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USING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TO STUDY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

by
Cheryl A. Smith

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Department of Educational Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of
Doctor of Education
At
Rowan University
May 2010

Dissertation Chair: James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.

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Cheryl A. Smith

Dedication

To my parents, Clarence and Lavera Davis, whose constant encouragement, unwavering support and love provided me with the willpower to continue my journey. Your faith and confidence in me never faltered. Your interest in my educational career, advice and love are an inspiration for all parents.

To my son, Sean Brett Smith, whose continued support made graduation a dream come true. Thanks to all of you for your guidance and assistance.

Acknowledgments

It is with great appreciation that I extend my thanks to the many people that made this research come to completion. I would like to thank the members of my committee for their support, constructive critique and positive feedback throughout this experience.

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To my committee members Dr. Conrad and Dr. Dawson, thanks for providing depth to the research through your insight and wisdom. Your participation on my committee was a constant support.

Finally, to Michael Collura, I cannot thank you enough for being a pillar of strength for me to lean on. Thanks for your love and encouragement during the final stages of the doctoral program.

Abstract

Cheryl A. Smith
USING REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TO STUDY SCHOOL LEADERSHIP
2009/10
James Coaxum, III, Ph.D.
Educational Leadership

The purposes of this investigation were to critically examine my principal leadership and to use reflective practice to improve my leadership practice and create positive change in the practices of teachers in the school. While scrutinizing critical incidents of practice, I utilized four reflective practice cycles to develop new action theories and new paradigms of leadership behavior.

Reflective practice Cycle I focused on me as an individual. Revisiting who I was conceptually opened reflection about my identity, prompting me to think differently about my leadership. My partnering with another principal consisted of reflective practice Cycle II. Our emphasis was on a problem framing analysis of managing behaviorally challenged students. This collaboration led to the establishment of a mentor program for behaviorally challenged students and a school wide positive behavior support program. Reflective practice Cycle III evolved into weekly grade-level meetings for teachers where they utilized the reflective practice framework to solve problems. This theoretical framework allowed us to examine our practice from a critical perspective for improvement in student learning. Reflective practice Cycle IV highlighted how the process of reflective practice spiraled outward to the school level for the development of a school-based learning community.

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Chapter I

Introduction

This dissertation documented my chronological growth as an educational leader during two years as an elementary school principal. It was a highly personalized account of my experiences that are autoethnographical in nature. My subjective experiences as a principal were written in the form of a biographical personal narrative, highlighting how I improved my leadership at Northfield Elementary School in the Sterling School District.

Policies based on effective school research identify principal leadership at the top of the agenda for educational reform (Zinkel & Greenwood, 1987). An effective principal is integral to school improvement. The most critical mental models in an organization are those shared by its leaders (Senge, 1990). Mental models of leadership must embrace collaborative theories of leadership. The leadership theories that many districts embrace follow the traditional archetype of a hierarchical chain of command. Decisions are made at the top with minimal input from the staff who are most affected by the decisions. This type of leadership style limits a school's range of actions to what is familiar, lacking emphasis on progress and learning for the staff. Reflective practice is an alternative approach to traditional methods of leadership.

It is my belief, developed from experience, that the majority of problems faced by principals are characterized by ambiguity which leads to confusion (Sergiovanni, 1991). This confusion defies any clear-cut rational solutions. In this study, I viewed my experiences through my own reflective lens as a principal for two years in a unique setting to improve my practice, thus enabling teachers to improve their practice. My own

reflective lens incorporated not only my values and feelings, but my understandings of the context of an issue that was an accurate and distortion free assessment. This study was written from the perspective that a principal is riddled with multiple complexities that render him or her dysfunctional as a leader. Using reflective practice as a tool, I aimed to improve my leadership by heightening my effectiveness as a principal.

Throughout this study, I used the concept of reflective practice to identify, examine, and modify my leadership to improve my practice. Reflective practice was the vehicle used by me to create more effective action. It involved the uncovering and examining of basic assumptions we made about teaching and learning from our limited points of view. By exploring alternatives, possibilities not previously considered evolved. As principal, I realized that change in the school was needed. This awareness came from the result of witnessing actions and assumptions that were inadequate. A change in perspectives was needed to further our learning so we could better meet the needs of our students. Primary to this dissertation, my purpose for utilizing reflective practice revolved around the critical examination of assumptions, beliefs, and meanings that frame educational practices. My experiences that are discussed in this dissertation were reflections of my work, revealing my use of reflective practice and its positive impact on the school and my leadership capacity.

Research Questions

This focus of the dissertation was centered on the following research questions:

1. How did I examine myself through an autoethnographic lens and continue my own learning by providing insight, data, and reflection regarding the role of elementary principal?

2. How did using reflective practice as a tool allow me to critically examine leadership?
3. How did I apply the process of reflective practice to my reflections?
4. What was the process that connected reflective practice and leadership?
5. How did reflective leadership transition to provide tools to enhance climate cultural decision-making?

Policies based on effective schools research identify principal leadership at the top of the agenda for educational reform (Zinkel & Greenwood, 1987). An effective principal is integral to school improvement. The most critical mental models in any organization are those shared by key decision-makers (Senge, 1990). Many school districts follow the traditional management archetype of a hierarchical chain of command. Decisions are made at the top with minimal input from the staff, who are most affected by the decisions. This model, if unexamined, limits an organization's range of actions to what is familiar and comfortable. Organizations that are modeled on the archetype of reflective practice are collaborative with an emphasis on learning. The entire staff is continuously involved in examinations of practice, beliefs about actions, and plans for future actions. The experiences I discuss are reflections of my work revealing my philosophy and leadership capacity as a developing and maturing professional.

Statement of Purpose

This dissertation documented my chronological growth as an educational leader during two years as an elementary school principal. It is a highly personalized account of my experience as a principal in an elementary school. It is autoethnographical in nature, focusing on my subjective practice as a principal in the form of a biographical, personal,

narrative, highlighting experiences at Northfield Elementary School in the Sterling School District. Throughout this study the concept of reflective practice was used to identify, examine, and modify my leadership to improve my practice.

Reflective practice is a reflection process for improving one's expertise in problem solving, decision-making, and complex thinking. It is an alternative approach to traditional methods of leadership. Reflective practice is a means to more effective action. It involves the uncovering and examining of basic assumptions people make through which any specific situation is viewed. By imagining and exploring alternatives, doors to other possibilities not previously considered evolve creating new assumptions not previously held. Using reflective practice as a tool, I examined my leadership to improve my theories-in-use. Reflective practice was a reflection process for me to improve my expertise in problem solving, decision-making, and complex thinking. The idea of reflective practice centered on the identification of discrepancies between beliefs and actions. By reflecting on these discrepancies, I identified ways to improve the quality of my leadership, thus promoting reflective practice development in teachers to build a successful school-based professional learning community.

Values

Throughout my life, I have always had a strong sense of purpose and profound commitment to children and learning. The prospect of making someone's life better through learning inspired me to pursue a career in educational leadership. Never before has leadership in education been more critical to public school systems. Concern about the academic performance of schools has mounted, while at the same time educators are beginning to appreciate the complexities of bringing about school reform (Fullan, 1999).

Because leadership is the pivotal force behind successful organizations, it is necessary that I have a comprehensive view of my leadership. My effectiveness as a leader is dependent on my ability to analyze and adjust my own manner of behavior to shape my environment. Situational elements such as the organizational structure of the district, my superiors, professional development opportunities, and community are interrelated components that have contributed minimally to my leadership platform. The caring and compassion I have for people and my love for learning is the leadership platform that eventually developed. My values, developed during my early years, have impacted my leadership.

I grew up in West Philadelphia as an only child in the 1960s. I was born to parents who had migrated to the city from rural West Virginia. My grandfathers were coal miners. I represent the first generation of our family that was far removed from the ethos of Appalachia. The Davis family was bonded together not only by blood, but by southern background, which often contrasted sharply with inner city life. That could possibly explain why we are so close. Nostalgically, I recall endless weekend visits from various extended family members who gathered at our home enjoying constant meals and spirited conversations. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins were an integral part of our most memorable occasions. My father's side of the family was gregarious. His nine siblings and their families migrated from West Virginia and settled in many of the states surrounding Pennsylvania, which afforded them convenient access to our home.

My house was designated as the official gathering place and was usually packed with relatives by Saturday. The aroma of southern cuisine filled the air. The smooth sounds of Motown bellowing from the record player, laughter, and small children running

around were hectic, but cozy. My experiences as a child with family were so vital that their support would later sustain me through many personal and professional ordeals. Nothing has influenced me more through the rollercoaster of life than the support of my parents who were both educators.

My parents' active involvement in schooling reflected an attitude of caring and commitment. My mother came from a family of educators. Her mother and several of her aunts were teachers in rural West Virginia during the era of segregation. She often showed me pictures and told me stories about the children they taught who overcame many obstacles and went on to become prominent professionals. The nurturing provided by my aunts and the attitude that achievement was possible was the central theme in all of my mother's stories. These stories contributed to my belief that the foundation of a support system of caring people is a catalyst to achievement.

My parents, both teachers, were frequent visitors to my school. My mother was very active in providing special treats for my class during the holidays. While working with the Parent Teachers Association (PTA), she organized a major fundraiser to help build a gym for my elementary school. In high school, my parents were present at athletic practices, games, dances, and volunteered for numerous functions and events. I was motivated by their participation and eventually developed a love for learning. Comer (1992) noted, children who observed their parents enjoying school involvement activities identified with that enthusiasm and imitated that involvement by becoming immersed in learning.

My family experiences along with former educators whom I met throughout my journey have influenced my belief that charisma, interpersonal skills, and hard work are

powerful motivational forces that galvanize subordinates to achieve more. Teaching school has been in my heart since I was a small child. As a young girl, a day did not go by that I did not imitate my classroom experiences with my blackboard, white chalk, and dusty eraser. My favorite pastime was getting together a few friends to play school with me as I played the role of teacher. As a child I did not know that my playing school was preparation for a long career in education.

Being a product of the Philadelphia school system in the 1960s was tumultuous. During that time inequities existed in the segregated public schools and massive desegregation efforts were being implemented in many neighborhoods. I vaguely remember how unsettling it was and the controversy it created. My family left Philadelphia before I started junior high school and I eventually lost contact with many of my acquaintances and the social landscape of the inner city. Finishing high school in middle class suburbia helped to formulate my vision that furthering my education by going to college was a worthy goal.

My teaching career began in Camden City in 1976. I was a vibrant young elementary school teacher who was energized by working with children in the urban setting. I was inspired by my favorite principal, Mr. Brown, to continue my education by taking additional courses toward my Masters degree. During the years we worked together at Foster Elementary School in Camden, he regularly gave me additional responsibilities throughout the school. These additional duties resulted in me being viewed by my coworkers in a leadership role. When Mr. Brown and I sometimes ate lunch together, we discussed pedagogy, school improvement, and curriculum. I was impressed with his knowledge about education and how everyone in the school just loved

him. The feeling of warmth the staff and students had for him impacted positively on his effectiveness as a school leader. Mr. Brown's most fascinating quality was his humanistic approach in dealing with people. He taught me that in order for people to work successfully together, an environment of trust and integrity must be established by the leader. Successful relationships, which produce connectedness as a means to achieving school goals must be a part of the school culture. I believe that a leader's personal responsibility is to manage with the utmost regard for subordinates' rights and common welfare. Mr. Brown intrinsically motivated me to do my best work. His personal concern for my overall happiness and professional growth prompted me to willingly give 100% to any assigned task. He "lit my fire" and covertly inspired me to pursue the principalship.

Mr. Brown encouraged me to become a principal by giving me the courage to follow a career path that I never thought about pursuing. After spending 10 years as a mathematics teacher in Camden City and 10 years as a first grade teacher in Gloucester Township, I was appointed to my first administrative position as an elementary school principal in September 1998. Before becoming a principal, I loved being a teacher. I enjoyed the feeling of being part of the team. The teachers and I worked together and helped each other be successful. There was a camaraderie that we shared personally and professionally. Then, I could be a leader but I could also be a follower. However, that changed once I became a principal.

Statement of Problem

During my first years as principal, I was faced with numerous challenges accrued from a variety of circumstances beyond my control. First, I was shocked by the sheer physical and emotional energy required to run what I hoped to be an effective school.

Secondly, I was alarmed that a few staff members appeared to have preferred a male in my position. This was particularly disconcerting to me because my predecessor, a male, had been generally viewed as ineffective. I had inherited a school with low standardized test scores, a transient student population, and personnel problems impacted by a lack of consistent leadership. Also, it is important to note that I was brand new to the district. I brought to the job a set of experiences that were outside the community and foreign to its culture. I was faced with the challenges of overcoming outsider status, a lack of acceptance, and limited knowledge of the school culture, which impeded my ability to mobilize the staff and move the school forward. I came to the position as a directive leader, which was not the answer. The staff had been accustomed to being in control and had no intentions in relinquishing power. Power and control were issues for me at that time. I needed to develop a repertoire of skills, maturity, and sensitivity in order to be successful.

My not sanctioning teacher empowerments led to a turbulent experience as a neophyte principal. The authoritarian management style was the leadership style that I had thrived under as a teacher. Due to my past experiences, that was what I knew best. After all, it worked for me and I was a highly successful teacher. I looked up to and felt secure with my former principals who played the paternal role. I believed it was an administrative prerogative to make every final decision. During that time in my career it had to be my way or no way. I attributed this to a low level of emotional involvement in the work of those I supervised. I did not feel secure and trust was lacking on both sides. So, I kept a safe distance.

I would never follow through with a suggestion from a teacher that did not meet with my notion of what was best. This was a result of my viewing the world as relatively impersonal and in terms of black and white. There was no room for creativity and things had to be predictable. My energies as a principal were directed toward achieving goals and determining what problems needed to be solved. I rationally analyzed problems and decided what needed to be done to resolve the problem. I influenced teachers to do things my way through the use of facts, which seemed to always perpetuate group conflict. My teachers had a saying, “It’s her way or the highway.” It was very obvious to them that I was threatened by open challenges to my ideas and troubled by any aggressiveness on their part. Part of my problem was lack of preparation for the job.

The only professional development I had as a principal was a period of intense classroom study, followed by periodic workshops of my choosing designed to update me on a series of topics with no follow-up. When leaders are learners themselves, they are better able to empathize and serve as models when supervising teachers (Lashway, 2007). One consequence of the lack of training for principals has been a dramatic growth in formalized mentoring programs that are extended throughout the career cycle (Lashway, 2007). Mentoring encourages principals to be more reflective and analytical about their practice while learning new strategies. Unfortunately, I did not have the advantage of having a mentor. Dialogue and reflective analysis were needed to help me better serve my school community. I needed to explore my values and find a more authentic voice in order to change. It was not new knowledge from others that I was searching for, but self-knowledge. Reflective practice gave me that self-knowledge. It provided clarity and direction in my search of becoming a better principal.

I strived to create a team between parents, teachers, and administrators to fulfill school goals. As a leader, I empowered my team toward our common objectives. How my constituents felt about me was essential to my effectiveness as a leader. Throughout this study I presented my developing leadership framework. Through growth as a leader, I mobilized my staff to achieve our goals. During the doctoral program, my theories-in-use evolved and continue to evolve. Developing my capacity to inspire others toward positive change for school improvement is a work in progress.

Theories-in-Use

I entered the Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at Rowan University primarily as an opportunity to become a more effective leader. I wanted to learn the theories behind the best practice models in school administration. Pursuing this knowledge has given me a better understanding of both my strengths and weaknesses as I developed strategies to meet the demands of becoming an effective principal. Prior to the beginning of this educational leadership program, my concept of effective leadership derived mostly from experiences with administrators and supervisors that I had the opportunity to work under as a teacher. They all came from an era in which the bureaucratic model of leadership was the norm. That era is over. Presently, with school leaders being held to a higher standard of accountability, the school reform movement has shifted school leadership from the authoritative model to a more participatory systems model.

This entire approach to learning from being reflective about my leadership was new to me. My learning had resulted in an epiphany. New concepts put into practice had resulted in superior results. It was my internal sense of clarity and direction that I

was having difficulty finding. Reflection on my leadership had enabled me to learn new knowledge about myself, while I continued to refine and develop my personal leadership theory.

In this chapter of my dissertation, I explain my core values, which impacted on my leadership theory. I discuss the values of education that were conducive to a positive school culture. I then place these values in several theoretical frameworks defining my theories-in-use. To further express my theories-in-use, I relate several significant examples of my professional experiences to clarify the leadership strategies I use to be effective.

During the course of my doctoral studies, I became interested in school reform. I was hired in 2001 as a principal of a 2-year-old charter school situated in the heart of North Philadelphia. My job focused on the charter renewal process, low teacher morale, and failing test scores. The former principal left the school in turmoil and organizationally much work needed to be done. Since the inception of the school, teacher turnover was high and most were not certified by the state. When I first began working there, the majority of the teachers were angry and burned-out. It was apparent that the children were not the priority. Teacher attendance was deplorable. Student disciplinary problems were at an all time high. A more positive climate was the only way to change a culture of negativism. I brought about a change because of my caring attitude in dealing with students, parents, and staff. This was the only way to move the school forward. People want to come to work and do their best when they are fulfilled.

Many of my values about education derived from my family background. I grew up in an environment where education and achievement were at the top of the list of

priorities. Some of my values come from personality traits characterized as being creative and a perfectionist. Others come from lessons learned through life experiences. During the course of this leadership program, I explored my values and clarified the values that were most essential for me. This clarification of values gave me a tremendous sense of self-discovery and liberation.

Understanding my leadership theory helped me see how my values reflected who I had become. These values drove my actions, thoughts, and feelings in distinctive ways. One of my most fundamental values centered on developing positive interpersonal relationships with staff. Close personal relationships gave meaning to my life personally and professionally. The central theme to this philosophy was humanistic. I was committed to human values where family and close friends were extremely important. My values were assessed on how it affected my close relationships.

Faculty members, students, and parents were like family to me. Each person was significant and how each person felt was important. We were a community joined for the common purposes of teaching and learning. Nurturing and making others feel good about themselves by caring for the whole person, not just the work tasks they were responsible for, produced harmonious relationships. The psychology behind these relationships was simple. People liked others not for who they were, but how they made them feel. Therefore, my success as a leader was dependent upon my ability to inspire cooperation among my subordinates by making them feel good about themselves. In order for people to willingly accept the direction of another individual it must make them feel good to do so (Bennis & Nanus, 1997). Those that I have followed passionately have made me feel

important. When people were made to feel good they naturally were cooperative. The conditions necessary for cooperation require trust.

It would be impossible for an organization to function without trust. The concept of trust is the belief in the honesty of another person. Honesty consistently emerges as the single most important ingredient in the leader-constituent relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 1997). It is important for a leader to be seen as practicing what she preaches. Consistency between word and deed is how leaders are judged to be honest. Trust implies accountability, predictability, and reliability (Bennis & Nanus, 1997). For successful leadership to occur there has to be fusion between the leader and followers with consensus about the desired outcomes. As a leader, I not only wanted my constituents to trust me, but I wanted to trust them as well. I needed to operate in an environment where I felt the security of trust around me. Only in an atmosphere of mutual trust did we discuss our professional strengths and weaknesses and resolve problems without feeling vulnerable. Trust replaced suspicion on both sides. Consequently, there was no need to use defensive tactics to undermine our goals. We looked for ways to get along even if we disagreed. This natural connection not only fostered collaboration, but led to mutual concern and a free flow of information. Without trust, honest communication was not possible.

Another value that I held was open communication. Communication was important because it created meaning for people. It was critical that the principal frequently bring constituents into conversations about their school. This inquiry process required an openness that ensured that all had input into decisions to build their commitment. As a leader, I was committed to deeply listening to the concerns of my

school community. Engaging them into conversations about what was working and not working gave me significant insights into accessing the needs of the school. Being open to critiques, whether of my ideas or leadership, from staff was beneficial in helping me improve and helping them feel a sense of ownership. An open flow of communication supported constructive feedback. By giving constructive feedback I demonstrated a willingness to help others be successful. By welcoming such feedback I demonstrated a concern about what they did and how they were perceived.

The concepts of positive interpersonal relationships, trust, and communication were key leadership strategies that supported learning. They also were my personal core values and emerged in my examination of the literature in leadership. Among the many theoretical frameworks that I examined, I found my leadership aligned with servant leadership, feminist leadership, and democratic leadership. The overlying principals of each construct focused on the following commonalities: equity in terms of how people were treated, collaborative and participatory decision-making, and attempts to enhance the self-worth of others. In this next section, I discuss how these theoretical frameworks, which comprised my theories-in-use, related to my core values of leadership.

Additionally, I discuss specific examples from my experiences that relate to the theoretical frameworks as referenced in Figure 1.

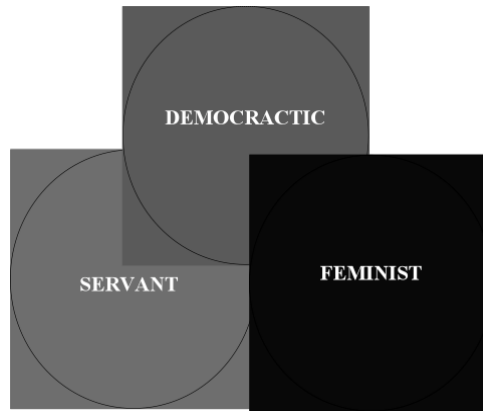


Figure 1 Theoretical Frameworks

Servant leadership. In building relationships that support a positive school culture I have often put myself in the position of what Robert Greenleaf (1977) called servant leadership. He described such leadership as placing oneself in service to others. It differs from the bureaucratic, hierarchical style of leadership empathizing trust, collaboration, and the ethical use of power. Placing one's leadership practice in service to others, so that at times it is difficult to differentiate the leader from the follower, is at the heart of this framework. As a leader, being supportive and assisting others in being successful is more important to me than being in charge. Embedded in my practice is the philosophy that the leader is servant first. I led by building up the capacity of others. I built up their capacity by listening, collaborating in problem solving, finding the necessary resources, and doing whatever it took to meet their needs. In practice, the servant leader gives a sense of direction to establish a fundamental purpose. Greenleaf states, "Servant leadership gives purpose to others who have difficulty in achieving it for themselves" (as cited in Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 125). But for the leader to be successful, trust is required. For trust to happen the followers must have confidence in the leader's

competence and values. As a servant leader my focus is on the emotional needs of others over work goals. I lead with empathy, which is the ability to sense feelings, needs, and perspectives of others. This led to a higher level of acceptance and loyalty with numerous possibilities for growth and change for the staff.

Robert Greenleaf's (1977) philosophy of servant leadership advocates for leaders to serve first and then lead by expanding services to individuals and the school. Greenleaf states, "When practicing servant leadership, the leader is often tempted by personal enthusiasm and commitment to define the needs of those served" (as cited in Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 125). Often teachers, parents, and students are not ready to define their own needs. However, Greenleaf (1977) maintains it is best to let those who will be served define their own needs in their own way. This related well to my view of the school being a collaborative community of learners. I believed that everyone's ideas were essential in reaching consensus on the following questions. What were we about and why? What was our obligation to the school community? After consensus was reached, as the leader, I modeled the values that helped shape the school as a community connected by a common purpose. The inclusion of all perspectives in shaping our values resulted in all members of the school community sharing the responsibility for servant leadership.

My responsibility was to create conditions that promoted authorship. Individuals needed to see their work as meaningful, to feel personally accountable for the consequences of their efforts, and to get feedback that lets them know the results (Bolman & Deal, 2001). I served the teachers by providing support and removing obstacles. This was accomplished by seeing that teachers had the necessary training and

resources to support quality instruction. As a motivational tool, incentives for continued professional growth were provided.

I was technically in charge. But I could not solve complex problems and move the school forward alone. I shared power among the teachers and leadership was shifted among them as well. Instead of diminishing my leadership capacity, it was strengthened, reflecting what sociologists call the norm of reciprocity. When people feel a sense of efficacy and an ability to influence their world, they seek to be productive (Bolman & Deal, 2001).

Being a servant leader came naturally to me. The following was one example of how I experienced followership. The traditional “Winter Festival” was always scheduled for the first week in December. The “Winter Festival” was an entertaining event for the entire school community in which our students performed a play with song, dance, and instrumental music. This was a major opportunity to bring the entire school community together and to increase parental involvement for a school event. During our November faculty meeting, teachers voiced their concerns to me about needing additional preparation time to make the program a success. Since there was so much opposition we took a faculty vote. The result was the postponement of the program to a spring date that everyone was comfortable with. We renamed the festival to the “Spring Festival,” and teachers made it a huge success.

Leaders often achieve results by acting like followers and depending on followers to act like leaders (Sergiovanni, 1992). I came to realize that a leader was only as effective as the followers. Role reversal was essential to a harmonious working relationship with teachers. As a follower, I listened to the thoughts and suggestions of my

staff in a nonjudgmental way. Everyone had the opportunity to express their opinions without retribution and have their input incorporated into school decisions. My goal was to nurture a staff of self-managers so they would not be dependent on me. To cast teachers in a role of subordinates was counterproductive in reaching school goals. Subordinates do the minimal and little else. Through shared decision-making and a desire to establish the value of collegiality, teachers were empowered to be independent so my direct leadership was not needed. In my work experience, relinquishing power and authority builds trust and integrity by allowing others to assume leadership roles. I valued servant leadership because it enhanced personal involvement, professional growth, and promoted teamwork.

Feminist leadership. The concept of giving others power and servant leadership are closely aligned with the feminist theory of leadership. Feminist theory grew out of a critique of leadership dominated by a white male structural functional perspective. Rosener (1995) described this leadership style, which focuses on the attributes of women as interactive. This style of leadership encourages participation, sharing of power and information, enhancing the self-worth of others, and building enthusiasm about the job. The traditional command-and-control style of management went against my nature of being supportive of others.

In this era, people no longer accept being dictated to and want their opinions respected. Working collaboratively by sharing power and information gave teachers the means to reach consensus and see the reasons for decisions. I practiced a concern for results with a concern for people (Helgesen, 1990).

According to Sergiovanni (1996), power is understood in two ways – as power over and power with. Power over emphasizes controlling what people do, when they do it, and how they do it. To share power with others is using power as a source of energy for achieving shared goals and purposes. Throughout the eighties an important discourse on power emerged – power with. Empowerment emerged from the work of a group of psychologists at Wellesley College, whose research focused on understanding the development of women. It suggested that the more one was capable of power with, the less one will seek power over (Kreisburg, 1992).

Jean Baker Miller (1976) noted, women needed power to advance their own development, but they did not need power to limit the development of others. She described ways of being powerful that enhance the power of other people while simultaneously increasing one's own power. Power was an expanding resource available through dialogue and shared endeavors. The mutual use of power resulted in collaboration and cooperation among the entire school community. Sharing power raised people's self-esteem to higher levels. The concept of "power with" empowered the staff to achieve school goals and objectives. When teachers were empowered the emphasis shifted from the discretion needed to function as an individual toward one's responsibility to the school community.

