneficial to do this type of activity in centers where she could work with specific groups. In looking at the data, Holly expressed concern about two students who did not seem to be as actively involved in the lesson. She later wondered in her journal if that was a result of a whole group lesson. Holly’s theory was that smaller groups allowed for more specific praise and affirmations. She also expressed unease in her journal that her use of touch, while there were more tally marks of this particular indicator, was “used to desist certain behaviors, not necessarily for praising purposes” (April 24, 2009). Holly ended her third reflection journal entry by stating, “I still want to improve on giving more specific praise each day to all and to make more of a genuine effort to touch students in a reassuring, thank you for being awesome kind of way”. (April 24, 2009). In reflecting on the experience, Holly indicated that the use of the observational tool was making her aware of the behaviors that she doesn’t always do but thought she did.
The information I have gleaned from the Engagement Tool has been invaluable. I have learned many things about my actions and behaviors towards my students, things I want to continue to improve on starting now. Each of these things is mentioned in all three of my reflections: affirmations, specific praise, and touching. (Reflection Journal entry, April 28, 2009)

Holly also expressed interest in continuing our work with the Engagement Tool and Exchange Dialogue at the conclusion of the study.

Holly’s reflective journal also contained elements of all three of Van Manen’s levels of reflectivity. Level one reflection, although limited, included the belief that specific praise and affirmations could yield more appropriate classroom behaviors. Level two reflections occurred in those instances when Holly talked about modifying the lessons for the next day as a direct result of what had happened during the observation lesson. Level three reflections occurred as Holly connected to past experiences and contemplated on her actions in the classroom and when she discussed the importance of listening regardless of learning preferences. Holly’s contemplations during the Exchange Dialogue, in her journal entries, and her desire to continue working with the Engagement Tool indicate that she is able to give thought to more than one side of an issue, actively seeks to find the truth behind her actions, and approaches her work with commitment and eagerness. These qualities are consistent with
Dewey's (1910/2005) idea that reflective practitioners are open-minded, responsible, and wholehearted in their work.

Ashley's Journey

I like the idea of using my career as a means of helping someone else. I've always enjoyed working with kids and I seem to have a knack for it. I see myself as a hardworking, dedicated, compassionate, caring, creative, and serious. (Reflection Journal, April 28th, 2009)

Ashley's spent much of her time growing up around kids and, as soon as she was able, began babysitting and thinking about following in her mother’s footsteps who teaches as well. She began her career in a first grade classroom in a large suburban school district and later worked as a Reading Specialist in that same district honing her skills in reading education. After nine years with the district, Ashley accepted her current teaching position in an upper elementary grade. Ashley believes the time she spent as a Reading Specialist was invaluable in terms of her knowledge of teaching reading and her skills as a reading teacher.

Ashley was interested in working with the Engagement Tool to look at how she was engaging the students in reading. She was especially interested in looking at different types of reading lessons and how she was working with the students during these times. Of particular interest to Ashley were the word work lessons and direct teach lessons. To this end, we scheduled observations to
focus on her behaviors during reading instruction and during these particular
types of lessons.

First Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

The first observation was conducted during word work when Ashley was
working on building the students’ word knowledge and vocabulary. Her goal this
year was to build enough prefixes and suffixes in their vocabulary so that
students have a repertoire of words to use in their reading and writing.

My whole goal is to expose my kids to as many prefixes and suffixes as
possible in order to help them have access to a plethora of other words.
The other thing I want to do is to help my students link what they know to
help them spell other words. This really just evolves as I see what kinds of
mistakes my kids are making. My hope is that they will eventually develop
this practice for themselves when they struggle with spelling/reading
unfamiliar words. (Reflection Journal entry, April 14, 2009)

Ashley thought the lesson went well but was worried about what she
described as side conversations. This brought up the idea that students who do
not struggle with word work may not be involved in the initial part of the lesson
and in studying the data, Ashley worried that it appeared most of her teacher
behaviors were directed at the struggling student. She expressed a desire to
change this practice and engage all her students in meaningful conversations
and, in particular, to challenge even the most skillful students. Maintaining
proximity to the students and affirming them were behaviors that Ashley had not
considered much, but she was pleased to see many tally marks on the
Engagement Tool beside those teacher behaviors. Referencing her days as a
Reading Specialist and the importance of giving specific praise to each child so
that each student knows exactly what he or she is doing right, Ashley was
cconcerned by the lack of tally on the specific praise indicator and wondered what
she needed to do to incorporate this back into her practice. She chose to use the
observational tool to focus on drawing out all students and giving specific praise.
In reflecting on the experience, Ashley was very appreciative of the objectivity of
the tools and having access to the data immediately through the Exchange
Conference.

It's more objective...it is more of a self assessment too because you
(referring to the observer) are really just the note taker...it is always good
to see your practice...I need specific goals to work on...I know what I
need to do but it is just in the craziness of everything...I need to hold
myself accountable to do the things that I know are good for kids but not
always do. (Exchange Dialogue, April 15, 2009)

Second Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

During the second observation Ashley used poetry to develop the skill of
questioning text when reading. The purpose of the lesson was to help the
students understand that the process of questioning and how questioning yields
a deeper understanding of text. She expressed surprise that the students were
not immediately coming up with questions and felt the need to adjust her lesson
on the spot to include more modeling and partner sharing. This garnered the responses and results she had envisioned when planning her lesson. (Exchange Dialogue, April 20, 2009). After viewing the observation data, Ashley again expressed unease when noticing fewer tally marks on students she perceived to be quiet. She was saddened by this and remarked that this is something she is aware of and had recently had a conversation with her teaching teammate about an article the teammate had read about calling on students. At that time Ashley had discussed a number of strategies with her teammate.

This makes me sad, especially since I am keenly aware of it. I wonder what makes me do this. I am thinking it might be due to the fact that I tend to call on students to check their understanding; especially students who struggle a little more and aren’t always listening. This leaves those that do what they are supposed to do behind. (Reflection Journal, April 20, 2009)

Connecting to herself as a student, Ashley revealed, “I was one of those kids. I was the kid that did what I was supposed to do and I probably got lost in the shuffle” (Exchange Dialogue, April 20, 2009). She theorized that students, who were getting more attention, got more instruction which leads to deeper learning. Ashley thought the observational data confirmed what she believed she was doing at the time and was pleased with the increased tally marks on specific praise. This was the teacher behavior she focused on after the previous observation and Exchange Dialogue. In her final comments during the Exchange Dialogue, Ashley acknowledged,
I know how to offer specific praise. It is just a matter of being aware that it is something I need to do. The process is always eye opening but it is always good to make sure that the things you are thinking are actually on paper. (Exchange Dialogue, April 20, 2009)

Third Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

Ashley’s reading lesson today had a deliberate connection to what the students were learning in science because she knew that science content had the ability to engage students. In talking about her lesson, Ashley shared what she hoped to accomplish with the lesson.

