REFLECTING ON REFLECTION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INQUIRY INTO PRINCIPALS' USE OF REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

A Dissertation

by

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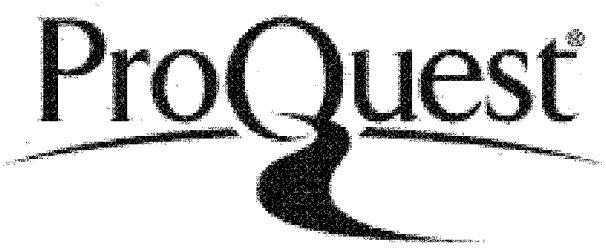

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ABSTRACT

Reflecting on Reflection: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Principals' Use of Reflective Practice

(December 2011)

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Today's principals work in a setting that has become increasingly complex and characterized by a great deal of uncertainty and variety. Reflective practice is a process that principals can utilize to develop expertise in effectively operating under these conditions (Short & Reinhart, 1993). The purpose of the study was to explore the extent and impact of principals' use of reflective practice. An understanding of conditions that surround reflective practice in the daily life of a school principal was revealed through examining the accounts of their lived experiences. The study was guided by the following central research question: What was the value of reflection towards principals' decision–making and leadership effectiveness?

The approach to the study utilized a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design. The research sample was obtained from recommendations made by superintendents from the Rio Grande Valley region of South Texas and based on a description of a reflective principal. Data were gathered by the use of standardized open-ended interviews followed by interview guide approaches and observations. Data

analysis entailed exploring patterns and connections that exist within the data and revealing themes in an attempt to gain meaning within the context. Conclusions were created through a synthesis of the literature and the themes that were identified.

The study provided rich description of the role of reflective practice in the daily lives of the principals studied. Examined was how principals conceptualized, utilized, and created a setting for the use of reflective practice. Also examined was the impact reflective practice had on the principals' leadership. The themes that emerged from this examination were synthesized with the literature that produced conclusions and recommendations. Information gained from the study provided insight into the use of reflective practice by principals to increase their effectiveness. Recommendations were created to provide suggestions to educator and administrator preparation programs for their curricula, principals for their practices, and researchers for possible future studies.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

School principals face daily challenges that stretch their knowledge and skill base farther and farther (Rohland, 2002). Current sets of demands face today's school principal in ways not experienced in the past. In a parody, Copeland (2001) described the myth of a superprincipal in the following job description:

> Position Opening: School Principal, Anytown School District.Qualifications: Wisdom of a sage, vision of a CEO, intellect of a scholar, leadership of a point guard, compassion of a counselor, moral strength of a nun, courage of a firefighter, craft knowledge of a surgeon, political savvy of a senator, toughness of a soldier, listening skills of a blind man, humility of a saint, collaborative skills of an entrepreneur, certitude of a civil rights activist, charisma of a stage performer, and patience of Job.Salary lower than you might expect. Credential required. For application materials, contact.... (p. 528)

The school principal has been seen as the key educational leader of a campus and the one person who has the most opportunity to exercise leadership (Gurr, Drysdale, &Mulford, 2006). According to Leithwood (2006), this leadership has very significant effects on student success and the quality of the school. School leaders serve as a catalyst for tapping into the potential capacities that already exist within a school. In a study by Leithwood and Riehl (2003), the research evidence claimed that one of the primary sources of successful leadership in schools was the principal, and that leadership makes important contributions to the improvement of student learning. In addition, those

successful leaders operate within accountability-oriented policy, serve highly diverse student populations, promote school quality, equity and social justice, and nurture the development of educational cultures in families.

In order to exercise effective leadership in this climate of change, principals must have "deep convictions, strong commitments, and clear ideas about directions for change..." (Starratt, 2003, p.23). According to Portin (2004), a principal "does his or her job each day with a passion for ensuring learning for all students while the Damocles sword of the next high-stakes test scores hangs in the balance, ready to judge whether the school is 'good' or 'failing'" (p. 14). Principals must be relentless about educating all children to high levels of achievement and use data to identify the best routes towards that achievement. To achieve this task, effective campus leaders have to create environments that make teachers and school staffs feel valued and respected while encouraging their growth and development. In addition, similar environments must be created that make parents and community members feel valued, respected, and welcome (Brill, 2008). While doing all of this, effective school leaders must be artful in reducing the extent to which interpersonal issues steal time and resources away from academics (Johnson &Uline, 2005). What it takes to lead schools in these challenging times is the ability to diagnose complex problems, in a variety of areas, to ensure effective leadership (Portin, 2004).

Within any given day, principals face complex dilemmas that require more than a superficial response. Sergiovanni (1991) stated:

> Principals and other school leaders are faced with an important choice. On the one hand they can base their practice on the assumption that predetermined solutions

> exist for most of the problems they face in the form of research-based theories and techniques. On the other hand, they can base their practice on the assumption that few of the problems they face lend themselves to predetermined solutions and resign themselves to the difficult task of having to create knowledge in use as they practice. (p. 3)

Given the choices as described by Sergiovanni (1991), it would appear that principals are in an impossible situation as they attempt to blaze new trails. Often there is the complete absence of an established course for principals to follow. Despite the uncertainty, decisions have to be made and actions taken in an environment where principals can expect to be judged by their actions. Despite the ambiguity, many men and women are operating schools in a successful manner (Schlechty, Keynote Speech, January, 29, 2008).

Sergiovanni (1985) contended that "the work of principals takes the form of a seemingly endless series of practice episodes made up of intentions, actions and realities" (p. 10). This reality forces principals to question their practice. The typical response to this dilemma, noted Sergiovanni (1985), had been to attempt to do better at using past rationales and techniques. Basic knowledge perspectives need to change before practices change enough to make a difference. Reflective practice is a route to this change.

The role of principal has changed under the pressure of today's accountability standards. Being a principal has become more complex and demanding (Tirozzi, 2001). Today, the principal is valued less for decisiveness and firmness and more for flexibility and sensitivity to complex environments (Rohland, 2002). Despite the changing in the role of the principal, expectations remain that has principals retain their managerial roles.

Currently, principals have a dual function within schools. First, they are the chief executive responsible for the general management of the school and next they are the leading professional responsible for leading teachers (Neil, Carlisle, Knipe& McEwen, 2001). According to Tirozzi (2001), focus must shift from management and administration to leadership and vision for principals to be leaders of tomorrow's schools. This evolution of the role of principal is "taking place in a context where future and past, change and continuity, are in conflict" (Rohland, 2002, p. 21).

Flawed thought processes can reduce the quality of principals' decisions. Opportunity for orderly and deliberative thinking can be hard to come by due to the frequency and seriousness of problems that face today's school principal (Davis, 2005). In a study of ongoing professional development programs for school administrators, it was noted that reflection on practice was critical; however, time to do it was difficult. The participants agreed that one of the primary reasons for unsuccessful campus leadership was a lack of reflection on leadership practice (Zellner, Jinkins, Gideon, Doughty, & McNamara, 2002). Even though time is limited, decisions made by principals carry great weight. At times diagnosing and analyzing complex problems require immediate decisions; however, the decisions made by effective school leaders during this period of immediacy are not ad hoc. Every decision made by a school principal either furthers the school's goals or gives the message that the schools goals are not important (Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, &Gundlach, 2003). Reflective practice is a process for developing a principal's expertise in problem solving, decision–making and complex thinking (Short & Reinhart, 1993).

Statement of the Problem

Today's principals work in a setting that has become increasingly complex. "The reshaping of the principal's role is taking place in a context where future and past, change and continuity, are in conflict" (Rohland, 2002, p. 21). Sergiovanni (1991) furthered this when describing patterns of school practice as "characterized by a great deal of uncertainty, instability, complexity, and variety" (p .5). Principals have struggled with balancing their managerial duties with visionary leadership (Tirozzi, 2001). Effective leadership can be problematic in today's educational setting. According to Day (2000), to be a good and effective principal in changing times, a principal needs the ability to engage reflectively in a broad range of contexts. Ways in which principals are able to utilize reflective practice to improve their effectiveness are not widely studied. In order to effectively lead their schools in today's educational climate, principals need to expand their arsenal of leadership strategies.

Reflective practice is a process that principals can utilize to develop expertise in problem solving, decision–making, and complex thinking (Short & Reinhart, 1993). Schuttloffel (1999) identified reflective practice as a tool to remediate inadequacies in the decision–making process. Sergiovanni (1991) described reflective principals as being "in charge of their professional practice" (p. 10), not passively accepting solutions and mechanically applying them. Day (2000) suggestedthat in order for principals to be effective, they need to nurture their critical thinking through reflection.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current qualitative study was to explore the extent and impact of principals' use of reflective practice. An understanding of conditions that surround

reflective practice in the daily life of a school principal was revealed through examining the accounts of their lived experiences. The study furthered the research on reflective practice and its use by school principals.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following central research question: What was the value of reflection towards principals' decision–making and leadership effectiveness? Examining the perceptions of principals themselves, the following questions were incorporated for the study:

1. How did principals conceptualize reflective practice in their decision–making?
2. How did principals utilize reflective practice?
3. How did principals construct a setting to utilize reflective practice?
4. How did reflective practice impact leadership practices?

Significance of the Study

The role of principal is critical to the success of schools. Leadership roles exhibited by effective principals are vital to the continuous change that educational reform has initiated. Principals act as facilitators of change, serving as "architects, engineers, constructors, and pedestrian's all at once and on the go" (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, &Montie, 2006, p. 213). Reflective practice can aid principals in effectively dealing with change. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) stated that "reflective practice is based on a belief that organizational change begins with individuals. Unless we as educators change the way we do things, there will be no meaningful educational change" (p. 1). During times of critical change, decision–making becomes more challenging. Decisions made without thought or reflection can lead to negative educational outcomes.

Therefore, principal reflection is essential to effective leadership and decision–making through the change process, and the study of reflection can encourage and improve its use by principals.

Today's principals must deal with an educational system that is both complex and dynamic which forces them to fuse the complexities of their roles with the complexities of the dilemmas they face (Rohland, 2002). Effective principals in successful schools know how to skillfully negotiate these complexities (Johnson &Uline, 2005). Focusing on the complexities of schools is critical. According to Greenfield (1987), principals can make sense of the complexity in their roles through examining and reflecting upon their beliefs, intentions, and actions. Examining the use of reflective practice in managing complex issues can assist principals in gaining insight into methods of improving their decision–making processes with the goal of more effective educational practices.

Time is a valuable commodity for a school principal. Day to day activities become hectic, forcing principals into on-the-spot decision–making (Greenfield, 1987). Polite (2000) found that the principal's workday was fragmented due to administrative tasks while Rohland (2002) noted that fragmentation was due to principals responding to immediate problems. It is evident that sustained, uninterrupted time is rare for a school principal. This condition is not conducive for reflective practice. Investigating how principals find time to reflect may lead to a better understanding of concrete practices that help facilitate reflective practice.

Delimitations of the Study

The following delimitations were applicable to this study:

1. The study drew upon participants from south Texas school districts and their perceptions within their particular settings could not be generalized beyond the participants.
2. The perceptions were based solely on the participants' responses to interview questions and observational data.
3. The study was limited to covering reflective practice and not other leadership practices.

Definitions of Terms

Constructivism: A philosophy of learning that follows the premise that learners, having prior knowledge to utilize as a basis for hypotheses, will construct their own set of content to solve problems (Leonard, 2002).

Critical Reflection: A level that moves past the acquisition of new knowledge and understanding into a level in which the practitioner evaluates existing assumptions, values, and perspectives (Cranton, 1996).

Espoused Theory: A stated set of beliefs and thoughts (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Knowing-in Action: Knowledge revealed through the skillful execution of tasks. Often individuals are characteristically unable to make it verbally explicit (Waters, 2005).