Sernak (1993) pointed out feminist writers described a relationship called an "ethic of care" which was a human connection to moral reasoning. This relationship included the qualities of connection, responsibility, commitment, and reciprocity. An "ethic of care" in schools was based on the philosophy that the principal's responsibility to others, with all the demands it entailed, coincided with the responsibility to oneself.

Caring was reciprocal between the caregiver and the care receiver, making the school a more humane place. It was a web of relationships between individuals that built a caring community where the use of power was shared and all were able to become leaders. The “ethic of care” is a feminist construct used by educational reformers as an organizational change theory describing how leaders can make schools more caring places. “Power with” rather than “power over” was the relationship I had with the staff to influence authentic change.

Human resource leadership coincides with the feminist theory, emphasizing the relationship between employees and organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). When the fit between employees and organizations is good, employee productivity is higher. The psychology behind the frame espouses that organizations are much like extended families, inhabited by individuals with needs. When needs were met and employees were happy, productivity was higher. Increased teacher productivity correlated with teacher attitudes about their work. McGregor (1985) was known for developing the concept of “open systems,” featuring innovations such as communication of good and bad news, self-managing teams, and peer-controlled pay system. This open system resulted in greater productivity. This perspective regarded people’s skills, attitudes, energy, and commitment as vital resources capable of making or breaking an enterprise (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The benefit of empowerment was monumental. Higher morale was a benefit that came from being listened to and being treated fairly.

I was directed by the superintendent to have my staff evaluate my performance during my first year as a principal. This entire process had me on edge. Was I too sensitive to value the voice of the devil’s advocate? Would the teachers be too harsh? I

knew it would force me to look at my leadership critically. However, as the process unfolded, I used any negative feedback as an opportunity to improve my leadership. Eventually, I incorporated each one of their suggestions into my practice. Every year after my initial experience, a formal paper and pencil survey was given out to assess the attitudes of my staff about my leadership. I wanted feedback on what they perceived as stresses in the school, if my intentions to deal with problems had been effective, and suggestions of how our school could operate more effectively. It was important for me to know how I could best serve them and what I could do to meet their needs. Hearing my teacher's perspectives forced me to understand their views and modify my leadership to maintain a cohesive working team. It also reinforced the concepts of sharing power and working as colleagues.

The strong emphasis placed on resolving issues positively related to the personal emphasis I placed on being fair and being seen as fair (Fennell, 1999). The following examples illustrate this point. A third grade teacher who was loved by staff, parents, and students suffered a massive heart attack. This happened suddenly and we were all devastated. To everyone's surprise she returned to work early after being out only three weeks because of her dedication to her students. During a faculty meeting, I made a point of acknowledging her struggle with illness and praised her dedication. I also assigned an aide to work with her in the classroom fulltime for the rest of the year. This would give her an opportunity to be released from her duties when necessary. My focus was on her emotional and health needs over her work goals. The capacity to sense feelings, needs, and perspectives of others was my style. Recognizing the staff as people and offering them support during the difficult times in their personal lives developed loyalty and

strengthened connectedness. The feminist leader promoted harmony, nurtured personal relationships, and made emotional connections with the people they lead (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). As a result, teachers were happier and were more involved in student affairs. Parents were more favorable towards the school and more involved with school life. Trust and positive relationships were the glue that bonded our staff together and allowed us to work collaboratively to achieve school goals. The key to creating an environment of trust was by demonstrating empathy, sharing feelings, open dialogue, and supporting individuals.

Positive relationships with the school community must be nurtured by the leader in order to flourish. I faced various kinds of problems in the daily execution of my duties. The most difficult problems were decisions involving disciplinary actions for students. Looking at these problems from a feminist theoretical construct, one source of conflict was certainly my strong sense of concern for each of the individuals in these cases. As I reflected on each individual case, I did so with compassion. My options were dictated by a sense of student priority and concern for my staff. Collins (2000) described the “ethic of care” as personal expressiveness and emotions which were fundamental elements used in discussions about the various course of action leaders used to solve dilemmas. An “ethic of care” was one of the many principles I used to guide my thinking.

Feminist research noted that women were more attuned to teaching and children. Many women brought their experiences to the workplace. These experiences included their active involvement in the domestic sphere (Helgesen, 1990). Traditional female values determined the course of actions I used to solve problems. I tried to resolve problems where both sides could claim victory. Unfortunately, that was not always

possible. When dealing with students, my reasoning considered what I wanted for my own child. For example, I had to discipline two students who fought on the bus. One child was a regular education student and the other child was a special education student. The policy was when students fought on the bus they were automatically suspended from riding the bus for three days. So the regular education student's bus riding privileges were suspended for three days, but the special education student's was not because riding the bus was part of his educational program. Beyond the justice issue of treating the students fairly, I was concerned that the special education student did not learn a sense of responsibility for his actions. This prompted me to give the special education student three days of recess detentions. Being fair and making this a learning experience for both students was important to me. All students must be taught consequences for inappropriate behavior as well as receive recognition for appropriate behavior.

During a classroom visit, I observed a group of students working hard completing a writing assignment. They were not only following directions, but working collaboratively. Each child received a "caught being good" sticker from me that could be used to retrieve a special prize from my office. As a principal, it was important that I was perceived as "walking the talk." This meant my behavior was consistent with the values I advocated. Teachers were openly recognized for their contributions and excellence in teaching as a way of thanking them and as encouragement to others. Showing all that I valued good conduct and learning by affirming students' and teachers' efforts with positive incentives was the norm.

According to the feminist theory, most women refrained from asserting their superiority, which affirmed the superiority of others (Rosener, 1995). Allowing parents,

teachers, and students a feeling of importance elevated their self-esteem, which was good for the school. For example, during my time at the Charter School, I arranged teacher schedules so as not to inconvenience them. Realizing that many of the staff lived out of the city and needed to travel a distance to get home, they were allowed to start their commute 15 minutes earlier every Friday to avoid heavy traffic. In another illustration, the cafeteria manager's husband was diagnosed with a terminal illness. I permitted her to come in one hour later twice a month with full pay, so she could accompany him to his doctors' visits. This was reflective of how I communicated with heart. Conflicts were inherent in my job as a principal. But acts of kindness kept the environment warm in spite of conflict. At the heart of feminist theory are the basic principles of how women's lives were traditionally organized. Traditional values, like emotional connections, honest communication, and building community were at the core of this leadership style. Building a successful learning community included the democratic style of leadership where all staff members were empowered to achieve school goals.

Democratic leadership. The democratic theoretical construct emphasizes participatory decision-making, equity, and open dialogue. It is the idea of building worker participation into the decision-making structure of the workplace, protecting it from managerial discretion (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Workers hired new employees, evaluated their bosses, and voted on major decisions. Participation in the decision-making process increased support for the decisions ultimately reached and reduced the risk that ideas would be undermined by opposition (Rosener, 1995). Democratic leadership practices reinforced a collaborative school climate. It promoted releasing human potential and instilling in individuals a sense of initiative and responsibility

(Kouzes & Posner, 1997). The democratic leadership style builds on teamwork, conflict management and influence (Goleman et al., 2002).

One example of participatory decision-making and open dialogue happened during the time I was principal at a Charter School. The school was fiscally supported by a nonprofit company, which had been losing money for the last two years. Because of the financial crisis, the Board of Trustees ordered me not to approve any expenditure for teachers' supplies during the school year. Rather than immediately forbidding teachers from ordering supplies, I called a meeting and explained the details of the financial crisis. I asked for ideas on ways to help them get the supplies they needed and suggestions about how to deal with the situation. Then I listened. I did the same thing at later meetings for parents, community members, and then a successive series of meetings for teachers and staff. Letting the constituents vent their frustrations, then come up with ideas on how to deal with the issues, built trust. The teachers were devastated, but I kept the lines of communication open around the issue. Our parent organization scheduled a series of fundraisers throughout the year for the purchase of supplies for teachers. By spending time discussing the problem with teachers and parents, we solved them collectively. Cooperative relationships and a shared mission promoted a spirit of cohesiveness around an unpleasant issue.

Creating unity and the framework for social justice was a democratic theoretical construct and was illustrated by the following example: Several teachers met with me during the fall. Citing an increasing African-American population, they discussed the need for a Black History assembly for students. They asked me to acquire the funds from my budget and set up a program. I agreed to provide the funding, but suggested that we

meet on a monthly basis so I could keep them informed of my progress and receive their suggestions. During the month of February, we celebrated Black History Month by inviting the drama company, Washington Productions, to present an assembly for students called *Fabulous Folktales in You*. The folktale chronicled the journey that two high school students took into the world of reading. Together they read about different cultures, learned how to solve problems, and experienced the application of morals. The program promoted an appreciation for our country's diverse cultures and demonstrated the benefits of reading. Additionally, it represented community and unity for the increasing number of African-Americans who now live in the area. When people worked cooperatively toward the accomplishment of goals, a spirit of cohesion existed. It was my responsibility to articulate a credible picture of our school goals in a way in which all could identify. Building a shared vision fostered a commitment to the long term (Senge, 1990). Understanding how my emotions impacted on our shared vision allowed me to become a more effective leader. My value of open communication led to a culture where teachers willingly participated in initiatives beyond their classroom requirements.

Collegiality is a powerful attribute of democratic leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992). Being sensitive to the feelings of those around me gave me the capacity to proactively deal with situations before they become major issues. I instinctively knew when the needs of the school were not being met by being sensitive to the feelings of teachers, parents, and students. By following informal cues, I watched for signs of distress and immediately intervened by involving others in the solution.

I valued teamwork. I reinforced the concept of teamwork by dedicating a portion of each faculty meeting to a "What's on your Mind" session. This was when teachers

could vent and voice their concerns to me. This was their time to bring any problems out in the open. It gave teachers an opportunity to have input in the management of the school. Support staff also had a voice in planning school goals and objectives too. Once a month I met with the secretaries. They told me what their needs were and how I could make their working conditions better. The meetings with them were productive and often led to the streamlining of many tasks. Monthly meetings were held with the PTA. This group brought parental concerns before me and allowed me to include their input into school goals. Democracy promoted human growth through understanding, listening to all viewpoints, inclusiveness, and empowerment. Cronin (1995) stated, "Democracy required a particular blend of faith in people; a belief that if people were informed and caring, they could be trusted with their own self-government" (p. 306). It required questioning leaders and putting limitations on the scope of their power. As a leader, I empowered my staff to be the masters of their own destiny.

My leadership was defined by the united focus of leader and follower as one. Leadership was enabling others to feel energized. I strived to create situations where people felt good about themselves and their work. Through conversation, teachers were encouraged to have a say in every aspect of their work and the school. Innovative ways of doing things were encouraged. Disagreeing with me was welcomed and not met with retribution. From setting performance goals to problem solving strategies, teachers had a voice. When problems arose, I had informal meetings with parents and teachers and solicited their solutions. This helped me think through problems out loud and evaluate all perspectives before implementing a solution.

Early on in my career as an elementary principal, I was under the assumption that it was my responsibility to plan professional development activities for the teachers. Without getting input from teachers about what their needs were, I selected a consultant to do a workshop on how to use the Everyday Math series, which was in its second year of implementation in the district. The feedback I received from the teachers about the workshop was negative. They called it boring and said it was minimally useful. Teachers felt it was repetitive, because most of what was presented was highlighted in their teacher's manual, which they used in lesson planning. Because of my enthusiasm for setting up what I hoped to be a pedagogical useful workshop, I was crushed. After that experience, I allowed the teachers to come up with choices for their next professional development workshop day. One teacher taped a flyer next to the sign-in sheet on the office counter asking teachers to list their preferences for professional development topics. She tallied the responses and ranked them in order according to what was most useful to them. The topic that got the most votes from the staff was Curriculum Mapping. The teachers explained to me it would be beneficial to them since it was a new district initiative and requirement. So we set up a workshop on Curriculum Mapping. The teachers selected the day and even set up breakfast that morning prior to the beginning of the workshop. The teachers were all in attendance that day and participated enthusiastically. At the end of the day, I commended the teachers on their level of interest and suggested that for our next faculty meeting a grade level of teachers could present us with strategies on how they mapped a language arts unit. Then as a group we would critique their efforts. Helping teachers grow professionally without micromanaging their efforts allowed me to build my confidence as the instructional leader of the school. By

encouraging participation, sharing power and information the climate of the school became more positive. Feelings of trust and respect flourished when problems were solved collectively.

Summary

In summary, my theories-in-use was an interwoven tapestry, which consisted of servant leadership, feminist leadership, and democratic leadership. This interwoven tapestry of theoretical constructs fostered acceptance of decisions by gaining input from the group. It symbolized a concern about personal feelings, communication, and represented a commitment to an empowered group. The entire school community was provided with a caring and equitable environment that empowered staff to greater productivity. Applying my theories-in-use, teachers had a voice in decisions pertaining to the operation of the school. This allowed them to feel a sense of ownership. Being reflective about my theories-in-use had allowed me to gain a better awareness of my leadership abilities, leading to more direct learning and action. It provided clarity for the action strategies I used and believed to be effective. This heightened my confidence in my ability to lead others. I was certain I could lead with conviction and make a significant change for the better in the lives of teachers and students. My initial leadership platform moved from a defensive stance to one of open communication, collaboration, problem solving, trust building, and the development of new skills providing the foundation for a professional school-based learning community.

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Introduction - Principal Leadership and Reflective Practice

The common perception is that schools are failing, and our children are not being prepared academically to meet the challenges of life in a rapidly changing and complex world (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). The way that schools are organized and operated has not changed because of school improvement efforts, despite devoting extensive fiscal and human resources to school reform. Educational organizations today use mainly mechanistic approaches to promote positive change. Problem solving to them means hiring someone from outside of the district to repair things. Educators are told how to use someone else's solutions to solve their problems, but are seldom involved in identifying the problem and solving it themselves. Veteran educators know from experience that educational innovations are recycled and come around again every few years under a different name. Because of this, organizational learning was minimal and meaningful change was lacking. The consensus from experts on school reform was real change depended on changes in ideas and beliefs (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). My role as an effective leader using reflective practice was helping teachers develop a new vision by advocating school reform as a major force for change and improvement.

This literature review on principal leadership and reflective practice provided conceptual frameworks and core definitions and the underlining rationale for these concepts. The theoretical framework of effective principal leadership began with a discussion about the traditional paradigm of leadership in schools. The emphasis was on

the shift from a traditional organizational bureaucracy to a democratic collaborative self-managed organization. This shift was part of a historical transformation in the satisfaction of human needs that allowed staff to evolve to higher levels of fulfillment. In addition, it detailed numerous techniques of how reflective practice was used by practitioners in the educational realm while exploring the principal's role as a reflective facilitator. A portion of the literature review revealed how practitioners fostered reflection in educators through the use of specific activities. These activities assisted educators in illuminating the things that were actually said and done in practice by exploring. It is necessary to note that in the context of schooling, all aspects are appropriate to reflect on because they are complex and rich in data.

My leadership as a principal and at the core of this dissertation was to foster a school culture of reflective practice. The purpose was to provide teachers and myself with the foundation to cope with the complexities of our profession by acquiring a new set of skills and insights. The research on principal leadership and reflective practice offered a means for this to take place.

Traditional Paradigm of Leadership in Schools

The model for organization and governance of schools was based on the industrial bureaucracy that emerged in the economy of the 1900s. The German political economist and sociologist Max Webber (1864-1920) was the noted founder of public administration (Scott & Davis, 2007). He developed the concept of a bureaucracy. The concept was based on a structure of organizations that had six essential dimensions in common and was referred to as the "ideal type." In that sense, even though the organizations were different on the surface all were structured identically. The six dimensions of the "ideal-

type” bureaucracy included a fixed division of labor, a hierarchy of offices, abstract rules, impersonal conduct, employment, and advancement by merit and efficiency (Scott & Davis, 2007). This efficiency movement was synonymous with employer insensitivity and people doing more work for the same pay (Weisbord, 1987).

The construct of scientific management was the prevalent management theory used in business and government. Based on the business model of that time, schools were managed using principles of scientific management and formal structures of authority. They were controlled by a hierarchy of power within each school system. Superintendents occupied the top of the hierarchy, followed by principals, with teachers being at the bottom. A hierarchy is a chain of command arranging levels of authority from maximum to minimum. Autocratic leadership, the more traditional approach to management, was not only used by school leaders, but thrived in a bureaucracy.

Culturally and historically, the use of a hierarchy derived from the traditional notion of diverse levels of human competence and acknowledges that not all work is of equal worth or value (Gronn, 2003). School leadership, which consisted of managing according to procedure, was associated with power and actions legitimated by authority. Until 1960, teachers, lacking any collective bargaining power, had very little authority in schools (Wirt & Kirst, 2009). Parents had minimal participation, except to support the school’s authority and discipline.

Although the reform movement changed the terrain of public education, little changed in terms of how schools were managed. There were many ways in which bureaucratic culture proved to be a barrier to change. This included multiple layers of hierarchy, a tradition of top-down chain of command, short-term thinking, lack of top

management support for change, limited rewards, lack of vision, and an emphasis on the status quo (Quinn, 1996). There was no denying that managerial hierarchy had been the source of much inefficiency. It killed incentive, crushed creativity, and stifled leadership (Jaques, 2001). Many people complained that the hierarchical organizational structure in the bureaucratic culture brought out the malicious aspects of human behavior like greed, insensitivity, careerism, and self-importance (Jaques, 2001). Along with this, requirements for living in the Information Age had produced a need for a more innovative learning culture where people were cooperative.

The shift from an organizational hierarchy, bureaucracy, and autocracy to democracy and collaborative self management was part of a larger historical transformation in the satisfaction of human needs and the social nature designed to meet those needs (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002). According to psychologist Abraham Maslow (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002; Maslow, 1943), our needs were satisfied in an ordered progressive way. Maslow (1943) posited that there was a hierarchy of needs consisting of seven primary categories in the following order of importance: psychological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs, self actualization needs, needs to know and understand, and aesthetic needs. Maslow's theory suggested human behavior changed dramatically as each stage was reached. A strategy that succeeded in satisfying one need may not necessarily satisfy another. By changing from an autocratic bureaucracy to a democratic self-management structured organization, the challenge was to create an organization that allowed us to evolve to higher levels of fulfillment.

People performed their jobs not only for salary and benefits, but for personal satisfaction. Many people sought work in organizations with values that matched their

personal values. Goleman (1997) suggested that teamwork, open lines of communication, and cooperation fueled people's passion for work. This occurred because people gravitated to what gave them meaning. Consequently, people expected more from their leaders than they did in the past. These factors escalated the need for organizational change, an inevitable companion of leadership effectiveness. Today's leaders must mold productive, cohesive teams out of the most diverse work force in history (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2004. Bennis and Nanus (1997) stated, "What the leader hoped to do was unite the people in the organization into a responsible community, a group of interdependent individuals who took responsibility for the success of the organization and its long term survival" (p. 197). There was an appeal for a new type of principal who understood the dynamics of change and was able to navigate the intricacies of the change process. The next section deals with critical elements that effective principals focus their attention on during times of change. The discussion highlights the competencies that principals incorporate in their practice that reveal the complex change process that enhances their ability to become exceptional leaders.

Principal as a Change Agent

After several decades of emphasis on scientific management, the field of leadership took a sharp turn in the 1980s toward leadership for school restructuring (Evans, 2001). A search of the literature by Talbot and Crow (1997) revealed that principals' roles evolved since the 1920s from scientific manager, to bureaucratic manager in the 1960s, to instructional leader in the 1980s. Currently, principals are experiencing a new evolution from the role as an instructional leader to a change agent. Previously, principals were charged with the implementation of policies and procedures

developed outside the school by the school board and superintendent. Presently, principals are charged with the implementation of policies and procedures, which involve change within the school, not just changes conceived by others outside the school. As indicated by the school restructuring literature, responsibilities have shifted to the school changing the roles of principals and teachers (Talbot & Crow, 1997). Adjustments toward school improvement remained with the principal whose leadership was to navigate and develop the organizational capacity for change.

Principals changed their schools by helping teachers develop a new vision of possibilities and then mobilized them to change toward the new vision (Bennis & Nanus, 1997). The principal as a change agent gave constituents a mental picture of how things could be. That mental picture was translated into reality by building an agreement within the school that the continuation of the present way of thinking was inadequate. The principal was proactive in shaping beliefs, attitudes, and values of the organization while options for the future were developed (Davies & Davies, 2004).

Vision was the understanding of the culture and history of the school as it related to the improvement of teaching and learning. Teachers were supported toward the achievement of the vision based on the principal's personal and professional values (Davies & Davies, 2004). Empathy was a valuable concept in articulating a vision. The idea of sensing how others felt and understanding their perspectives contained many advantages. The acceptance of the vision by teachers was linked to the principal being adept at maintaining positive interpersonal relationships with the staff. From this description one concluded that teachers understood that the vision they shared with the principal was in sync with their own best interest, which resulted in meaningful work.

Trice and Beyer (2001) stated that, “the most important quality of an innovative leader was that he or she be able to convince members of the organization to follow new visions” (p. 442). Visions caused people to grow, learn, and expand their abilities in order to achieve what they desired. According to Bolman and Deal (2008), effective principals helped establish a vision, set standards for performance and create focus and direction for collective efforts. To accomplish this required a deep level of reflection about one’s core values and beliefs (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Once the principal clarified the vision internally with the staff, school reorganization began. A variety of strategies were used to reenergize people, reinterpret values, and reshape the culture to set the change process in motion. To understand the use of principal leadership as a change strategy in schools, we embarked on an understanding of school reform.

School Reform and the Principalship

Society’s needs have changed radically since public schools were first instituted in America. The push for school reform accelerated from the recognition of changes in the traditional family structure, an increase in poverty, the inadequacy of social service programs, and a decreased sense of civic responsibility, placing increased expectations on schools. Parents frustrated over the lack of student achievement became critical of the public schools. Federal laws in the 1950s were mandated to improve science quality and teaching. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was implemented to improve education for poor children. The need for more effective schools and the need to reform the schools beyond changes in curriculum were brought to the forefront in the early 1980s through reports such as the National Commission on Excellence in Education called “A Nation at Risk” which was the imperative for educational reform (Seller,

2001). The passage of the No Child Left Behind Act caused educators a considerable amount of concern by putting the full burden of federal policy behind the accountability movement, mandating that schools bring all children to a proficient level of performance or encounter punitive provisions. If schools were to accelerate student achievement and move onto innovative ways of teaching and learning rather than just addressing test-based short-termed agendas, effective leadership was the key.

For school reform to succeed, the focus must be on effective leadership as a major force for change and improvement. The intellectual background to school improvement can be traced back to Kurt Lewin (Weisbord, 1987), who was the primary shaper for democratic leadership and social change. Lewin was an experimental social psychologist who changed the course of social science. His action research on leadership and participation was one of the twentieth century's greatest social achievements (Weisbord, 1987). He entwined scientific thinking to democratic values, which resulted in the concept of participative management. In addition, he emphasized problem solving by building commitment to action, by including people's feelings, perceptions, self-esteem, and motivations. School reform required change. This meant that business and the values that underlined school operations needed change. A way of gaining perspective on the requirements for school reform began with viewing schools as learning organizations (Seller, 2001).

The Learning Organization and the Principalship

Based on the work of Senge (1990), a school is a learning organization. It is a place of continuous learning for both the students and the staff. Learning in this context is not the recitation of information, but increasing the ability to create the desired outcomes.

It is where innovative patterns of thinking are nurtured for lifelong learning. It is a place where shared ambitions are released and people are continually absorbing wisdom together. Learning takes place since infancy as we maneuver our environment for survival. It is a natural process and continues throughout our lives. The performance of a productive school not only depends on individual learning, but on how well people assimilate learning to work together. A school culture that values collaborative activities is indispensable. The struggle every leader faces is how to get people to work together to create a functioning team.

Functioning teams consist of members who are not driven by the quest of individual glory and who give themselves over wholeheartedly to the group effort (Jackson & Delehanty, 1995). People's perceptions of their workplace are based on relationships and their environment. Integrating relationships and the environment in a move from individualism toward cooperation is essential to building a team.

Team building evolved in the early 1960s as a solution of how to use workshop learning in real life (Weisbord, 1987). It involved the use of a T-group, which was an education in self-awareness. This type of learning offered the amalgamation of diverse people. People learned to trust each other, developed common goals, complemented each other's strengths and resolved differences. The norms, values, and priorities they shared contributed to learning. Channels of communication were opened so all had an opportunity to contribute ideas. People who had a stake in ideas and participated in their creation were more dedicated to their success. People working together as a productive team were the essence of the learning organization.

The structures of an efficient organization are flexible and support activities that sustain learning and this leads to change. Through the learning process, the organization increases the ability not only to cope with change, but to manage it effectively. In order for school improvement to be successful, the organization must change to support the actions of people as they implement procedures required for effective educational practices. The person whose support is most critical for organizational change is the principal.

There is a direct relationship between leadership and school improvement. Learning is not just limited to the classroom setting, but is incorporated as part of the educator's job. Consequently, the leader encourages innovation in the search for new options and strategies in the learning organization. Additionally, the inclusion of risk-taking strategies and a future oriented perspective is essential to moving the organization forward. The potential of leadership to influence pupil and teacher performance is precise. It is consistently argued that the quality of leadership matters in determining the motivation of teachers and quality of teaching (Harris, 2004). School leaders mobilize people's commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to make improvements. According to Senge (1990), leaders in learning organizations are designers, stewards, and teachers. Senge (1990) stated, "Leaders are responsible for building learning organizations where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models" (p. 340). This conceptualized a new type of leadership.

Recent literature (Goleman et al., 2002) acknowledges the power and praise granted to autocratic leaders who take all the credit for a job well done. Their behavior

erodes workers' spirits and the satisfaction they get from their work. On the other hand, most of the work of leaders in learning organizations takes place behind the scenes. Heider (1997) demonstrates this by paraphrasing Lao-tzu; "The wise leader settles for good work by letting others have the floor because the leader has no need for fame, he does not take all the credit for what happens" (p. 17). Nevertheless, leading in a learning organization does have its rewards. There is a profound satisfaction created in empowering others to achieve results they care about. The rewards derived from empowering others are much more enriching than the praise granted to autocratic leaders who customarily have tremendous egos. Autocratic leaders manage without regard for the long-term human cost of minimal productivity. This strict top-down style of leadership produces outcomes that hinder the vitality and productivity in schools. Leadership style has an enormous impact on the shaping of the school's culture.