The purpose of this lesson was to model the idea of reading with a question in mind. I want my students to understand that reading with a question in mind helps good readers pick out the most important information they read. I directly linked this back to my own personal experience back in college when I didn’t read with a question in mind and my entire Western Civilization book was yellow. Hopefully these stories about my lack of reading strategies help my students understand their usefulness. (Reflection Journal entry, April 27, 2009)

After viewing the observation data, Ashley was pleased with the tally marks but still thought that giving specific praise was something that needed to be more automatic in her practice. She also thought the observational data confirmed much of her beliefs about the students in class and reinforced the need to ensure that all students were being engaged deeply in the content.
During the Exchange Dialogue, Ashley discussed several effective strategies she had used in the past but not recently and the need to work these strategies back into her practice (April 24, 2009). Connecting her experience with the Engagement Tool with her work with Cognitive Coaching in her previous teaching situation, Ashley stated that both are purposeful and have the potential to affect her teaching directly and therefore represent powerful tools. (Reflection Journal entry, April 28, 2009).

Ashley’s Exchange Dialogue and Reflective Journal reveal a few instances of technical reflection evidenced in her discussion of instructional strategies for calling on students. Ashley continually made reference to experts in reading, specifically, and education, in general, and pulled from that knowledge for strategies to use in the classroom. This is strong support of practical action.Apparently much of Ashley’s reflection was located at Van Manen’s (1977) third level of reflectivity. Substantiation of critical reflection was her desire that students develop good reading strategies and to see the value of these strategies beyond the classroom. Wondering about the purposefulness of her teaching is another example of critical reflection. Schön’s (1983) idea of reflection in action was revealed in one of Ashley’s journal entries.

The whole purpose of my lesson was to help my students understand that the process of questioning can help them understand text at a deeper level. I expected the kids to be brimming with questions after a couple readings, but that didn’t happen. After some modeling a few more seemed
to catch on. I think the time to discuss their thinking with a partner was invaluable though. This opportunity to reflect on their own thinking seemed to bring the questions to a whole new level. Pretty soon everybody had something to say. (Reflection Journal entry, April 20, 2009)

Korthagen’s (2001) cyclical model of reflection was evident in some of final thoughts and comments in Ashley’s Reflection Journal.

Quite honestly I often wonder how purposeful my teaching really is. There are so many things going on during a lesson. The engagement tool gave me some things to directly focus on improving. Immediately I was able to interpret the (observer’s) notes and use them to change my practice. Then I could follow up after every lesson and see if I achieved my goal. (April 28, 2009)

Ellen’s Journey

I have dedicated my professional life to being the finest teacher I can possibly be and I am passionate about my work. I am willing to continually grow, learn more, and share what I’ve learned. I am dedicated to establishing positive learning that supports each child’s social and intellectual growth. I create a classroom with an extremely positive, safe, risk-free, and loving environment, while fostering confidence, determination, and discipline in every student. (Reflection Journal, April 28, 2009)
Ellen's journey to the classroom was not a traditional one. She got married immediately after graduating with a Design and Art degree and did not work outside the home following the birth of her children and during their early years. When her children were older, she accepted a teaching position at the preschool her children attended. Later, she accepted a teacher's aide position in a large suburban district where she actively began to pursue teaching certification. After only one year as an aide, Ellen was assigned a second grade classroom. In her nineteen year career as a teacher, Ellen has taught preschool, second grade, and fourth grade. She currently teaches in an upper elementary grade.

Being in upper elementary grade, there is departmentalization and Ellen was interested in using the Engagement Tool to look at the engagement behaviors of both classes she taught. She was particularly interested in the review lessons and her use of “read alouds” as a means to review science content. (A read aloud is a whole group instructional strategy in which the teacher reads a selected juvenile trade book to the class.) To this end, observations were scheduled in her room that encompassed two groups of students and at times when she was using a read aloud to review science content. Ellen expressed curiosity about the two groups of students and wondered if student engagement differed between the two classes. The observation schedule was adjusted after the second Exchange Dialogue because Ellen became curious about her engagement practices during other types of science lessons.
First Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

In thinking about her lesson, Ellen believed the book chosen for review was a good, rich piece; one that most of the students were interested in and would surely capture their attention. She gave a little chuckle and said that in previewing the book she learned some things she did not know. Having the student on the carpet, Ellen thought, gave the review a more intimate, laid back feeling (Exchange Dialogue, April 13, 2009), but then she wondered whether the carpet was the best place for this lesson and whether using the document camera would allow the students to connect to the pictures and the read aloud more deeply. Once she viewed the data, Ellen was convinced that she could have predicted what the data revealed. She was pleased to see that the data showed that she listened, affirmed, and checked in with the students. Ellen also commented that she tries to get everyone engaged with the learning by asking questions but was concerned that the questions she was asking were not higher level questions and immediately came up with a way to adjust her instructional strategies for the upcoming review lessons that incorporated the use of read alouds.

In order to include more higher level questions in my read aloud lessons, I am going to write one or two out on sticky notes prior to reading; at the time of my preview. I plan to use the “Think, Pair, Share” strategy so that all students are part of the exchange and responsible for at least thinking about the questions. (Reflection Journal entry, April 13, 2009)
In reflecting on the data on higher level questions, Ellen wondered whether she was trying to review too much content at once and therefore was not allowing time for the type of thinking necessary to respond to higher level questions. Ellen believed having to respond to higher level questions was critical to student learning and knew that this was an important component to her lessons if she really wanted the students to deal with the content. “Adding “deeper” questions will encourage my students not only to listen carefully, but apply what they know, background knowledge, risk what they think they know, and use Science language to communicate it” (Reflection Journal entry, April 13, 2009). In reflecting on the process during the Exchange Dialogue, Ellen thought it made her more aware of her teaching practice (April 13th, 2009).