Phenomenology: A study of the world as perceived by an individual when placed in a state of consciousness where there is reflection being utilized in an effort to be free of everyday biases and beliefs (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003).

Reflection-in-Action: This reflection occurs while a problem is being addressed and the expected outcome is unknown. This process is conscious yet is difficult to verbalize. Reflection-in-action involves thinking about a problem in a new way (Waters, 2005).

Reflection-on-Action: Reflection that is consciously undertaken after an event (Waters, 2005).

Reflective Practice: Currently, no universally accepted definition exists for a definition of reflective practice. However, there are many different perspectives as to meaning (York-Barr et al., 2006). For this study, the following perspective adequately serves as a definition: "deliberate thinking about action, with a view to its improvement" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p. 40).

Organization of the Study

The study was presented in five chapters. Chapter I included the Introduction, Statement of the Problem, Purpose of Study, Research Questions, Significance of the Study, Assumptions, Delimitations and Limitations of the Study, Definition of Terms, and Organization of the Study. The Review of Literature followed in Chapter II. It began with an introduction and followed with sections that cover perspectives, theoretical foundations, stages of reflection, reflective techniques, and reflection and the principal. Chapter III described the methodology of the study. Research design, population and sample, instrumentation, and procedures were other areas to be examined. Finally, data analysis, reliability and validity were discussed. Chapter IV described the analysis of data. It began with an introduction and followed with sections that covered each research question and its respective emergent theme. The last chapter, Chapter V, began with an

introduction and followed with a summary of data analysis, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Leadership is critical for school improvement. Schools and society are changing and becoming more diverse, while standards and accountability are increasing for school principals. The use of reflective practice provides principals with tools to meet the complex nature of dilemmas facing educators (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

The aim of this literature review was to examine how reflection impacted principals' efforts in effective school leadership. The first section addressed the numerous perspectives that existed for reflection. Following the perspectives was a review of the theoretical foundations of reflective practice as established by Dewey (1910), van Manen (1991) and Schon (1983). The third section outlined the models involved in reflective practice that various scholars used in describing their reflective models that were founded from theory. This was followed by a description of the most common techniques used in reflection. Concluding the literature review was a review of reflective practice in relation to the principalship.

Perspectives

A review of the literature on reflection showed that there was much variation in definition. Eraut (2004) noted, "as 'reflection' has many meanings and can be found embedded in many different forms of practice some charting of these variations is needed if we are to avoid generalizing over too wide a range of reflection contexts" (p. 1). "'Reflective practice' was in danger of becoming a catch all title..." according to Bleakley (1999, p. 317). Others made similar observations. When discussing preservice

teachers, Ward and McCotter (2004) noted that "students do not automatically know what we mean by reflection; often they assume reflection is an introspective after-the-fact description of teaching. Reflection...has been an invisible process to many of our preservice teachers" (p. 255). This review was not an attempt to list the full array of the definitions, rather, to present a basis for understanding the complexity of defining the term. While there were several definitions of reflection in the literature, the number of articles that did not contain a definition far out-numbered the ones providing a definition.

Dewey (1910) stated that reflection was the "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in lights of the grounds that support it and the further consequences to which it leads" (p. 6). Elaborating on this broad definition, Dewey (1910) described such thought as conscious and voluntary, based on evidence and rationality, and supported by a disposition of open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility. Thus, being reflective meant not simply the ability to think using certain processes, but also to value and act upon certain habits of mind.

According to van Manen (1991), reflective practices can be broadly defined as a "form of human experience that distances itself from situations in order to consider the meanings and significance embedded in these experiences" (p. 100). Van Manen (1991) also defined reflection in relation to one's ability to make deliberate choices. He wrote:

> Reflection is a fundamental concept in educational theory, and in some sense it is just another word for 'thinking'. To reflect is to think. But reflection in the field of education carries the connotation of deliberation, of making choices, of coming to decisions about alternative courses of actions. (p. 98)

Schon (2000) detailed how a teacher might use reflection-in-action to solve a problem in the classroom:

> An artful teacher sees a child's difficulty in learning to read not as a defect in the child but as a defect of his own instruction. And because the child's difficulties may be unique, the teacher cannot assume that his repertoire of explanations will suffice, even though they are at the tongue's end. He must be ready to invent new methods and must endeavor to develop in himself the ability of discovering the solution. (p. 66)

This described careful, sensitive observations of classroom events, reflection on the meaning of those observations, and then a decision to act in a certain way. The actions were not separate, fragmented steps, but a continuous fluid action. Schon (1987) explained:

> When the practitioner reflects-in-action in a case he [she] perceives as unique, paying attention to phenomena and surfacing his intuitive understanding of them, his [her] experimenting is a once exploratory, move testing, and hypothesis testing. The three functions are fulfilled by the very same actions. (p. 72)

Rudney and Guillaume (1990) provided similar perspectives. Rudney and Guillaume (1990) argued that "reflective teaching requires an active and persistent exercise of judgment about curricular or instruction issues" (p. 13). Deliberation was included in this description of reflection. Deliberation helped teachers identify which actions were appropriate or inappropriate. Pennington (1992) defined reflective teaching as "deliberating on experience" (p. 47). Greenfield (1987) compared the reflective process to "engaging in an internal dialogue with one's self using experience, intuition,

and trial and error thinking in defining and solving a problem or dilemma" (p. 275). Richert (1990) described reflection as "the capacity and orientation to make informed and intelligent decisions about what to do, when to do it, and why it should be done" (p. 509).

Ross's (1990) perspective of reflection recognized the importance of attitudes, attributes, and understandings that influence the kinds of difficulties that will be recognized and acknowledged how those difficulties will be interpreted and diagnosed, and what judgments are made about the desirability of various solutions. More specifically, Ross (1990) looked at reflection "as a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility for those choices" (p. 22). Ross (1990) stated "that the elements of reflective practices include:

- recognizing educational dilemmas;
- responding to a dilemma by recognizing both the similarities to other situations and the unique qualities of the particular situation;
- framing and reframing the dilemma;
- experimenting with the dilemma to discover the implications of various solutions; and
- examining the intended and unintended consequences of an implemented solution and evaluating it by determining whether the consequences are desirable" (p. 99).

Richards, in an interview with Farrell (1995), said:

> Critical reflection refers to an activity or process in which experience is recalled, considered, and evaluated, usually in relation to a broader purpose. It is a response

> to a past experience and involves conscious recall and examination of the experience as a basis for evaluation and decision-making and as a source for planning and action. (p. 95)

Peters (1991) recognized that reflective practice involves critical thinking and learning, both of which are processes that can lead to significant self-development. Saban, Killion, and Greene (1994) stated that "reflection is the practice of analyzing one's own action, decisions, or products by focusing on the process involved" (p. 16).

Jay and Johnson's (2002) perspective balanced the rigidity and open-endedness that often accompany many definitions. Jay and Johnson described reflection as follows:

> Reflection is a process, both individual and collaborative, involving experience and uncertainty. It is comprised of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one's thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others. One evaluates insights gained from that process with reference to: (1) additional perspectives, (2) one's own values, experiences, and beliefs, and (3) the larger context within which the questions are raised. Through reflection, one reaches newfound clarity, on which one bases changes in action or disposition. New questions naturally arise, and the process spirals onward (p. 76).

Theoretical Foundations

The theoretical works of Dewey, van Manen, and Schon were often cited as the foundation of reflective practice in literature. Their works combined to present reflection as a theory of understanding, coping with and learning from problems. The contributions of the three theorists guided explanations of the cognitive act of reflection and interact with complex problem solving in education.

It was difficult to find a bibliography, from an article or books with the word reflection in the title, without a reference to Dewey's, *How We Think* (1910). Most scholars traced the origins of reflection in education to Dewey. Dewey's theory provided a framework for an explanation of how people think about problems and how they learn from their experiences.

Reflective thinking is important not only as a tool for teaching, but as an aim of education, explained Dewey (1964), since "it enables us to know what we are about when we act. It converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action" (p. 211). Dewey (1910) described reflective thinking existing such as stream of consciousness, which included daydreams and random recollections. But, as he explained, reflective thinking separated itself from other forms of thinking in that it involved: 1) a state of uncertainty and hesitation, some sort of mental difficulty, in which thinking originates, and 2) searching and inquiring to find a solution that will resolve the troubled, uncertain mind. Dewey (1910) also reminded readers that reflective thinking is not necessary in all circumstances, but rather it is a particular type of thinking for particular circumstances. When competing solutions are to be considered, reflective thinking should be involved. But knowledge of reflective methods was not sufficient. There must have been a union of skilled methodology with attitude. Dewey (1964) spoke of the need for developing traits of character such as open-mindedness or sincerity, wholehearted interest, responsibility, as well as the need for a habit of thinking in a reflective manner. To Dewey (1910) reflective thinking represented an elaborate system of making sense of a confusing situation, in which there were several ways to respond, in order to act in a thoughtful manner.

Dewey (1910) explained that reflective thinking begins when a person encounters a situation that precipitates a state of confusion, doubt or apprehension, and decides to deal with it. Attitudes, open-mindedness, wholeheartedness, and responsibility, influences a person's decisions to begin reflective thinking about the problem they encounter and impact the phases of a person's reflective thinking. Dewey (1910) described five such phases: suggestion, intellectualization, guiding idea (hypothesis), reasoning, and testing the hypothesis by action. Dewey (1910) asserted that the five phases do not progress through a fixed sequence and that there is no set method. Individual reflective processes differ, and particular phases may be repeated to more clearly define the problem. Dewey (1910) continued to explain that the process changes with different people and at different times so that, in some instances, a phase may be missing entirely or subsumed within another phase.

Dewey (1910) also argued that attitudes, experiences, and judgments influence the form and outcome of reflective thinking. He proposed that reflection is important in the change processes through the reconstruction or the reorganization of experiences. Dewey encouraged educators to be thoughtful students of their own practice, rather than followers of prescription or routines. He maintained that educators should investigate their practice through inquiry. Dewey (1910) warned of placing pre-service teachers into the schools before they develop the habit of reflection. He felt they could be overly influenced by existing practices, diminishing the potential for reflection, inquiry and experimentation, and encouraging mindless imitation (Dewey, 1910).

Like Dewey, Max van Manen was a major contributor to the study of reflective thinking in teacher education. Van Manen (1991) developed a framework for

understanding the development of reflectivity which had levels that served as benchmarks for monitoring progression and growth as a teacher's level of self-efficacy enhanced their reflective practice. Van Manen (1991) offered three basic levels of reflection in teaching: the technical, practical, and critical levels of reflection.

The technical level of reflection takes into consideration the efficiency, and effectiveness of means to achieve certain ends, which are not open to criticism or modification (Hatton & Smith, 1995). Technical reflection refers to reflection used to examine skills, strategies, and methods. Such reflection is used in analysis of achievement of predetermined goals without giving much consideration to contextual influences within and outside of the classroom. At this level the contexts of the classroom, school, community, and/or society are not seen as linked to the problem (van Manen, 1977). The technical level of reflection stresses administrative behavior and management skills and recognizes that technical activity is how decisions are implemented. However "the reflective practitioner also engages in a cycle of behavior that makes it possible to interpret not only what is happening but also (and perhaps more importantly) why it happened or what ought to be happening" (van Manen, 1977). This model does not minimize the importance of technical skills but recognizes that this was a starting point rather than an end point for professional growth. This lowest level of reflection was labeled by van Manen (1977) as the "empirical-analytical paradigm."