Shaping School Culture and the Principalship

Research suggests that there is a conceptual framework that leaders use for classifying approaches used to manage change in organizations (Bista & Glasman, 1998; Bolman & Deal, 2008; Deal & Peterson, 1999). This framework includes four approaches, which are structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. It rests on key assumptions about the concepts of goals, needs, power, and symbols and how they are used in organizations. Additionally, management functions and corresponding leader behaviors are identified as they apply to the work of the school principal. The structural frame deals with organizational goals, roles, and results. The human resource frame emphasizes the importance of caring and the fit between needs and values that organizations and people possess. The political frame highlights the use of power,

conflict, negotiations, and compromise. Finally, the symbolic frame focuses attention on meaning and the symbols, rituals, ceremonies in which faith and hope are communicated as referenced in Figure 2. Bista and Glasman (1998) postulate that the human resource frame and the symbolic frame are used more frequently among effective principals. The human resource frame's core focus is to achieve harmony between the needs of the school and the needs of the people in the school. It uses the act of caring, emphasizing interpersonal relationships and participatory management.

| <u>Frame</u> | <u>Barriers to Change</u> | <u>Essential Strategies</u> |
|---------------------|---|---|
| Human Resource | Anxiety, neediness, feelings of incompetence | Training to develop new skills, involvement |
| Structural | Confusion, chaos | Communication and realigning formal patterns and policies |
| Symbolic | Loss of meaning and purpose, clinging to the past | Creating transitional rituals: mourning the past and celebrating the future |

Figure 2 Conceptual Frameworks

Participatory management, synonymous for teacher empowerment, means giving teachers the right to participate in the determination of school goals, policies, and to exercise professional judgment about the content of the curriculum and means of instruction (Bolin, 1989). Teachers have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in decisions about the context of their work. Being respected, valued, and supported by the principal are elements that impact on empowering them to become more responsible

educators. If teachers are expected to implement a change, they have to be included in planning. A school coping with change needs all of the various school constituencies to work together to solve problems.

Sergiovanni (1992) demonstrates that consensus runs deep in successful schools where a value system emerges that represents a covenant for working together. That covenant forms the basis for decisions and actions. DePree (2004) describes a covenantal relationship between the principal and staff that rests on shared commitment to ideas, values, goals, and management practices. According to Sergiovanni (1996), “a covenantal community was a group of people who shared certain purposes, values, and beliefs, who feel a strong sense of place, and who think of the welfare of the group as being more important than the individual” (p. 66). This type of community arouses faithfulness and forces people to work together for the common good. Bonds are established among teachers because the principal is caring. These connections enable work to be meaningful and satisfying to the teachers. It is important to note how caring used by the principal during times of change builds trust and strengthens commitment.

The symbolic frame is used continuously by effective principals to provide inspiration and organizational vision in a culture of change. The principal creates symbolic activities that give the school purpose. This purpose is reinforced by the use of artifacts that represent core values and beliefs reinforced through ceremony and an informal network of school staff. These values are shared beliefs that emphasize parents as partners, high expectations, quality teaching, collaborative problem solving, and continuous personal and professional learning for all. The core mission is the belief that all children can learn. The principal uses these values as a basis for decision-making and

provides incentives for personnel and students whose actions exemplify their commitment to the values. Sergiovanni (1992) states, “the principal reinforced norms of performance and success by recounting stories of the schools achievement” (p. 78). Stories communicate what is important in a simplistic and clear-cut way. They help connect the faculty to the school by making them feel a part of something special. The use of stories, ceremonies, rituals, and symbols strengthen new priorities. These symbolic activities used by the principal give momentum to the range of beliefs and values underscoring the transpiring culture. An example of a principal embedding his priorities in the school is by practicing what he preaches. Modeling one’s values gives confidence to teachers and minimizes resistance. Principals use the human resource and symbolic frames to build trust and integrity when dealing with school life. Both of these frames are highly effective when used to motivate and manage conflict and represent the affective side of school leadership. Placing emphasis on the emotional side of school leadership is important because along with change comes anxiety, stress, and ambiguity. Principals leading change have to keep the staff working together productively despite these emotions. Few principals welcome resistance, which is not only necessary, but desirable.

Resistance to Change and the Principalship

Organizational learning, principal leadership, and change cannot be understood without considering the concept of resistance to change. Complaints are often valid reasons used to overcome change by increasing consensus for resistance. Resisters deserve attention, clarification, and support from the principal. Change accompanies upheaval of the familiar way of doing things. It causes uncertainty about one’s competence and is intimidating. Successful implementation of a change requires

skill, an improvement plan, and the ability to correct flaws. Building consensus among a faculty extends from the development of a shared commitment to core values. Evans (2001) suggests that this commitment “springs from the clarity and focus of a leader’s vision and from people discovering that their leader has the will and power to make change work” (p. 278). Dissent can be seen as a potential source of new ideas and breakthroughs (Fullan, 2001a). When dissent is constructive it is embraced by the principal and used to move a school forward. However, Evans (2001) describes entrenched resistance by members of an organization as hardened unprincipled resistance, which limits a principal’s ability to resolve the normal range of conflict surrounding school change. These types of people are vigorously challenged by principals who are passionate about their purposes. Evans (2001) reveals that leaders must be “committed to certain non-negotiable central values that make up the culture of the school and then demand adherence to these” (p. 280).

According to Fullan (2001b), since groups of people have multiple realities, any collective change attempt involves conflict. To heighten chances of success and reduce conflict, implementation of change must be supported with adequate resources, technical assistance, capacity building, and problem solving opportunities. Day (2000) concluded from empirical research that good leadership in successful schools is closely connected to the commitment and capacity of principals to engage in reflective practice. Evidence from each of the 12 principals in this study suggested that all engaged in at least five kinds of reflection to be effective: the holistic, where the emphasis was upon vision and culture building; the pedagogical, in which emphasis was placed upon staff acquiring, applying, and mentoring teaching, which achieved results aligned to their vision; the

interpersonal, where the focus was upon nurturing staff, children, and parents; the strategic, where the focus was upon intelligence gathering and networking to secure some control of the future; the personal, where the focus was upon self knowledge and self development and fulfillment (Day, 2000).

Leadership and Reshaping School Practices

The literature about leadership and the role of the school principal confirms the belief that there is a direct relationship between leadership and principal effectiveness. Historically, the prevalent leadership style was autocratic. This meant to control and be coercive towards subordinates, prevented them from being productive. Organizationally, schools were based on this model. School reform cannot be successful without organizational change. The key to school improvement requires effective principals to move their schools forward by reshaping organizational practices. This is done through leadership that makes schools places where innovative patterns of thinking and learning are fostered. This type of leadership stimulates an organizational shift from the autocratic model to a democratic model using human relations and motivational theory. The result is a school climate that leads to the empowerment of teachers and staff. Empowerment is synonymous with the concept of “power with.” This means the principal is equal in status to all other school personnel. All are committed to common goals and teachers are involved with making decisions related to their work.

The principal as a change agent reshapes the culture of the school by the restructure of new goals and perceptions. The organizational changes that empower people encourage them to seek innovative ways of doing their work. Resistance to change is enviable and has potential for learning and growth. The principal uses vision to create a

culture where the process of change is welcomed, because it is believed that he has the power to make change work.

In our democratic society, schools are key organizations in the education and socialization of our children. However, many believe school reform efforts are failing. If change is to have meaning, it has to be more than just structural. Change that is sustained depends on a change in beliefs. Reflective practice is used as a tool for the reassessment of held beliefs to improve our practice. The next section examines the principal's role in using reflective practice that fosters personal learning, behavioral change, and improved performance. The process of reflective practice is used as a leadership strategy to demonstrate how principals create meaningful change in schools.

Reflective Practice

History of reflective practice. The objective of my research was to investigate the use of reflective practice as an educational strategy in that practitioners develop analytical and problem solving skills that reflect their work as a means to learning. The focus of this research was on our staff being reflective learners in a school environment and the subsequent development of a school-based learning community. This part of the literature review provides the methodological and conceptual foundation for the study of my leadership that translated into my own evolution as a reflective practitioner, and secondly, my ability to support teachers in their efforts to incorporate reflection into their practice.

Interest in reflective practice relates back to the educational reformer John Dewey (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Dewey espoused that people learn best through experience. Furthermore, he emphasized the creative human, self-corrective aspects of inquiry. It is

believed that past experiences with parents, mentors, and other role models influence one's educational beliefs. Reflective practice involves examining those beliefs to improve upon our actions. The process consists of moving from one experience to the next while scrutinizing the context of each issue and situating that issue in terms of our values and feelings. This is done to uncover the discrepancies between beliefs and actions. It is the optimistic belief that meaningful change is possible. Exploring values, behaviors, and beliefs is crucial for organizational learning that results in change for school improvement.

Donald Schön (1930-1997) was credited for his groundbreaking work on "reflective practice" (Schön, 1987a). His seminal research publications that are considered pioneering works are at the core of this dissertation. Donald Schön, in collaboration with Chris Argyris, contributed to professional effectiveness and organizational learning by developing reflective practice. Their studies led to an influential series of books around the development of reflective educators (Smith, 2005).

The term reflective practice involves the examination of held beliefs to assess their validity, bias, and limitations in a given context (Mezirow, 1998). It is the removal of constraints about preconceived notions, values, and narratives to further learning and effect change in a frame of reference. The term reflective practice used in educational pedagogy is a concept referring to a continuous process from a personal perspective, by considering critical incidents from one's life experiences (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Characteristics of reflective practice include: the questioning of the previously unquestioned, challenging assumptions, meaning making within a specific context, the aim of self improvement through the development of increased awareness, and deeper

understanding of intentions and practice (Watson & Wilcox, 2000). The methodologies used in reflective practice use frameworks, theories, and processes to explain learning, behavior, and how people react in situations. Understanding how people construct meaning is a critical component of reflective practice.

In reflective practice, the researcher distances himself from an act and self-reflects on that act in order to better understand dilemmas, recurring issues, embedded inconsistencies and his own motivation and biases. Schön (1983) encourages both in-the-moment reflection and a distanced reflection of experiences afterwards. Reflective practice involves thoughtfully considering one's own experience in applying knowledge to practice for meaningful change. From a leadership perspective, how principals think about schooling, teaching, and learning influences how they perform. These thoughts, which are not randomly arranged in one's mind, are organized into implicit and explicit mental frames of reference (Sergiovanni, 1991). These frames, one's educational mindscape, provide the justification that enable school principals to make sense of their decisions and actions.

Argyris and Schön's (1978) starting point for their research was that people have mental models that govern how they behave in certain situations. The process of self-examination begins by evaluating the context of an issue in terms of values and feelings and then checking to make sure there is an accurate, distortion free assessment leading to more effective actions. The purpose of this self-examination is to uncover discrepancies between beliefs and actions.

Educational issues are framed by our mental models in ways that decisions are made according to a perceived logical process. Our beliefs and assumptions are engrained

in our subconscious mind. Reflective practice allows one to examine behavior. It is possible to develop a profile of one's beliefs by observing how a principal performs his or her role. This leads to a deeper understanding of why we do what we do. My aim was to use reflective practice to achieve meaningful change by exploring and modifying basic assumptions interwoven into my leadership strategies that led me to act in conventional ways. Unless educational leaders examine and modify their mental models, sustained school improvement is impossible (Senge 1990).

Conceptual Frames and Definitions

Theories of action: Theory in use and espoused theory. By thoroughly observing behavior, it is possible to develop a synopsis of our action theories. Argyris and Schön (1974) argued that people have mental models which dictate how they react in situations. These mental models are beliefs and assumptions that are too complex to identify. They include ways people plan, implement, and review their actions (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Additionally, these mental models guide people's actions rather than the theories they advocate (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Consequently, few people are aware of the mental models they use. The key to change is identification and assessment of these mental models (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). There is a split between theory and action, however, Argyris and Schön (1974) suggest two theories of action are involved. Recent studies call them theory-in-use and espoused theory (Anderson, 1997; Argyris & Schön, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Smith, 2005). Theories-in-use guide actual behavior and tend to rely on implied assumptions about the way things are. They directly and consistently influence behavior in the same way genetic code influences our psychological development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). The words we use to convey

what we do, or what we would like others to think we do, can be called espoused theory. Espoused theory is what we say we think we believe (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). When someone is asked how he would behave under certain circumstances, the answer he usually gives is his espoused theory of action for that situation. This is the theory of action to which he gives his allegiance, which upon requested, he communicates to others. However, the theory that actually governs his actions is his theory-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1974). When the consequences of the strategy used are what the person wanted, then the theory-in-use is confirmed. This is because there was a match between intention and outcome. However, the consequences may be unintended. They may also not match, or work against, the person's values. Argyris and Schön (1974) suggest two responses to this mismatch, and they can be seen in the concepts of single and double-loop learning (Smith, 2005).

Single-loop and double-loop learning. According to Argyris and Schön (1978), learning involves the correction and detection of error. When something goes wrong, it is suggested that the first response for many people is to look for another strategy that addresses and work within the governing variables, which are one's goals, values, rules, and plans. These governing variables are activated and used rather than questioned. This represents the concept of single-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Double-loop learning is an alternative response that questions one's governing values by subjecting them to critical scrutiny. This type of learning leads to modification in the governing values and a shift in the way strategies are used. In this form of learning, behaving differently is accompanied by change in underlying assumptions and beliefs.

Single-loop learning symbolizes first order change that leads to temporary improvement and has no effect on the basic organizational process, including how people perform their roles (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Even though new procedures provide problem solving reprieve, basic assumptions and organizational processes remain unexamined and unchanged. It involves following routines and a preset plan, affords greater control, and is less risky for the organization and the individual. Any real changes are transitory. In contrast, Fullan (2001b) reported double-loop learning symbolizes second-order change, or “changes in beliefs and understandings that were the foundation of achieving lasting reform” (p. 45). Lasting reform requires new goals, structures, and roles that are modifications in our underlining theories-in-use. In double-loop learning, the problem is personalized as we attempt to consider not only what we do and why, but how personal and organizational behavior contributes to the problem (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Double-loop learning is creative and reflexive. According to Argyris (1982), “reflection here is primary because the basic assumptions behind ideas are confronted... hypotheses are publicly tested... processes are disconfirmable not self-seeking” (p. 103). Senge (1990) notes a new paradigm that advocates thought processes or seeing the structures that underline complex situations, and for distinguishing high from low level change. This new theory-in-use offers a new way that begins with restructuring our thought processes to promote a transformation in behavior. Reflective practice facilitates double-loop learning that improves professional practice through behavioral change (Osterman & Kottkamp 2004).

The next step that Argyris and Schön (1974) took was to set up two models that describe features of theories-in-use that either inhibit or enhance double-loop learning. The belief was that all people utilize a common theory-in-use in problematic situations (Smith, 2005). Recent studies (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Smith, 2005) describe Model I or the Traditional Model as inhibiting double-loop learning. Model II, or the reflective practice model, is described as enhancing double-loop learning.

Model I, the traditional model. Model I, as a theory-in-use or values, involves making references about another person's behavior without checking whether they are valid and advocating one's views theoretically without explaining or illustrating one's reasoning (Edmondson & Moingeon, 1999). This assumption implies predictions about the kinds of strategies people employ, and about the resulting consequences (Anderson, 1997). Argyris and Schön (1974) reveal this as a common pattern of behavior based on an internal set of rules that is an omnipresent part of society. It shapes behavior in practically every realm of our personal and organizational lives. These theories-in-use are shaped by an implicit disposition to win and to avoid embarrassment and by being defensive (Smith, 2005). The main action strategy suggests complete control of the environment and tasks in addition to the protection of self and others. Having control over others inhibits communication, produces defensiveness, and is less likely to lead to growth. Defensiveness is used to protect the individual or others, for example, "I could not tell him no, it would make him angry."

However, the assertion that Model I is defensive has another implication. As Argyris and Schön (1974) explain, Model I advocates "withholding valuable information,

telling white lies, suppressing feelings and offering false sympathy assuming that the other person needs to be protected and that this strategy should be kept secret” (p. 71). The decision-making process is based on assumptions about other people that include their intentions, feelings, and behavior (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). To maintain control, the assumptions are not shared or tested and options are not explored. Therefore the potential for learning is seriously impaired (Anderson, 1997; Argyris & Schön, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). As a result, the governing values identified in Model I inhibit double-loop-learning. Evaluating our governing values or intentions characterizes double-loop-learning. By changing the governing values, Model II produces new action strategies that address changing circumstances and school improvement as referenced in Figure 3.

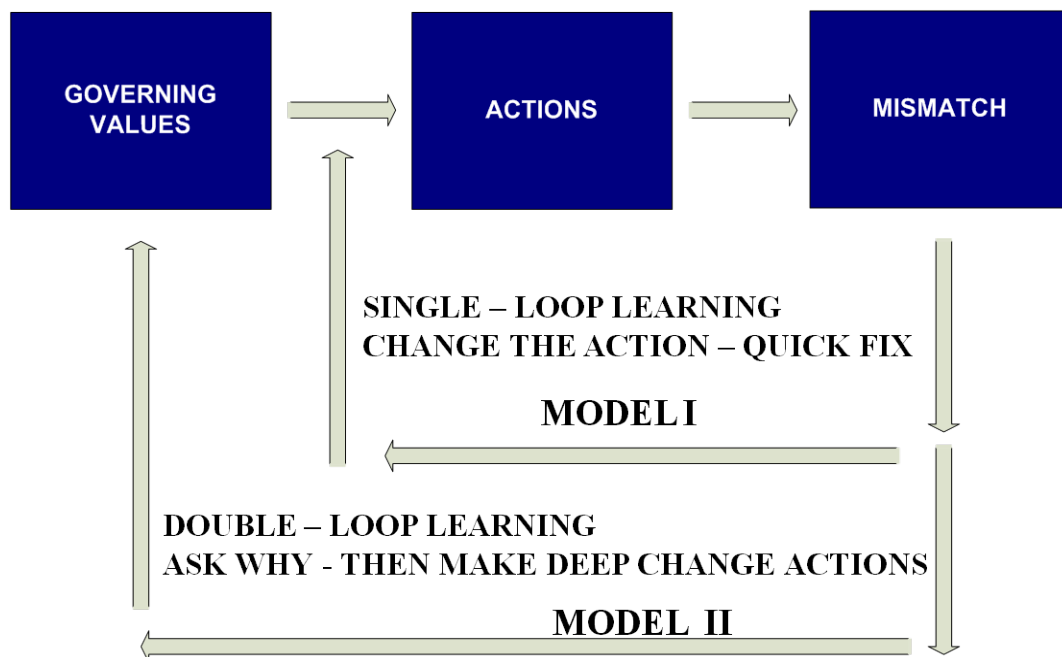


Figure 3 Model I and Model II

Model II, the reflective model. Model II includes theories-in-use that reduce the negative consequences of Model I and increases growth, learning, and effectiveness (Argyris & Schön, 1974). The significant features of Model II include the ability to look at data and make inferences. Additionally, it includes the views and experiences of the participants rather than seeking to impose a view upon the situation. Theories are tested with an invitation to others to confront one's views (Anderson, 1997). The outcome is based on the most complete and valid information possible. The consequences are double-loop learning in which the processes are open to exploration and the views behind hypotheses are tested publicly. Model II strategies develop an organizational climate characterized by trust, open communication, creative problem solving, and shared leadership (Anderson, 1997; Argyris & Schön, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Smith, 2005). The end result is increased effectiveness for school improvement.

Chris Argyris (1982) used action science to research the study of practice problems in academic organizational settings to develop new understandings. This technique was classified into two types. One technique was called skills of reflection. This was how our mental models influenced action and was demonstrated in the concept of "leaps of abstraction." According to Senge (1990), reflective practice skills start with "leaps of abstraction" (p. 192). He contends that through "leaps of abstraction" our minds literally move at lightning speed. During this phase, our learning slows because we immediately leap to generalizations about ideas and rarely stop to test them. This is because our conscious mind cannot handle large amounts of concrete details all at once. For example, if 30 movies are shown, most of us will have trouble remembering details of what each movie was about. However, in our minds we categorized each movie under

topics such as comedy, horror, drama, thriller, or romance. This is because our abstract conceptual reasoning substitutes concepts for details, and then reasoning occurs in terms of concepts (Senge, 1990). Our learning becomes limited because everything is categorized from specifics to general concepts.

For example, a statement made by a child's teacher can label a child throughout his time spent in the school. The statement, "Jim is a behavior problem," may or may not be valid. Jim was a student who had exhibited specific behaviors that were noted. He was inattentive in class, which caused him to get low grades. He had been suspended twice for fighting during the course of the year. He rarely did homework and showed little interest in learning. What happened to Jim was that teachers made a "leap of abstraction." They substituted a generalization, "Jim is a discipline problem," for many specific behaviors and treated this generalization as fact. It was given that Jim was a discipline problem and he was treated accordingly. This assumption about Jim's behavior was never questioned when Jim followed rules and his behavior was good. He was not noticed when his behavior did not fit the stereotype. Educators never test inferred generalizations. If someone had asked Jim, they may have found out that he often tried to behave appropriately and there were reasons behind his negative behavior that no one knew about. Reflective practice is necessary to test generalizations and inquires into reasons behind behavior.

A second technique that Argyris used from action science was called the left hand column (Senge, 1990). This technique was an exchange that demonstrated how our mental models operated by manipulating situations to avoid dealing with how we truly think and feel. The left hand column matched precisely what one was thinking to the

corresponding column, which was what was actually being said and used to make a comparison. This comparison examined one's own assumptions and how those assumptions were canceled. Additionally, it prevented a counterproductive situation from improving by undermining opportunities for learning in situations that involved conflict.

The Use of Reflection in Education

This section is an analysis and clarification of the major role of reflection and how it is used by practitioners in the educational realm. Willis (1999) suggests that reflective practice carries the challenge for practitioners to resolve contradictions between espoused theories and theories-in-use by uncovering discrepancies between beliefs and actions. Schön (1983) advocates how through reflection, a practitioner can query the methods developed around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and make new sense of the situations of uniqueness that he allows himself to experience. Evans (2003) refers to reflection as a complex and deliberate goal driven process of thinking about and interpreting experience in order to learn from it. Ashby (2006) describes reflection as active, purposeful thought applied to an experience to understand the meaning of that experience for the individual. Mezirow (1998) reports reflection as "turning back" on experience that is simple awareness of an object, event, or a state, including awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, intention, action, or of one's habits of doing these things. It also means letting one's thoughts wander over something, taking something into consideration, or imagining alternatives. Weber (2003) defines reflection as the ability to reflect on, to understand, to evaluate, and to see the interrelationships among the deep assumptions that underlie one's work. To reflect on a topic is to try to understand it more deeply. In doing this, factors such as context, assumptions, cultural

biases and political beliefs are considered. Argyris (1982) argues that without reflection there is little learning because people must examine the actions of their theories-in-use for change. The primary aim of using the process of reflection in education is to gain understanding, which leads to changes in what we do and new perspectives. It requires a critical appraisal of experiences and the understanding we gain through adding to our knowledge (Ashby, 2006).

There is much value in the process of reflection for the improvement of professional practice. According to Dewey (1998), it enables us to act in a deliberate and intentional fashion to attain future objects or to come into command of what is distant and lacking. By putting the consequences of different ways and lines of action before the mind, it enables us to engage in a higher level of consciousness when we act. Reflective practice is a learning model that emphasizes the importance of cognition, behaviors, and the decisions we make (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). In reflective practice, theories are closely linked with daily practice maintaining that thought influences action. In essence, personal action theories that encompass our ideas about the world govern our decisions.

Reflective practice promotes learning by internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of oneself, and which results in a changed conceptual perspective (Boyd & Fales, 1983). When educational practitioners utilize reflective practice, the key element is learning from experience in such a way that produces cognitive and affective change. Reflection is essential to collaboration and teamwork, because as Argyris (1991) points out, “each individual encourages the other to question his reasoning. And in turn, everyone understood the act of questioning not as a sign of mistrust or invasion of privacy but as a

valuable opportunity for learning” (p. 108). Reflective practice is an intentional and conscious process of reexamination of beliefs and experiences. At its core is the identification of discrepancies between beliefs and actions. The process then leads to an exploration of alternative perspectives and eventually to a transformed way of thinking with new courses of action.

Currently, educators use systems of instruction that prescribe in detail how teachers are to teach and manage their classrooms. These systems dictate what, how, and in what order materials are to be used, what curriculum items need to be addressed, and what methods are to be used to assess children’s learning (De Mulder & Rigsby, 2003). Traditionally, teachers had limited input into these decisions. Although these conventional methods of teaching had been useful, there was the recognition that the most important tasks of the teacher and principal occurred in an “indeterminate zone of practice” (Schön, 1983, 1987a). The indeterminate zone reflects the confusing and chaotic life of the classroom and the school. It refers to the unpredictable and ambiguous reality of the classroom. Because of this indeterminate zone of practice, educators need strategies to think about teaching in ways that are grounded in direct experiences and struggles. These strategies provided a rich store of experiences that could be conveyed to others and drawn on to solve immediate problems. Sergiovanni (1991) states, “professional knowledge was created in use as professionals, faced with ill-defined, unique and constantly changing problems, decide courses of action” (p. 292).

Donald Schön’s greatest contribution was to bring reflection into the center of an understanding of what professionals did (Smith, 2005). According to Schön (1983, 1987b) the most fully developed model of the process of acquiring “professional artistry”

is reflective practice. Schön's (1987b) term professional artistry "referred to the kinds of competence practitioners sometimes displayed in unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice" (p. 22). Schön's (1987b) use of professional artistry summarizes the intended purpose of reflection. He presents a strong argument for adapting educational strategies so that practitioners incorporate not only the mastering of skills needed to complete work specific tasks, but focus on the development of problem solving skills that reflect their realities. The concept of professional artistry comes from the premise that people know what to do without following a strict procedure. This knowing is not taught within the construction of frameworks, theories, and processes to guide learning. It is best achieved through incorporating professional judgment involving the work realities of practitioners.

Schön (1983) describes "the dominate paradigm of professional knowledge as technical rationality, which involved a rigid application of content to situations that were specialized, firmly bounded, scientific and standardized" (p. 23). Because reflective practice is characterized by indeterminacy, this paradigm is incomplete. Schön (1987b) notes that the technical rational approaches based on rules, use diagnosis and analysis and focus on technical expertise. The professional artistry approach uses patterns and interpretations focused on professional judgment, and implies that theory emerges from practice. Professional artistry requires transcending the rules and plans of technical rationality to "reflect in action" (Bailey, Saporito, Kressel, Christensen, & Hooijberg, 1997).

In the context of professional education, Schön (1987b) advocated for integrating approaches, technical rationality, and professional artistry. Schön (1987b) held that

“professional education should be redesigned to combine the teaching of applied science with coaching in the artistry of reflection-in-action” (p. xii).

According to (Russell, 2005) there is a distinction between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-on-action resembles our everyday concept of reflection as thinking back through recent events. It involves looking at our experiences, connecting with our feelings, and refining them to be consistent with our theories-in-use. The result of this type of reflection builds new understandings to inform our actions as situations unfold (Smith, 2005). Reflection-in-action is a puzzling or surprising event which stimulates recognizing a new way of thinking about a professional situation of practice. This process of reflection leads to an exploration of various alternative perspectives and eventually to the transformation of self with new courses of action that inform practice.