Second Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

In celebration of Earth Day, Ellen focused on bringing awareness to environmental issues during her read aloud review. The adjustment to the review from the first observation to the second was immediately apparent. The students were at their desks and the pictures in the book were projected on the wall using the document camera. Throughout the review Ellen asked the whole class higher level questions and asked them to share their responses with their partner before calling on individual students to respond. During the Exchange Conference she wondered at the trouble the students had in responding to those types of questions and speculated the reading skill of inferring could have attributed to the difficulty. She also wondered if the student struggled to interpret the pictures
because there was very little supporting text. She expressed disappointment at what she considered was a surface understanding of environmental issues and was concerned she really didn’t get the deep thinking she was after. She questioned whether the lesson was “worth thirty minutes of instruction” and decided it was, not only for the science concepts but that the students needed to have “different experiences and learn to look at art and to figure out point of view”; therefore the subject matter was important enough to warrant the time. (Exchange Dialogue, April 21, 2009). She later speculated that the population of students she worked with had limited outdoor experiences and began to think of ways to provide urban children with more hands-on, real world experiences with earth science. Ellen discussed additional outdoor field trips and other learning opportunities for the students that she felt could be instrumental in providing the experiences she felt the students lacked. In talking about the observational data and her focus on higher level questions, Ellen remarked,

The observational data was [sic] quite accurate. It detailed exactly what I was after. The data also revealed that the lesson itself did not lend itself to constant individual questioning. The lesson required the students to do a lot of very deep thinking and me a lot of explaining and teaching. (Reflection Journal entry, April 21, 2009)

In reflecting on the experience, Ellen appreciated getting the kind of feedback that made her think through some strategies for including each student in the learning and for creating a process to make sure she had questions
prepared that would encourage students to think deeply about the content (Exchange Dialogue, April 21, 2009). Ellen used the observational data to make immediate changes to the structure and format of her review lessons. In using a different format for her review lesson, Ellen exclaimed, “Experimenting is always important to see what works best” (Exchange Dialogue, April 21, 2009).

Third Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

After the second Exchange Dialogue, Ellen became curious about her engagement practices during other types of science lessons. The final observation was conducted during a whole group activity in which students were individually responding to higher level questions on an inquiry chart. This lesson was a direct result and a connection to “Earth,” a movie the students had seen the day before. When Ellen decided to take her students on a field trip to the movies, her hope was that the movie would live up to the preview literature she had received. She believed that if it did, it would reinforce in a different way the content she taught during the year. During the Exchange Dialogue, Ellen was excited about the opportunity the students had to view the film because it did just what Ellen desired. The students returned from the movie discussing what they had seen in terms of the content they had learned all year. Ellen thought the inquiry chart was another way for them to make connections to the science content and for her to gain an accurate assessment of each child’s level of understanding. In reviewing the observational data, Ellen thought the data revealed she assisted students with questions, encouraged them through the use
of affirmation and listened to their ideas, but she was struck by the lack of higher level questions. Then she realized that because the questions were written on the inquiry chart and students were doing individual work, some behaviors were not captured on the observational tool. Ellen was purposeful when designing this lesson as individual work because of her concern that much of the student work was collaborative and that they needed the experience of thinking and working independently from their classmates.

This work was to be done on their own, without the help of others. I chose for them to work individually because so much of their work is done with partners and in groups. I really wanted to see what they knew and understood about a couple of very important Life Science Standards. (Reflection Journal entry, April 24, 2009)

She expressed a curious interest in having the observational tool used for a whole class period to see whether there would be a difference in the tally marks. This curiosity occurred after noticing that there were very few engagement behavior tallies on the data collected on one particular student. She remembered engaging in a conversation about the inquiry chart and the student’s responses after the observer had left the room. Her theory was that a longer observation would more accurately reflect all her interactions with the students. In reflecting on the experience Ellen remarked that she enjoyed the process because she was always interested in improving her craft (Reflection Journal entry, April 28, 2009). She commented the observational tool and Exchange
Dialogue made her really think about her questions, ways to ensure all students were involved in deep thinking, and holding students accountable for the content (Exchange Dialogue, April 24, 2009). The reflection tools also led her to wonder about her practice at the beginning of the year with a new group of students (Reflection Journal entry, April 28, 2009). We talked about doing some observations and Exchange Dialogues at the start of the next school year.

Ellen’s adjustments to the lesson format displayed Practical Action or second level reflection. Her wondering about the value of the lessons and the time spent on lessons are examples of third level reflectivity or critical reflection, as is her speculation that urban children need more experiences outside the classroom with the environment and more experiences with interpreting art; something that goes beyond her content area. Wondering about her questioning, adjusting how she prepared for and formatted her review lesson, then creating a new question and the idea of experimenting to find out what works best are behaviors consistent with Korthagen’s (2001) cyclical model of reflection and Dewey’s (1910/2005) idea that reflection is continual inquiry.

Lisa’s Journey

I describe teaching as my vocation. I felt called into the profession by an awareness of the need for humane treatment of special populations and the possibilities that exist through the learning process. I see myself as a guide, a planner, a motivator, a problem solver, a listener, a giver, and a learner. (Reflection Journal, April, 28, 2009)
Lisa’s 29 year journey was a varied one with a multitude of experience in several areas of education including General Education, Special Education, and Art Education. She started her career in a public school district in Special Education. Not too long after, she was offered and accepted a position to start a formal education program at a residential outdoor camp for emotionally disturbed boys, a position she held for two years before moving to Austin to work with and develop curriculum for deaf and blind students. In returning to Dallas she accepted a position with the same agency as the residential camp helping to start up a program that would evolve over time into a small, private, urban community school. Connecting her love of art and her passion to teach, Lisa teaches art to pre-kindergarten through fifth grade students.

Lisa was particularly curious about the engagement tool and how it would translate to her teaching practices in an art classroom. In addition she wondered about her engagement behaviors across grade levels. In an effort to shed some light on these wonderings, the three observations were scheduled during the art time of three different grade levels. Observations were scheduled with a fourth grade class, a third grade class, and kindergarten.

First Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

The first observation was conducted with the fourth grade class. The students were continuing with a paper mâché project that was started in a previous class period. Class time was dedicated to adding color and a smooth finish to the student projects. Lisa designed the lesson for art production and the
goal for the lesson was for the students to continue to produce their art work. “I like to structure a lesson so that there is a time that allows them (the students) to express themselves creatively and become involved in the process” (Exchange Dialogue, April 15, 2009). They had started with Greek vases as a thematic focus and Lisa hoped to connect the students back to this original idea during this class time. Lisa believed it was a successful lesson with a few students finishing the color process and everyone being able to apply paper mâché to the form correctly. In reflecting on the observational data Lisa commented:

What I noticed from the data was that the students who needed the most attention got it. I think that I have developed a pattern of responding to needy students quickly in an effort to keep the classroom functioning at a good flow. (Reflection Journal entry, April 15, 2009)

She also mentioned that it is very rare in a production lesson for students to raise their hands because the goal of this type of lesson is continuous work to produce the art. Lisa was affirmed in her practice in looking at the data holistically because they indicated her positive interactions with students; however, she perceived things in the data that caused her to ask several questions about her practice.

I wonder if there is a pattern to the kind of attention I give to the boys over the girls? There is not a lot of dialogue happening during the lesson. Is this problematic or desirable given the nature of the lesson? Should I examine my definition of “needy” to make sure that (particular student) does not fit
into that category and is possibly being neglected? Will dialogue levels be different at different grade levels? (Reflection Journal entry, April 15, 2009)

Lisa developed her own theory about her last question, which she revealed in her journal, “The more experienced students should have greater independence and self sufficiency” (April 15, 2009). She also predicted that the observational data of the younger children would reflect an increase in the behaviors that were indicative of more dialogue. In reflecting on the experience, Lisa admitted to being a little nervous “because I don’t get the opportunity to look at things so specifically. It is like getting a new perspective. It’s not bad. Being nervous just means you’ve been affected” (Reflection Journal entry, April 15, 2009).

Second Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

The second observation took place with a group of third grade students who were also working on a paper mâché piece. It was a production lesson in which students were creating one form from a combination of shapes. The students were adding to their armatures and Lisa’s hope was for them to understand that parts were becoming one whole. She thought she would not be able to assess this understanding accurately until the students, using the completed product from another project, could tell what shapes came together to make the one object. In reviewing the data, Lisa immediately answered one of the questions she asked as a result of the first exchange. She determined that there was no basis to believe that her interactions and attentions toward the boys
differed from her exchanges with the girls. Lisa again used the data to ask questions about her practice and wondered how the teacher-student interactions would compare in a theory lesson and a production lesson. Theory lessons, as defined by Lisa, follow a more direct teach model of instruction and production lessons provide the opportunity for student to work individually and independently on their pieces. Lisa felt at both were essential to art instruction. She commented there was not enough specific praise and wondered whether the high activity level in the classroom interfered with personal specific feedback. (Exchange Dialogue, April 21, 2009). She also wondered whether specific praise or feedback would affect student investment in art and began to think through organizational strategies that could provide opportunities for specific praise and positive feedback. Lisa was concerned by what she perceived to be an apparent lack of courtesy in her teacher behaviors but was comforted by the proximity to teacher (student initiated) indicator because she acknowledged it was a sign that the students felt comfortable approaching her, addressing her, and asking questions (Reflection Journal entry, April 21, 2009). She wondered how her courtesy behaviors toward the students were affected during the times she is facing agency deadlines and those times when she is able to focus on student growth in art (Reflection Journal entry, April 21, 2009). She felt she may be less courteous when she was under pressure to meet a deadline. In reflecting on the experience, Lisa was no longer anxious about the observational data and thought
that through the process she identified some specific working goals, which included specific praise and courtesy.

Third Exchange Conference and Exchange Dialogue

A kindergarten class was the setting of the third observation. The focus of this preparation lesson was to build knowledge around the concept of “island” in preparation for a semi-guided drawing time that was a pre-cursor to water color painting. Lisa started the lesson by reading a book connecting to the colors and items found on an island. In thinking about the effectiveness of the lesson, Lisa shared that she had not always conducted this type of lesson in this guided way but thought it was better for student understanding to create their drawings with her guidance (Exchange Dialogue, April 24, 2009). She was apprehensive to view the data because she hardly used read alouds in the art classroom and was unsure as to how the students would respond. However, she was interested to see whether there would be a difference in tallies in something other than a production lesson and decided to do an introductory lesson for the third observation. In viewing the observational data, Lisa remarked,

I noticed that teacher affirmation and listening were two areas that cut across all students. Accepting feelings and specific praise were intermixed. Desisting was especially prevalent. I think this type of profile might be considered normal given the nature of the activity as well as the age group. (Reflection Journal entry, April 24th, 2009)
In reflection on the number of desist behaviors, Lisa wondered whether she needed to be more proactive in noticing positive behaviors as a way to address negative behaviors. She reflected on how she had done this with a previous class and developed a plan with components of what she believed had been successful in the past. Curious to know whether this new plan would be effective, Lisa expressed an interest in having me continue observations in the kindergarten class with the observational tool. She also wanted to increase the sample size by adding more observations. Her theory was that a large sample size would better reflect the variety of classes she taught and her teacher behaviors. Lisa ended her Reflection Journal with “Usually when I feel like a lesson didn’t turn out the way I thought it would, I revisit the sequence and mode of presentation and revamp for the next time (April 24, 2009).

Lisa’s concern about desisting behaviors coincide with level one reflections on Van Manen’s (1977) levels of reflectivity while her immediate plan to prevent misbehavior showed Practical Action reflection. Her question about possible gender differences in her classroom was evidence of level three or critical reflection. Other evidence of critical reflection included her desire for the student to enjoy and appreciate the creative process and to be invested in art. Lisa’s journey is consistent with what Dewey (1910/2005) believes to be the business of education, which is to discriminate between tested beliefs and mere assertions and to develop a preference for conclusions that are properly grounded. An example of this preference was evident when Lisa asserted that
there could possibly be a difference in her interactions as a female teacher with male students when compared to her interactions with female students. The converse, she speculated would also hold true. However, her idea of gender different interactions was quickly dismissed in light of the observational data of her practice.

The Intersection of the Teachers’ Reflective Journeys

This section explores the common themes that intersected the teachers’ lived experience of using an observational tool for reflection. These commonalities may be singular to this study and a direct result of using the observational tool and Exchange Dialogue. Using a different observational tool may yield different results. Dewey’s (1910/2005), Schön’s (1983), Van Manen’s (1977), and Korthagen’s (2001) ideas will be used as the medium to draw out the themes.