The practical level of reflection, as van Manen (1991) explained, is a complex concept that explains much of what teachers do every day. While the technical level emphasizes prediction and control, the practical level represents understanding. This type of understanding, however, is not based on making predictions and exerting control over

the environment. Instead it entails an interest in taking the "right" action and asking questions such as "what I ought to do" (Grundy, 1987, p. 13). Grundy explains:

> While the technical interest draws from the empirical analytical scientific tradition, suggested by its emphasis on generating law-like hypotheses, the practical interest draw from the historical-hermeneutic sciences. This is apparent in the practical interest's association with interpretation and holistic understanding of action. (p. 13)

The importance of skill in the technical level is supplanted by judgment and taste: "Taste...constitutes a special way of knowing. It belongs in the area of reflective judgment...Both taste and judgment are evaluations of the object in relation to the whole to see if it fits with everything else, whether, the, it is 'fitting'" (Gadamer, 1979, p. 36).

Van Manen (1991) described the practical level as guided by a concept of knowledge that focuses on techniques, control, efficiency, and effectiveness. Van Manen (1991) also described the practical as communicative understanding, which means practical decisions are guided by the analysis and clarification of individual and cultural experiences, perceptions, and assumptions. Reflective thinking is used to frame and solve problems in ways that would help a person gain interpretative understanding of educational experience, including the nature and quality of that experience.

The third level that van Manen (1991) presented was critical reflection, which means practice guided by the constant inquiry into and critique of features of society that dominates and represses some people. This interpretation is based in critical theory. Reflective thinking focuses on the consideration of the worth of knowledge and the nature of the social conditions toward a goal of an educational system free of structures

that repress individuals or promote inequality among groups. The critical level addresses the purpose for a decision and provides the substantive "why" governing action. Reflective practitioners at the critical level bring their philosophy and values to bear when making decisions, therefore, decisions are not value neutral but the product of a more purposeful orientation. According to van Manen (1991) reflective practices could have been broadly defined as the "systemic inquiry into one's teaching practice and the deliberate attention to one's experience" (p. 12). When a professional operates at the critical level, he or she analyzes personal action within a wider socio-historical and politico-cultural context (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Zeichner& Lister, 1996).

Schon's (1987) view of reflection was concerned with action, experience, and values of the professional's knowledge. Reflection-in-action was the heart of Schon's (1983, 1987) model of professional expertise. "Reflection-in-action has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action" (Schon, 1987, p. 28). Professionals engaged in reflection-in-action are involved actively in the interpretation and development of their knowledge and reflect while in action. However, not all professionals reflect while in action all of the time. Schon (1987) noted that when professional practice is moving forward in an expected manner, the practical knowledge of the professional dictates practices. Professionals develop a repertoire of practice in which they learn to pay attention to factors and develop sets of responses to typical situations. Professionals develop automaticity of tacit knowledge. In cases of surprise or when the practitioner's intuitive sense is challenged, reflection-in-action is stimulated. "Stimulated by surprise, they turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action" (Schon, 1983, p. 50).Reflection-in-action is the intuitive knowing of

the professional, the actions of practice and the outcomes of practice. When the outcomes are unusual or undesirable, reflection-in-action may be prompted. "It is the entire process of reflection-in-action which is central to the 'art' by which practitioners sometimes deal well with situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and value conflict" (Schon, 1983, p. 50).

Schon (1987) identified three key distinctions of reflection-in-action. First, the reflection is conscious. Second, reflection-in-action questions the assumptions underlying knowledge-in-action in a critical manner. Third, reflection-in-action fosters experimentation. "What distinguishes reflection-in-action from other kinds of reflection is its immediate significance for action" (Schon, 1987, p. 20). Reflection-in-action occurs during action and could have been either implicit or explicit. Schon (2000) described it as a reflective conversation with a situation. The goal of the conversation is to come to an understanding of the situation and form a plan of action. As the practitioner continues this conversation, in search of the problem, he or she finds new information that adds to the puzzle.

Reflection-on-action is the act of looking back on past practice and making sense of the action after the fact. Included in reflection-on-action is a discovery of how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected action. "We may reflect on action, thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action are involved actively in the interpretation and development of their knowledge of classroom practice in terms of personally and professionally relevant frames of thinking" (Ethell & Mcmeniman, 2000, p. 87). "Reflection-on-action can be described as learning

from experience in a deliberative manner. Reflection-on-action helps make explicit the understanding that shaped practice" (Schon, 1983, p. 61).

Models of Reflection

During the past several decades, education has seen an increased interest in reflective practice with the development of a plethora of reflective models. Paradigmatically, many differed sharply in purpose and method while others shared many similarities. Van Manen (1977) inferred that reflective growth is sequential and that one naturally moves through stages. As well, it was suggested that as one moves through the stages, it becomes no longer a function of meeting role expectations, but of carrying them out affably. Grimmett's (1989) distinctions however, suggested that practitioners could operate at any reflective level depending on purpose and method. It is conceivable that a practitioner may reconstruct assumptions about a matter for one situation and decide practice through information generated by consultants for another.

Louden (1989) presented a framework in his attempt to cut through the variety of ways for which reflection is used. He presented four methods or forms of reflection thatincluded introspection, replay and rehearsal, enquiry, and spontaneity. Introspection, which is similar to contemplation or meditation, involves looking inward and thinking and feeling about an issue. The next form, replay and rehearsal, includes discourse on thinking about a past or future event. Enquiry involves action, discourse and thinking in a deliberate process of inquiry. The final form, spontaneity, does not involve preconceived thinking but seizing the moment and making changes immediately.

Sergiovanni (1991) pursued the development of a reflective practice model to illustrate how knowledge is informed in practice. His model had interrelated components,

practice episodes, theories of practice and antecedents. Administrative work is constructed of a context, practice episodes are influenced by theories of practice that he called "bundles of beliefs and assumptions..." (p. 10) about ones perceptions of how things work, consequently functioning as "mindscapes and platforms" (p. 10). "Theories of practice do not just emerge but are formed and shaped by a number of antecedents" (p. 12). Antecedent conditions extend the context of reflective practice even further by considering one's values, craft knowledge, self-knowledge and theoretical knowledge. Sergiovanni (1991) combined the different contexts of knowledge into four different levels of reflective practice. The first level (Technical) deals with cognitive-rational thought and theoretical knowledge. Following this is the second level (Interpretive) which covers craft knowledge and tacit knowledge. Next, the third level (Personal) entails an individual's self-understanding and self-management. Finally, the fourth level (Critical) extends into moral development and moral consciousness.

According to Osterman and Fishbein (2001), reflective practice aims to create behavioral change through a process that explores and contrasts theory and practice. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) placed reflective practice in a constructivist paradigm and describe it as an experiential learning cycle that consists of four stages: experience, observation and analysis, reconceptualization, and experimentation. In the first stage, the practitioner steps back to examine the experience, looking at intentions, actions, and outcomes. In the process of observing and analyzing the experience, additional dimensions of the problem emerge and act as a stimulus to learning. The practitioner seeks for new understanding and new strategies when confronted with awareness that actions are not consistent with values or that actions are not consistent with values or

actions are not effective. The new ideas are tested in action and through successful experience; new behaviors and ideas are integrated into patterns of action. "In essence, reflective practice is an action research process where the researcher(s) identify a problem, gather additional data,and, with the new insights emerging from analysis of the data, develop an action plan. With implementation, assessment, and continued refinement of the plan, the cycle of reflective practice continues" (Osterman, 2001, p. 4).

Smyth (1989) incorporated a critical perspective into his version of the reflective cycle. His cycle contains four steps: describing, informing, confronting, and reconstructing. According to Willis (1999), Smyth's model was an "expressive phenomenological approach that can serve to bring to light the experienced quality of episodes of practice and thus can offer considerable elaboration particularly to the describing phase in the reflective practice cycle" (p. 92). The cycle starts with describing, in which a significant event is brought into thought and described. Informing, the next step, can be interpretative reflection—looking for typicality and significance in the event, and critical reflection—looking to see the power relations in the event. The third step, confronting, has fellow practitioners assist practitioners to compare their "theories in practice" with their espoused theories. The last step, reconstructing, is a process where practitioners analyze the evidence of practice and devise new ways of proceeding.

Polite (2000) reported on a study of school principals that instituted a reflective practice program. The reflective thinking projects that the principals are involved in uses ordered reflective steps. "'Visioning—Critical Reflection (desired outcome)' is the first step in the process. Principals are asked to spend time considering what should be occurring with the target practice selected and to consider the ideal outcomes and persons

who will support the planned activities"(Polite, 2000, pp. 7-8). This step requires structured reflection and reflective conversation that include perspectives from peers, teachers, and parents. According to Polite (2000):

> "Reflection for Action" (consider the current state) is the second step in the process. At this point, the principal considers what is happening at his/her school with respect to the target practice prior to any interventions. "Technical Reflection"(how will you cause change?) is the next step in the reflective process. At this step in the process, the principals are ready to begin designing and implementing a plan of action to bring about change. (p. 9)

"Interpretive reflections" (what are the implications of the change) is the last step in the process. The implications of change emerge after plan implementation and an understanding of the implications are critical to the process.

Jay (1999) described three types of reflective thought—descriptive, comparative, and evaluative—that combined to create a deep thinking process. The first type of reflection, descriptive, simply means that a matter upon which one is reflecting is described. Jay (1999) explained:

> This may involve describing a classroom concern (reflection as problem solving), describing a bias or an assumption (reflection as frame analysis), describing a theory (reflection to link theory to practice), describing feelings or a tone or a level of understanding (reflection as mindfulness), to name a few examples. (p. 16)

Descriptive reflection involves finding what is significant in a matter, recognizing the significant features to find the causes and consequences, change them if necessary, and put them back into context to create change.

The second type of reflection that Jay (1999) described is comparative reflection. Comparative reflection compares different interpretations of a matter. When reflecting on a matter comparatively,

> we ask ourselves (or better yet, as other) how we might reframe a situation differently. A school counselor, an ethnographer, or a parent will use a much different lens than a teacher. Culturally diverse people may offer competing interpretations. A student's point of view also provides valuable insight. Comparative reflection involves seeking others' opinions to inform, confirm, or refute our own limited perspectives. (p. 17)

Evaluative reflection, the third type of reflection described by Jay (1999), involves making a judgment. Through evaluative reflection, a matter is considered "in light of the different perspectives with an eye toward changing it" (Jay, 1999, p. 17). Evaluative reflection evaluates the implications of practice against goals, morals, values, and ethics. This evaluation aids in determining which course of action is a good one. This avenue of thinking raises the question of whose perspective is being used. Because of this "evaluative reflection implies a moral responsibility to not only to understand a situation or see it from another point of view, but to face the consequences of such insight and make concordant kinds of decisions or transformations of thought" (Jay, 1999, p. 18). Traveling through descriptive, comparative, and evaluative types of thought can result in

powerful understanding. This process leads to ideas that are thorough, complex, and meaningful and take one to a deeper level of understanding.

Schuttloffel (1999) presented a seven-step process of generic reflective practice. This model was created to assist Catholic educational leaders in decision–making. The steps included:

1. Identify the dilemma
2. Search for multiple solutions
3. Test and evaluate potential solutions
4. Choose the best solution
5. Formulate a plan-of-action
6. Implement the plan-of-action
7. Evaluate the results and adjust as necessary

When identifying a dilemma, according to Schuttloffel (1999), it is important for the practitioner to consider it from multiple perspectives. This consideration may lead the practitioner to conclude there are several problems embedded in any particular dilemma. These problems require prioritization while comparing the competing values which leads to the next step-searching for multiple solutions.

The search for multiple solutions requires an investment of time. It is possible to resolve a dilemma in multiple manners. Because of this, as the practitioner enters the third stage, it is recommended that possible solutions are tested and modified as needed. At this stage it is important for the practitioner to "envision the positive and negative outcomes associated with each" solution (Schuttloffel, 1999, p. 36).