Schön (1983) describes the process “reflection-in-action” as a tool that practitioners use to cope with troublesome situations. Reflection-in-action is the process of situating the issue in terms of values and emotions, understanding the context of the issue, and checking to make sure the assessment is accurate. Schön (1983) identifies reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as encouraging both on the spot reflection, which is a knowing response to an immediate situation, followed by distanced reflection of experiences afterwards. The questioning of a problem solving technique by a practitioner may change his initial understanding of the problem. Constructing a new description of the problem leads to a new theory articulated by ones values, feelings, or emotions. Educators use reflection as a method to scrutinize their practice to deepen their own understanding of teaching and learning. By doing this, they gain opportunities for

personal and professional growth that transforms their practice in the classroom and throughout the school (DeMulder & Rigsby, 2003). Schön (1983) states, “when a practitioner reflects on his practice, the objects of reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the systems of knowing-in-practice which he brings to them” (p. 62). Reflections on practice are varied and situated in the social and instructional context shared by the educational community. Schön (1983) observes that:

Practitioners may reflect on the tactic norms and appreciations, which underlie a judgment, or the strategies and theories implicit in a pattern of behavior. He may reflect on the feeling for a situation which has led him to adopt a particular course of action, on the way he has framed the problem he is trying to solve or on a role he has constructed for himself within a larger institutional context. (p. 62)

Such reflection allows unique problems to be solved spontaneously by using a repertoire of past professional experiences, images, successes, and failures to reshape interpretations and courses of action. A study (Boyd & Fales, 1983) revealed that reflective practice was not a one way linear process, but had a spiral effect. “It is more comparable to alternating current, flowing back and forth between intense focusing on a particular form of outer experience reflecting back inside to what that has meant to you, externalizing it and internalizing it” (p. 106). In a similar vein, it was observed that:

In the reflective practice cycle practitioners begin by giving attention to the purposive activities which make up their practice. Then they examine them to see to what extent the activities which actually occurred were what were planned, critique those activities in different ways and determine corrective action for a further episode of practice which is then to be examined in turn and the cycle continued. (Willis, 1999, p. 91)

The reflective practice cycle is continuous and includes description, appraisal, suggested correction, and planning for subsequent action. A crucial element of reflective practice is the ability to pull back from the experience upon which one is reflecting with a diagnostic and objective eye. Mezirow (1998) records impartiality, consistency, and

subjectivity among the characteristics of a reflective practitioner who employs context specific principles governing proper interpretation. Through the use of school-based inquiry, continuous improvement and collaborative work teams, educators conceptualize their roles and transform their practice by developing their reflective practice.

The Principal as a Facilitator of Reflection

In discussing the facilitation of reflection in a school setting, I considered my role as the principal in that experience. In the context of this research, I was identified as a principal working in an elementary setting. The educators with whom I worked were tenured and non-tenured teachers who were contractually limited. Although there was much literature on techniques used to develop reflection skills, there was less on the role of the principal in that development. However, it appeared that this was an emerging body of literature.

There were many benefits to employing reflective practice to examine assumptions and beliefs that framed educational practices. It allowed us the security to ask questions of ourselves without fear, criticism, or judgment. It opened the door for any experience to become a learning experience. The more reflective practice was used as a tool to examine practice, the more proficient in the process I became. Reflective practice became the framework I used to share my discoveries and insights with my colleagues. Once the staff began using reflective practice, we reflected on teaching and learning, student performance, and every aspect of school life learning to work in new ways. Learning via reflective practice enabled the Model II theories-in-use to be utilized. The research shows a convincing argument that reflective practice is a means of improving learning (Amobi, 2005; Argyris, 1991; Bailey et al., 1997; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Mueller,

2003; Russell, 2005; Watson & Wilcox, 2000; Willis, 1999). The assumption was that if we improved our skills, knowledge, and expertise as a result of using reflective practice the benefits would naturally be increased learning for the entire school.

Reflective practice research has been applied in education with documented results. Brookfield (1995) discusses his own growth and involvement using the reflective process and the importance of critical reflection used by college faculty in teaching. He espouses that in order to be successful in becoming reflective, the teacher must use four reflective lenses that include: the teacher's unique autobiography as a teacher and a learner, the use of personal self-reflection and insights for teaching, student perspectives and feedback, colleague feedback from observations, and theoretical literature that provides an alternative framework for a situation (p. 28). The principal's use of reflective practice in fostering reflection in others was reinforced by Russell (2005), when he discovered his own reflection-in-action that resulted in a strategy for helping new professionals experience the benefits of reflective practice through a program of professional development. Through self-study that used a structured approach along with personal reflection in action, he was able to foster reflection in others. He concluded that reflective practice should be taught and the benefits of instruction were more productive than assuming that reflective practice differed from our everyday sense of reflection. Mueller (2003), a beginning teacher educator sought to cultivate reflective practices for herself and her students. She initiated pedagogy of reflective practice by introducing teacher candidates to the art of engaging in self-reflective practices throughout the year. This self-study contributed to a teacher educator's cycle of learning and changing practices. In addition, she discovered that it was through self-reflection and modeling the

process to others that she was able to further her teacher-students' and her own teaching.

Bailey et al. (1997) discuss the value of pedagogical development in teachers of higher education. The authors discuss the concept of a disconnect between mastering content knowledge and the teaching of that knowledge effectively. They argue that to be effective pedagogically, faculty must approach teaching as a reflective practice. A model was developed around two principles of developing reflective skills: (a) a dialogue between mentors and novices where the latter used ideas and beliefs to guide their practice in specific situations, and (b) the fact that the specific situations involved episodes of surprise, failure, and frustration. The feedback used to reflect was provided by teaching portfolios and diagnostic student evaluations, both recognized approaches to faculty development. This model revealed the way to instill reflective practice in others was by serving as an example. Principals practiced what they preached so teachers learned reflective practice by witnessing it firsthand.

Schön (1991) notes that Lewin (1948) argued that collaborative reflection on practice had a profoundly educative intent and outcome. He argued to become effective practitioners, educators must reflect in and on their own inquiry and draw on their reflections to design educational experiences for others. In fostering reflective practice in teachers, it was necessary for me to explore the numerous school-based techniques and my role as a reflective practice facilitator.

Techniques for Fostering Reflective Practice

Since Schön's work (1983, 1987b), educators have begun to appreciate the range of techniques necessary to solve professional problems, particularly the flexible approaches needed in dealing with complex and ambiguous situations (Watson &

Wilcox, 2000). Schön (1983) suggests that reflective practitioners build up “a repertoire of examples, images, understandings and actions” (p. 138) useful for scrutinizing new problems. In fostering the development of reflection skills in interviews with twenty-six university educators, Amobi (2005), found that one of the images associated with reflection was voice. The study portrayed the professional voices of teacher educators on reflective teaching in one-on-one interviews. Boyd and Fales (1983) discuss facilitating reflection using open-ended responses to a 5-item questionnaire, the reflection of the authors themselves, and interviews with exploring and defining the parameters of reflection. Ashby (2006) recommends using models by setting the incident within the context of a framework and using different lenses to view it from different angles. The Hastings Center Report (Verkerk et al., 2004) followed a similar pattern using a reflection enhancement tool to enhance awareness of the many moral aspects of the daily practice in which professionals operate. The aim was for the professionals to think of their identity in terms of a Reflection Square model. This method serves as an instructional tool for the critical examination of one’s own views as they are embodied in one’s core beliefs and expressed in past behavior. There are three steps to this instructional tool. Initial reflection consists of a reaction to a case presentation; guided reflection involves the critical examination of the morally salient particulars of the case, and mapping responsibilities are a matter of reordering one’s own professional position in the practice of daily work. Bailey et al. (1997) identify mentoring, teaching portfolio development, and workshops as standards for facilitating reflection. DeMulder and Rigsby (2003) discuss a professional development program for teachers that focuses on the writing of narratives. According to their study, writing narratives reinforced reflective

practice. This enabled teachers to do detailed classroom observations of children that prompted additional reading of the literature that produced more powerful narratives.

Watson and Wilcox (2000) wrote about two methods for reading to a better understanding of professional practice to be used alone or in collaboration with others. These were writings of examinations of experiences, perceptions, and roles as related to practice. The first method invites educators to read their stories of practice through narratives. The second method is to read stories grounded in conventions of practice. These include things done routinely such as strategies, approaches, and routines that have the power to shape us in ways we may not realize. Both methods are grounded in the asking of challenging questions about ordinary moments in professional life. Mezirow (1998) refers to the Dialogue program using collaboration and group dialogue for understanding others and oneself as an educator. A facilitator helps the group share assumptions that are major factors in making their judgments. Topics emerge as participants learn to understand how others think and feel about common concerns. The emphasis is on understanding how the expectations and patterns of thought deeply influence their experiences. Mueller (2003), a beginning teacher educator discusses how she required her students to reflect on their thinking using their journals and including them in teaching portfolios. This provided insights of how to foster discussions about teaching and learning while she engaged in her own self-study.

Almost all of the literature reviewed advocated using a reflective journal as a key strategy. Schön (1987b) describes a reflective practicum that took place in virtual reality, with the distractions of the real world removed, focused on learning with a student and coach. Students learned to recognize good practice, to build images of confidence and to

think in the midst of acting (Adler, 1991). Learning had a lot to do with the behavioral world they created and the coach's ability to foster a relationship open to inquiry.

Encouraging teachers to be open to experimentation and risk of inquiry is a fundamental rationale in promoting reflective practice. Any uncertainty is offset by support and guidance from the principal, colleagues, and mentors for their development within the process of developing reflection skills. Supporting teachers' reflective practice requires an environment that nurtures new ways of knowing and learning. Additionally, the principal reinforces the idea that knowledge gives teachers expertise that results in a strong professional voice. Ashby (2006) explains that reflective practice empowers teachers because they learn knowledge and good practices while developing confidence in their own abilities. Teachers become open to multiple perspectives while carefully examining their assumptions. A study by DeMulder and Rigsby (2003) reported that teachers gained new perspectives by learning to consider and appreciate other viewpoints and their contexts. These new perspectives led to greater understanding of the children they taught. Teachers pointed out that reflective practice was transformational (DeMulder & Rigsby, 2003). Looking at the emotional aspect of an incident clarified reactions to certain situations. Ashby (2006) discovered that these insights led to a deeper understanding of one's self. It was an understanding of self that had transformative potential as it opened the door to making choices about future actions.

Summary

This literature review provided the methodological and conceptual framework for the study of my leadership that translated into my own evolution as a reflective practitioner and secondly, my ability to support teachers in their efforts to incorporate

reflection into their practice as a means for improvement. Reflective practice as a tool for the reassessment of held beliefs to improve one's practice is at the core of this study.

In the first section the literature review focused on effective principal leadership in schools. This study involved the theoretical framework of effective principal leadership and began with a discussion about the traditional paradigm of leadership in schools. The emphasis was placed on the shift from a traditional organizational bureaucracy to a democratic collaborative self managed organization. This shift was part of a historical transformation in the satisfaction of human needs that allowed staff to evolve to higher levels of fulfillment. Ultimately, this motivated them to greater productivity. In addition, the literature discussed the principal's roles as an effective leader. These roles included helping teachers develop a new vision by shaping new attitudes and advocating school reform as a major force for change and improvement. In addition, the effective principal shaped the culture of the school to become a learning organization while dealing with resistance to change. These factors heightened leadership effectiveness. This discussion of principal leadership augmented the information contained in my theories-in-use and stressed the significance of servant leader, feminist, and democratic frameworks of leadership.

The second section of the literature review pertained to reflective practice. This included the seminal work that addressed the theoretical literature on reflective practice, detailing the stages of the process and outlining the basic strategies. It is significant to highlight that reviewing the literature on reflective practice uncovered a multiplicity of notions on what reflection is, and in particular the varying phrases one can go through in reflecting (Newton, 2004). The focus of this dissertation was oriented toward determining

the applicability of the reflective practice literature to principal leadership and educational transformation. Next was discussed facilitating reflective practice in schools in the context of the principal and teachers working in a collaborative environment which leads to greater learning for all.

This research explored and detailed the process through which my leadership both evolved through the use of reflective practice and how it translated into energizing teachers to reflect on their practice leading to positive changes in our school. To illustrate this transformation process the next chapter of this dissertation turns to the methodology of self-study.

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

Schools today are busy places in which principals, students, and teachers are pressured with high-stakes testing and held accountable for demonstrating to their constituents achievement of state standards and mastery of specific content. Because of school reform and improvement efforts, school districts spend the majority of their time planning for improvement and less time in reflecting on their choices (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Educators put more emphasis on a one-size-fits-all approach to solving problems than the open-ended discovery approach. These results lead to an educationally barren school climate where intellectual creativity is overshadowed by the daily routine of discipline problem students, impersonal surroundings, and low morale among staff (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). School reform and the accountability movement shifted the role of the principal from strictly managerial functions to being an instructional leader for students and staff and numerous responsibilities that fall in between. To meet the challenges presented by the changes and complexities in education, school principals must learn to integrate reflection and dialogical competence into the decision-making process (Noonan, Walker, & Kutsyuruba, 2008). With these challenges, Gardner (1995) suggests, “the only hope for vitality in large scale organizations is the willingness of people throughout the organization to take the initiative in indentifying problems and solving them” (p. 152).

This research chronicled an intense personal account of my role as an elementary principal over a 2-year period. Using the school setting, my practice as a principal was intimately and critically examined from the inside to identify deficiencies, accomplishments, and my ability to grow from my experiences. My unique experiences and dilemmas and the meanings that I derived from them will contribute to assisting other educators as they reflect on their own experiences and grow professionally in their craft.

Purpose of the Study

This research documented my chronological growth in leadership during two years as an elementary school principal. Throughout the study, the concept of reflective practice was used to identify, examine, and modify my leadership to improve my practice. The purpose of the autoethnographic study was to critically examine my leadership that translated into my own evolution as a leader using reflective practice. Weber (2003) defines reflective practice as the ability to reflect on, to understand, to evaluate and see the interrelationships among the deep assumptions that underlie one's work. My purpose for utilizing reflective practice was to examine my leadership behavior more critically. Factors such as context, assumptions, cultural biases, and political beliefs were considered when making decisions by applying my theories-in-use. My challenge was to resolve contradictions between my actions and my espoused theories-in-use by discovering discrepancies between beliefs and actions. The knowledge gained led to new perspectives.

My evolution as a reflective practitioner using reflective processes entailed legitimizing the reflective practice process with the faculty, modeling the use of reflective practice in my own practice for all to see, facilitating team member involvement with

reflective practice, and helping to construct shared meaning by gaining commitment to a plan for moving the staff toward our vision of creating a school-based learning community. This self-study was viewed through an autoethnographic lens in the continuation of my development providing critical insight, data, and reflection. Specifically, I developed capacity within myself to continuously learn and improve my craft by embedding norms of reflective practice in my work and secondly, fostered a culture of reflective practice among teachers to further their learning. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How did I examine myself through an autoethnographic lens and continue my own learning by providing insight, data, and reflection regarding the role of the elementary principal?
2. How did using reflective practice as a tool allow me to critically examine my leadership?
3. How did I apply the process of reflective practice to my reflections?
4. What was the process that connected reflection and leadership?
5. How did reflective leadership transition to provide tools to enhance climate cultural decision-making?

I was the dominant research tool in the social context of the school. This offered me the unique opportunity to scrutinize my interpersonal relationships, decision-making skills and problem driven outcomes within the role of the principalship.

Research Design

My data collection strategies followed a qualitative paradigm. The qualitative research paradigm is used as an inquiry process of understanding a school-based dilemma

conducted in its natural setting. Data collection in the form of words was used to construct a holistic picture of my principal leadership (Creswell, 1994). Basic characteristics of the qualitative mode of inquiry included: 1) Naturalistic – research taking place in the actual school setting and being the direct source of data and the researcher is the key instrument (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998); 2) Descriptive - data taking the form of words rather than numbers; 3) Process - researchers are concerned with the process rather than outcomes; 4) Inductive - the researcher does not search out data to prove or disprove a hypothesis; rather theories are built from the details: a picture is constructed as one collects and examines the parts; 5) Meaning – the emphasis is on how people make sense of their lives and experiences of their world; 6) Field work – involves behavior that is observed and recorded in its natural setting. Creswell (1994) espouses that in a qualitative study, one does not begin with a theory to test or verify. Instead, a theory may develop during the data collection and analysis phase of the research.

This study evolved through an autoethnographic approach seeking to improve my principal leadership through reflection. This study explored my questions and problems as I attempted to address dilemmas of theory and practice for the improvement of my leadership. Qualitative research is an overarching term that covers many forms of inquiry as the researcher studies social context with the least amount of disruption as possible (Ellis, 2004).

Autoethnography is a qualitative genre of research. It is written using the form of first person voice. The construct allowed me to describe my personal experience within the social context of a school. At the center of this autoethnographic study resided my own self-awareness and the reporting of my experiences and introspections as a primary

source of data. I was the primary source of data trying to construct my experiences in a meaningful and mindful way.

The autoethnographic form of autobiographical personal narrative embraces roles and biases of the researcher as a holistic view of the subculture emerges. There are many benefits to autoethnographical research. Ellis and Bochner (2000) advocate the benefits of autoethnographical research as the researcher having the ability to participate in the story engaging the story line morally, emotionally, aesthetically, and intellectually. Examining all aspects of a personalized experience allowed me maximum opportunity to arrive at the core meaning of the experience. The study was hermeneutic in nature, meaning it was a story of interpretation of meaning. It asked the question: What did this experience mean? In an autoethnography, the researcher is studying self within a subculture making meaning of all the experiences in the setting (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). A benefit of autoethnography is the contribution to the improvement of educational practice, while another is the improvement of the situations in which these practices occur (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). It was the improvement in the understanding of educational practices by me as an educational leader that was the primary area of concern in this dissertation (Noffke & Zeichner, 1987). Improvement of practice meant resolving problems that were open-ended and complex using collaborative inquiry to come up with interventions and new ways of doing things.

Change was at the heart of this autoethnographic research project. This concept of change, as it related to reflective practice, was perceived by me as being risky. New problems required me to think in new ways outside my old paradigms. Reflective practice meant that I had to be willing to change by evaluating my own work leading to new

possibilities. I became my own agent of change leading to growth. This autoethnographic research embraced my personal thoughts, stories, and observations as a way of understanding my role as a principal for two years in a school setting. The process of shedding light on my unique interactions in the school made my emotions and thoughts visible to the reader. Autoethnography embraces the researcher's subjectivity and puts it into the forefront of the research (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I used my own experiences to reflect back and look more deeply at me along with the interactions within my unique setting.

Data Collection

This research illustrated my own perspective as a principal in one unique elementary school, taking into account my personal challenges, relationships, celebrations, and the multiple realities of staff, students, parents, and colleagues that helped shape my experiences. The interpretations that I formulated were constructed with human data sources that I encountered as part of the culture of the school. Because autoethnography produces literary representations to ensure validity, Feldman (2003), has developed four criteria upon which data collection is based:

1. Provide clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work.
2. Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data. What specifics about this data led us to make this assumption?
3. Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the self-study.
4. Provide evidence that the research changed or evolved the educator and summarize the value to the profession. This can convince readers of the study's significance and validity. (pp. 27-28)

In autoethnography, I became the primary participant of the research in the process of writing personal stories and narratives that included direct observation of behavior, unraveling of perceptions, and embracing my own personal thoughts and

observations. This was used as a way of understanding the benefits of reflective practice and my leadership in a diverse school setting. My theory building emerged from a complex mix of classroom experiences, collegial exchanges, solving dilemmas, reflective opportunities, and selected readings. These theories were not constrained by the theory building conventions of the academic community. Instead, I was free to explore ideas that were important to colleagues within the context of the school and classroom (Mohr, Rogers, Sanford, Noverino, & Clawson, 2004). Data were collected through the use of field notes, journaling, looking at archival records whether institutional or personal, interviewing my own self, and using writing to generate self-cultural understandings. According to Long (2008), in an autoethnography the writer uses his own feelings and thoughts to understand the situation.

My aim was to gather episodes of data as a self-study focusing on the improvement of my leadership practices. The focus of my data collection was to construct a picture using self-narrative writing that moved between the deeply personal psychological aspects and the much broader cultural context (Ellis, 1999). The field notes I gathered were kept in a notebook of descriptions of people, objects, places, events, activities, and conversations (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). In addition to the descriptive material, the field notes contained the more subjective side of my observations. Along with the field notes being rich and descriptive, they were also reflective, highlighting my feelings, problems, concerns, and biases. The observations depicted concrete action, descriptions of people in the natural setting of the school emphasizing how they looked and how they acted. These observations also included a rich description of the physical setting, accounts of events and activities and my own behavior and assumptions.

This autoethnographic study used conventions of literary writing. Ellis (2004) described autoethnography as a research writing story method that connects the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. This form of writing features concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Using sensory and emotional experiences, I wrote my personal narrative about my leadership using my own voice. I embraced my personal thoughts, stories, and observations as a way of understanding my leadership. I scrutinized my interpersonal relationships, decision-making skills, and problem driven outcomes. The experiences I confronted, the problems I faced, and the interpretations obtained from them strengthened my own practice as a principal and enhanced my leadership.

Context of the Study

This dissertation documented my chronological growth as a principal during the years 2007 through 2009 at Northfield Elementary School in the Sterling School District in southern New Jersey. The Sterling School District is situated in a suburban area with a strong urban influence. The town of Sterling is consistent with an urban atmosphere, because of the gangs, crime, failing public schools, and fiscal mismanagement have inundated the township in recent years. Five out of eight schools have failed to make Average Yearly Progress (AYP) under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation.

There are eight schools in the Sterling School District with a student enrollment of approximately 5,000 students in grades prekindergarten through 12. In addition, the district has a full day prekindergarten and kindergarten program. The five elementary schools service students in grades prekindergarten to 4. The upper elementary school

contains grades 5 and 6, while the middle school educates students in grades 7 and 8. There is only one high school that includes grades 9 through 12 and is used frequently by the community for extracurricular activities.

I was a principal in the Sterling District for three years, two of them at Northfield Elementary School, where my journey was situated. The school enrolls approximately 500 students and was the setting for the study. The student population of Northfield was 95 percent African-American with an average class size of 22. Including certificated and non-certificated staff, there was a total of 70 faculty members. The school had a full-time child study team and a part-time counselor. The regular education staff included five prekindergarten teachers, four kindergarten teachers, four first grade teachers, and three teachers each in grades 2 through 4. Additionally, there were special education inclusion teachers in grades 3 and 4. Four more special education teachers taught self-contained classes in all of the grade levels. There were two secretaries, four custodians, and one fulltime nurse.

My first year as principal in the Sterling District was during the 2005-2006 school year. That year I worked in an elementary school named Thurgood Marshall, which was located in the Hatfield North section of the district. During that school year the district experienced a ten million dollar budgetary deficit that resulted in the closing of three elementary schools and the elimination of many jobs. Thurgood Marshall Elementary School was one of the schools designated to close and my position as principal was abolished. I was rehired by the district for the 2007-2008 school year as principal of Northfield Elementary School.

Northfield had a history of being one of the better schools in the district. Previously teachers worked together collaboratively and state standardized test scores were on the rise. In the 2004-2005 school year, Northfield Elementary was the recipient of the Governors School of Academic Excellence Award. Since then, they have had three different principals in three years. A lack of consistent leadership contributed to low morale, a significant drop in standardized test scores, and a school climate encompassed by conflict. Many of the best instructional practices employed by the teachers in the past had been lost to a culture of apathy resulting in mediocre teaching.

Safety and security issues added to the malaise in the school. Teachers and staff complained about not feeling safe. On September 18, 2007 an unknown gunman fired three bullets at the back of the school. One of the bullets ricocheted off the building shattering the window of a fourth grade classroom. Although the students were not in the room at the time of the incident, two teachers were. During the summer of 2008, a high school student was killed on school property as a result of gang warfare.

The 2007-2008 school budget called for more security guards district wide. When the voters defeated the budget in April 2007 it was sent to the township for reductions. The town council removed most of the new security measures. The school district appealed to the state of New Jersey and the only security guard positions reinstated were at the middle and high school. As a result, teachers, students, and parents were unsettled and the ambiance was one of anxiety.

During the 2008-2009 school year, the Sterling School District began the year without a permanent superintendent. For the past several school years the Office of the Superintendent had been occupied by several interims, leaving the district without the

proper leadership and direction. Because of a lack of leadership and accountability “For Sale Signs” were seen on numerous properties around the town. A massive amount of parents were transferring their children to schools in other districts. At school board meetings, residents were vocal about the lack of a quality education offered by the district.

Reflective practice was the tool that allowed me to grow personally and professionally studying my leadership skills. In addition, I provided the groundwork for reflective practice to be utilized in the school empowering teachers to solve problems by improving their educational practices.

Overview of the Project

The aim of this study was to provide me with an opportunity for professional growth and increase my ability to reflect on my own leadership practices. However, the starting point for this study began with me becoming an agent of my own change. The quality of my influence on the school using reflective practice allowed me to grow professionally, developing problem solving theories that empowered me to improve my educational practices. My goal as a reflective practitioner was to solve problems of practice and provide teachers with the reflective practice framework to do the same by furthering their learning.

I achieved the goal of becoming a reflective practitioner by integrating reflection into my practice by planning and implementing four reflective cycles. Cycle I was where I engaged in individual reflective practice. Schön (1995) advocates that reflective practitioners develop an epistemology of practice. This epistemology was grounded in the experience of “I” in the question, “How do I improve my practice?” Whitehead (2000)

further explains that the created epistemology is legitimized by four characteristics that generate a discipline of education in reflective practice. First, the inclusion of “I” in educational inquiries can lead to the creation of research methodologies, which are distinctly educational and cannot be reduced to social science methodologies. Second, the inclusion of “I” in claims to educational knowledge leads to the question, “How do I improve my practice?” Third, the inclusion of “I” in explanations for an individual’s professional learning can lead to the creation of living educational theories, which can be related directly to a principal’s improvement in relationships with her staff and students. Fourth, values can be used as the educational standards, which create our disciplines of education.

The living theory approach was qualitative and practical in the sense that it was a method for me to improve my leadership embracing the benefits of reflective practice. This method of inquiry allowed me to use creativity in studying my practice as a principal by asking my own questions and integrating my own learning into solving school problems (Whitehead, 1989). It was essential to the study that I learned through personal experience about reflective practice and its potential to increase my effectiveness for improvement in practice.

The organizing framework for this study was the reflective practice spiral. This framework asserts that the place to begin implementation of reflection is with gathering oneself (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2006). It reflects the assumption that learning occurs from the inside out. The spiral has four levels, beginning with the most personal level of individual reflective practice, “My engagement with Individual Reflective Practice” and extending outward to “Reflective Practice with a Partner,” then

to “Reflective Practice in Small Groups or Teams,” and ending with “School wide Reflective Practice.” There was interconnectedness among the stories starting with reflective practice with myself, and ending with reflective practice school wide resulting in a comprehensive effect on learning (York-Barr et al., 2006). The reflective practice spiral focuses on critical incidents of practice that are episodes of experiential learning. These experiential learning cycles prompt the development of new action theories and strategies.

Data gathering consisted of the use of field notes, journaling, looking at archival records whether institutional or personal, interviewing myself by writing to generate self-cultural understanding and reflective analysis. Reflective practice was fostered by our engagement in learning oriented conversations and group dialogue sessions held in grade-level and faculty meetings. Journaling captured these conversations. They were based on my reflections based over a period of time documenting facts, evidence of work, and reflective commentary with the intention to enhance learning. At the completion of this study, common strands, key attributes, and coding of the data served to provide retrospective insights. The entire school was involved in a cycle of inquiry, reflection, and action leading to the development of a school-based professional learning community. We questioned common practices, approached problems from new perspectives, considered research to propose new solutions, and evaluated the results starting the cycle anew (Loughran, 2003).