It was readily apparent through the course of the study that the teachers who volunteered to participate with the research exhibited Dewey’s (1910/2005) essential qualities for reflective practice: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. Each teacher, when volunteering for the study, had questions about her practice, questions they hoped and believed would be answered during the course of the study. As the study progressed they developed theories and generated more questions. They all viewed the observational data as hard evidence of their practice and used them to inform their action. Questioning beliefs and practices are examples of open-mindedness. Each teacher believed
the observational tool and Exchange Dialogue would enlighten them about their practice and would serve as a catalyst for improving it. Each teacher expressed a deep commitment to teaching and to the students. At times the observational data caused dissonance that was somewhat disturbing to the teachers and they immediately sought strategies to change that result. Seeking the truth and using the knowledge gained as a result of that search shows responsibility to the students and the profession. That each teacher volunteered for the study with no extrinsic reward and anticipate continued work with the tool, displays wholeheartedness.

Schön (1983) posits that reflective practitioners are able to reflect both in action and on action. These five teachers, when reflecting back on the particular lesson during the Exchange Dialogue consistently made reference to ways they modified, adjusted, or changed what they planned to do because of what was occurring during the lesson at the time. This is reflection-in-action. The observational data guided their reflections-on-action and it was evident that these teachers were able to draw from a multitude of resources to direct their next steps and to work through or modify instructional strategies, managerial practices and behavioral issues that arose in the classroom. They were able to draw from and made continual reference to their pedagogical foundations, knowledge base, and extensive experiences in the classroom.

In considering Van Manen’s (1977) hierarchical and sequential levels of reflectivity, evidence of technical rationality was apparent but limited. There
seemed to be more evidence to support the second and third levels of reflectivity and it appeared to be sequential. The teachers seemed to move to the higher level of reflection after thinking through how they would change the lesson the next time they taught it or what instructional strategies might be more effective or yield better results. These types of reflection seemed to lead the teachers to critical reflection where themes of equality and fairness emerged in all of their reflections. In one capacity or the other, teachers wanted to be fair in their interaction with the students and how they engaged the students in learning. This idea of fairness could manifest itself in the classroom through equal access to learning or in handling behaviors in a consistent manner. Other themes that revealed themselves through the teachers’ critical reflections included the desire for students to feel affirmed and acknowledged in their strengths and the value and importance the learning had for students outside the classroom.

Finally, and it could be a singular result of the nature of the observational tool and Exchange Dialogue, each teacher’s reflective journey appeared to go through the five phases of Korthagen’s (2001) model: action, looking back on action, awareness of essential aspects, creating alternative methods of actions, and trial, which is of itself a new action. All of the teachers used the observational data to look back on their practice, discussed their theories of what happened in the classroom, developed new strategies or modified practices to use in the next lesson. The teachers’ desire to continue to use the tool and the Exchange
Dialogue indicates that reflection is not a destination but a continual growth journey.

Connecting to Dewey (1910/2005), Schön (1983), Van Manen (1977), and Korthagen (2001), the common themes emerging from the five reflective journeys included:

(a) These teachers exhibited qualities of open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness.

(b) The teachers use the observational data and the Exchange Dialogue as a vehicle for reflection-on-action and for reflection-for-action.

(c) There seem to be more instances of practical reflection and critical reflection than technical rationality or reflection.

(d) The five reflective journeys manifested a cyclical process.

My Journey as Participant Observer

In reflecting on my own experiences with the phenomenon of being a participant observer to five teacher’s reflective journeys, I found the process to be engaging and enlightening. At times, I thought I was witnessing theory develop as teachers played with the observational data out loud and I was honored by the trust and the confidence the teachers placed in me, allowing me to be an observer in this process.

The five teachers readily volunteered for the study and welcomed me into their classroom as they expressed an interest in learning more about their practice. They made their classroom schedules readily available, gave up three
of their precious conference periods for the Exchange Dialogues, and took the
time to share their thoughts and ideas honestly in the Reflection Journals during
a time when they themselves were busy with additional tutoring and school
committee work. I wonder whether our ongoing relationship impacted their
willingness to participate in the study. On my part, I appreciated their willingness,
responsibility, and whole-hearted commitment to their practice and looked
forward to spending time in the classrooms conducting the observations, and I
eagerly anticipated the Exchange Dialogues and the probable insights on
practice that would result.

At times it was difficult to distinguish between all of my roles and as a
result of previous and continuing relationship with these five teachers, the role of
researcher proved to be quite challenging. I taught alongside several of these
teachers and now actively write curriculum with them. I think this relationship
contributed to the easy rapport and fluidity of the Exchange Dialogue and the
honesty reflected in the journals. There was a foundational trust level that
became apparent when one of the teachers commented that she could not
believe some of the things she shared in the Exchange Dialogues. It is my belief
that this established relationship gave the teachers a sense of safety and they
felt more comfortable taking risks in their reflections. However, there were
challenges to the study with this established relationship as well. We, the
teachers and I, are accustomed to working side by side with easy exchanges of
ideas. The coaching nature of the tool challenged me and caused minor
frustration on the part of the teachers who at times during the Exchange Dialogue solicited my thoughts. My role as participant observer was to seek their thoughts and provide a vehicle for reflection through questions. I found, oftentimes, that I wanted to continue our conversations and discussions and share my own thoughts and insights with the teachers. Ashley addressed this issue in her final Reflection Journal entry.

I am use [sic] to sitting down with (the researcher) to hash out the answers to burning questions. This time was a little different. (The researcher) couldn’t give me as much insight. Rather, she had to turn the questions back on me. This was good for me. I need the pressure to be more reflective in my teaching. Looking at the data and drawing my own conclusions helped me direct my own path. (April 28, 2009)

In analyzing the dialogues and journals, I was surprised by the quantity and quality of the reflections in the written journals. There was such richness in the nature of reflections during the Reflective Exchange Dialogue that I had anticipated that the journal entries would move beyond the dialogue. However, what was actually documented in the journals seemed to be a retelling of discourse that occurred in the Reflective Exchange Dialogues. This may have been a result of the research design as teachers first engaged in peer dialogue and then wrote in their individual journals. Another surprising finding was that the teacher reflections very quickly moved beyond the teacher behaviors as documented on the Engagement Visit Tool. The EVT appeared to limit their initial
reflections because it was as if the behaviors documented on the observation tool opened the door to reflection; however, once through that door, the teachers’ reflective journeys took different paths. Individual discourse about reflection focused on different aspects of behavior and became more relevant to a particular individual’s practice. In this chapter, I have tried to report each teacher’s journey as accurately as I could and in some cases I identified common practices; however, my experience was that each teacher’s reflective journey was unique.