The next step, according to Scuttloffel (1999), is to choose the best solution and follow that with formulating a plan-of-action. The plan-of-action can assist practitioners in anticipating the reaction of various individuals and groups. From there the necessary modifications may be made to the plan that will be needed prior to implementation, the next step.

This process is complete as the results are evaluated and adjusted as necessary. It is important to take time to evaluate the ramifications of decisions. Through evaluation, practitioners "create professional knowledge for dealing with dilemmas. This is a desired outcome of reflective practice" (Schuttloffel, 1999, p. 37).

Reflective Techniques

Reflective techniques are numerous and depend upon the practitioners' perspectives and personality characteristics. Effective reflections require productive use of techniques designed for critical thinking "Fostering reflective practice requires far more than telling people to reflect and then simply hoping for the best" (Russell, 2005, p. 203). The literature revealed two common avenues for reflection. Reflective techniques were done either through a written format, generally done introspectively, and through collaborative relationships.

Within the research, reflective journaling can take on many different versions. According to Ashby and Krug (1998), "Reflection takes many forms. Keeping a diary is one means of reflection. Another is exchanging letters with a colleague. Some principals share their reflections in articles for newsletters and professional journals" (p. 44). Fendler (2003) discussed how journal writing can empower the writer in that "self-disclosure can constitute a new self" and help "to develop an opinion and come to a

critical realization" (p. 22). "The easiest way to do this is through reflective journal writing. Often, selections of this writing may be included in a professional portfolio" (p. 21). Jay and Johnson (2002) discussed the use of the reflective seminar in which reflective practice is developed through dialogue and the implementation of a portfolio that requires reflective writing in multiple repetitions with support from a mentor. Autobiographical narratives are another avenue that "can provide writers with great insight about how perceptions are shaped by experience" (Fendler, 2003, p. 22).

Other techniques of reflection utilize collaborative relationships with others that will assist in insightful thought. Merickel (1998) pointed out that utilizing a supervisory relationship to review intentionality, beliefs and base assumptions that surround a dilemma can aid in clarifying patterns and themes necessary for learning and professional growth. A semi-structured shadowing program was developed by Polite (1997) to facilitate technical and interpretive levels of reflection of principals. Principals were shadowed by a professional development coach, engaged in feedback sessions and participated in a three-day retreat. Greenfield (1987) reported that shadowing and group supports have value in reducing principals' sense of isolation and enable them to reflect on their actions. Reflection may occur in small group settings such as support groups, graduate seminars, or book study groups (Ashby & Krug, 1998).

Reflection and the Principal

With the heavy emphasis on standards and accountability in education, principals face increasing challenges meeting the complexities that entail day-to-day life on a campus. Being an effective principal requires mastery of a myriad of leadership activities. According to Ashby and Krug (1998), in recent years:

> an extensive body of literature developed from attempts to describe activities that characterized principals of effective schools as instructional leaders. One difficulty with this approach is that there are many different kinds of school settings, and the range of ways in which leadership can be exercised in virtually limitless. (p. 35)

It is sometimes difficult for principals to detect the importance of their leadership activities. "It is not by chance that some principals are more effective than others, even when all are faced with the same demands and constraints. Effective principals have a better understanding of how the worlds of schooling and school leadership work..." (Sergiovanni, 1995, p.29). Accountability has forced principals to think creatively, critically, and contextually about dilemmas. Ashby and Krug (1998) noted:

> If we have learned one thing about effective leaders, it is that they come in all sizes and shapes. What appears to distinguish them from others isn't a distinctive set of characteristics but a distinctive approach that emerges from their personal conceptualization of the task. Effective leaders find diverse, creative ways to accomplish the basic leadership tasks in the ways they interact with teachers, students, parents, and others. These ways are compatible with individual personalities and the contexts in which they operate. In short, effective instructional leaders don't do different things than ineffective leaders; they do things differently. (p. 37)

In Texas, principals are governed by standards that are handed down by the Texas Education Agency. Those standards serve as the foundation for the individual assessment, professional growth plan, and continuing professional education activities

required for principals. There are seven broad areas incorporated into the Texas Standards for Principals (2001). Each area consists of specific sub-skills. The seven broad areas include:

1. Learner-centered values and ethics of leadership: A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity and fairness, and in an ethical manner.
2. Learner-centered leadership and campus culture: A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students and shapes campus culture facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.
3. Learner-centered human resources leadership and management: A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by implementing a staff evaluation and development system to improve the performance of all staff members, selects and implements appropriate models for supervision and staff development, and applies the legal requirements for personnel management.
4. Learner-centered communications and community relations: A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
5. Learner-centered organizational leadership and management: A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students through

leadership and management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

6. Learner-centered curriculum planning and development: A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the design and implementation of curricula and strategic plans that enhance teaching and learning; alignment of curriculum, curriculum resources, and assessment; and the use of various forms of assessment to measure student performance.
7. Learner-centered instructional leadership and management: A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a campus culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Mastery of principal standards requires principals dig deeply into their repertoire of effective leadership skills.

The principal standards established by the Texas Education Agency indicate a wide variety of complex skills needed for a principal to be successful in facing the dilemmas that complicate education. Time restraints often impactdecision–making "The hectic nature of the principals' day-to-day activities forces them to make a host of on-the-spot decisions" (Greenfield, 1987, p. 274). This combined with the complex nature of dilemmas facing principals in regards to standards they are required to meet makes the job complicated. Schuttloffel (1999) stated:

> Undoubtedly, the principal's life and work would be less complicated were it possible to solve dilemmas by imposing pre-determined, quick-fix solutions—a

> "cookbook" approach to school management. Unfortunately, however, this is not always possible and perhaps not preferable if only because principals who attempt to solve dilemmas in this way find themselves running from one problem to the next and implementing short-term solutions, each of which may create new problems and dilemmas. In this "firehouse" or "crisis-management" decision-making process, principals fail to identify the root causes for dilemmas, search for multiple solutions, test and evaluate the solutions, choose what portend to be the best solution, implement a coherent plan-of-action and, as events unfold, evaluate the results and adjust as necessary. (p. 41)

Polite (2000) commented that the complex nature of the principalship requires a principal to no longer think exclusively of their management skills that are used in effective decision-making, but to also consider the reasoning behind their decisions and their consequences. It is important for principals to move beyond a focus on techniques of school administration to focus on the critical purpose of school administration. Central to this move is a shift towards reflective practice. By becoming more reflective, principals can see patterns in their behavior, analyze situations on the spot, and clarify their own goals (Greenfield, 1987). Reflective practice challenges principals to think not only in terms of *how* (technical) to solve problems, but *why* (critical) when considering a solution, and *what* (interpretive) message the decisions send to the school community (Polite, 1997, Schhuttloffel, 1999). Sergiovanni (1991) concurred that reflective practice assists principals in mastering the complex. He stated that reflective principals

> do not passively accept solutions and mechanically apply them. They do not assume that the norm is a one best way to practice, and they are suspicious of easy answers to complex questions. They are painfully aware of how context and situations vary, how teachers and students differ in many ways, and how complex school goals and objectives actually are; they recognize that, despite difficulties, tailored treatments to problems must be the norm. As the same time reflective professional practice requires that principals have a healthy respect for, be well informed about, and use the best available theory and research and accumulated practice wisdom. (p. 10)

The gap between theory and practice is approached in a variety ways by principals. Most principals learn theory in their educational and administrative preparation programs while fewer connect that theory into practice. Alumni of educational administration programs typically report that the study in those programs had little relevance to their practice and cite the theory learned as irrelevant. Students in these programs reject the lessons of research as impractical or inapplicable because they lack the validity in the context of their experience (Osterman & Fishbein, 2001). Starratt (1995) noted that theories in a book on a shelf in the principals' office do not guide a principals' vision. Questions, interpretations, and commendations are ways the leader keeps the vision close to the action.

Schon (1983) introduced the term, *reflective practice*, as a way of overcoming the dichotomy between theory and practice. He concluded that professionals did not deduce solutions to dilemmas from theories they learned in graduate schools. Most of the time, professionals were forced to face dilemmas as unique problems that did not conform to

model problems that were taught in the university. Dilemmas faced in practice always involved more contextual variables than the reduced variables of the theories and models studied in their educations.

Traveling between the practical realities of practice and the ideals represented in theory while meeting the standards required of a principal forces individuals that desire success and effectiveness to become artisans of their craft. Blumberg (1989) as cited in Sergiovanni (1991) used those terms in describing the nature of administrative work. Artisans are described as knowing what results are acceptable in a given problematic situation, having an understanding of the nature of the materials they work with, mastering the basic technology that undergirds their craft and employing the technology effectively, and most important, knowing what to do and when to do it. Sergiovanni (1991), commenting on Blumberg's (1989) analogy, summarized that:

> reflective principals practice as artisans by bringing together deep knowledge of relevant techniques and competent application of tried-and-true "rules of thumb" with a feel for their practice and a penchant for reflecting on this practice as they create something of practical utility. Craft knowledge represents an anchor equal to and sometimes superior to theoretical knowledge in making up one's theories of practice and informing one's professional practice. The hallmark of the artisan is ability to reflect on practice. (p. 3)

In summary, Dewey (1910), van Manen (1977), and Schon (1987) provided the theoretical foundation behind the notion that reflective practice is an essential component of effective decision–making. Many others, (Jay, 1999; Louden, 1989; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Schuttloffel, 1999; Sergiovanni, 1991; Smyth, 1989) provided school

administrators with models in the utilization of reflective practice. According to Brill (2008), regular reflection on practice is imperative for a school administrator's growth and development. Brill (2008) continued by stating that" the art of leadership not only involves communicating the vision, it also involves charting a course, moving toward action, and motivating others to walk a particular path. Decision–making is the engine of educational leadership" (p. 99).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The study focused on school principal's use of reflective practice in their professional setting. The study also focused on the context in which principals utilize reflective practice and the process that was used by the principals. Examining the accounts of the lived experiences of school principal's use of reflective practice lead to an understanding of the extent of principals' use of reflective practice, the conditions that surrounded its use, and the benefits that were gained through its use. Ultimately, the purpose of this study was to further the limited research of the use of reflective practice by school principals.

This chapter will discuss 11 major topics. The introduction begins with a recap of the study and is followed by a section listing the research questions. Next the research methodology and the research design are described. Population and sample follows and are with a specific definition for each. After this, instrumentation and procedures are explained. Next, data analysis is explained in detail and followed by a section on reliability and validity. To conclude this chapter, a section summarizing the methodology is included.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following central research question: What is the value of reflection towards principals' decision–making and leadership effectiveness? Examining the perceptions of principals themselves, the following questions were incorporated for the study:

1. How did principals conceptualize reflective practice in their decision–making?
2. How did principals utilize reflective practice?
3. How did principals construct a setting to utilize reflective practice?
4. How did reflective practice impact leadership practices?

Research Methodology

Research and experience show that solutions to complex problems are not always interchangeable. The context of the problem was a key component in determining the effectiveness of a solution. Reflective practice addresses this situation by examining problems in their context (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). The importance of context in reflective practice and the complexity that is inherent within made qualitative research a natural design paradigm (Hancock, Ockleford, &Windridge 2007; Maxwell, 2005).

When considering design choices for doing research and considering the strengths and weaknesses of qualitative and quantitative methods, a pragmatic approach was used when selecting a qualitative method. "Some questions lend themselves to numerical answers; some don't" (Patton 2002, p. 13). Without the restraints of predetermined categories, qualitative research allowed for a study with more depth and detail (Patton, 2002). According to Hancock, Ockleford, and Windridge (2007), qualitative methodology should be used when exploring a new area where issues are not yet understood, how people experience something, or looking at real-life context. Maxwell (2005) stated that "the strengths of qualitative research derive primarily from its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers" (p. 22). He described five intellectual goals that were especially suited for qualitative research. They were:

1. "Understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in" (p. 22).
2. "Understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions" (p .22).
3. "Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new,'grounded' theories about the latter" (p. 22).
4. "Understanding the process by which events and actions take place" (p.23).
5. "Developing causal explanations" (p. 23).