Reflective Practice Cycle I

Cycle I represented the development of my individual reflection capacity. My challenge began with the process of reframing my hectic days as opportunities to learn

and reprioritizing my time to make good on those opportunities, so that reflection and learning served as the foundation for my practice. In the first cycle, I used several frameworks for guiding my intentional reflection experiences. The purpose was to prompt inquiry and reflection about my practice as a self-study. I used the 4-Step process to guide reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action, both focused around a specific event or action. This process brought me through a sequenced process of thinking described as the following: 1. (what?) description of event; 2. (why?) analysis and interpretation; 3. (so what?) overall determination of meaning; 4. (now what?) and projections about future actions (York-Barr et al., 2006). Direct observation was the most reliable information about practice and identified my theories-in-use.

The methods that I used to reflect alone included writing narratives to contextualize the experience when exploring practice dilemmas, examining student work products, journaling, and reading literature. This cycle provided me with the ability to explore the nature of reflective practice and my need to be aware of, and monitor my own thinking, understanding, and knowledge about leadership in terms of the development of my practice. Additionally, it enabled deeper thinking about my practice by challenging my own ideas for improvement. I was immersed into the everyday life of school entering the subject's world through ongoing interaction seeking perspectives and meanings (Creswell, 1994). I learned to view my work with a critical eye, often dealing with contradictions. Reconstruction of my ideas was based on new understandings and insights.

Reflective Practice Cycle II

Cycle II represented my joining with another principal in the process of reflection to achieve greater insights about my leadership practice. Joy Brady was a principal of another elementary school in the Sterling School District. According to York-Barr et al. (2006), joining with another person in the process of reflection can result in greater insight about one's practice, especially when trust is high and the right combination of support and challenge is present. The partner reflection that Principal Brady and I engaged in was voluntary and organized. The goal that Principal Brady and I focused on was promoting the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth. Our aim was to conduct a mini inquiry using reflective practice on how to effectively manage behaviorally challenged students in our schools. This partner reflection allowed us to critique our leadership philosophies by comparing and contrasting our decisions about these types of students.

As new principals in the Sterling School District, Principal Brady and I routinely discussed the complexities of the ever-increasing demands of our jobs. We not only discussed student and teacher concerns, but school policies and procedures. This partner reflection was at times humorous. We both learned not to take things so seriously and mistakes were an unavoidable aspect of the learning process. The presence of this strong collegial relationship provided us both with decreased feelings of isolation on the job and increased professional and social support. It also increased our sense of who we were as principals and how things worked in the district. Given the connection and exchange with another principal who practiced in the same district, the feeling of loneliness decreased.

This type of partner reflection was voluntary and self-organized. Some of the ways we reflected together included interactive journaling, discussing instructional design possibilities for instructional improvement, talking through the steps of an inquiry cycle related to specific events, reading and talking about articles, and online dialogue. I collected our data using a journal. The journal was an important means of gathering data about events, actions, feelings, and interpretations to assess our practice and personal action theories as principals (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Descriptive details about problematic situations were entered into our journals daily. We also utilized the case record to gather and analyze data. Osterman (1991) describes the use of case record to gather and analyze experience in a format for creating a structured narrative about a problem situation. To prompt a reflective analysis of the thoughts and intentions that prompted the action and its impact we addressed the following questions (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004): What did you hope to accomplish? What alternatives did you consider? What actions did you take? What happened as a result of your actions? Were your intended objectives achieved? Why or why not? We looked for moments when we felt most connected and disconnected in our work that caused anxiety and surprise (Brookfield, 1995). Our focus was on emerging patterns, which allowed us to identify persistent dilemmas. Analysis of these patterns helped us uncover hidden assumptions (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

The reflection partnership that Principal Brady and I shared was a reward to both of us. We have supported and contributed to each other's growth in numerous ways. In addition to improvements in practice, the relationship that developed was a valuable resource and support in many aspects of our professional work lives. It benefited me in

the aspect of not feeling so isolated while conducting my duties throughout the day. From an emotional standpoint, having the assurance that at least one person understood what I was going through and cared was immeasurable. Reflecting on practice with Principal Brady led us from a pleasant level of interaction to more substantial and collaborative interactions in which our commitments to school improvement, and continuously improving our leadership practice were realized.

As a principal, an increased sense of efficacy emerged from reflection with Principal Brady, which positioned me to extend the practice to small groups or grade-level teams. Beyond the individual, the potential for instructional improvement increases as more people choose to make commitments to professional improvement and learning. As relationships formed, the potential for school improvement increased. My work with Principal Brady was a critical partnership. The partnership was important because my ability to reflect on issues was difficult and not necessarily automatic. My discussions with Principal Brady helped me identify areas of my practice that needed to be developed and had the potential for improvement.

Reflective Practice Cycle III

There was a huge shift to reflecting alone or with a partner to reflecting in small groups (York-Barr et al., 2006). Cycle III discussed teachers reflecting in grade-level teams. Teacher inquiry is defined as an active enterprise with learning that is in a state of evolution, rather learning than being more fixed and stable (Loughran, 2003). Arnold (1995) discusses teacher dialogues that are used to reflect on instructional practices and student learning. As a principal working on my ability to be reflective on my practice, I assumed primary responsibility for facilitating conversations with teachers by posing

reflective questions revolving around instructional practices. Topics for discussion dealt with issues like differentiated instruction, classroom management, parent involvement, vertical and horizontal articulation by grade levels, lesson planning, and the use of student testing data to make decisions about instruction, best practices, and any other issues pertaining to student learning.

The composition of the small group teams were organized by grade-level teams of teachers who had a common planning time designated in their daily schedule. Weekly, each teacher had one grade-level meeting that was mandated by the negotiated teacher contract. These meeting were used for reflection. Since the meetings were not voluntarily, teachers with diverse personalities, intentions, and levels of commitment were teamed together. Each grade-level team was diverse and this diversity often affected our outcomes. The grade-level teams of teachers in grades pre-kindergarten through 4, met weekly during their common planning period of 45 minutes. These meetings consisted of seven participants including myself. The configurations of our teams were four teachers, one mathematics instructional support teacher, and one reading instructional support teacher, and myself.

I gave my authority for decisions over to the group along with responsibility for the outcomes. My role in the process was the reflective practice facilitator who was outcome neutral and responsible for guiding the group through the process to discover their own outcomes by listening, learning, and figuring things out together (York-Barr et al., 2006). The instructional support teachers had a high level of expertise in the content areas of language arts, writing, science, and mathematics, which affected the group's

work and decisions. The benefits of reflecting in groups were more resources, experience, knowledge, and energy.

While group participants grew in their collegiality, optimism about making significant school improvements grew as well (York-Barr et al., 2006). Our focus was on discussing best practices, examining student data and work, and reviewing and designing assessment procedures. Additionally, there was an emphasis on examining past practices that evolved into future school improvement practices. While reflecting together, teachers increased their understanding of students' learning ability and this understanding served as a framework for their curricular, instructional practices. The effectiveness of the teacher dialogue sessions included an oral reflection at the end of the session. Narratives were used by me to document the richness of these teacher dialogue sessions. Arnold (1995) identifies teacher dialogue sessions as a successful approach to learning:

When teachers feel comfortable enough to reveal problems in their own instructional program and seek solutions from the group; bring in ideas they found to be especially successful with their class and urge others to try them; volunteer to share new research; demonstrate a successful lesson for the group and find that a need for the principal decreases because of the group's increased capacity for leadership. (p. 35)

To engage in reflective practice required trust among colleagues. Information sharing and open communication were the bases for trust. Teachers freely shared their experiences because they trusted the fact that the discussion of problems would not be interpreted as incompetence or weakness. As teachers grew in their collegiality, optimism about making improvements in their practice grew as well. As principal, the more information I shared with teachers, the more empowered they were, the higher morale was, and the more trusting they became. The potential gains that were realized at the

team level of the reflective practice spiral were that groups of people brought to the process a variety of perspectives, experiences, knowledge, and energy.

Working with small groups of teachers in dialogue teams was an effective way of sharing, learning, and relationship building that ultimately supported decision-making. We were effective because of the relatively small group size, composition of groups by grade levels, initial focus on reflection and inquiry, and the group's input on decision-making. The weekly reflection sessions with teachers gave them the time to observe, evaluate, and consider their impact on teaching and learning. It gave teachers the opportunity to step back from the pressure of preparing for the next lesson and engage in deeper thinking about events and situations (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005).

Dialogue and discussions among teachers prompted reflection on teaching and learning for school improvement. Teachers benefited from sharing of viewpoints with colleagues of various experience levels. Reflective practice Cycles I, II, and III were the foundation for designing Cycle IV. Reflective practice Cycle IV was a plan where reflective practice spirals outward to the school level yielding an increase in perspectives, leadership, and people learning together to improve their practice. The core of fostering school-wide reflective practice was the teachers' response to change and how change efforts were supported from an organizational perspective (York-Barr et al., 2006). Change efforts supported by me resulted in the development of a school-based professional learning community.

Reflective Practice Cycle IV

In Cycle IV, I discussed the planned actions that were necessary for facilitating and fostering a paradigm shift regarding school wide reflective practices. The goal of this

cycle was the development of a framework for ongoing reflection and problem-solving within the school, resulting in a school-based professional learning community. During this cycle, teachers were provided with educational research about the general benefits of reflective practice. These benefits included collaboration for student success and the open-ended process of inquiry, which included reflecting to figure out what made sense moving forward. This information was disseminated during our faculty meetings.

Faculty meetings were not used for the sharing of informational items as in the past. These items were given to teachers via electronic email and morning memo bulletins. This freed up the faculty meetings to be used for teachers' sharing of new ideas and insights about student learning, discussing research, and the development of a professional learning community. Faculty meetings began with partner sharing about an unexpected instructional success or challenge and the thinking it prompted.

In addition, several site based professional development workshops were held that introduced the entire faculty to the concept of professional learning communities. The agendas included presenting research on professional learning communities, introducing norms for collaborative work, and the development of a protocol that would be used for examination of student work. The meetings would end with a take away question to prompt reflection. Our school mission statement was being developed to incorporate the characteristics of a professional learning community. To involve the community, teachers and staff developed classroom web pages for parents to demonstrate how the students were utilizing reflective practice and inquiry based learning in the classroom.

The cycles were measured by evaluative feedback given from teachers and staff. This feedback was designed to ascertain whether they had learned through collaborative work drawn on their knowledge and learning from a range of contexts to reflect on their practice. The feedback all required a free response and allowed teachers to express their views and experiences (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). Teachers also gave examples of issues discussed and whether they had used reflection to influence their practice. The data collected were focused around a key question: How does collaboration with colleagues enable teachers to think reflectively about their practice for school improvement? The goal of the collaboration was to enable deeper thinking about practice in an atmosphere of constructive and honest feedback through the use of a school-based professional learning community.

Data Analysis

In qualitative analysis the following activities engage the attention of the researcher: collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, formatting the information into a story or picture, and writing the qualitative text (Creswell, 1994). The analysis of data is based on a personal narrative derived from emotional recall. Emotional recall is expressed through writing that includes physical details, thoughts, and events of the particular episode. In qualitative research, the data emerge as the research and writing process progress.

This means the categories, themes, and patterns materialize from the data. Each reflective practice cycle was organized around four major topics that included: My Journey, Leadership Challenge, Defining Moments, and Critical Decision-making. These cycles detailed my experiences with individual reflective practice, extending to reflective

practice with a partner, and then reflective practice in small groups ending with a school-based professional learning community. These major categories helped me organize my data as the issues unfolded. My personal narratives included my successes as well as my failures in an honest manner. The cultural settings of the schools were entwined with emotions that had an impact on the categorization of data.

After compiling the data through the use of field notes, journal, observations, and document analysis, they were categorized by color codes representing patterns and themes. The following lists of categories were initially developed: perspectives held by subjects, subjects' philosophy of learning before and after the study, setting, context, relationships, process, activity, and strategy. The process of sorting these data was done in color-coded file folders. Each color represented a theme. After assigning the data a category, I reviewed them as patterns and themes emerged. The data were also compared to reflective practice theory and literature resulting in emerging patterns and themes. I checked for validity and reliability of my findings by using data collected from multiple sources, which were triangulated to reflect a variety of perspectives and substantiate the findings. My goal for writing the narrative emerging from the data analysis was to create vicarious experiences of the events. Data sources were fluid in its creation and provided me with an opportunity to derive meaning from the artifacts.

Inquiry narrative was used and is defined as an intentional reflective process, the action of learners interrogating their learning, constructing and telling the story of its meaning, and predicting how this knowledge might be used in the future (Akin, 2002). Kotter's (1996) Eight Stage Change Model and Fullan's (2001a) Five Components of

Effective Leadership were the change frameworks used for documenting my growth as a reflective practitioner.

Summary

This autoethnography was used to identify the experiences I faced, the meanings that originated from them, and to provide other educators with a path to further develop their knowledge about the principalship. My personal narratives were fluid with no exact prescriptions and were in a constant state of metamorphous. Contextual understandings, nuances, and subtleties are at the core of the narratives and provided me with thought provoking reflection. The narrative was written in descriptive details of events described as relating to reflective practice and my leadership in developing its use ultimately school-wide. The details of the events conveyed what happened how, to whom, and to what effect. The four reflective cycles highlighted the growth of reflective practice from the individual level extending school-wide to the development of a school-based professional learning community. During each reflective cycle, reflective practice was used as a tool for learning. These narratives emphasized to readers my personal experience in the principalship. This study involved questioning assumptions, and examining beliefs about students, learning, and other variables of educational practice. The goal of the study was to prompt a second-order change where existing practices were reshaped around new practices leading to ongoing learning.

Chapter IV

My Engagement in Individual Reflective Practice

Introduction

The four reflective practice spirals: Individual Reflective Practice, Reflective Practice with a Partner, Reflective Practice in Small Groups, and School wide Reflective Practice provided me with the ability to explore the nature of reflective practice and the need to be aware of and monitor my own thinking, understanding, and knowledge of leadership. My values contributed to the kind of principal I am. It is my natural tendency to be extremely intense as I fulfill my various responsibilities. I am a woman who wears numerous hats juggling many diverse roles. These roles include, but are not limited to being a mother, daughter, homemaker, friend, principal, and student. Because it is necessary to get things done quickly and accurately these roles are conflicting and put enormous demands on my time and energy creating stress. This stress caused me to be in a constant state of anxiety. Incorporating reflective practice in my life was a conscience effort to slow down, clarify my thoughts to make my existence easier. I needed to develop new ways of coping for a more productive lifestyle. My engagement with reflective practice gave me a significant opportunity for clarity, personally and professionally.

My espoused theories-in-use were challenged for improvement as I utilized reflective practice throughout my research. The construction of multiple frameworks for handling school-based dilemmas was centered on reflective practice leading to new understandings and insights. My journey allowed me to utilize reflective practice as a tool

to critically examine my leadership by providing insight, data, and reflection regarding my role as an elementary principal. The medium used to examine myself was through an autobiographical lens using the methodology of autoethnography. This examination of myself through reflective practice went beyond the awareness of assessing decisions. It centered on the critical level of reflection that brought about an awareness that routines were not adequate and a change in perspective was needed leading to further learning.

Reflective Practice Cycle I

Cycle I represented the development of my individual reflective capacity. The first priority I encountered with my journey was finding and guarding time and space for time to turn back on experience in a meaningful way. The frenetic activity of the principalship left little time for me to give myself permission to claim time to reflect. Life for me was noticeably out of balance and I had to intentionally create space to ponder professional perspectives without distractions. The life of an elementary principal did little to support reflective activity time alone. However, the commitment to be reflective was important and the task of finding time to be reflective had become an integral part of my daily life. My task became finding my own way of claiming space for reflection.

My days were so unpredictable in terms of planning and routine. From the moment I arrived at school until I left for the evening I was constantly being blindsided with drama. I was the only principal in the building, which meant I was continuously inundated with answering telephone call requests from parents, teacher conferences, responding to student disciplinary infractions, completing the necessary paperwork for Central Administration, monitoring three lunch periods and resolving any issues that happened to come my way.

Nevertheless, I built my reflection time into a daily routine during the last thirty minutes prior to dismissal time by asking the secretary to take all messages, closing the door, turning off the lights and sitting at my desk. The basis for my reflective journey was to deepen my personal inquiry and thoughts that led to greater learning about self and my espoused theories-in-use as a principal. In this chapter, I used several frameworks to guide my reflective practice journey with self. These frameworks were the Personal Development Model for Professional Purpose and Practice, the Self-Observing Technique, the 4-Step Process for Guiding Reflection, and Five States of Mind Mental Model for guiding reflection on my own. In addition, I used the Five Components of Effective Leadership as a key change theme to illustrate my leadership improvement (Fullan, 2001a).

My journey. During the 2007 – 2008 school year, I was rehired in the Sterling School District as principal of Northfield Elementary School. I had previously served as principal of the Thurgood Marshall Elementary School during the 2005 – 2006 school year prior to the reorganization of the district and school closing. As the new principal of Northfield, I began the job with a familiarity of the district and many of the staff members. Additionally, I was minimally aware of the lack of structural continuity and low test scores for which the school had a reputation. Under my predecessor's administration, state standardized test scores in the area of Language Arts for our fourth grade students fell below the proficient range. As the school year progressed, the fourth grade teachers were bickering and in total disarray. Due to all the turmoil among the fourth grade teachers, one teacher quit abruptly. As the new principal, I was partially convinced that letting things remain the same and not rocking the boat was the way to

proceed, at least for my first year. After all, these were veteran teachers and trouble was not on my agenda.

“Oh Mrs. Smith....an irate parent is on the phone – sounds like trouble again – Gosh,” quipped our school secretary Ms. Drake. I was not sure if the sound at the end of Ms. Drake’s sentence meant trouble or not, but I had grown to appreciate her intuition when it came to parents. As a veteran principal’s secretary she was usually correct in her predictions. Mrs. Miller, a parent had called to schedule an appointment about a problem with her fourth grade son and his teacher. Typically, during that type of parental request, I would ask if she would be amicable to having the teacher sit in on the meeting. I felt that this was a positive, proactive, and professional way of dealing with parental complaints. Nevertheless, Mrs. Miller declined the offer.

The afternoon was chilly and overcast when Mrs. Miller arrived at the school. Based on my secretary’s earlier premonition, I pondered if the messy weather was indeed an omen of the conversation I was about to have. As I sat next to Mrs. Miller at the battered conference table in my office, after a few initial greetings and small talk we got down to business. “Mrs. Smith in your opinion, how could my son who was an honor student in grades kindergarten through third grade and received excellent grades be failing in fourth grade?” Seeing this as an opportunity to bring tranquility to the beginning of an escalating problem, I quickly considered my options before I vocalized them. Saying that the fourth grade curriculum and expectations were more advanced seem to border on complacency. Then again, if I questioned teaching strategies that may not have been utilized in the classroom, then I would look like I did not possess confidence in the teacher’s ability. I chose the option that I thought her son had proven to

be a capable student and that he was momentarily having adjustment issues with the greater academic demands of a higher grade. I then mentally patted myself on the back for coming up with such a swift reply to Mrs. Miller's question that seemed to provide an adequate response.

I was still a little baffled as to why Mrs. Miller asked the question. It did not take long for me to come to the realization with her next statement. "This problem is not unique just to my son. I have heard many parents of students in that classroom complain about the harshness of that teacher and the same scenario has been going on for the past few years," said Mrs. Miller. I stated, "Certainly if there is a problem with the majority of our high achieving students struggling academically it will be addressed." I nodded and responded with, "Thank you for bringing this concern to my attention, I will investigate the situation and get back to you." We ended our conversation and I quickly closed my office door and attempted to process the dialogue I had with Mrs. Miller.

I was internally processing to myself the idea of bringing the conversation to our fourth grade meeting. I suspected the teachers' reaction would be defensive and I wanted to avoid that. It would be difficult to develop and change a school culture in need. Furthermore, change takes time and I am new here. From an intellectual perspective, I would do what was in the best interest of our children. However, from an internal stance, I felt conflicted and agitated. I knew something had to be done, "change was in the air" – most likely sooner than later.

A few days had passed since the meeting with Mrs. Miller. I intentionally decided to review the cumulative records of all the fourth grade students so I could have some data to refer to before approaching our two lead teachers about the problem. I was

astonished at what I discovered. The current fourth graders who were third graders last year, scored in the proficient and advanced proficient range on the state assessment given in the spring. Many of these students had achieved honor roll status and appeared to have a bright academic future ahead. Next, I examined the grade reports that each teacher submitted to me quarterly for each semester. I discovered that the majority of these students were failing the marking period. There was an enormous amount of Ds and Fs given out by at least two of the three teachers. When I met with the two instructional support teachers for some insight, they confessed that this had been a major problem for a while. According to them, those fourth grade teachers were determined to do it their way.

As the new principal, it was a complex situation in which to be placed. I was experiencing mixed emotions, felt awkward, overwhelmed, and overly responsible. I knew that left unchecked that these feelings could turn into thoughts of guilt and inadequacy. Hargreaves (1994) suggests that the educators who work the hardest carry a large degree of burdens. He explains that principals are particularly vulnerable to feelings of culpability as a result of a combination of factors, including a commitment to care and nurture, the open-ended nature of the administration, pressures of accountability, and a persona of perfectionism. The cyclical nature between expectations and constraints further intensified thoughts of derisory about those under our care. For me, these pangs of anxiety prompted my use of reflective practice as a tool for plowing into the core of my conscious mind and heart for clarity. I needed to find my own answers to the problem before I attempted to resolve the issue with the teachers. My search for answers set my reflective journey in motion.

My journey began with an examination of who I was. This meant understanding me and the focus was on who I was in my work. Who I was and my beliefs consciously and subconsciously drove both my thoughts and actions. Focusing on me was significant to reflective practice because it influenced what I believed, how I thought, and how I behaved in the context of being principal of a school.

A Personal Development Model for Professional Purpose and Practice that emphasized the centrality of identity on thinking and doing was originally conceived by Bateson (1972) and has since been espoused by Dilts (1996) and Garmston and Wellman (1999.) Dilts refers to the personal development model as Levels of Change and Leadership and Garmston and Wellman refer to it as Nested Levels of Learning. Drawing from these Personal Development Models for Professional Purpose and Practice, I began my journey of an introspective analysis. The first level of the Personal Development Model for Professional Purpose and Practice is the mission or overarching purpose of the organization. The second level is the identity and refers to the person's sense of self. The third level is the values and beliefs and encompasses what we view as highly important. The next level is the capabilities, strategies, and mental maps that give direction to our behavior. This model helped me to understand who I was in my work and how I contributed to the growth of others. These various levels of personal development offered insight about the interconnectedness of my identity, beliefs, and leadership. It provided a structure for me to understand my thoughts and actions and allowed me to engage in questions of meaning and purpose in my work. My daily thoughts and interactions of my work were grounded in my personal identity. Using these reflective models, I

examined a critical incident emphasizing the use of reflective practice leading to leadership improvement.

My identity and beliefs influenced the strategies I used to resolve problems. It provided me with a structure for understanding the reasoning for my response to the dilemma and gave me authorization for engaging in questions of meaning and purpose as a principal. My reflection began with the upper levels of the model, which were more abstract than the levels below and had a greater degree of impact on the individual.

The first level of the model was the examination of my mission and overarching purpose for being the principal of Northfield Elementary School. The questions and answers I reflected on during the first level were: What was I working toward? I wanted to develop an understanding about myself and my leadership practices by enhancing my skills at being an instructional leader. Personally, I was working toward heightening my level of self-awareness about myself. Professionally, I was scrutinizing my performance as a principal and creating opportunities for growth. What are we as a school creating or aiming to achieve? Our goal was to achieve an understanding of our own behavior by developing a conscious awareness of our action strategies and theories-in-use in the development of a professional learning community. In conjunction with parents and teachers my mission was to provide the students with a motivating and supportive learning environment, which promoted academic achievement and positive personal growth necessary to be successful in a diverse and ever changing world. We needed to support our students so they had a sense of belonging in their school and were successful in their learning. As I reflected on the word “learning,” fostering not only academic but

social and emotional growth came to mind. These were my core beliefs that were the underpinnings of my purpose for being at Northfield.

The second level of reflection focused on my identity. The questions and answers I reflected on were: Who was I in this work? I was the principal who used reflective practice as a tool to further learning in myself and my teachers. How did I hope to contribute? As principal I immersed myself and teachers into the art of utilizing reflective practice so we might discover and research some of our taken for granted assumptions that influenced our decision-making about teaching and learning. The ultimate goal was to create a professional learning community. Being a facilitator of teacher and student learning, I was facilitative and less directive when working with teachers to solve problems. This meant that I must teach teachers the kinds of questions that not only employed inquiry, but support their learning about why such inquiry enhanced their effectiveness. I am also a connector of people and resources. To heighten the chances of a successful resolution to a problem and reduce conflict it was my duty to support teachers with adequate resources, technical assistance, capacity building, and problem solving opportunities. I hoped to contribute by being a life-long inquirer and learner. In addition, I contributed by affirming the presence of dilemmas in everyday educational practice and affirming the struggle in which I engaged in reflecting on best courses of action when faced with such dilemmas.

The third level of reflection focused on my capabilities, strategies, and mental maps. I reflected on the following questions: How did I accomplish this work? Our faculty meetings were used to develop our professional learning community. During these meetings teachers reflected on experiences and explored insights that had not been

previously considered. Taken for granted assumptions about learning were challenged encouraging an open-minded attitude and possibilities of new perspectives. What strategies guided my actions? My goal was to have teachers work together collaboratively to solve school problems and increase their learning. We captured experience, reflected upon it and learned from it. Our professional learning community gave us the opportunity to collaborate to solve school problems. Regular faculty meetings centered on discussions about teaching and learning. Unique situations were captured in the form of field notes that were constructed in a narrative account about a significant event in our school. As a group we examined our stories to scrutinize our thoughts and feelings about our practice. Utilizing my leadership theories-in-use that encompassed servant leadership, feminist leadership, and democratic leadership, my focus was on the commonalities of each construct. These commonalities were enhancing the self-worth of teachers and staff, collaborative and participatory decision-making, and equity in terms of how people were treated. By operating these principles, I mobilized the staff to align themselves with my vision and mission.

In order to monitor my progress in reflective practice and leadership improvement, I integrated the concept of self-observing into working with my staff. Bergsgaard and Ellis (2002) introduced the concept of self-observing as a technique by which educators become conscious observers of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This technique allowed me to gain insight into the progression of my leadership practices. Self-observing is a form of mental activity that is described as “the condition of consciousness characterized by awareness, objectivity, clarity, acceptance, and being in

the present as well as by the absences of opinion, preference, prejudice and attachment” (p. 56).