In considering each teacher’s journey, I began to wonder about the research design. This led to some thoughts and ideas for continued research. For example, would the journal reflections have been different or richer if the research design was reversed and teachers first wrote in their Reflective Journals before participating in the Reflective Exchange Dialogues? What would be the impact on teacher reflection if the study was done without the dialogue component or without the journal component? How might I redesign the observational tool? The study was designed intentionally to give teachers the choice of time of my observations, content of the lesson, and student grouping. Would the results have been different if the observations were conducted during only one type of lesson and one type of same student grouping, i.e. whole group, lecture or direct teach, math lesson? Such questions prompt me to readily acknowledge that this study has led to more questions than answers and I am
eagerly anticipating my continued work with the idea of teacher reflection and its implications for teacher practice.

An unexpected benefit to the teachers, as a result of my role with the school, is that although after the study concluded, they can continue this reflective journey and persist in using the Engagement Visit Tool to ask and answer questions about their practice. The teachers all expressed an interest in my continuing to serve as coach and critical friend to their practice. This invigorates and inspires me. Through this process I have witnessed the reflective journeys of five very committed teachers and have taken a journey of my own, one that has lead me to truer and deeper understanding of what it means to be a reflective practitioner.

Summary

The relevant findings that contribute to answering the three research questions were presented in Chapter 4. Using excerpts from the Exchange Dialogue and Reflection Journals, in this section I detailed each teacher’s reflective journey as a means to support the findings, discussed common themes using Dewey’s (1910/2005), Schön’s (1983), Van Manen’s (1977), and Korthagen’s (2001) theories as a foundational basis, and ended with my own lived experience of being a participant observer.

The fifth and final chapter of this study will present my understanding of the findings documented in Chapter 4 in relationship to their importance to teacher reflection and instructional practice.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In Chapter 5, I discuss my findings of the lived experiences of five teachers who worked with an observational tool, Reflective Exchange Dialogues, and Reflective Journals as a component of their professional development. I assess the findings from Chapter 4 in terms of their importance to teacher reflection and instructional practice. This chapter addresses the findings in relationship to the three research questions of this phenomenological, multiple-case study:

1. How do teachers make sense of observational data during a post observation reflective dialogue?
2. How do teachers reflect on classroom observational data?
3. How might the holistic reflection experience impact teachers’ pedagogical practice?

Making Sense of Observational Data

The teachers in this study shared a genuine curiosity about their practice. Each was given an opportunity to decline to look at the data collected on the observational tool, but each time the participants expressed eagerness to examine the objective data collected during their lesson. One teacher expressed a sense of apprehension about the data but remarked that this was not a negative thing. Each teacher shared an appreciation for the objective nature of
the tool and that I, as the researcher, was just a “note-taker” during the observation (Ashley, Exchange Dialogue, April, 15, 2009).

To depict accurately how the teachers made sense of the observational data during the Exchange Dialogue, an explanation of the role I played in the conversation and the purpose of the observational tool is essential. My role was that of a facilitator or coach during the Exchange Dialogue. I set the stage for the dialogue by opening the conversation in a way that established a fair playing field. Then, to encourage reflection and ownership in the process, I asked the teachers to talk about the lesson and whether they were pleased with the results. After giving them an opportunity to talk about and analyze their perception of the lesson, I asked them if they were ready to see the data. I let them review the information from the observational tool and as they verbally analyzed the data, I paraphrased their ideas and theories. After they developed a theory and a plan of action, I asked them to reflect on the process. (See Appendix B for the Exchange Dialogue Protocol) It is also critical to mention here that this observational tool was designed to encourage teacher reflection on their students’ engagement practices and not to be used as an evaluation instrument.

The teachers were eager to talk about their lessons and the outcomes of those lessons in terms of desired goals, instructional strategies, and results. Interestingly, as the teachers began to describe each lesson, they developed theories about what would have yielded better student results and formed practical action steps. This was done regardless of whether it was an ongoing
lesson or a plan for the next time they taught that concept. Plans of action, which included instructional strategies, organizational strategies, or managerial strategies, were easily accessed by these experienced teachers. The teachers talked of the strategies and why they believed these strategies would be more effective with no difficulty. There was never an instance in either the Exchange Dialogue or the Reflection Journal in which teachers struggled for next steps. This could be a direct result of their pedagogical foundations, knowledge base, and years of experience in the classroom. This could also be the result of a particular cultural characteristic of the school. The entire school is organized around a problem solving approach to instruction. During instruction, students were presented with problems to resolve and asked to think out a plan of action, which would be critiqued, before proceeding to resolution. This problem-solving approach to instruction lends itself to the idea that teachers in this school continue that approach when examining their own work.

In making sense of the observational tool, teachers began what can only be described as a dialogue with self. They moved fluidly from one idea to the other, from one thought to the next and it appeared as if they were completing the thoughts they started out aloud in their heads. They would question and respond, wonder and give reasons, and discuss and debate assumptions. At times they would say things such as “Don’t you think . . .,” but then neither waited for, nor seemed to need my response to the question. At this point it was as if I was just a spectator in the making sense process. During this dialogue with
the self, all the teachers talked of the way the data affirmed their thoughts about specific students. They wondered why there were or weren’t tally marks on particular indicators and explained why they took or didn’t take certain actions. During the process of dialogue with the self, the teachers displayed Dewey’s (1910/2005) two reflection sub processes of perplexity, hesitation, and doubt and sought additional facts to support their ideas and/or actions. Even though I was a participant in the Exchange Dialogue when the teachers were making sense of the data, I felt as if I was witness to a private dialogue.

During the course of the dialogue each teacher identified a few teacher behaviors, highlighted on the observational tool, which they wanted to incorporate back into their practice, and they gave rationales for why this was important to them or to the success of the students. Again, the teachers were able to address how they would do this and developed a plan of action. These teachers’ behaviors were tallied on the Engagement Visit observational tool. The use of a different observational tool may yield different results.