Research Design

Phenomenological research focuses on the understanding of meaning of lived experiences (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Patton, 2002; Sokolowski, 2000; van Manen, 1990). This approach investigates how individuals make sense of experiences and transform those experiences into consciousness (Patton, 2002). The goal of phenomenology is to obtain a deeper understanding of the meaning of everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). According to Patton (2002), in order to reach this goal, it "requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon – how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 104). All of our understanding comes from the sensory experience of phenomena that must be described, explained, and interpreted. Because of this,

> phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in doing, develop a worldview.

> There is no separate (or objective) reality for people. There is only what they know their experience is and means. (Patton, 2002, p.106)

Sokolowski (2000) concurred by positing that consciousness and experience are intentional relationships that a person has to an object, regardless if that object is physical, a memory, or an imagination. Because of this, the mind does not exist only to itself, but the mind co-exists with the world.

Phenomenology was an appropriate methodology in the study of reflective practice. Reflection is at the heart of phenomenological inquiry. According to van Manen (1990), individuals cannot reflect on their lived experiences while living through the experiences. He stated that

> if one tries to reflect on one's anger while being angry, one finds that the anger has already changed or dissipated. Thus, phenomenological reflection is not introspective but retrospective. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through. (pp. 9-10)

He also added that "the insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (p. 77). The study sought to utilize the reflective nature that is inherent in phenomenology to explore reflective practice.

Population and Sample

The population for this study was public school principals from the Rio Grande Valley region of South Texas that exhibited characteristics of being reflective decision makers. To obtain names of these principals, superintendents were contacted for

recommendations. A letter describing the study and a description of a reflective principal was sent to all of the superintendents in the Rio Grande Valley region. This letter asked superintendents to recommend principals in their school district they felt met the description of a reflective principal. One week after mailing the letters, a follow-up email was sent to the superintendents as a reminder.

The selection of the sample was done purposefully. According to Patton (2002), the "logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" (p. 230). Patton (2002) described the type of purposeful sampling that was done in this study as typical case sampling. In typical case sampling, cases are selected with the assistance of key informants to help identify who and what is typical. To obtain the sample, a letter describing the study and a definition of a reflective principal was sent to all of the principals that were recommended by the superintendents. This letter requested their participation in the study. A follow-up email was sent one week later as a reminder. From the positive responses obtained from the principals, a selection of five individuals was purposefully selected for the study.

Instrumentation

Data for this study were gathered through interviews and observation. The first instrument used was standardized open-ended interviews. This process involved using a predetermined wording and sequence of questions (see Appendix A) that were determined in advance. Interviewees were asked the same questions in the same order. Questions were worded in an open-ended format. The strength of this approach came from the increased comparability of responses due to respondents answering the same questions (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Patton, 2002).

The second instrument used was the interview guide approach. This process involved outlining a set of topics and issues to be covered in advance. The interviewer determined the order and the wording of questions during the course of the interview. This style made the interview both conversational and situational. The strength of this approach laid in the ability to close gaps of data that may have resulted from the standardized open-ended interviews (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003; Patton, 2002).

Observation was the other instrument used to gather data for this study. Van Manen (1990) used the term close observation to refer to the process of observation by entering a person's life world and participating in it. He described the researcher as a gatherer of anecdotes. An important part of collecting anecdotes was recognizing "what parts of the 'text' of daily living are significant for one's study while it is happening" (p. 69). According to Patton (2002), observation allows the researcher to enter into and understand the context in which the study participants operate. He listed four strengths in using observation. They were:

1. The researcher is"better able to understand and capture the context within which people interact" (p. 262).
2. The researcher is allowed to be open, discovery oriented and inductive by having firsthand experience with the setting and people in the setting.
3. The researcher has the opportunity to make observations that would escape the participants.
4. The researcher has the opportunity to learn things that participants might be unwilling to disclose in an interview.

Procedures

The first step in the data collection procedures entailed contacting the 28 superintendents of the school districts within the Rio Grande Valley. A letter describing the study and a description of a reflective principal was sent to all of the superintendents and asked the superintendents to recommend principals in their school district that they felt met the description of a reflective principal. One week after mailing the letters, a follow-up email was sent to the superintendents as a reminder. Responses were gathered and a list of ten recommended principals was created.

Next, contact with the recommended principals was made. A letter describing the study and a description of a reflective principal was sent to all of the principals that were recommended by the superintendents. This letter requested their participation in the study. Along with the letter, a questionnaire for descriptive information and a consent form were included. A follow-up email was sent one week later as a reminder. From the positive responses obtained from the principals, a selection of five individuals was purposefully selected for the study. Cases were selected that represented a cross section of the population, being careful to maximize the variation of gender, race, years of experience and school. Cases selected were contacted to set up meetings for the standardized open-ended interview.

A standardized open-ended interview was conducted with each of the selected principals. The interview was recorded for transcription and field notes were taken. At the conclusion of the standardized open-ended interview, an appointment was made to conduct the interview guide approach and observation. During and after the time span that encompassed the interviews, transcription of the interviews occurred. Copies of the

transcripts were sent to the participating principals for verification. Transcripts and field notes were reviewed to assist in creating questions for the interview guide approach as well as for data analysis. Following the interview guide approach, observations of the principals in their educational settings were conducted and field notes taken. Once the data collection ceased, the data were compiled using Microsoft Word and pseudonyms were assigned to the participants. The data analysis that began during data collection continued. Figure 3.1 is a flowchart depicting the data collection procedures:

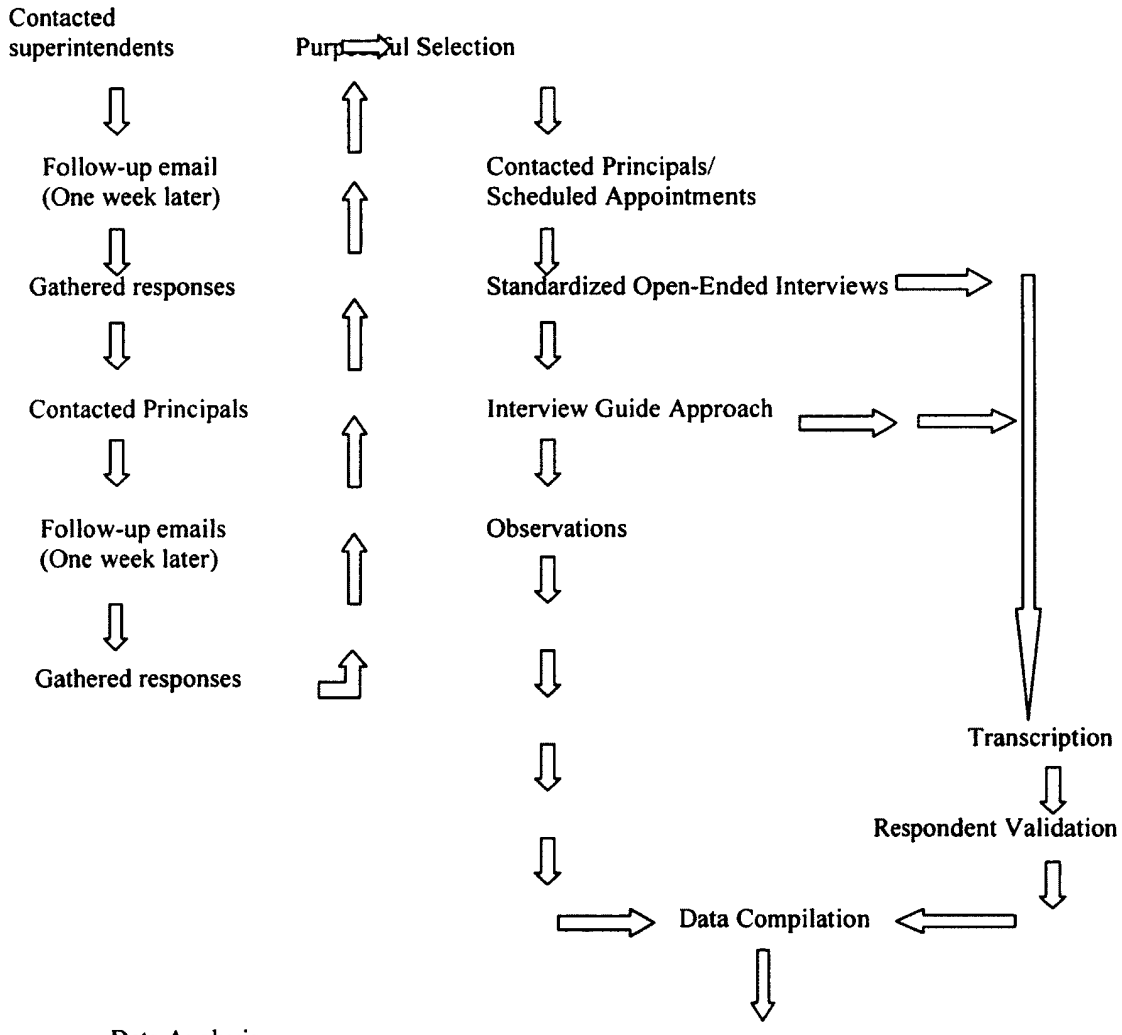

Figure 3.1. Data collection flowchart.

Data Analysis

No single formula exists for transforming qualitative data into findings (Creswell, 1998; Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). Patton (2002) stated that "because each qualitative study is unique, the analytical approach used will be unique" (p. 433). He continued by noting that there are an abundance of guidelines for analyzing qualitative data. Studying examples of qualitative analysis can be helpful; however these examples are not concrete rules. Application of guidelines requires judgment and creativity. The study synthesized the qualitative data analysis process established by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) with guidelines suggested by a variety of other authors.

Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) described data analysis as a fluid process that moves back and forth between steps. Patton (2002) stated a need for analysts to observe and adapt their own processes during qualitative analysis. Creswell (1998) demonstrated that qualitative data analysis acts as a spiral that revisits previous steps. The steps as presented served as a guide for data analysis. While sequential in nature, movement back and forth between steps was necessary, dependent upon the data analyzed.

The first step presented by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) involved getting to know the data. They stated that "good analysis depends on understanding the data. For qualitative analysis, this means you read and re-read the text" (p. 2). Maxwell (2005) concurred that the initial step in qualitative analysis was reading the data that was to be analyzed. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) continued by noting that it was important to write down any impressions and consider the quality of the data during this step. Patton

(2002) suggested that this step of data analysis began during data collection. This was a point where ideas for making sense of the data emerged.

The second step of the Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) process required that the analysis became more focused. Focus depended on the purpose of the evaluation and could have be done by question, event, or by case. The study was focused utilizing the research questions.

Focusing on the research questions led the study into the third step described by Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003). This step involved categorizing information. According to Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003), "this is the crux of qualitative analysis" (p. 2). Maxwell (2005) noted that the main categorizing strategy in qualitative analysis is coding and the goal of coding is to break apart "the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts" (p. 96). Patton (2002) added that without this type of classification there is chaos and confusion. The study coded using Taylor-Powell and Renner's (2003) suggestion utilizing preset and emergent categories. Preset categories were a derivative of the research questions. Emergent categories were defined after analysis of the data had begun and as a result of what the data revealed.