The strategy that I used to develop the technique of self-observing was contemplative meditation. Contemplative meditation derives from Buddhist meditations and was described by Brown (1998) as a method that synchronized the observer with the learning environment and what was simultaneously occurring within. Contemplative meditation awakens and clarifies perceptions and emotions and develops knowledge and compassion (Bergsgaard & Ellis, 2002, p. 61). The process of self-observing reinforced the application of the steps of the reflective practice cycle that was comprised of pausing, openness, inquiry, thinking, learning, and action. This led to the foundation for new insights and improved leadership practices.

The practice of self-observing combined with much soul searching resulted in my realization that I had feelings of inadequacy about confronting the fourth grade teachers about the lack of achievement their students’ were experiencing. I wanted to avoid dealing with the issue. This was because I felt threatened and believed that acting on these emotions would result in my utilizing a transactional leadership style causing the teachers to be cynical and resist change. The teachers needed to feel empowered to make the decision that the continuation of the present way of doing things was insufficient and not controlled into doing things my way. It took courage on my part to bring resolution to this problem in a constructive manner. Reflective practice gave me clarity in discovering who I was and what I believed as a principal. It fostered learning, behavioral change, and improved performance. It also gave me the confidence to move forward. Parker (1998)

espoused that we teach and we lead grounded on who we are. I learned more about who I was as a principal, what was important to me, and how I thought.

Reflective practice is a cyclic process (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). It began with a dilemma that could not be resolved using standard operating procedures. Being uncertain about how to resolve the problem, I stepped back to examine this experience guided by the 4-step process for guiding reflection. What was the nature of the problem? The nature of the problem was that many students at the fourth grade level who were previously successful academically were struggling. What did I do? I reviewed the students test scores, cumulative records, and current grades to clarify the problem. In the process of investigating and analyzing this experience the problem materialized more plainly. The problem a divergence between my actions as a leader and my theories-in-use motivated me to seek a deeper understanding of events and how these events resonated with my leadership. I needed a window into my leadership practices to explore the contradictory nature of my behavior that was not aligned with my theories-in-use. This dilemma created a philosophical conflict for me in how I interpreted and resolved problematic issues. The next step was the analysis and interpretation stage. Why was I thinking and feeling this way? I felt overwhelmed and inadequate. As a new principal of the school, I did not want a confrontation with teachers about nonproductive entrenched practices that had not been addressed previously. My first thought was to be authoritative and push the teachers toward change. However, I knew that the social psychological fear of change and their lack of skills would defeat my efforts. When I met with the fourth grade teachers during our next grade-level meeting and discussed my meeting with Mrs. Miller and my concerns about student achievement, they were oppositional. The

problem was I was trying to legitimize an issue that people had never been able to address before. Such a discussion became emotional and even painful. I became frustrated and strived to remain in unilateral control albeit I could not suppress my negative feelings. Nevertheless, after much acrimony, we all came to the consensus that our next meeting would consist of examining the fourth grade students' achievement, what targets we needed to set to improve learning, and what strategies we might use to get them where we wanted them to go. Each teacher agreed to bring data on their classroom practices and student performance for discussion at our next meeting. How did my thoughts and feelings affect my choice of leadership behavior? I knew that I had to enable the teachers to expand their awareness, understanding, and insights about teaching practices. I empowered them by making it possible for them to collaboratively engage in reflection about practice, strategies, and the interpretation of data to make changes. Being reflective was the team approach in examining our own role in the difficulties with student achievement. No doubt teachers identified administration and parents as part of the problem, but they went on to admit that they had contributed to it as well. We also agreed to question each other's reasoning pertaining solutions with the understanding that asking questions was not a sign of mistrust but a valuable opportunity for learning.

My choice of leadership was transformative rather than transactional. I realized that I could not ignore the teachers' feelings about the problem and make a unilateral decision about student achievement conveying disregard for them. This led me to think about the inconsistencies between my leadership theory-in-use and the Model I action strategies that I initially used. The principles of servant leadership, democratic leadership, and feminist leadership encourage serving others, participation, open dialogue, and the

sharing of power. I realized that I alone was not responsible for student performance. My core values of positive interpersonal relationships, trust, communication, and my Model II theories-in-use emerged as powerful perspectives that influenced my leadership actions, while defining my own role in the problem.

The final stages of the process involved reconceptualization and experimentation. This was the overall meaning and application stage. I answered the question, so what? What have I learned from this and how can I improve my practice? At this point in the process, I had identified the problem area and through reflective practice had developed a profound understanding of my leadership through the experience. Through the analysis of my behavior I explored what I did, why I did it, and the consequences. I had gained clarity and understood the situation in a different way. My repertoire of leadership strategies focused on collaboration, cooperation, and ownership. Now prompted by the awareness of a problem, I used new information and strategies more consistent with my Model II theories-in-use and more effective in achieving the outcomes aligned with our school mission.

The final question focused on implications for action. Now what? How could I set up conditions to increase learning from this situation? Reflective practice allowed me to develop new theories about my strengths and weaknesses as a leader. Through reflective practice I internally explored an issue, which created meaning in terms of who I was, which resulted in a changed conceptual experience. Because of the demands of the principalship, I came up with a mental model to guide my actions. When confronted with a dilemma I used the five states of mind with related questions illustrated by Costa and Garmston (2002) to offer a mental model for guiding reflection on my own:

Efficacy – How was I assuming responsibility for my role in the situation?

Flexibility – What new ideas did I learn about that increased my impact?

Craftsmanship – Was this better than what I used to do? How was it improved?

Consciousness – What was I aware of? What did I know?

Interdependence – Who else might help? Who else can I talk to?

Thinking through this framework facilitated internal reflection when I was having difficulties clarifying a problem in my mind, reviewing my actions, and identifying a solution. I had the Five States of Mind posted on my office wall for easy access.

My journey with individual reflective practice opened my identity and explored a new way of being that was beyond my conscious state of mind prior to my involvement in this research. My learning about leadership thrust into a second-order change that was conceptual and prompted a new understanding about self. I linked how my thoughts influenced my leadership behavior. This linkage prompted moving from a defensive stance to one of open communication, collaborative problem-solving, and trust, internally and externally.

This second-order change evolved from my use of Fullan's (2001a) key components of effective leadership, which were the foundation for my leadership development around the concept of change. This change was an internal change that led to my improvement. There were four themes in particular that I utilized: moral purpose, understanding change, developing relationships, and knowledge building. On most days I was faced with a multitude of problems that contained moral dilemmas. This was when I used reflective practice in the upper three levels of the Personal Development for Professional Practice Model, to understand myself by clarifying my mission, identity,

values, and beliefs. Next, reflection was intentionally embedded into my Model II theories-in-use that encompassed equity in terms of how people were treated, enhancing the self-worth of others, and collaborative decision-making. This ultimately fostered my implementation of equity-related procedures in resolving problems with teachers and students. I became grounded in moral purpose, explicit about my values that underlined my leadership behavior, and was in constant pursuit of seeking diverse perspectives and knowledge to inform my decisions.

Change was at the heart of my journey with reflective practice. My understanding of change was staying committed to my own growth as a leader as well as the growth of teachers. Change for me involved using reflective practice as a process to work with colleagues to reflect on current practices, expand my knowledge base by developing new skills, and sharing ideas. I developed a sense of empowerment because of renewed clarity of professional values and beliefs. Reflective practice changed the hectic routine of my principalship that caused me to be off balance. Consequently, giving time to pause in my day allowed reflection and learning to restore my perspective. Reflective practice improved my leadership ability by providing me with a greater awareness of the possibilities that emerged from innovative thought.

Relationship building was a process of internal change from being open to teachers with different viewpoints. I became inclusive and caring, allowing them to bring their unique contributions to the teaching and learning process. The scenario described in this chapter highlighted the progression of my ability to be reflective. In return, teachers' growth was nurtured, creativity was supported, and constructive feedback was offered in the context of mutual learning.

Knowledge building was my foundation for reflective practice. At the heart of reflective practice was the aspiration to continually learn for the improvement of practice. Being reflective gave me the humbleness to acknowledge that I do not know everything and to give up needing to be correct. Knowledge building was the muscle behind reflective practice. As a reflective practitioner, knowledge building was gathering information about problem situations, myself, and my leadership practice. Visiting and revisiting everyday situations in the context of the school led me to develop new and different understandings. Gathering information about circumstances, exploring my emotions and outcomes gave meaning to my leadership practice. Reframing situations allowed me to view the status quo in a special light.

Summary

In conclusion to the scenario of reflective journey with myself, the process of reflective practice allowed me to grow professionally and improve my leadership practices. Reflective practice allowed me to shift the focus from the behavior of the fourth grade teachers to my behavior and my underlying Model I theories-in-use. I discovered my own desire for control and realized I had interpreted the problem as a threat to me. Through the full experiential learning cycle of reflective practice, I raised to conscious awareness my values, ideas, and beliefs. From this reframing of the problem, I realized how my behavior contributed to the conflict indirectly. To break the cycle, my behavior toward the teachers evolved. I reaffirmed my Model II theories-in-use and empowerment that shifted responsibility to solving the problem to the fourth grade teachers, relinquishing my efforts to control them. I psychologically began to internally feel the negative consequences of my leadership behavior. Once this negative leadership

behavior was identified I began to modify my leadership strategies into new paradigms of leadership behavior. I aligned my actions with my Model II theories-in-use. Furthermore, I developed an understanding of how assumptions about teacher behavior shaped my behavior. In this next chapter, I continue on my journey utilizing reflective practice with a partner. In this case, I described the effects of using the process of inquiry to grow professionally and achieve greater insights about my leadership practices.

Chapter V

Reflective Practice With a Partner

Introduction

The next level on the reflective practice spiral was reflective practice with a partner. This chapter is about my experience with another elementary principal in the Sterling district. Our aim was to grow professionally by achieving greater insights about our leadership practice. “Awareness of one’s own intuitive thinking usually grows out of practice in articulating it to others” (Schön, 1983, p. 243).

As human beings, our interactions with others afford ways of understanding who we are in the world around us and in our professional lives. Reflecting on educational practice with another person had the prospect of enriching my understanding that supported improvements in my practice (York-Barr et al., 2006). After completing the first spiral of individual reflection, adding a partner in the reflection process resulted in the following: decreased feelings of isolation at work, given the presence of a collegial relationship; expanded learning about my leadership practice, given the different perspectives of another elementary principal; a heightened sense of who I was and how things worked in the Sterling district, given the connection and exchange with another principal who worked in the same district; and, greater commitment to my practice and school environment, given an increased sense of competence and connection to another principal in the district.

There were instances I felt very detached from my teachers due to the nature of my position. The adage “It’s lonely at the top” was true for me. I felt all alone making the

tough and unpopular decisions many times with minimal support from my superiors. My access to sensitive and personal information about personnel allowed me to share only general information with teachers. Much of the negativity from the problems I dealt with on a daily basis was kept inside. To minimize my isolation, regular meetings with Principal Brady provided me with a sense of companionship. It felt good knowing that I was not alone and someone else was experiencing similar problems.

Partner reflection revealed information about an individual's philosophy, leadership capacity, commitment to professional growth, ability to anticipate problems, and take risks. It provided the opportunity to examine each other's leadership philosophies by comparing and contrasting our actions in particular situations.

Reflection with another person offered a protection against perpetuating only my own thoughts. Bright (1996) suggested that others play an important role in reflective practice because colleagues are very perceptive in detecting bias present within a practitioners practice. Reflecting with a partner addressed the major concern about reflecting solely with myself, which reinforced only my own views and perceptions. Compared with reflection in groups, partner reflection offered the advantage of privacy (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Reflective Practice Cycle II

In this chapter, I discuss my engagement in reflective practice with Joy Brady, another elementary principal in the Sterling School District. The partner reflection that Principal Brady and I engaged in was voluntary, self-directed, and self-motivated. I selected Principal Brady to be my reflection partner because we were both new elementary principals committed to continuous improvement, had shared interests, and

were involved in working on our Professional Growth Plan together. In addition, Principal Brady was open to examining our leadership practices and would encourage and support changes in practice. The mini-inquiry that Principal Brady and I conducted for this research was to promote reflection on how to effectively manage behaviorally challenged students in our schools. We met every Friday after school hours at a park that was mutually accessible. Our reflective meetings lasted one hour. Principal Brady and I had only known each other several months before our reflective practice sessions began. Although we were friendly, it was necessary that we set up a framework that allowed us to develop a level of trust. “No one would talk about problems – personal or organizational unless they felt, safe, secure, and able to take risks” (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 45). The framework that we used was a set of interrelated dispositions that promoted trustworthiness (York-Barr et al., 2006). These dispositions were embedded in our discussions and served as guidelines.

To be in a trusting relationship required the following skills: being present, being open, listening with empathy without judgment, seeking understanding, viewing learning as mutual, honoring the person, and honoring the process (York-Barr et al., 2006). Being present for us meant allowing our attention to expand enough to include the immediate experience. The parameters surrounding our reflective practice sessions put limitations on anything other than what was happening at the moment. As principals, we both experienced a fast-paced existence in our schools. We needed to clear our heads of all the lingering dissension of the week and be focused on what was happening presently. It was an acknowledgement of value to the time that we had set aside for reflection. We externalized our thoughts so we could explore the present experience. Because our lives

as principals were so hectic, we were prone to making hasty decisions and accepting shallow and occasionally incorrect understandings about experiences. To guard against this we allowed ourselves to have an open state of mind. Open-mindedness permitted us the deliberation of multiple perspectives. Hearing contradictory opinions was not threatening and enabled us to give our full attention to alternate possibilities.

We came to the conclusion that we made mistakes, were not always correct in our assumptions, and there were multiple ways of making sense of our world. Listening with empathy and without judgment enabled us to learn from and connect with each other as reflective partners. As we listened to each other's stories about practice, it was convenient to be disapproving of actions that were not aligned with our thinking. To prevent this when listening to each other we suspended our thoughts so the focus was on the speakers experience and what it meant to them. The challenge was for us to be open to stepping back and seeing things from a new perspective, developing a pathway for learning and improvement. Our work as reflective partners was breaking down our sense of isolation through giving each other feedback and helping each other grow. We both struggled with shifting our conceptions from being a principal who was essentially a building manager to an instructional leader whose primary focus was to help teachers improve. Principal Brady and I were both relatively new principals to the District and lacked experience with operational issues at our buildings. These operational issues took up most of our time taking decreasing our focus on instruction. Additionally, we both could spend the entire day with student discipline.

Making time to spend in the classroom was a challenge for both of us. I relished being able to review student work samples. Our priorities as instructional leaders were to

get into classrooms, observe best teaching practices, evaluate the rigor of instruction and provide feedback to our teachers. We also partnered in formulating professional growth activities for our teachers. We discussed confidentially teachers' performance as well as our own. Hearing another's perspective proved to be helpful. Having someone to talk to who was in a similar situation alleviated stress from the demands of our jobs because we often felt overwhelmed.

According to Covey (1989), understanding is one of the most powerful ways to make a connection with another person. As reflective practice partners, Principal Brady and I knew from the onset of our reflective practice sessions that we would not always be in agreement. So we agreed to disagree. Our goal was to consider the circumstances and understand each other's corresponding thoughts and actions. Understanding allowed each of us the sense of confidence to let go of needing to be right, preconceived judgments, and negative assumptions. Principal Brady and I both viewed learning as mutual and felt that we both benefited from the reflective practice process. Each of us brought to the process varied perspectives and experiences. Learning from each other to improve our leadership was our focus. In our commitment to be reflective partners it was necessary that we honored each other. We agreed to respect each other even when we held different views. In addition, we agreed not talk behind each other's back or share information that was offered in confidence. It was also necessary that we honored the process of reflective practice. We realized that learning to think together to solve leadership problems, creating options for learning, and reflecting on results would not come automatically. This was something that would develop over time and at first it felt awkward. However, we both believed that we could become more effective in our leadership practices.

Principal Brady and I used four strategies as a template to expand our thinking when reflecting on dilemmas: we asked open-ended questions, responded with SPACE, reframed perspectives, and engaged in dialogue. At the core of reflective practice is an investigation. Our investigation was an active search for understanding. Arriving at understanding promoted learning. Learning promoted thinking. Thinking was a consequence of asking questions. We were careful that when speaking to each other we used an approachable voice so our tone communicated an openness to be questioned. Our questions were structured in a way to ignite wanting input, generating dialogue in a search for answers. For example, one question we both asked frequently was: When you reflect back on the situation, what might you do differently next time? Using this type of open question enabled us to use creative thinking to construct meaning and learning from the experience. It also allowed us to continue the dialogue productively.

For example, I had two teachers who had poor attendance. They reported to work late by ten minutes every day. I warned them verbally first and then in writing that their chronic tardiness was an issue and immediate improvement was expected. Unfortunately, after three months and minimal improvement I was forced to begin disciplinary proceedings. After reflecting back on the situation with Principal Brady, I realized that a more tactical approach may have resulted in compliance from the teachers much sooner. Principal Brady discussed with me alternatives to being punitive. The goal was to have the teachers buy in to the school rule of being punctual when reporting to work. By working collaboratively with these teachers we could have come up with a plan to help them overcome their issues with tardiness. Having the teachers contribute ideas to their plan for improvement, listening to their needs and providing support would have resulted

in compliance. She helped me understand that this could have been a positive experience in growth for the teachers instead of a negative one.

It was important that our responses to questions encouraged thinking and inquiry just as our questions did. The response strategies used were described using the acronym SPACE (Costa & Kallick, 2000). Responding to promote reflective thinking required silence on the part of the listener. Silence was the first element of the SPACE acronym. The next element of the SPACE acronym was paraphrasing that required listening. Listening allowed us to paraphrase the main concepts and say them back to check if the meaning of the speaker was correctly interpreted. The third response strategy described by the SPACE acronym was accepting without judgment. We accepted each other's thoughts without interruption or responding with disagreement. The next SPACE response behavior we used was clarifying. Clarifying was used when we asked uncomplicated questions to enlighten the meaning. The last response strategy of the SPACE acronym was extending. We used this to extend our thinking beyond what we had already considered and discussed. We frequently ended our sessions with a take away question that would continue reflection.

In reflective practice, learning is the process of seeing things from a new perspective within a new framework. Reframing directly entwined the notions of reconceptualization and experimentation. According to Osterman and Kottkamp (2004), the learner tests new ways of thinking by directly confronting the former theory-in-use by initiating behavioral strategies that are aligned with the new Model II theories-in-use. Experimentation tested the new ideas in action that led to the development of new competencies.

Our goal of partner reflection was to grow professionally by achieving greater insights about our leadership through the use of reflective practice. We each accepted the responsibility for our own professional growth. Dialogue and collaboration were essential for reflective practice and learning (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Our dialogue and discussion sessions consisted of asking questions, challenging ideas, and processing learning verbally. Once we clarified our thinking, our understanding of events deepened.

This cycle consisted of dialogue and collaboration around our Professional Growth Plan that was based on an assessment against the New Jersey Standards for School Leaders. This plan linked my professional goals with the school's needs. It outlined a series of activities that I engaged in overtime to improve teaching and learning. The research focused on Standard # 2, which was: The facilitation of an articulated professional development program that was meaningful, job embedded and included multiple opportunities. The staff met weekly for the purpose of problem-solving, collaborative planning for curriculum, and learning. The staff operated with a commitment to the norms of reflective practice, experimentation and continuous improvement to advance school goals for student learning. Reflective practice helped us grow professionally and was job-embedded. The reflection strategy that we used to support our learning together was in the form of a mini-inquiry. The mini-inquiry framework provided a mechanism for us to question each other about our leadership practices, to delve into the reasoning behind these practices, and in doing so expand our own view about leadership. The mini-inquiry that Principal Brady and I conducted for this research was to promote reflection on how to more effectively manage behaviorally challenged students. This reflective practice project was a field-based project in problem

framing analysis with a focus on the child who was consistently in trouble throughout the school.

Problematic students were troublemakers and their behavior was taken for granted. They caused havoc in class and during activities outside of the classroom. They disrupted a calm school climate for other students and undermined a sense of accomplishment for teachers and administrators. From the perspective of learning, they were usually low achievers, or not measuring up to their academic potential. Although in both our schools the number of students who fell in this category was minimal, they disrupted the entire school.

The strategy that we utilized to engage us in the experiential learning cycle of reflective practice consisted of three steps. The first step was to identify the student and explore perceptions and assumptions. The second step was to conduct a cautious observation of the student. The third step was to analyze the information and describe the learning. The fourth step was the reconceptualization and experimentation stage where new action theories and strategies emerged. Experiential learning was achieved through reflecting on everyday experience. The next section involved a direct encounter with a student and how Principal Brady and I learned from that experience.

Leadership Challenge

It was an unusually wet Monday morning when several teachers on outside morning duty let the students in the front door to wait in the vestibule before the bell rang to signal the start of the school day. The vestibule was crammed full with children and the noise level was enormous. I always thought it was a practical gesture to allow students to come in early on inclement weather days. Because of the small space in the

entrance hall it was chaos. The telephones in the main office rang violently and both secretaries appeared to be moving at lightning speed multitasking. Seeing that things were swelling out of control I left my desk before they ruptured, to make my entrance into the vestibule.

For the most part, the duty teachers had the students in straight lines. As I walked around, I was bumped into by a boy named Danny who ran directly into me and almost knocked me down. “Excuse me young man, you need to settle down and get in line!” I yelled. Then I saw Danny push and shove another child for no apparent reason. Finally, I remembered who he was. This was the same boy who I caught running up and down the halls screaming loudly two days ago. Yesterday he was sitting in the office during recess time for using a marker to scribble on the bathroom walls. His first grade teacher reported to me that he disrupted lessons by laughing loudly for no apparent reason and frequently deliberately fell out of his chair. He had been suspended for stealing items from other students and fighting in the schoolyard. In addition, he served four detentions for using inappropriate language and talking back to his teacher. It was reported to me that he disrupted music, art, and gym classes so often that the teachers refused to allow him to participate by sitting him alone in time-out.

“Danny, you go sit in my office on the bench right now,” I said. “No! Mrs. Smith I didn’t do nothing.” “It’s not fair,” he screamed. Each time I confronted him, he denied wrong-doing and screamed defiantly at me, “It’s not fair.” “Danny, do as you are told!” I shouted. He finally ran into the office purposely slamming the door behind him.

What a way to start the week. That boy had drained me, and it was not even 9:00 a.m., I thought. Danny was always in trouble. Dealing with him made me squirm. I

perceived him as being disrespectful, disobedient, and uncooperative. The encounter prompted me to reflect on the following question: How could it be that he is only in first grade and has such a negative reputation? I was perplexed. So far, the consequences he received for his behavior did not work. Basically, he was a large handsome child. His level of mischief indicated that he was fairly intelligent. I could envision him as being a well-mannered responsible student. After all, he was only an impressionable 7-year-old. There must have been a reason that these attention-seeking behaviors had manifested in him so early in his life.

My description of Danny portrayed him as being disobedient and irresponsible. In addition, the judgments of many of the other teachers based on their experiences with him confirmed my perception. The references to various sanctions Danny received because of his behavior highlighted the action strategies that were used. The theory-in-use that teachers and I used with Danny and disruptive students like him required confrontation and consequences. The next stage of the experimental learning cycle of reflective practice was for Principal Brady and me to observe Danny's behavior and describe it with all prior judgment about Danny stripped away. Our observations of Danny were devoid of any emotion and underscored the inconsistency between the first description and the second.

Step I: Problematic student. We reflected on a student who was troublesome from the perspective of consistently exhibiting disruptive behavior throughout the school. This student was not engaged in learning and consistently caused problems in the classroom, hallways, during recess, and at lunchtime. Out of school suspension had been used as a punitive consequence on numerous occasions with minimal results. This type of

student was something that was prevalent in both of our schools and we would mutually benefit from the inquiry. In this situation, the problem was facilitated by me and illustrated my role in bringing the issue to the forefront.

Step II: Observation. We each observed Danny in two different settings to make an accurate analysis of his behavior and my own. On October 11th, 2008, Principal Brady observed Danny in his classroom during a mathematics lesson. The students were doing a drill that reinforced the memorization of basic addition facts to 12. Principal Brady noted that while the teacher was explaining the lesson, Danny was looking in his desk and dropping his pencil on purpose. Several times the teacher told him to pay attention and put the pencil in his desk. He insisted on answering her back insisting that he was listening. Finally, the teacher told him if he could not settle down she would send him to the principal's office. Danny then put his head down on his desk and covered his eyes. The teacher grabbed his arm, made him get up from his desk and chair and walked him to the side of the room to sit at a desk in the corner alone. She told him he could go back to his seat and join his classmates when he was paying attention and ready to learn. Danny sat in his seat quietly and began to focus. He raised his hand enthusiastically to answer questions, but was never called on. Then the teacher passed out an activity that the students worked on independently. Danny worked quietly and finished his assignment before more than half of the class. It was obvious he could do the work and wanted to sit back at his desk with the other classmates. As the teacher circulated the classroom checking the student's assignments, she pasted shiny gold stars on their papers. Danny raised his hand, only to be ignored. His assignment was never checked, neither did he receive a shiny gold star from his teacher. Danny finally got restless after being ignored

and fell out of his chair. The teacher yelled at him and put his name on the chalkboard indicating an afterschool detention. Danny retaliated by talking back and ripping up his assignment. To minimize the disruption, the teacher situated him at a desk in the back of the classroom. The teacher and classmates continued to ignore him.

On October 18th, 2008 the second observation of Danny was done by me during a physical education class. The class was outside on the playground playing softball. Danny was jovial and excited about being able to participate in the activity. His classmates seemed to enjoy his energy. The class was broken into two teams. To my surprise, Danny was voted by his peers to be one team's captain. Given this responsibility, Danny seemed to naturally fit into this leadership role. The physical education teacher used Danny to demonstrate to the other students how to bat the ball. There was one boy named Joe who was having difficulty with batting. Some of the other students began to laugh and make fun of him. However, Danny spoke up and told them to stop. The students stopped and did not argue with him. I was shocked when Danny took Joe aside to show him the proper way to bat the ball. During Joe's turn to bat, he hit the ball successfully. Danny looked proud and bellowed, "Way to go, Joe!" As Danny walked around the field, a boy tripped over Danny's foot and fell to the ground. The boy ran to the teacher and accused Danny of tripping him purposely. Without the teacher investigating the incident, Danny was told to leave the game and go stand next to the wall as a punishment. Danny was devastated. He threw the bat on the ground and ran against the wall punching it with his fist. I followed Danny to the wall and saw his knuckles were bleeding from hitting the wall. He was crying and I escorted him to the nurse's office. I used that time to talk with Danny to try to understand him better. He asked me if he was

going to get suspended. I asked him why he thought that. He said, “Because I’m bad and always in trouble.” My coming to the realization that this was how we treated Danny began to upset me. He was automatically guilty because of the inferences that we believed about him. His self-image was being destroyed by the people who were responsible for helping him develop constructively.