One teacher behavior mentioned by all the teachers was specific praise and in the Exchange Dialogue and in the journals specific praise was addressed in both behavioral and academic terms. Teachers talked about ways that specific praise could be used as a way to highlight and acknowledge appropriate classroom behaviors. Some teachers reported that a child, who had been specifically praised for an appropriate behavior, served as a model to the other children. For the teachers, specific praise in an instance like this served multiple
purposes. It affirmed the child who demonstrated the appropriate behavior, caught the attention of the other students whose behaviors may not have been so suitable, and could possibly have averted misbehaviors. Teachers understood this to be a very effective classroom management strategy. Academically, teachers believed that specific praise was more helpful to students than mere affirmations. For the teachers, specific praise could be beneficial in letting students know when they were on the right track in their work and aid them in identifying their own academic strength. The teachers believed when used in this way, specific praise was a powerful tool for students’ academic growth.

Another behavior commonly selected by the teachers was higher level questions and extensions. All teachers expressed an interest in engaging all students in the content at a deeper level. Apparently, age of the students or content taught was not a factor. Teachers regardless of the grade level or subject area selected these two teacher behaviors. The desire to engage all students more deeply with the content through higher level questions and extension is indicative of Van Manen’s (1977) critical reflection.

The five teachers in this study exhibited very few instances of reflections at Van Manen’s (1977) technical rationality level. One possible explanation for this may be as indicated by the lack of tallies on student off task behaviors and desist teacher behaviors, these particular teachers appeared to be highly skilled at classroom management and their students knew their behavioral expectations. Reflections on issues of classroom management and behavioral expectations are
located at Van Manen’s technically rationality level. This is the level he believes precedes the other levels. Their reflections were located at Van Manen’s practical and critical reflection levels because the teachers were concerned with the consequences and value of the lessons.

Reflecting on Observational Data

In analyzing the transcripts of the Exchange Dialogues and the entries in the Reflective Journals, teacher reflections appeared to evolve during the course of each Exchange Dialogue. Reflections progressed through the self, the student, the class, and then to more universal concerns. This evolution of reflection was evident in each teacher’s journey.

At first, the teachers focused on the specific teacher behaviors they displayed during the course of the observation and asked for clarification of the operational definitions. Much of the first Exchange Dialogue was spent making sure there was congruence between their understanding of the particular teacher behaviors documented on the observational tool and the formal operational definitions. These definitions were made available to them at the start of the study but once they received the data from the first observation, they were very interested in how each behavior was tallied. Comments such as, “I thought I did that more”, “I know I did that, but maybe it wasn’t directed at those four children”, and “I wonder why I do that” were prevalent during their initial reflections of the observational data. Apparently at this point in the exchange dialogue, the documentation of their actual practice challenged the teachers’ assumptions and
beliefs about their teacher behaviors. Some teachers made connections to past experiences both personal and professional as a way to explain or to wonder about their practice. This is consistent with Valli’s (1997) Personalistic Reflection. Some cited educational theories/ theorists and/or educational literature as proof of the importance of specific indicators. All talked about being aware of the indicators and how that awareness led to student engagement but they believed they needed to bring those specific teacher behaviors back into the foreground of their thinking. Perhaps the teacher behaviors documented on the observational tool were tangible and something the teachers could make sense of with relative ease or something they had control over. This initial focus on the self is consistent with Tremmel’s (1993) assertion that reflection “must include a backward step into the self” (p. 456).

After reflecting on their teacher behaviors, the teachers turned their attention to specific students. Through the dialogue they expressed their concerns about particular children. These concerns were both academic and behavioral. They reflected on how they were engaging the high achievers, how they were drawing out the quiet children and whether they thought they were successful at both. During the reflections of how they engaged the children, the teachers began to develop theories about their practice, theories they planned to test over the course of the next few days. The reflections here were indicative of Schön’s (1983) reflection-on-action. The observational data appeared to confirm the intuitive perceptions the teachers had about the individual students and they
did not seem surprised by the particular student behaviors each child exhibited. The observational data provided them with an external view that validated and affirmed their held assumptions of the children as individuals in the class.

Reflections then turned to the class as a whole and included broad instructional and/or managerial strategies that impacted the group. Discussions arose of the differences between groups or classes and the instructional and managerial strategies that were effective with those groups. A few teachers shared how they restructured their instruction of particular areas of the curriculum over the years, discussing what didn’t work in the past to explain how they currently organized for instruction and why it was more or less effective. All teachers discussed different instructional strategies in a way that indicated their practice was a work in progress; one in which they were continuing to develop. Each teacher expressed a need for continual professional growth in an effort to be more effective in the classroom.

Finally, the teachers’ reflections moved to more universal concerns. These concerns were evidenced in their reflections on the need for equity in the classroom and the need to engage all students in deep, relevant learning regardless of learning preferences. Another universal theme the teachers’ reflected on was the value of the learning beyond the classroom, regardless of the content area. This became apparent in the teachers’ desire to give the students tools and skills they could apply throughout life and also in their desire for students to have an understanding of environmental issues. Teachers had
aspirations for the students to connect to the creative process and develop an appreciation for art. In addition, teachers recognized the limitations of the students’ experience and so made efforts to provide an enriched learning environment that could provide some of these experiences. Reflections, such as these, are indicative of Van Manen’s (1977) critical reflection.

As documented in the transcripts of the reflective exchange dialogues and from reflective journal entries, teacher reflections transitioned through several phases. They first grasped the concrete teacher behaviors they could control and change. Then they turned their attention to the individual students and what might have the most impact on their learning. Moving on to the class as a whole, they reflected on effective practices on the group and finally they reflected on universal themes that dealt with equity and the value of the learning experience.