The fourth step in the Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) process involved identifying patterns and connections within and between categories. Maxwell (2005) noted that it was important that the patterns and connections did not focus primarily on similarities that sort data into categories independent of context. Relationships should have sought that connected statements and events into a coherent whole. Taylor-Powell and Renner (2003) also suggested that it was important not to overlook countervailing

responses to prevailing themes and to attempt to gain meaning within their context. The use of tables and matrices assisted in illustrating relationships across two or more categories (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Taylor-Powell & Renner 2003).

Taylor-Powell and Renner's (2003) last step involved interpreting the data. The study reviewed the data in its entirety, attempting to create generalizations through a synthesis of the themes that were identified (Creswell, 1998; Taylor-Powell & Renner (2003). The generalizations were reported in a written format (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002; Taylor-Powell & Renner 2003). Writing was a method of capturing and externalizing the process of thought on a phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). According to Patton (2002),

> the analyst should help readers understand different degrees of significance of various findings, if these exist. Because qualitative analysis lacks the parsimonious statistical significance tests of statistics, the qualitative analyst must make judgments that provide clues for the reader as to the writer's belief about variations in the credibility of different findings....Readers will ultimately make their own decisions and judgments about these matters based on the evidence you've provided, but your analysis-based opinions and speculations deserve to be reported and are usually of interest to readers given that you've struggled with the data and know the data better than anyone else. (p. 504)

A visual representation of the process of data analysis was depicted in Figure 3.2.

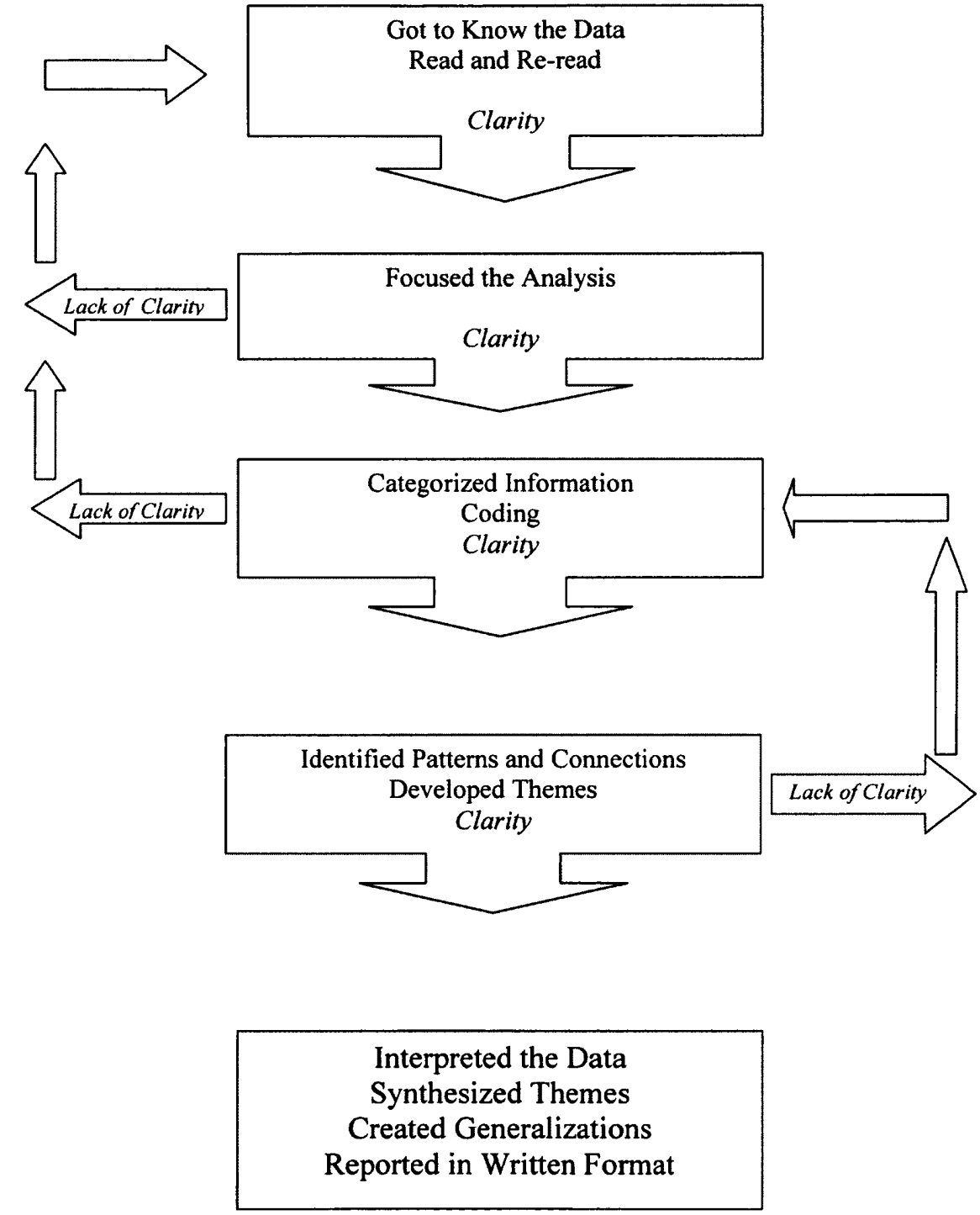

Figure 3.2. Data analysis flowchart: Qualitative data analysis process.

Reliability and Validity

The traditional, quantitative view of reliability is difficult to fit into a qualitative study. Some researchers (Morse as noted in Denzin& Lincoln, 1998; Stenbacka, 2001) felt that using the term reliability was not appropriate when discussing a qualitative study. Stenbacka (2001) argued that since reliability is concerned with measurement, then its relevance in qualitative research is minimized. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the term "dependability" (p. 300) is a more appropriate term. They went on to describe the congruence of reliability and validity in qualitative research by stating that "since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter" (p. 300). Patton (2001) added, in regards to the qualitative approaches that a researcher employs, that reliability is a consequence of validity in a study (p. 316).

An essential element for monitoring the validity of a qualitative study is through the use of methods and procedures (Maxwell, 2005). Listed are strategies that the study employed to verify validity.

1. Respondent validation –According to Maxwell (2005), this is the single most important way to avoid misunderstanding the meaning of what participants say and do as well identifying researcher biases and misunderstandings. Patton (2002) considered respondent validation as an important part of triangulation. Transcripts of the interviews were given to the respondents to check for errors and to insure the intent of the respondents' answers.
2. Rich data –Interviews enable the researcher to collect rich data that are detailed and varied enough to reveal a picture of what is going on. Such data requires verbatim transcripts of the interviews (Maxwell, 2005).

Superintendent recommendations of reflective principals created a pool of data rich individuals. Interviews with the selected principals were transcribed.

3. Triangulation –Patton (2002) noted that studies that utilize one method of data collection are more vulnerable to errors. Multiple methods of data collection which provide different types of data provides for cross-data consistency.
4. Maxwell (2005) commented that "this strategy reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method, and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations that one develops" (p. 112). Data was gathered through the use of a standardized open-ended interview, interview guide approach, and observation to insure the ability to triangulate the data.

Summary of Methodology

The approach to the study utilized a qualitative methodology with a phenomenological design. The research sample was obtained from recommendations made by superintendents from the Rio Grande Valley region of South Texas and based on a description of a reflective principal. Data was gathered by the use of standardized open-ended interviews followed by interview guide approaches and observations. Data analysis entailed exploring patterns and connections that existed within the data and revealing themes in an attempt to gain meaning within the context. Generalizations were created through a synthesis of the themes that were identified. Validity was monitored in the qualitative study through the use of respondent validation, collection of rich data, and triangulation.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

This study described the utilization of reflection and how that reflection contributed to the effectiveness of the principals' decision–making. The descriptions chronicled the challenges that principals faced daily in the highly complex world of managing and leading a campus. Through analysis of these descriptions, insight was gained into how the reflective principal operated in such a complex environment that lacked predefined answers to problems.

The established emergent themes were derived from the principals' descriptions of their experiences. These emergent themes were common to several but, perhaps, not all participants. The emergent themes were defined after analysis of preset categories that were derived from the research questions. The syntheses of this coding into emergent themes were the researcher's integration of the unique principals' experiences into a systematic description of the phenomena. Through multiple readings of the text and looking for patterns, the researcher discerned the themes in the descriptions of experiences and how these experiences related to each of the research questions.

Research Questions

The sequence of the interview questions corresponded with the sequence of the research questions. Interview questions followed the standardized open-ended interview and the interview guide approach formats. The specific research questions were

1. How did principals conceptualize reflective practice in their decision–making?

2. How did principals utilize reflective practice?
3. How did principals construct a setting to utilize reflective practice?
4. How did reflective practice impact leadership practices?

How Did Principals Conceptualize Reflective Practice in their Decision–making?

The participants were very thoughtful with their responses on the questions that were posed in order to gain understanding on how they conceptualized their reflective practice. The participants discussed the frequency in which they utilized reflective practice and what it looked like to them. They explained how diverse viewpoints and past experiences were utilized during reflective practice to fully understand a problem.

While reflecting on their own use of reflective practice, four out of five principals used language that indicated the frequency that reflective practice is utilized. Richard commented that he felt reflective practice "is an ongoing process" and added that he would "always try to look at other people's perspectives." Brian used similar language saying that "reflective practice is an ongoing...daily or as needed practice." He further explained that "it is a constant reflection, every minute of the day." Priscilla added that she would "constantly go back and think." Greg surmised about his use of reflective practice when problem solving that he would "always try and think and try to minimize mistakes and try not to do it again."

When asked to describe what reflective practice looked like, all the principals paused, took their time, and were very thoughtful in their answers. While each answer reflected their individual personality, the answers shared commonality as well. Richard, a former science teacher, saw reflective practice from an analytical view point. He stated that "a lot of it is visualizing....It would look exactly like the scientific method." His

science background was also evident when he said, "Reflective practice just means going back and analyzing hypotheses based on procedures that were followed." He later commented, "Reflective practice would be coming back and analyzing the results." Greg also described the need to visualize and added introspective thinking. He stated that he liked to write things down to try "to visualize it to determine the best route before I can make a decision." He summarized what reflective practice looks like by describing it as follows:

> *Looking within yourself and past decisions and what long term effects will be at the end. Before I make a decision I will think of an experience I have had related to it and try to foresee what will occur if I make a decision.*

When describing what reflective practice looked like, the word "scenario" was used to paint a description of the thinking process. For Blake, it was important that in his decision–making that he made "a judgment based on all the information versus just part of the information." To accomplish this, he related his approach:

> *I try to look back on any situation I have ever encountered or heard similar to it. I try to think of someone else similar and how they handled it. I try to think what the results were and the consequences of their decision—just different scenarios. I play out different scenarios in my head .... I have multiple contingencies based on every scenario. It looks like a web or an organizational chart depending or different scenarios that arise.*

Brian also used the word "scenario" in his description; however, he described reflective practice in a multitude of ways. He began by saying that it is "running scenarios...a lot of

that. Almost like playing chess. A lot of talking and thinking out loud--yeah, a lot of that. Conversations." He tried to clarify his thoughts by summarizing that:

> *It would be scenes of what happened-- part of it-- and it would be graphic organizers representing what happened and how it builds to other things—or branches off into two other things. A lot of voices—different people's voices—this person said that, this person said this. Faces of people that it impacted. A little bit of everything. A video player replaying it and graphic organizers.*

Priscilla also described reflective practice as having conversations in her head. Her mental picture of reflective practice involved her thoughts.

> *As they come in I decide if they [thoughts] are important or not and mentally put them into piles. It is almost like I am having a conversation inside my head. Believe it or not, it would not be as structured as people would think it would be. Because I am a math person, people would expect it to be very structured or very linear; it would not be that. My thoughts just pop up. .... Like a web map.*

In her summarization of her thoughts on reflective practice, she integrated sentiments that were shared by all the principals:

> *I guess every conversation you have, that is what you do. No matter what situation, formal or informal, that is how it comes across. You think about thinking. You take into account different experiences--your experience and other's experiences--what has happened in the past...I don't know any*

other way of doing that other than it just being part of your everyday practice.