Step III: Analysis. Principal Brady and I got together to dialogue about our observations about Danny. We both agreed that although Danny did exhibit misbehavior, we also saw some positive aspects of his behavior. We both observed plenty of evidence that Danny had good interpersonal skills and in certain situations functioned well in a group. We also were able to see how teachers, including myself, reacted to Danny and how these reactions affected him. As Principal Brady and I reflected on our experiences with Danny, another side of the picture emerged. We began to see Danny’s perspective and developed empathy. I learned that Danny was very sensitive and sought more attention than the average child. He told me he lived with his father who worked most of the time. He was with a baby-sitter most days and all they did was watch television. He completed his homework on his own. He missed his father and only spent time with him on the weekends. Principal Brady learned from her observation that Danny was a capable student. He enjoyed mathematics and if given the opportunity would excel.

I recognized that Danny had leadership qualities that I never saw before. He was chosen by his peers to be the softball team captain. His physical education teacher used him to demonstrate to the class the proper way to bat a ball. When he realized that Joe struggled with batting the ball he enjoyed helping him. The students allowed him to take full control and complied with him when he told them to stop making fun of Joe. I

perceived Danny as being a bully and thought of him as demanding others to give into him. But it was obvious that the other students were not afraid of him and genuinely liked him.

Principal Brady and I both became conscious of the fact that Danny and other students similar to him were not being given a fair chance. We had mental models that we did not think we had. We made inferences about Danny and similar students with behavioral problems based on past confrontations and other teachers' descriptions and conclusions. As principals we both thought it was our job to chastise these type of students every time they appeared to do something wrong. We wanted to maintain control over them and use them as examples to keep other student's in line. We were guilty of convincing ourselves that the inferences we made about problematic students were true. As we analyzed the data new action theories and strategies emerged.

Step IV: Reconceptualization and experimentation. It was difficult for me to recognize that I contributed to Danny's misbehavior. He acted out because he felt it was expected. He knew that being a troublemaker was how the principal and teachers saw him and this was how he saw himself. I was under the belief that by forcefully reacting to his behavior, I could control him. What Principal Brady and I learned was the more the teachers and I reacted negatively to his behavior the more he misbehaved. It became a vicious cycle of power and control between us.

As a result of our learning, Principal Brady and I established a mentor program for Danny and students like him. This allowed "at risk" students to develop a trusting relationship with a faculty member and develop an open line of communication. The mentor and mentee built up a relationship that was meaningful and long lasting. We have

learned not to react negatively to misbehavior. We established a reward system for Danny and students like him. By rewarding positive behavior, misbehavior was seen less often. I recognized that my harshness with students like Danny reflected my assumptions about them and my own insecurities. I am more conscious about my mental models and how they influence how I treat people.

Summary

In conclusion to this chapter about reflective practice with a partner, Principal Brady and I reflected on dealing with a problematic student, which was a profile of the many students we encountered on a daily basis with behavioral difficulties. What Principal Brady and I realized was we did not give students like Danny a fair chance. We discovered the inconsistencies between our espoused theory and our actions. While I perceived myself as being fair and advocating addressing the needs of each individual child, I was failing students like Danny. I concentrated on his faults and never took the time to recognize his good qualities. While I thought of myself as empowering my students by having a mutual respect and rapport, I recognized that I did not use these strategies with Danny or advocate that his teachers use them as well. I espoused building students' self-esteem, but found that my mental models with Danny and students like him resulted in prejudgment, punishment, and control.

Principal Brady and I discussed how Model I assumptions affected my behavior. The more we reacted to Danny's behavior the more he misbehaved. I recognized I was personally responsible for Danny's behavior. As I progressed through the reflective process, I realized that our efforts to bring Danny under control were counterproductive. Initially, Danny was perceived to be the blame for all of the problems. Now, Danny and

students like him are seen as children with difficulties who need nurture and support. With this new understanding, I began to rethink my leadership practice by aligning my actions more closely with my espoused theory-in-use and Model II assumptions.

In the experimentation stage, I worked with Danny in a more open and honest way. Through mentoring we built a relationship. I gave up the punitive way in which I responded to him. Instead of making provenance about his intent based on other's reports, I listened to his side of the story to gain a more legitimate understanding of the circumstances. I established a caring relationship by reconceptualizing my role in dealing with him. As principals we integrated this new way of thinking and acting into our leadership practice as we worked with other students' with behavioral difficulties and their teachers resulting in a better school climate.

The next level of the Reflective Practice spiral was the small-group level of reflective practice. The potential to influence educational practices throughout the school significantly increased as groups of teachers' entrenched reflective practice in their work. A culture of inquiry and learning took hold on a larger scale.

Chapter VI

Reflective Practice in Small Groups or Teams

Introduction

The potential to improve educational practices significantly increased when groups and teams embedded reflective practice into their work. In this research a culture of inquiry and learning spiraled forth from reflection with a partner and extended to reflective practice with small groups and teams. Reflective practice in small groups and teams at Northfield included weekly grade-level meetings focused on inquiry and learning about differentiated instruction. This allowed teachers to examine past practices and future possibilities by soliciting the perspectives of a diverse group of educators to address instructional strategies that met the needs of all learners.

There was a huge discrepancy between reflecting individually or with a partner and reflecting in a small group because of the personal risk involved. Individual and partner reflection was voluntary and self-organized. Teacher participation in reflective practice with small groups was appointed by the principal and resulted in less control over who joined the group and their desire to participate (York-Barr et al., 2006). Despite the risks, expanding reflective practice to small groups had the following benefits: given more people - enhanced learning and resources for learning about practice; given group members committed to learning together - a sense of accomplishment that improvement in practice can occur; given greater understanding of our own and others experiences - improved school climate and collegiality (York-Barr et al., 2006).

The voyage toward reflective practice and learning in small groups was complicated because people had to work as a team. According to Vella (1994), teamwork was productive because people learned how to work together effectively. The establishment of trust was one of the most immense challenges to effective teamwork. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) state,

Reflective practice in a group setting is a high risk process... In most organizations, problems are viewed as a sign of weakness... to break this conspiracy of silence requires new organizational norms. To engage in reflective process, individuals need to believe that discussions of problems will not be interpreted as incompetence or weakness. (p. 44-45)

For learning to be productive, design and planning are essential. Group design and facilitation for reflective practice is highlighted in this chapter because managing group learning is more complex than individual or partner learning. According to York-Barr et al. (2006), research indicates that clear expectations and structures increase the likelihood that reflection, learning, and useful outcomes result from group interactions.

Reflective Practice Cycle III

Discussing test scores was a volatile topic at Northfield. New Jersey state standardized test scores were low for our third and fourth grade students. Teachers perceived themselves to be considered at fault. Historically, the principal made decisions about instruction and many of the teachers did not trust the process. There were many inconsistencies. There was no continuity in terms of what skills were being taught among teachers in the same grade-level. Decisions about instruction were based on short-term needs that focused on ordering the correct quantities of materials and resources instead of long-term curricular needs that centered on instruction. Since teachers rarely communicated about instruction, there was the predictable cycle of minimal articulation

between grade levels about instructional strategies and how to meet the learning needs of all the students.

As principal, I knew that developing processes for communication was a vehicle through which teachers could make much needed adjustments in teaching and learning. The curriculum was disjointed and there were no clear guidelines of what grade-level concepts should be taught. It was common practice for teachers when planning lessons to omit chapters in student textbooks because they did not think spending time on a particular skill was necessary. As a result, teachers complained about students not learning effectively because they lacked the necessary prerequisite skills for the next grade-level. The biggest complaint entailed successfully teaching various student proficiency levels in the heterogeneous classroom. Because of these issues we implemented reflective practice and differentiated instruction as the focal point of our weekly grade-level meetings.

Recognizing that having a designated time to meet was a key factor for effective collaboration for reflective practice in groups, I incorporated a common planning and preparation period for each teacher of the same grade-level into the master schedule. The planning and preparation period was 45 minutes long. These grade-level meetings were allocated times for teachers to reflect on practice and plan for differentiated instruction. Described in this next section were the major components of the grade-level meetings' reflective processes.

Developing norms and expectations. Teachers agreed on general expectations for how our meetings were run; reflection and learning were at the core of the meetings, discussions were respectful, and everyone contributed. Our goal was to work together

harmoniously to solve school problems. To achieve this we adopted the seven norms of collaborative work (Garmston & Wellman, 1999). These norms were: pause, paraphrase, presume positive intentions, probe for specificity, pursue balance inquiry/advocacy, put items on the table, and pay attention to self and others. Included with these norms were the following reminders: suspension – setting aside our perceptions and impulses to listen to the views of others, dialogue – sharing together for the purpose of increasing understanding and possibility, and, discussion – narrowing perspectives and limiting possibilities. We met weekly and reminders were placed on tables and revisited at each meeting as a reference of the behaviors that assisted learning and working together. The learning processes used with small groups of teachers included reflection through dialogue with colleagues and the forms of inquiry such as reframing and asking questions.

Clarifying values for decision-making. Teachers differentiated instruction so all students in the classroom could learn effectively regardless of ability. Teachers were surveyed at Northfield to determine what values they wanted to use to make decisions about differentiated instruction. Using the survey results, each grade-level chairperson facilitated conversations with their teachers to rank order the values. Grade-level chairpersons compiled this feedback and identified four values for decision-making. They were (a) utilizing a repertoire of teaching strategies, (b) utilizing a variety of instructional activities, (c) utilizing a variety of ways to access or evaluate student progress, and (d) utilizing a variety of information processing strategies.

Decisions were based on the premise that all students are unique in terms of their academic ability, cognitive skills, as well as pace of learning, personality, and motivation.

Students learn at different rates and have different learning styles. For all students to learn, teachers must teach incorporating a variety of senses and providing varied learning experiences. Integrating a variety of instructional activities had positive effects on student learning. Variation in teaching methods and learning activities addressed the needs of diverse learners. A variety of assessments were used to determine accurate student progress because of varying cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and academic abilities of the students. Information processing pertained to teachers incorporating content and mental procedures involved in using knowledge. In order for students to be successful, teachers used numerous strategies to influence their mental activities during instruction.

Determining short and long-range goals. Each grade-level chairperson pushed their teachers into determining which skills were important for their students to learn in each content area. By November 2008, these results were compiled into a list that focused conversations in the weekly meetings about short and long range instructional goals. Each grade-level focused on the specific questions. These questions were the following: Given the core concepts, relevant applications, and critical skills that were identified for mastery, how did we extend the knowledge and skills for those students ready to move forward? How did we ensure that those students who had not mastered the identified skills receive opportunities to learn about the key concepts?

First, each teacher reviewed data gathered from standardized tests, portfolios, subject area inventories, pretests, posttests, and cumulative records. Using this information, the teachers designed individual plans moving the students to the next performance level. These plans were focused around each student's learning needs. Using this information teachers designed intervention plans based upon student performance

results. Goals were then developed for an instructional program that enabled each student to demonstrate his ability. Teams of teachers used conversations to exchange ideas about their students' needs. During these discussions, teachers related positively to designing and adjusting instruction to promote learning. Mr. Quinn, the fourth grade teacher, discussed how the weekly grade-level meetings focused on conversations about instructional goals for students and how they were beneficial.

The struggling learners in my classroom caused me to spend way too much time teaching a new skill. I was way behind on the pacing chart. That was an issue for me. I also thought that the weekly grade level meetings would be a waste of my time because the other classes were ahead of mine. To my surprise the ideas I received from my peers helped me design effective lessons and craft instructional adjustments for my below level learners.

Engaging in dialogue. As each grade-level team moved to dialogue, six teams of four teachers in grades prekindergarten through 4, two instructional support teachers, and myself, an adjunct member of each group were given (a) the values for decision-making, (b) each grade-level's long and short range goals for instruction, (c) standardized test score data determining the ability levels of each classroom teacher's students, and, (d) behavior management plans to motivate students. Grade-level teams then proceeded to talk about instructional strategies that would be appropriate given the range of student needs and abilities. We ensured understanding why different strategies were used. Also, we talked about what key concepts we wanted students to master at the end of each marking period and why mastery learning was necessary. Each grade-level created a skills array for each content area highlighting the skills that needed to be taught and an accompanying best practices chart that highlighted the most successful teaching strategies.

Mrs. Jackson, a second grade teacher, frequently complained that during the first few months of the new school year she spends most of her time teaching material that should have been mastered during the previous school year. She feels differently now as highlighted below:

At the beginning of each school year my mantra was no wonder my class is behind. None of my students come into second grade ready to learn second grade skills. Previously teachers never had time to discuss instructional issues. Now our focus is on instruction and I have time to plan not only with my grade-level teachers but with teachers who are in the grade-levels above and below me. We all have a framework of the skills that need to be taught at each grade-level.

The teachers at Northfield felt comfortable with the decision-making process. The group process of studying issues, soliciting input and feedback, clearly articulating values for decision-making, and providing a rationale for each decision became an accepted practice. Even if teachers did not agree with every decision, they trusted the process and honored the outcome.

As principal, I was an adjunct participant and served as a facilitator of the grade-level meetings. The meetings were intentionally designed to foster relationships and learning. A small snack was provided at each meeting to show caring and foster connection. My intention was to make the meetings enjoyable yet valuable. I purposely modeled reflection and inquiry throughout our meetings. I introduced questioning and open-ended thinking into the group's culture. Many teachers began embedding differentiated instruction into their content area instructional practices because of their increased knowledge and idea sharing. Because of the relatively small group, teacher participation was high. All teachers had input. The focus of each meeting was on reflection and inquiry through dialogue. Mrs. Whaley, a new first grade teacher, commented:

As a new first grade teacher, I didn't have a clue about professional inquiry and reflection. I heard about it in college courses but never learned how to put it into practice. These meetings allowed me to see how it works. I have made it a part of my teaching strategies. There is a definite link to problem solving and making more educationally sound decisions.

The frequency of the meetings, conversations, and relationship building activities resulted in collaborative decision-making. Teachers shared collective responsibility for student learning. Mrs. Carosello, a veteran third grade teacher, commented:

We always had meetings. However, these meetings are different. In the past the discussions were superficial and we did what we were told. Now we work as a collaborative team who has the power to make decisions about curriculum and instruction.

Reflective practice in groups and teams illustrated the importance of collegial support intended to improve practice. In the next section, a reflective practice scenario was examined. The group process was problem identification, observation and analysis, reconceptualization, and experimentation.

Step I: Problem identification. After establishing the basic framework for the weekly grade-level meetings, teachers' conversations became more personalized as they shared their observations, assumptions, and feelings about the difficulty they had in teaching academically diverse students in their classrooms. The teachers agreed that meeting the learning needs of all of their students in the classroom was a problem, because of their various academic levels. Then, for the purposes of the study, they identified two students in each of their classrooms who were having learning difficulties. In the next step, teachers shared their perceptions about these students and their problems. As teachers talked about their students it became clear that they had made certain assumptions about why they had learning difficulties. Their assumptions revolved around the students' perceived inappropriate behaviors that the teachers felt interfered

with the learning process. The initial biased descriptions of the selected students were relatively negative. Of the 12 students selected, eight were boys and four were girls. All eight boys were medicated for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Each student was involved in supplemental services for language arts and mathematics. All 12 were involved in the after-school tutoring program. Two boys and two girls had been referred to the child study team for possible evaluation. All of the boys and two of the girls were perceived as troublemakers. While different in some ways, all of the students participated in attention seeking behavior and had problems getting along with their peers. The teachers felt that they had used all the necessary interventions to help these students but, at the same time, these students were responsible for their situations. According to the teachers, these students never did homework, constantly talked and played during instruction, displayed disruptive behavior, never completed assignments, and refused to put forth any effort. The other children in the classrooms isolated these students and the teachers did the same.

The teachers felt that these students lacked the proper social skills, which undermined their self-confidence. They seemed to feel that if they had better relationships with the other children they would try harder and be more successful with their assignments. The teachers also blamed their quality of parenting, by assuming that too little attention was given to education in the home. All of the teachers felt that they were doing all that they could do help these students learn. They felt that incorporating differentiated instructional strategies into their practice as a remedy was a superficial approach to solving the problem. Many felt that one teacher in a classroom with numerous students was powerless in addressing everyone's learning needs.

Ms. Suarez, a second grade teacher who has 25 students with varied academic abilities, stated the following:

I gear instruction to my average students. My above average students are not challenged enough and my below average students can't keep up.

Mrs. Totoro described the ability range of her fourth grade students as difficult to handle.

When you walk into my room you will see a girl struggling to read at the beginners' level. A boy seated next to my desk successfully tackling a higher-level word problem. Then at the back of the classroom is Miguel struggling to write a complete sentence because his native language is Spanish. I have been teaching for years and find this situation difficult.

Dealing with the diverse needs of every child requires up front planning and time.

Lessons can be set up where students work towards learning the same skill in a method that is appropriate for them. All students learn differently. This discussion explored teachers' beliefs about their classroom situations and provided a foundation for reflective analysis. These teachers communicated assumptions about these students and their classrooms. The next stage was the observation and analysis phase of reflective practice.

Step II: Observation and analysis. For a 3-week period teachers observed their selected students and recorded occurrences when the students seemed to feel a sense of competence. Specifically, teachers identified each student's individual academic strengths and weaknesses to individualize the student's instructional program by developing a profile. Then teachers used instructional strategies aligned with the profile to assist the students with learning. Teachers looked for active participation and successful completion of assignments and positive involvement with the other children. For each of these occurrences, the teachers also gathered information about the learning situation that promoted the opportunities for differentiation of assignments. Since it was important for them to know their students informally, they asked their students to respond

to an open-ended questionnaire with age-appropriate questions about their learning preferences. This gave teachers a grip on determining learning styles and preferences for students who had a difficult time controlling their behavior.

Teachers also looked for specific occurrences of off task behaviors and non-completion of assignments and used these situations to develop an understanding of what was happening from the student's perspective. Following these incidents, teachers recorded a description of what they had observed and then met with the student asking his or her side of the story. Teachers used their weekly grade-level meetings to present and discuss their observations. The consensus was the students had no interest in the assigned activity and as a result refused to try. However, the teachers found examples of how modifying their lessons to match the student profiles allowed students to remain on task and complete the activity with success. They also observed how motivating these experiences were for the children. Miss Kelly, for example, discussed an instructional strategy used to motivate her students:

We had a cooperative learning mathematics activity. The students were grouped in small teams heterogeneously according to their interest in sports and asked to engage in a problem solving activity. The team that finished first and had the correct answer would win a prize. All of the students remained on task and competed for the prize enthusiastically.

Jose, who was an English language learner and low achiever, was provided with activities that were bilingual in nature and he made a top score on the Language Arts test.

Because of their observations, the teachers were thinking of ways to modify their practice by incorporating a variety of instructional strategies into their lessons based on student interests. Mrs. Heller, for example, talked about determining learning preferences for her students with behavior problems:

Today, while teaching a writing lesson, I had to stop and intervene when Chris snatched Paul's pencil off his desk. When I told Chris he could write a story and draw a picture about his favorite toy, he sat up straight and folded his hands on the desk. He maintained eye contact throughout the rest of the lesson. When working independently, he was quiet and remained on task. He seemed to try harder and enjoyed learning.

Finding time to develop lessons based on learning preferences of the children was a challenge and took more time and effort. Because teachers were able to see the immediate benefits of student progress, many felt the additional time needed for planning was worth it. Teachers reported the 12 students who were identified initially were making progress because they were more engaged in learning. The adage "one size does not fit all" was the mantra in grade-level meetings and was a critical step in the change process.

Step III: Reconceptualization and Experimentation. The more the teachers began observing the students while engaged in differentiated instruction, their ideas began to change. They had a more concrete understanding of their students' strengths and weaknesses as related to learning. They had a deeper appreciation for the individualities of each student, their unique interests, and how this related to their experience in the classroom. When the teachers began this project during their grade-level meetings, they were feeling confident they were doing all they could do to teach their students, but did not believe they could meet all of their diverse learning needs. They felt there were too many constraints, such as behavioral problems, lack of time, large class size, lack of instructional aides, the rigors of standardized testing, and students entering the grade level without the readiness skills necessary for success. Through their observations they began to see areas for improvement and also developed an appreciation of how their actions and the classroom experience influenced learning. They saw they needed to develop strategies that made all students feel included in the learning process. The

discrepancy between all students being included in the learning process and prior actions of the teachers, made them open to new strategies. With these experiences, they began to reconceptualize their role as teachers and develop new action plans for integrating differentiated instruction into their teaching.

As teachers shared their ideas, their plans took form. They worked hard to plan interesting and effective lessons utilizing a variety of teaching strategies and instructional activities based on mixed ability levels and interests of the students. As teachers continued to plan instruction around the interests of their students, they began to know their students as children. Knowing the children better allowed teachers to see what activities were not appropriate for a particular child and develop optional lessons adapted to the child's needs. While teachers espoused differentiation, their experiences assisted them in understanding that they held Model I beliefs that prevented them from using this as a planning method. Most teachers felt that they had too much paper work and limited time to plan effectively for differentiated instruction. Classrooms were structured so all students would conform behaviorally and academically. The problem was there were a growing number of students who could not conform. The understanding that their students learned differently and had a variety of needs encouraged teachers to change their practice. Changes in teachers' practices prompted changes in students. After executing a new plan, teachers said their students developed more confidence and became more engaged academically.

Summary

The process of reflective practice facilitated new understanding for the teachers working in small groups. The most important change in their perception dealt with the children. Initially, when they described their students who had academic needs that were not being met they focused on behavior and were critical of them. As they observed these students and got to know them better they developed empathy. Instead of attributing their lack of academic progress to behavior, they took the time to find out what would motivate them. With the focus on the students as children with differences the focus on their practice began to shift. This reconceptualization prompted them to differentiate instruction based on the ability levels and interests of the students. The more they got to know their students individually; they recognized their needs and searched for new ways of helping them learn. Their efforts to apply their new theory-in-use brought about significant improvement in achievement of their students. This reinforced teachers' commitment to plan for differentiated instruction. The changes in their students heightened their efficacy as professionals. They realized they were responsible for the increased student engagement and learning in their classroom.

Double-loop learning was responsible for teachers' changes in beliefs and understanding. Teachers experienced open communication, collegiality, and problem solving by consensus and using data to make inferences in a risk free environment. Grade-level meetings were no longer used as gripe sessions, but used to promote professional development.

As principal, I attended weekly grade-level meetings. My role was the facilitator, who offered the theoretical framework of reflective practice to guide the discussions.

That theoretical framework was problem identification, observation and analysis, reconceptualization, and experimentation of new ways of doing things. I provided the organizational and psychological support for the teachers that allowed them to examine their practice from a critical perspective. The conceptual framework for change was based on Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four Framed Model for Understanding Organizations. Using this model, my emphasis was on the human resource frame of emphasizing caring, interpersonal relationships, and participatory management.

The weekly grade-level meetings provided teachers with a structure for learning and developing new skills that alleviated anxiety about their implementation of differentiated instruction. Through this experience, my theories-in-use were enhanced by allowing me to instill in teachers a sense of open communication, teamwork, and collegiality. I set the process of reflective practice in motion and teachers directed the process. Smyth and Cherry (2005) refer to the paradigm of being in the learning process together, and asking ourselves questions about experience in real time. We reflected together on what ideas and feelings emerged as we studied the situation. My leadership changed from the supervisory relationship of critique and comment. Learning was mutual. In this cycle, we explored together teaching and learning that prompted a deeper understanding of our practice, including the need for change by examining our own contribution to the situation for school improvement leading to change on the organizational level.

Chapter VII

School-Wide Reflective Practice

Introduction

York-Barr et al. (2006) espouse a theory of action for reflective practice that was fundamental to all four spirals in this research. Reflective practice required a moment of contemplation. This was a purposeful slowing down to create a space where being in the moment and being open to a variety of possibilities emerged. Openness was fundamental to the reflective practice framework. It meant consideration of changing viewpoints and letting go of the need to be right or the desire to win (Webb, 1995). Inquiry was the thinking phase. It was the state in which questions about practice emerged. Inquiry was prompted by a dilemma or puzzle. Questions were the conscious processing of thoughts for examining practices. The last phase was learning. New and deeper insights that led to improved actions were gained by the reflective practitioner.

There was a greater possibility of achieving school-wide improvements in practice as reflective practice grew from the individual level of the spiral toward the school level. The prospect at the outer levels of the spiral was that individual reflection and learning was more wide spread. The benefit of reflective practice at the school-wide level was increased probability for meaningful and sustained improvements in practice given the talents of staff members throughout the school. Resources, perspectives, relationships, leadership, and shared responsibility increased tremendously given the larger number of staff members learning together. Our group composition connected people across grade-levels and curricular areas, which brought forth different

perspectives and relationships between individuals who usually would not have the opportunity to interact. Our aim with school-wide reflection was to have all staff members involved in collaborative learning and contribute to our educational goals for students. In this chapter, I describe the development of school-wide reflective practice at Northfield. I begin by discussing the school-based professional community framework model that we utilized. Second, I discuss the reflective practice initiative at Northfield focusing on how reflective practice became integrated into our school culture. Kotter's (1996) change model was used to demonstrate the process of implementing change in our school. The goal was to allow teachers to make meaningful change in practice by establishing a school-based learning community.

Reflective Practice Cycle IV

The organizational form I used to facilitate reflective practice was based on the Model II environment focused on open communication and collaborative problem-solving. My role as the facilitator for the reflective practice process was to build trust and ensure that the staff members felt safe in the process. My theory-in-use was based on building positive interpersonal relationships, trust, and communication. Its foundation was a collaborative and democratic approach to leadership. As a principal, I worked hard at empowering the staff so they felt a sense of ownership of the school. I utilized the human resource frame of Bolman and Deal's (2001) Four Framed Model for understanding organizations. My emphasis was on building positive interpersonal relationships and empowering teachers to be a part of the decision-making process. Because of the risks involved in problem analysis and critical reflection, the staff members felt confident that openness was valued and would not lead to negative

consequences. As a leader, it was my core belief that the teachers were competent professionals and had the ability to assume the responsibility for addressing weaknesses in their practice. I believed that they could learn and improve their own practice. The staff knew I trusted them and in return they trusted me.

We used the framework developed by Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1995) for designing our school-based professional community. This framework identified potential benefits, defined characteristics, and examined organizational support. The following benefits resulting from this design were: increased teacher efficacy and empowerment, satisfaction from being treated as a valued professional, and collective responsibility for student learning. Identified as characteristics were: shared norms and values, reflective dialogue, openness and sharing about practice, and collaboration with a focus on student learning (Kruse et al., 1995). The structure and social resources in this framework were communication models and supportive leadership. The teachers and staff in the school were empowered to engage fully by directing the process of improvement.

Reflective practice initiative at Northfield Elementary School. The purpose for the reflective practice initiative at Northfield was to create a more collaborative work culture so that students with various learning challenges would be more successful academically. By the end of my first year as principal at Northfield, I had a much better understanding about the issues obstructing student achievement. There was a lack of continuity and community that was aggravated by the regular turnover of principals. Although many of the teachers had been at the school for years and had a vested interest in their students, the culture of mistrust and lack of communication blocked Northfield from advancing its instructional practice. The district had negotiated with the teachers'

union three professional development days throughout the current school year. I knew for our teachers to make progress this was not sufficient. We needed more time for school-based professional learning, if improvements were to be made.