Impact of the Holistic Reflection Experience on Pedagogical Practice

Looking at the impact of the holistic reflection on the pedagogical practice of each teacher, it could be said that they used the process to make changes to their teacher behaviors. The holistic reflection experience, which included classroom observations using an objective observation tool, dialogue with a colleague, and reflective journal writing, appeared to have both and individual and a collective impact on participating teachers’ practice. The holistic reflection experience served to remind them of the effective teacher behaviors they wanted to incorporate back into their practice and it challenged their assumptions and beliefs about their practice. The teachers used the knowledge gained from the
reflection experience to fine-tune aspects of their practice and expressed a desire to continue to use the observational tool and reflective exchange dialogue to learn from their practice. For example, Nancy became more aware of directing her questions to all students, not only to the ones who were eager to participate. She also incorporated more instances of seeking students’ ideas, thoughts and opinions and asking higher level questions or providing extensions. These were the behaviors of particular interest to Nancy; however, there was also an increase in the instances when Nancy provided latency by waiting five seconds for students to respond. Holly became more aware of the way she was using touch behaviors in the classroom. Ashley and Ellen engaged the students more deeply in the content by increasing their instances of asking higher level questions and Lisa used the holistic reflection experience with the Engagement Visit Tool, reflective exchange dialogue, and reflection journal to question her practice. These visible changes in the participating individual teachers’ practice appeared to result from their holistic reflection experience.

The teacher behaviors on the observational tool were not unknown to these experienced teachers. They recognized and acknowledged that these were effective teacher behaviors that needed to be a natural part of their practice. It was almost with a sense of frustration that the teachers talked about knowing what to do and how to do it and expressed concern that these behaviors were not more innate in their practice.
The data and reflection experience challenged their assumptions about their practice causing them to wonder about their practice toward individual children and question their practice in relationship to specific indicators. The teachers used this experience to develop theories and detail ways to change what they were doing with specific students and with the class as a whole. This type of reflection may be a result of the years of experience each teacher had. Novice teachers may not have access to all the instructional and managerial strategies that experienced teachers have gathered and developed through the years. The data recorded on the observational tool between the first and second observations indicated an increase in the behaviors the teacher had selected as areas of focus. The specific praise and higher level questions and extensions indicators were the ones most commonly identified by the teachers. In each case, there was a marked increase in tally marks between the first observation and the second and third observations. In some cases, there were increased tally marks on other indicators, such as latency, affirmations, and delving, all of which indicated that the teachers knew effective strategies to foster student engagement and could apply them during classroom instruction if the lack of inclusion of these strategies had been brought to their attention. Observational data collected between the second and third observation for some teachers remained static. This could be indicative of a different type of lesson or grouping of students. The teachers wondered about this as well.
The impact of the experience on the tangible aspects of teacher practice was immediately apparent and documented on the EVT. During the Reflective Dialogues, teachers remarked they intended to adjust the specific behaviors, identified on the EVT. Teachers made a conscious effort to alter their practices as a result of this holistic reflection experience. The more abstract concepts that came to light as a result of the holistic experience were not captured by the EVT. These concepts such as an appreciation for art and the need to develop skills that went beyond the classroom were revealed during the teachers’ reflections; however, any impact these reflections had on pedagogical practice could not be measured by the EVT. This could be due to the length of the study or a limitation of the instrument itself.

At the end of the study, the teachers expressed an interest in continuing to learn about their classroom practices and teacher behaviors by using the observational tool and by participating in exchange dialogues. This desire again displayed Dewey’s (1910/2005) three characteristics of reflective practitioners: open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness. The observational tool gave them objective feedback and the exchange dialogue gave them the opportunity and the time to talk about their practice in a meaningful way. For them it was an effective way to question and learn from their practice; therefore, the holistic experience of using an objective observational tool and participating in dialogue about the data as the vehicle for reflection appears to be an effective
way of encouraging teacher growth because it has an immediate impact on teacher pedagogical practice.

Implications for Future Research

An area of interest and one for further study would be to determine whether novice teachers focus on the same indicators as did these more experienced teachers. The study sample size could be increased to determine whether interest in the specific praise indicator can be generalized to all experienced teachers or only whether it is only indicative of this specific population. Another benefit to increasing the sample size would be to determine whether the apparent developmental evolution of reflective thought from a focus on the self, the individual student, the class, and then to more universal themes can be generalized to other teacher populations such as pre-service or novice teachers. The research design could be changed to investigate the importance of the sequencing relationship of journaling to reflective dialogue. For example, a research design in which journaling is done prior to the Reflective Exchange Dialogue or a design in which either the Reflective Exchange Dialogue or the Reflective Journals are eliminated might yield different results in terms of Van Manen’s levels of reflection.

Conclusion

In this study the use of the Engagement Visit Tool, coupled with the Reflective Exchange Dialogue Protocol and Reflective Journal Protocol, appears to be an effective way to foster reflection and encourage change in experienced
teachers' pedagogical practice. As documented in this study, there was an immediate impact on teacher practice as a result of the observation, dialogue, and journal; however, due to the time frame of the study, any long-term impact is yet to be determined.
APPENDIX B

REFLECTIVE EXCHANGE DIALOGUE PROTOCOL
## Reflective Exchange Dialogue Protocol
### The Reflecting and Planning Exchange

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting the Stage</th>
<th>“I really enjoyed being in your class today – It was great to see you work with your students.”</th>
<th>Assuming positive presupposition and establishing a fair playing ground</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning the Reflection</td>
<td>“So what do you think of your lesson? How do you think it went?”</td>
<td>Posing an open-ended question that allows the teacher to take the lead in interpreting the lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>“Talk to me about what was going on when I was there.”</td>
<td>Provides the teacher the opportunity to talk about his or her emotional reactions, bring up any factors that he or she noticed, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>“Did you get the results you wanted?”</td>
<td>Asking the teaching to analyze the results of the lesson from his or her perspective and focus on the students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the Data</td>
<td>“Are you interested in seeing the student engagement data?” (Show the teacher the data on the Engagement Tool.)</td>
<td>Asking the teacher if he or she is ready to see the data - handing the data to the teacher to begin to analyze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the Data</td>
<td>“So, what you are seeing and what you are telling me is __________.”</td>
<td>Paraphrasing to stimulate the beginning of cause-effect relationship between his or her behaviors and student engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting on the Data</td>
<td>“Why do you think that might be so?”</td>
<td>Inviting analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>“So you are saying that if you __________, then __________.”</td>
<td>Invitation to plan and act on his or her theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>“So, the next time I’m here, you would like for me to __________ while you are __________.”</td>
<td>Finalizing the plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting</td>
<td>So, tell me, as you reflect on this process, what does it do for you?”</td>
<td>Reflecting on the entire engagement exchange process and determine level of positive feelings for the next time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