Every principal placed a high importance on soliciting diverse points of view. This issue was interspersed into the answers to most questions, providing an abundance of data. The situation dictated whom the principal would approach to get the diverse viewpoints. Every principal was adamant that it was important to gather the opinion of others. Blake framed his description as a need to see a problem as a whole. He stated:

I think the only way you can make a quality decision is to get everybody's input. Not everybody is going to be the same-- depending on the issue, depending of the subject, once again. I think some people might have personal issues--personal values--that might make them feel a certain way, but I think it is important to look at true overall picture and not just focus on one item itself or one issue itself.

Brian shared the importance of seeing a problem in its entirety when he commented:

Bringing everybody in...I....put on my CSI cap and investigate every single thing. I don't really feel like I have a full picture unless I have heard from everybody... as many perspectives or views on the topic or whatever is being discussed that will help to provide more of a panoramic view of it and get a better picture of it.

Richard linked the importance of multiple viewpoints to his leadership style. He said that his participative type of leadership leads him to being "very big on shared decision–making." Through this style he gained the perspective of other people while still retaining the ultimate responsibility for decisions that are made. This was illustrated when he said:

> *Whenever you have a participative type leadership or management, people have more than a vote—they have a say. So, that is where you start building trust. They know if they give an idea and it is good for kids it will more than likely be implemented. I always try to look at things from other people's perspectives and try to get an idea of where they are coming from. I believe in participatory leadership styles, and I believe people have a voice, not necessarily a vote.*

The focused personality of Priscilla was evident when she said, "You have to be careful to not be so strong willed about certain things that you may forget what other people may be thinking." She added further detail later when she elaborated that:

> *I know I am very focused, but there are times when I need to step back and ask what everybody else needs and ask what everybody else thinks. When I make big decisions, I talk to my leadership team and discuss the different points of view. We discuss how this decision might impact future decisions.*

For Greg, it was important that his team had a voice. By observing Greg at his school during interactions with his staff, it was evident that teamwork was important to him. This philosophy towards teamwork was also shown in his description of how he considered diverse viewpoints:

> *I guess by allowing everybody on my team--we have a very diverse team at my campus--to voice their concerns and opinions on the table.... As an administrator I am challenged every day and not take anything for granted and make sure you hear your teachers and your constituents and that they are involved in decision-*

making. They are your workhorses, and, if they aren't content, it ain't going to happen.

The importance of past experiences was shared similarly by all five principals but was discussed to a lesser degree than considering diverse viewpoints. Greg noted that "before I make a decision I will think of an experience I have had related to it and try to foresee what will occur if I a make a decision." Richard concurred by saying, "I will think back so that when I am in that same situation again I can do a better job or do it just as proficiently." He went on further to say:

As a principal, I build on past experiences. There is a lot of reflection that goes on based on prior cases and how am I going to handle it this time. I do reflect back on my decisions to see what I did right or what I did wrong. I also review what possible outcomes could have been if I went another route.

When discussing the importance of past experience in decision–making, Brian discussed the element of having predetermined solutions. This detail reinforced the idea that complex decision–making was situational. He described that:

I am always thinking, 'What did we do last time?' 'How was it handled last time?' 'Was there a problem there? OK, we will do that again, but this time we are going to do it this way.' It is never, 'This is how we did it last year, so this is how we are going to do it this year.'

Blake's reflective nature was evident in his description on how he used past experience in decision–making. Not only did he reflect on his past experiences, but he related that he tried to utilize the past experiences of others as well. He said:

I try to look back on any situation I have ever encountered or heard similar to it. I try to think of someone else similar and how they handled it. I try to think what the results were and the consequences of their decision.... I am one of those who that's the only way you can learn is from your mistakes if you stop and look back and see what went wrong. I think in our business that happens a lot. More often than notthe approach I like to take is 'Okay, what went wrong?' and then go backwards. Now, let's go backwards to the very beginning. What were the issues? What steps did we take that led us to make a bad decision or wrong decision?

Priscilla related most of her past experience to when she was a classroom teacher; however, she also integrated the past experiences of others. She noted, "You think about thinking; you take into account different experiences, your experience and other's experiences, what has happened in the past." She added:

I use a lot of my past experience as when I was a classroom teacher. I always go back to that. I have been an assistant principal at a high school, a large high school, and I have been an assistant principal at this campus here. Some of the experiences I have had as an assistant do play a role....because I can see how decisions made in this level do make an impact. But the majority of the experience I use comes from when I was a teacher. When I make decisions, I ask 'How would I feel as a classroom teacher?'

When looking at how principals conceptualize reflective practice in their decision–making, it was important to investigate how reflective practice led to full understanding of an issue. The utilization of diverse viewpoints and past experiences was

paramount in this understanding. While all of the principals described using reflective process to gain full understanding, Priscilla was able to describe it in terms of improvement. She noted:

> *You always have to make sure you are looking at all sides. So I constantly go back and think, this is what I am doing, does it support my focus? Does it support my expectations? If it doesn't, how am I going to make that change?*

Emergent Themes

As the data were analyzed from the identified sources, two themes emerged when considering how reflective process was conceptualized in decision–making. The first theme, ongoing internal dialogue and visualization, permeated the description from all of the principals. The second theme, thorough consideration without preconceived solutions, was made abundantly clear from the data gathered.

An ongoing internal dialogue and visualization described the nature of reflective process as verbalized by the principals. All of the principals used words such as "always," "constant," and "ongoing" to describe the frequency of reflective process usage. The description of what reflective process looked like varied among the principals but carried the theme of internal dialogue and visualization. Both Richard and Greg used the term "visualize," and Blake and Brian used the term "scenario" to describe what is happening during reflective process. Brian even compared the process to "playing chess" in his head. Priscilla described the process as having "conversations in her head" and putting her thoughts into "mental piles." All of the data combined led to the first emergent theme for conceptualizing reflective process as ongoing internal dialogue and visualization.

Thorough consideration without preconceived solutions was a key component of the essence of reflective process. The definition of reflective practice used for this study is "deliberate thinking about action, with a view to its improvement" (Hatton & Smith, 1995, p.40). Improvement was at the core of the principals' efforts. All of the principals' descriptions indicated the importance of having as much information as possible when making decisions. The data was rich with descriptions of the need to involve others to obtain multiple viewpoints to an issue. Blake saw the involvement of others as looking at the "true overall picture," and Brian compared it to providing a "panoramic view," Richard spoke to the importance of seeing issues from "other people's perspectives," and Priscilla shared the need for "different points of view."

The principals discussed using past experiences as well as diverse viewpoints. Past experiences were described to a lesser degree; however, they were considered important as well. Richard's comment best described how past experiences were used by principals. He stated, "I will think back so that when I am in that same situation again, I can do a better job." The principals did elaborate the need for solutions to be considered by situation. Brian noted"it is never 'this is how we did it last year, so this is how we are going to do it this year.'" The data compiled revealed the second emergent theme to be that thorough consideration without preconceived solutions was critical for the principals' conceptualization of the effective use of reflective process. Figure 4.1,*Conceptualization of Reflective Practice,* illustrates how the two emergent themes worked together to create solutions as well as fostered future reflective practice.

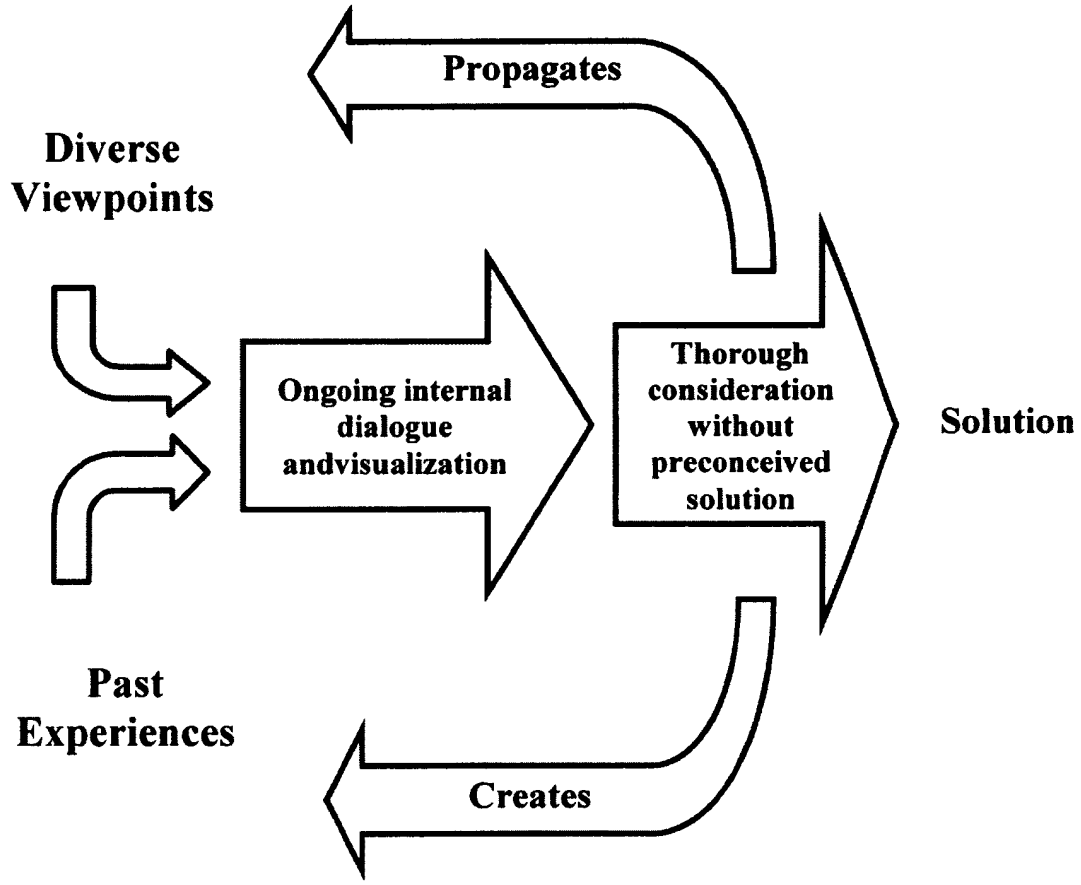

Figure 4.1. Conceptualization of reflective practice

How did principals utilize reflective practice?

When exploring how reflective practice was utilized, the principals' descriptions showed variation in the kinds of issues that they felt would most benefit from a reflective approach. The participants discussed how they determined which challenges were worthy of their time and energy. They continued by describing how they managed thoughtful consideration while being within a challenging situation.

When asked which issues benefited most from reflective practice, principals related their description in terms of specific challenges they were facing on their specific campuses. Blake quickly answered and was very clear when he said, "Parents expect two things: they expect to pick up their kids the way they dropped them off, and I know they expect them to learn. I think these are two priorities." He clarified further by stating:

> *Safety is my number one priority.... I think parents expect to have their kids here....They expect them to be safe, they expect them to learn. I believe that safety is one area that you just really can't toy around with and you literally need to think, see where areas you can improve on. I think you need to take information from everybody to ensure you have a safe campus.*

Observation concurred that his campus was next to a busy street. There were a large number of small children that did not ride buses but were picked up. The high volume of car and pedestrian traffic coupled with parents at school dismissal time validated his concerns.