I began by rethinking how time spent in our faculty meetings could be more productive. I wanted to use our faculty meetings to be more supportive of collaboration and professional learning. Our meetings were 60 minutes long. Many of the issues discussed were informational and could be communicated to teachers by e-mail or memorandums. This would give us 60 minutes each month to learn together as a group in the development of a school-based professional learning community.

When I presented the proposal to the faculty, about 90 percent of the teachers voted to approve the change. Even though the teachers were contracted to meet once a month after school with me, I wanted them to have a voice in how the time was used. Our support staff's participation was voluntary. However, many attended our meetings. As a result we acquired one hour each month for staff learning. Essentially, school wide staff development opportunities were embedded into our school program.

At our first meeting, teachers incorporated the reflective processes that they initially learned during their grade-level meetings. They also collaborated among themselves and made the decision about how their reflective practice learning initiative would be designed. The teachers agreed on a protocol. It consisted of a grade-level team of teachers doing a presentation to the whole group by stating the problem area for discussion. Then everyone participated by asking the grade-level team clarifying questions. Once the questions were answered the grade-level team gave feedback to the whole group about the problem. The resolution was determined collaboratively by all

involved. For the first 10 minutes of the meeting a team building activity was used to bond the teachers together. Then the group moved to presentations that focused on school problems followed by the group reflection process. The end of the meeting included overall debriefing of the activities by the participants. The teachers were unanimous that their focus would be on student learning centered around vertical articulation across grade-levels that were problem areas.

As the facilitator, I gave teachers enough flexibility to shape the initiative and make it personally meaningful and contextually relevant. Nevertheless, ongoing adjustments that supported the learning process were made. The conversations that teachers had about learning were school wide discussions about instruction, standards, curriculum, and assessment. Since Northfield was identified as a school whose students were not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the area of Language Arts under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, writing was identified as an initial target for improvement.

Our middle of the year faculty sessions highlighted teachers taking a leadership role by doing presentations to the faculty. At our introductory meeting a teacher presented research on professional learning communities and another teacher coordinated the design of a protocol that was used to foster collaborative examination of student work. This process supported teachers' efforts in sharing their students' work and best teaching practices. Reflective practice with colleagues was used to uncover problems embedded in these areas to support better quality student performance. Throughout the year, observational data and feedback were collected from our faculty meetings. These meetings consisted of each teacher bringing samples of their students' work with

assignment descriptors and the corresponding scoring rubrics. During the meetings the faculty was divided into teams by grade-levels. The presenting team described contents of the students' assignment uninterrupted by comments or questions. At one meeting the grade-level presenter began with the following question:

Do you think the questioning techniques used in the mathematical problem-solving activity showed evidence of prompting higher level thinking skills?

With the presenter listening quietly, the teacher participants offered challenging feedback such as numerous strategies that promoted higher-level thinking skills in the context of using questions to teach math skills. The teachers used the last 10 minutes for reflecting on the feedback and the application of critical thinking skills. Mrs. Watson, a third grade teacher, stated the following:

This process of reflection helped me focus on how I teach. The feedback clarifies my thought processes when I am planning and teaching lessons.

Mrs. Dinney, a fourth grade teacher, stated:

Our willingness to question past practices, even things that we have always believed to be correct, has opened our minds to new perspectives for improvement.

At our last faculty meeting in June, results of our reflective practice initiative evaluation indicated that teachers felt strongly about increasing their knowledge of the curriculum both within and across grade-levels. Teachers also indicated valuing the opportunity to collaborate with their colleagues and make critical decisions about their practice in reference to student learning. In addition, student achievement in Language Arts as measured by the New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge test showed significant improvement. Teachers began to take more leadership roles as their conversations about teaching and learning became more inquiry oriented. Their primary

focus was on collaborative problem solving that empowered them to make the necessary changes in their practice. The result of teachers looking at their work from a critical perspective utilizing reflective practice evolved their teaching to a higher level of competence. Teachers felt that reflective practice embedded collaboration and teaming into the school culture, which was a primary goal for developing the school into a professional learning community. In exploring teachers' experiences of utilizing reflective practice, the following key consistencies emerged. Each key consistency will be explained.

Trust. When teachers were asked about the merits of reflective practice and its influence on their teaching practices, language about trust and confidence was a theme. Teachers reported that reflective practice gave them a sense of social and emotional support from colleagues. Pam Jones, a first grade third grade teacher, explained:

I've taught the entire year without the support of a mentor. I could have definitely used some help because my classroom was out of control for the majority of the year. My students talked and played all day long. I constantly had to raise my voice and speak over them to be heard. It was so frustrating. I wasn't able to teach. So, I decided to quit my teaching job because it was not for me.

After using the process of reflective practice at the grade-level meetings Pam Jones revealed:

To be honest, I was a bit ambivalent when reflective practice was first introduced at our grade-level meetings. But I was pleasantly surprised. The bonding that developed between my colleagues and I helped me tremendously with my classroom management issues. I felt safe enough with them to speak freely about my problems. My colleagues listened and gave me suggestions that worked. This comfort level gave me the reassurance that I needed to try their suggestions. As a result, I was able to establish classroom control. Consequently, I decided to stay on and teach for another year.

This personal connection was significant because it was the foundation for their social and intellectual relationships. Reflective practice motivated more substantial discussions about teaching and learning, which was of value to teachers.

Collaboration. When teachers were asked about how reflective practice improved their practice, the value of a continuing dialogue about issues with their peers was mentioned. Teachers looked forward to conversations about teaching and learning. Carrie Walker, a veteran fifth grade teacher with over 30 years of experience, calls herself technologically challenged. After a professional workshop she explained the following:

I struggled with using the smart board to teach lessons. It was a disaster for me. I envied how fast the younger teachers learned how to use it to teach their lessons. During our last smart board training we were allowed to work in groups with our peers. I was amazed at how easy I learned how to use it.

Resolving issues and learning with their peers gave teachers a sense of empowerment. Carrie further stated,

Had it not been for having the opportunity to work collaboratively with my teacher partners, it would have taken me much longer to incorporate the use of the smart board in my lessons. Learning along with my colleagues made it easier to grasp the concept and much more fun too.

Responsibility. Teachers structured their presentations during the reflective practice faculty meetings to meet their needs and the needs of the school. After one of our reflective practice meetings, Mr. De Simone, the gym teacher, stated the following:

I have never seen so many teachers involved. I have been around here for years and I have never seen so many teachers contributing ideas. It appears that issues are being resolved because everybody is scrutinizing for the answer to problems. In the past no one got involved with resolving issues but the principal.

Teachers voiced that the meetings were interesting and appropriate to their needs and the needs of the school. As teachers took ownership of their school they worked a lot harder to make necessary improvements to make it better.

Agenda. The district did not allow teachers to have a voice in their professional development activities. Teachers noted the importance of being able to set their own agendas for the reflective practice meetings. Mrs. Caryn Johnson, the kindergarten teacher, noted:

Finally as teachers we have been given some credibility in deciding what our needs are professionally. After all who knows better what we need training on than we do.

This level of autonomy allowed the teachers to focus their attention on areas that were most beneficial to them in the classroom and the school. Teachers felt that they had a responsibility to get as much out of the meetings as they could.

Logistics. The meetings were structured so the group could function effectively. The teachers utilized their time constructively, channeling and addressing issues as they came up. Nancy Coleman, the reading specialist, commented:

When we get together after school for our meetings, I am ready to relax after the long day with the children. The structure of our reflective practice meetings is helpful because we need to move through the process and get a lot accomplished before its time to end our day and go home.

Teachers were extremely comfortable after establishing strong bonds with each other and stayed within their assigned roles in order to help the reflective practice presentations stay on track.

Change at the organizational level. The Eight Stage Change Model developed by Kotter (1996) was the framework that we used to identify key elements of our change process. The elements that guided us were: establishing a sense of urgency by

identifying threats to our school goals by having honest discussions and developing scenarios about our future possibilities; developing a vision and strategy by meaningfully grounding our initiatives in a desirable future purpose; anchoring new approaches in the culture by having new initiatives be a part of our daily work; communicating the change vision by openly and honestly addressing concerns and anxieties; creating a guiding coalition by bring together all staff members, supervisors, and administrators to support the new initiatives.

Response to Research Questions

The first research question was: How did I examine myself through an autoethnographical lens and continue my own learning by providing insight, data, and reflection regarding the role of the elementary principal?

My journey began with who I am. This meant understanding myself, and the focus was on who I am in my work. Who I am and my beliefs subconsciously drive my thoughts and actions. Reflecting on me through an autobiographical lens prompted an introspective analysis examining what I believe, how I think and how I behave in the context of being principal of a school. I used the upper levels of the Personal Development Model for Professional Purpose and Practice as a framework to examine my identity. It provided a structure for me to understand my thoughts and actions and allowed me to engage in questions of reflection and purpose in my work. My daily thoughts and actions are grounded in my personal identity.

The Professional Development Model for Professional Purpose and Practice has various levels that coincide with leadership. I used this model to examine my role as an elementary principal. My examination began with the upper levels of the model, which were more abstract than the levels below and have a greater impact on the individual.

The first level of the model examined the mission and overarching purpose for being a principal. The questions I reflected on during this first level were: What am I working toward? What are we as a school aiming to achieve? In conjunction with parents and teachers, my mission was to provide the students with a motivating and supportive learning environment, which promoted academic achievement and positive personal growth necessary to be successful in a diverse and ever changing world. As a faculty, we needed to support our students so they had a sense of belonging in our school and were successful in their learning. Learning meant fostering not only academic, but social and emotional growth as well. These were my core beliefs and the underpinnings for being an elementary principal.

The second level of reflection focused on my identity. The questions I reflected on were: Who am I in this work? How do I hope to contribute? First, I am a facilitator and teacher of student learning. Using these reflection questions, I arrived at the conclusion that as principal, I needed to be more facilitative and less directive when working with teachers to solve problems. As a result, I taught teachers to ask themselves the kind of questions that not only supported their inquiry, but supported their learning about why such inquiry enhances their effectiveness. As principal, I am also a connector of people and resources. To heighten the chances of a successful resolution to a problem and reduce conflict, I supported teachers with adequate resources, technical assistances, capacity building, and problem solving opportunities. The model of Personal Development for Professional Purpose and Practice allowed me to monitor my progress as a principal by being a conscious observer of my thoughts feeling and behaviors. This model has provided the structure for me to examine myself through an

autoethnographical lens and continue my own learning by focusing inward to discover who I am. The assessment of my core values, in terms of who I am, is constantly evolving. It provides me with insight about my role as an elementary principal in the development of new knowledge and understandings for continuous learning.

My autoethnographical journey through reflective practice examined my capabilities, strategies, mental maps, and how my thoughts and feelings affected my choice of leadership behavior. My goal as a principal in this research was to enable teachers to work collaboratively to solve school problems and increase their learning as we progressed forward to establish a school-based professional learning community.

Being powerful was described by Jean Baker Miller (1976) as enhancing the power of others while simultaneously increasing one's own power. The mutual use of power resulted in collaboration and cooperation among the entire school community. My sharing power raised teachers' self-esteem to higher levels of fulfillment. Empowerment is synonymous with the concept of "power with." As the principal I was in equal status with my teachers. We were all committed to common goals for school improvement. Teachers had the opportunity to participate meaningfully in decisions about the context of their work.

My journey with reflective practice began with me. This journey opened my identity and explored new ways of being that were beyond my conscious state of mind prior to my involvement in this research. My learning about leadership thrust into a second-order change that was conceptual and prompted new understandings about myself. My leadership theory moved from a defensive stance to one of open-communication, collaborative problem solving, trust, and honesty. This internal change

enhanced my leadership theory. According to Bennis and Nanus (1997), trust implies accountability, predictability, and reliability. Honesty is the single most important ingredient in the leader-constituent relationship (Kouzes & Posner, 1997).

Through this journey my leadership shifted from being transactional to transformative using reflective practice. Change was at the core of my journey with reflective practice. It involved me using reflective practice as a process to work with colleagues to reflect on current practices, expand my knowledge base by developing new skills, and sharing ideas. Through the use of my leadership theories-in-use of servant leadership, feminist leadership, and democratic leadership, I developed a sense of empowerment because of renewed clarity of my professional values and beliefs. My leadership theory was improved because reflective practice provided me with a greater awareness of the possibilities that emerged from innovative thought.

Relationship building was a process of internal change for me because I became more open to teachers with different points of view. I was inclusive and caring, allowing them to bring their unique contributions to the teaching and learning process. This inclusion of all perspectives in shaping our values resulted in teachers seeing their work as meaningful and feeling personally accountable for the consequences of their efforts (Bolman & Deal, 2001). In return, growth was nurtured, creativity was supported, and constructive feedback was offered in the context of mutual learning.

The second question was: How did using reflective practice as a tool allow me to critically examine my leadership?

This study using reflective practice involved questioning assumptions, examining beliefs about teachers, students, and learning. The goal was to prompt a second-order

change in which existing practices were reshaped around new practices leading to further learning. The examination of my leadership through reflective practice goes beyond the awareness of accessing decisions. This level of reflective practice is about awareness that routines are not adequate and a change in perspective is needed to further learning.

As I critically examined my leadership, I focused on the relationship between my ideas and action. My perceptions about myself and others influenced my leadership, and my growing awareness about my assumptions created change. This was evident in this study when I illustrated how Model I assumptions influenced my behavior with teachers and students. Argyris and Schön (1974) explain Model I advocates, “withholding valuable information, telling white lies, suppressing feelings and offering false sympathy assuming that the other person needs to be protected and that this strategy should be kept secret” (p. 71). The decision-making process is based on assumptions about other people that include their intentions, feelings, and behavior (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). To maintain control, the assumptions are not tested and the options are not explored. My initial leadership platform was to use control strategies to manage behavior. My problems with teachers and students came about because their behavior challenged my authority to maintain control. My Model I theory-in-use emerged without the realization that my behavior contributed to the problem. Using reflective practice as a tool, I began to critically examine my leadership. This led to the modification of my leadership strategies into new paradigms of leadership behavior. I aligned my leadership actions with my Model II theories-in-use to bring about change.

Model II is the reflective model. Model II includes theories-in-use that reduce the negative consequences of Model I and increase growth, learning, and effectiveness

(Argyris & Schön, 1974). Additionally it includes the views and experiences of the participants rather than seeking to impose a view upon the situation. The outcome is based on the most complete and valid information possible. Model II strategies develop an organizational climate characterized by trust, open communication, creative problem-solving, and shared leadership (Anderson, 1997; Argyris & Schön, 1974; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Smith, 2005).

Reflective practice was used as an intervention by identifying the problem, gathering information about the problem, analyzing the data in relationship to my own goals and values, and experimenting with new strategies that emerged from the analysis. I used new understandings to change the nature of my work in ways that had positive effects on teachers, students, and learning.

I also provided evidence of how reflective practice provided the foundation for a professional school-based learning community. Through my leadership, organizational norms were reshaped to allow teachers the opportunity for collaborative reflection to solve problems and improve learning. By embedding reflective practice into the school structure, teachers became partners in learning to better understand themselves and their students. Integration of new knowledge, assumptions, and beliefs about students, ourselves, and our professional practice brought about new meaning. Reflective practice enabled the reconsideration of long held beliefs and ways of doing things and broke patterns of behavior reinforced by habit.

The third research question was: How did I apply the process of reflective practice to my reflections?

At the heart of reflective practice is learning and the way the experience is processed. Mezirow (1998) spoke of learning as a cycle that begins with experience, continues with reflection, and later leads to action. This type of learning describes the Experiential Learning Theory. The following example details the Experiential Learning Theory. As principal I have a confrontation with an angry student. This is the experience. Reflection of this experience involves the following: trying to explain to myself why this confrontation happened; comparing this experience to previous experiences to determine what was the same and what was unique; analyzing it according to personal and/or school standards of conduct and formulating a course of action connected to the experience of others such as colleagues who have had confrontations with students. Conferring with colleagues, these actions would lead to critical reflection. In this stage, I asked myself questions about the experience in terms of previous experiences. The next stage is the abstract conceptualization stage, where I try to find answers using logic or ideas rather than feelings. I make generalizations, draw conclusions, and form hypotheses about the experience. The last phase is the action stage or phase of experimentation where I try the hypotheses out and make changes if needed. The application of the process of reflection to my reflections were: Having a problematic experience, reviewing and reflecting on that experience, learning from that experience, and trying out what was learned.

The fourth research question was: What was the process that connected reflection and leadership?

The goal of this research is the establishment of a school-based professional learning community. The process that connects reflective practice and leadership is learning. Reflective practice is the idea of identifying discrepancies between beliefs and actions. By reflecting on these discrepancies, leaders identify ways to improve the quality of their work and the work of others. Reflective practice requires leaders to confront ill-defined, unique, and challenging problems as they decide on resolutions. In addition, reflective practice exposes questions that leaders have that are personally biased and limiting and provides opportunities for expanding perspectives and generating alternatives. The process that connects reflection and leadership is the leader's continuous examination of beliefs, practices, past actions, and future actions. Reflective practice affixes leadership and learning for all. The goal of a reflective leader is to discover beliefs that drive actions and modify those actions to ensure that they are aligned with beliefs.

The fifth research question was: How did reflective leadership practice transition to provide tools to enhance climate cultural decision-making?

Reflective practice is focused on thoughts, feelings, and actions that are inconsistent with professed beliefs. It is concerned with the divide between one's espoused theory and one's theory-in-use. This divide created a dynamic for reflection and dialogue. Reflective practice leadership promoted open-mindedness and flexibility in faculty by inviting multiple perspectives and interpretations to old theories by framing new ways of doing things. Additionally, I took on the role of the co-learner who modeled and facilitated the practices of questioning, investigating, and seeking solutions to

problems. At Northfield Elementary School reflective practice promoted school-wide learning leading to the development of a school-based professional learning community.

A key component of a school-based professional learning community was a collaborative school climate. The collaborative school climate where teachers were empowered to make decisions and solve problems was incorporated into the school culture by the use of effective leadership behaviors. As principal, I spent considerable time building trust and relationships among the faculty. I facilitated a site-based management team where faculty had a voice in the decision-making process. During faculty meetings teachers were routinely engaged in team building activities that developed mutual trust. Reflective practice was the model we used to solve problems. It allowed teachers to construct knowledge through multiple forms of inquiry such as action research and examination of disaggregated school data and research for improvement.

Summary

Fundamental to my theory-in-use was sharing of power, collaboration, enhancing the self-worth of others, and building my interpersonal skills. Making teachers feel valued created enthusiasm about the job. The reflective practice initiative at Northfield put teachers in the leadership role of instructional improvement at the classroom level. As the principal, I developed a culture of shared leadership by letting go of my authority and allowing my theories-in-use of servant, feminist, and democratic leadership processes guide my practice. I advocated teacher leadership. Teachers worked directly with students and were viewed as credible by their teacher colleagues. In the reflective practice initiative, teacher colleagues learned and reflected together to expand their pedagogical practices during our faculty meetings, forming a professional learning

community. My practice of offering feedback in a trusting way assisted in nurturing teachers and their ideas. By soliciting advice and opinions, and acknowledging to teachers that I did not have all the answers inspired them to assume greater responsibility for problem solving. Throughout the entire reflective practice initiative, I established the groundwork by integrating reflection and inquiry into the school culture for improvement. As a result, teachers were enabled to examine their beliefs and their practice to create meaningful change through double-loop learning.

Chapter VIII

Summary

This dissertation represented a personalized account of the study of my leadership as a principal using effective leadership and reflective practice. It centered on how I used reflective practice to create positive change in a school. Using myself as the subject and researcher in the social context of an elementary school, I fostered a culture of reflective practice among colleagues that would allow them to cope with the complexities of our profession by acquiring a new set of skills and insights.

The research discussed my theories-in-use that consisted of an interwoven tapestry of servant leadership, feminist leadership, and democratic leadership. As principal, my use of this interwoven tapestry of theoretical constructs fostered acceptance of decisions by gaining input from the group. It also emphasized my concern about personal feelings, communication, and represented a commitment to an empowered group leading to greater productivity among teachers.

Through my interactions with teachers, I illustrated the direct link between leadership and principal effectiveness. Shifting the school from a bureaucracy to a democratic self-managed school allowed the staff to evolve to higher levels of fulfillment. The facilitation of reflective practice in the school led to a collaborative school climate that resulted in greater learning. Reflective practice enhanced my principal leadership, transforming the school to a learning community.

Autoethnography was used to critically examine my leadership and reflective processes. I studied myself and my interactions with teachers through an autobiographical

lens, gaining critical insight to my theories-in-use. Reflective practice promotes learning that enables a distancing of oneself from an act plus self-reflection on that act to better understand patterns, recurring issues, and inconsistencies. Using four reflective practice spirals, I demonstrated how reflective practice enhanced individual learning and created change in the school by advancing to a learning organization. We used various reflective practice models to examine critical incidents of practice that prompted cycles of experiential learning. These cycles of experiential learning prompted reframing to develop new action theories and strategies. Reflective practice was the tool that allowed me to grow professionally. It developed my leadership skills that enabled me to empower teachers to solve problems by advancing their own learning. The ultimate result was the improvement in educational practices.

Teachers and I used reflective practice to examine our beliefs and create meaningful change in our work. Teachers' initial encounter with reflective practice created feelings of anxiety. To overcome these issues, teachers were provided with on-going professional development that gave them reflective practice skills and a framework that is still used today in grade-level and faculty meetings to examine their teaching practices. As a faculty, we conquered the solo mentality and began working collaboratively with each other to improve our school. Reflective practice provided the structure for us to exchange feedback on improving instruction and student learning.

This dissertation focused on the strategies I used to foster a school-based learning community. In this learning community I actively promoted a school culture of trust, collaboration, and empowerment for the successful implementation of school goals. Reflective practice and effective leadership was used to foster the development of

teachers in order to build a successful school-based learning community. My leadership changed significantly as I grew in my ability to apply reflective practice to the principalship. Effective leadership manifested itself not only in my improvement as a principal, but in fostering reflective skills in teachers in the pursuit of excellence in education.

The literature about leadership and the role of the school principal emphasized the direct link between effective leadership and principal effectiveness. It highlighted the shift in schools from an organizational bureaucracy to a democratic self-managed organization allowing staff to evolve to higher levels of fulfillment. The seminal work addressed the theoretical literature on reflective practice, detailing the stages and outlining the basic strategies. The focus was oriented toward determining the applicability of the reflective practice literature to principal leadership and educational transformation. It emphasized facilitating reflective practice in the school, in the context of principal and teachers working in a collaborative environment that led to greater learning. The purpose of this autoethnographical study was to critically examine my leadership that translated in my own evolution as a reflective practitioner. I studied myself, and my interactions with another principal and teachers, through an autobiographical lens using four reflective practice cycles providing critical insight data and reflection. The results of this study were expressed in a personal narrative. The four reflective practice spirals: My Engagement with Individual Reflective Practice, Reflective Practice with a Partner, Reflective Practice in Small Groups and Teams, and School Wide Reflective Practice emphasized how reflective practice was an effective strategy for enhancing individual learning, creating change, and shaping a learning

organization. Reflective practice was revisited as the tool that allowed me to grow professionally, developing my leadership skills so that I could empower teachers to solve problems by advancing their learning to improve educational practices. The use of various reflective practice models allowed us to examine critical incidents of practice. These cycles of experiential learning prompted reframing of these critical incidents to develop new action theories and strategies. This theory building emerged from a complex mix of classroom experiences, collegial exchanges, and solving dilemmas. The framework of reflective practice was the structure teachers used to implement a school-based learning community.

My theories of use allowed me to create a collaborative culture within the school to develop a school-based professional learning community. Servant leadership, feminist leadership, and democratic leadership symbolized my concern for the personal feelings of my staff. My theories-in use, along with the norm of open communication, represented my commitment to the empowerment of my teachers. My ability to empower teachers heightened their productivity. My teachers delighted in being able to have input in making decisions pertaining to school policy, curriculum, and instruction. Teachers were in the habit of continuously scrutinizing their practice, allowing them to resolve issues for their own improvement as well as their students. Teachers collaborated together to set school goals and used self-assessment techniques to improve performance.

The school culture of Northfield changed from a school where the teachers worked in isolation to a more collaborative culture where all staff members had a voice in making critical decisions. Our faculty meetings, which once served the purpose of being informational only, turned into reflective practice sessions. These sessions were

uninterrupted discussions among colleagues about best practices, curriculum, and improving instruction. Teachers worked as a team to resolve complicated problems using a variety of perspectives from their peers. The core of our professional learning community centered on the use of reflective practice.

Recommendations for Future Research

To examine further autoethnographical works of principal leadership in the realm of using reflective practice as a strategy for enhancing individual learning, creating change, and shaping learning organizations would be compelling. This research has not only provided a deeper understanding of my leadership for myself and others, but I hope it has enhanced the profile of this form of qualitative inquiry for other educators involved in research. My goal in studying my leadership was to communicate key learning experiences about reflective practice to a wider audience. In this process, I have learned about the nature of my practice from reflecting on my inner most thoughts and feelings about leadership. Although all principals confront diverse struggles in their own practice, it is vital to share struggles and triumphs as colleagues and learn from them. Pedagogical and didactic forms of learning are predominant in educational leadership programs. This type of learning has enormous limitations. More emphasis needs to be placed on learning from reflecting on practice. This type of learning, achieved through incorporating professional judgment involving the work realities of practitioners, must be included in the preparation programs for educational leaders. Minimal research has been published that explores and details the process through which principal leadership translates into energizing teachers to reflect on their practices leading to positive changes in the school. It is in this vein that I hope my contribution supports other educational leaders in their

continuous journey of making time to develop, implement, and access action theories for improvement of their leadership practice.

Limitations of the Study

This study is limited in its scope to the viewpoints and experiences associated with one principal's use of reflective practice as cycles of experiential learning about leadership. This research is autobiographical in nature and limited to the interpretations of my experiences and interactions with colleagues in the educational setting where I have worked as a principal.

Conclusion

Reflective Practice was used at Northfield as a process to clarify the deep assumptions that underlined our work as school practitioners (Weber, 2003). As a faculty, we examined every aspect of our school by interpreting our experiences to learn from them, and improve our school. New knowledge was created from this analysis of perceptions linking theory and practice (Schön, 1987a). The exploration of alternative perspectives led to a transformed way of thinking with new courses of action for improvement. In addition, a deeper understanding of our circumstances was gained by viewing our dilemmas through the lenses of our assumptions and cultural biases. The conscious reexamination of our beliefs allowed us to identify discrepancies between beliefs and actions, resulting in new ways of doing things using the Model II theories-in-use.

Change was an integral part of this autoethnographic research project. According to research, principals changed their schools by assisting teachers in developing new visions of possibilities, and then mobilized them to change toward the new vision (Bennis

& Nanus, 1997). As the principal of Northfield, I utilized reflective practice to do the following: improve my own leadership, legitimize reflective practice with the faculty by modeling its use in my own practice, and by facilitating teachers' collaborative involvement. Teacher collaboration complemented and encouraged teacher development. These processes constructed a culture of commitment to creating a school-based learning community. Our school-based learning community derived from an ethos of using reflective practice, which fostered learning, behavioral change, and improved performance.

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