Priscilla's description was also directly related to conditions that she faced when becoming principal one year earlier. Her campus was underperforming and had a

climate of low expectations. She stated that "changing the climate and instructional practices....I think those go hand in hand." Further explanation was given when she said:

> *Just based on my experience at this campus, the climate had to change. The expectations had to change. You have to find a way to make the hard decisions you need to make, but also create a trusting environment for people to share with you how they feel about your decisions.*

When describing his issues that benefitted the most from reflective practice, Richard gave a student–centered response. He went on to add the reflecting assists in complex situations. This was described when he relates that reflective practice is beneficial to:

> *Anything pertaining to student success, student behavior, or student code of conduct, you would really have to reflect and look at the facts because it is going to have to have direct impact on the students.... You do not want to make emotional decisions. It is the difference between doing the right thing and doing the thing right. Doing the thing right is black and white—you are doing it because it is policy. Doing the right thing is recognizing the need for flexibility.*

Likewise, Brian noted that he "really thinks that when you approach those challenges, you always have to keep in mind what is in the best interest of the children." Greg took a different path when he stated that he "feels the most important issues would be parents and teachers--building relationships with my teachers and letting them know that they are part of my family." The principals were asked to describe how they determine which kinds of challenges were worthy of their time and energy. Most of the principals framed

their descriptions directly with the student in mind. While focused on student success, most principals also shared that time was an issue for the principal. Of all of the principals, Greg gave the most non-specific description by stating, "I would probably have to say that all challenges are worthy of my time." Other principals gave a more specific description. Blake stated:

> *Anything that affects student learning and student safety...those would be my priority. You look at it from that viewpoint as to 'What does the community want?' Mainly the child's community—not the whole community—but the child's community.*

Richard shared a similar description when he said:

> *My reflection always revolves back to #1 how are we going to get students to perform at their optimum level and #2 how are we going to provide a service to the teachers so they can have the tools to perform... It all boils down to how it is going to affect student performance, student behavior, and student safety.*

Brian succinctly summarized the principals' sentiments when he stated, "Definitely put the kids first."

Finding time for reflective practice was an issue described by principals as well. The high quantity of issues that principals dealt with everyday made solving problems more complex. Priscilla said that "time is a problem with any principal...you just have to really be able to multitask and organize and make sure we are all on task, and it is very time consuming." Richard noted:

Time is a major struggle. I think especially in our business when you are running schools, there are so many moving parts, and there are so many demands and you handle so many problems on a daily basis. Time is definitely an issue.

Since time was an issue, the principals described the need to slow down and think reflectively during their busy day. When asked about how he addresses the need for time to face a challenging issue, Brian replied, "Normally, I stop." He explained further saying:

Because the repercussions of not stopping in the middle of something and changing it... when you have a piece of information that is going to affect the outcome. If you choose to ignore that piece of information, then you're just asking for whatever trouble you're going to have to deal with throughout in the process. I really don't think it's ever too late to stop.

Richard described that he liked to take time with decisions as well. In order to mentally process the challenging issue, he reported that:

Any time there are decisions to be made....I try not to make emotional decisions. I try not to make decisions on the spot. A lot of times I try to ask people to give me time to think about it or send me an email regarding that so that I can process it.

Blake extended the sentiments of Brian and Richard by saying that emergency situations are the only times to make quick decisions.

I think the only time a decision should be made quickly is when there is an emergency situation. I think for all the important decisions, it's important not to think black and white, but you have to think grey. You need to take everything into consideration. I think you do need to take a step back and you have think aboutthe

decision your about to make. Try to get as much input as you can. Use all your resources. The only time should be quick to make a judgment is if it's an emergency situation.

In order to facilitate time for decision–making, Blake reported that he physically extracts himself from the situation to think. He related:

Here on campus, usually what I will do is take a break and walk away from whatever setting I am in and just take whatever time I can--even if it is even just a little stroll around campus--and I usually come back with an answer or a decision. That happens more times than not.

Slowing down to thoughtfullyconsider a problem was done mentally as well as physically. Two principals reported the need to prioritize and slow down the mental process in order to effectively problem solve. Priscilla related that:

You prioritize. This is urgent, but is not so urgent but can impact this. To be honest with you, it is 24/7. All I do is think about it.... That is just my personality because my thoughts are just quick and go from one to another.

Richard shared a similar description by saying:

My mind is very active, and it races a lot. I have to make a conscience effort to slow it down.... With a lot of thought comes a lot of reflection; with a lot of reflection comes a lot of stuff going on in your head. You have to slow it down.

Emergent Themes

When considering how reflective practice was utilized, one theme emerged. For principals, multiple factors initiated the utilization of reflective practice. The combined data revealed three common factors. First, reflective practice was utilized to the degree

that an issue affects students. Second, reflective practice was utilized with an issue in relation to the campus priority. Third, reflective practice was utilized with an issue to the degree of its complexity.

Throughout the dialogue with principals, it was evident the more an issue affected students—the more reflective practice was utilized. Some responses were directly considering the student. Richard stated that reflective practice is beneficial to "anything pertaining to student success" while Brian kept in mind "the best interest of the children." The other three noted using reflective practice with issues that affect students. Priscilla noted "climate and instructional practices," Blake described safety and learning, and Greg felt "the most important issues would be parents and teachers." This compiled data revealed that issues are reflected on in relation to the degree that the issue affects students.

Reflective practice was initiated when issues that are a priority at the campus are considered. Blake described a situation where safety was a priority at his campus. Priscilla described campus climate, while Richard noted student behavior as needs at their school. Greg stated that at his school there was a need in "building relationships with my teachers." Principals identified these campus priorities as issues that required utilizing reflective practice.

In addition, issues that initiated reflective practice were issues that were more complex in nature. The principals described issues such as climate, behavior, and relationships while considering the viewpoints of students, parents, and teachers. The variables that go into these decisions lead to the complexity of the issues. Blake noted, "I think for all the important decisions; it's important not to think black and white, but you

have to think grey. You need to take everything into consideration." The emergent theme that multiple factors initiated reflective practice was described by thinking in the "grey." Figure 4.2, labeled *Factors Initiating Reflective Practice*, illustrates the factors that the principals described when reflecting on their own utilization of reflective practice.

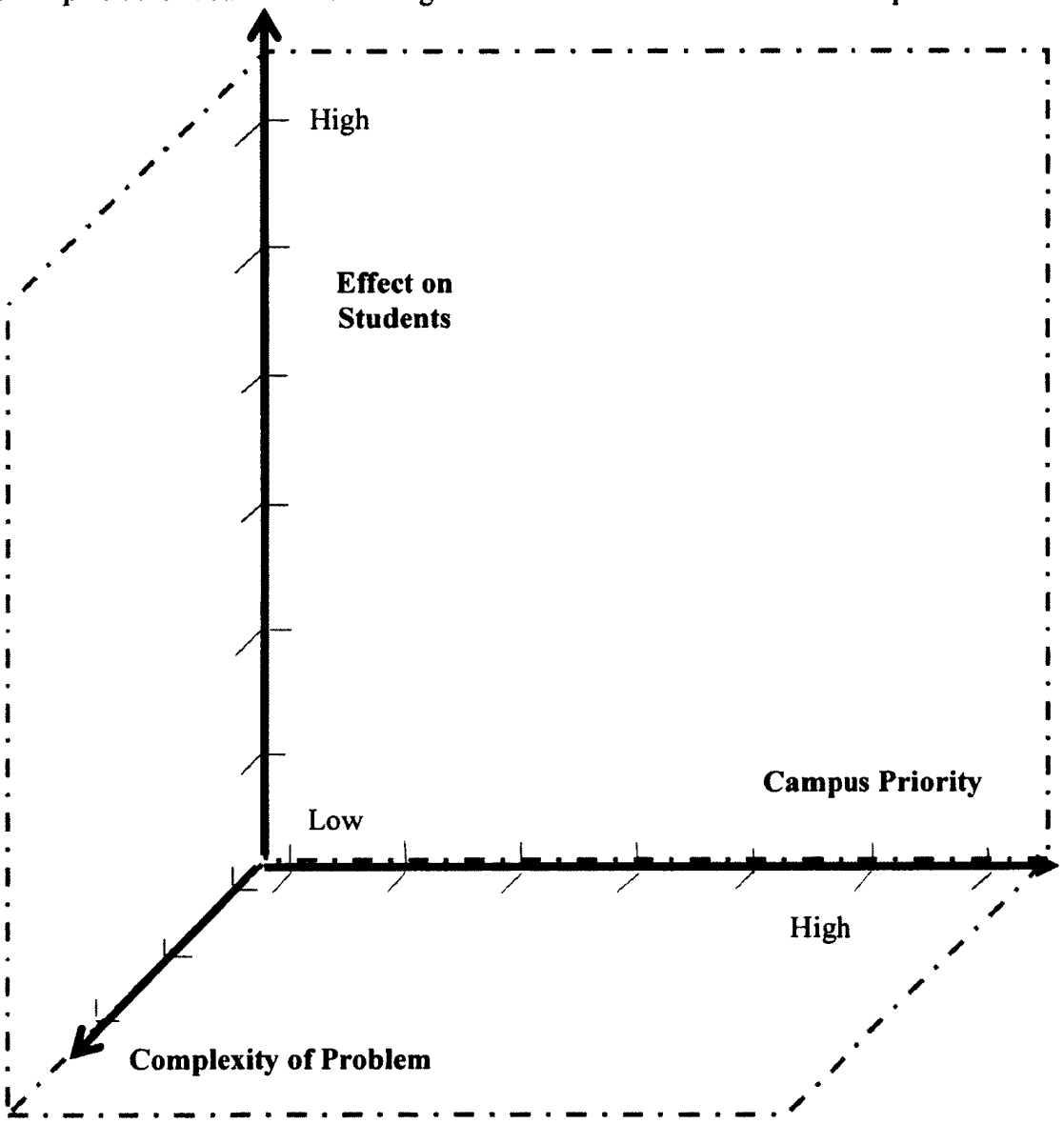

Figure 4.2. Factors Initiating Reflective Practice

The principals also discussed how the issue of time to engage in reflective practice affects its usage. The data gathered from their descriptions details the difficulty involved with finding time to thoroughly reflect on important decisions. This topic will be integrated into the following research question.

How didprincipals construct a setting to utilize reflective practice?

When looking to explore this research question, inquiry was done to describe structured time to engage in reflection at work and elsewhere. In addition, questions were posed dealing with relationships with others in regards to reflective practice. These questions combined revealed how the principals constructed a setting to utilize reflective practice. The first question posed to principals dealt with having an established structured and regular time to engage in reflection. Three out of five principals described that their regular reflection time was done at home. The other two principals described reflecting at home in subsequent questioning. Combined, the data revealed that all of the principals utilized their free time for more thoughtful reflective time. The data also revealed that reflection was done at work while attending to tasks.

When looking at the reflection done outside of the school day, Greg related that his regular reflective time is done late at night. He noted:

> *For me it is at nighttime. It is late at night when my family is asleep. By this time I am also looking at email, looking need to write things down because at night I can't sleep if I am thinking about things.*

Richard described reflection time done at home while unwinding from the day. He said:

A lot of times I do that (reflection) after work...after the day, when I am home, unwinding. I will think about different issues--what I did right, what I did wrong, what I need to do the next day to fix it, to address it...jot some notes down.

Blake concurred with the other principals about reflecting at home. He described a different scene in that he involves peers during this time. He related:

I do not (reflect) at school. I do at home. I go outside—look at the sunset. That is my time which I look back and reflect. It is those moments where I come up with 'I should've said this' or 'I should've done this' or I tell myself 'I was pretty good at making that decision.'That's also the time if I'm still questioning or doubting, I'll make my phone calls to my peers and ask them 'How would you have handled this?' I do have a moment of time daily where I just I sit back and reflect. If there's something bothering me or I'll make phone calls to certain individuals I trust and they give me input as to 'You should have done this' or 'Do this next time.'So at school I do not, but at home I do.

The principals described regular reflection while attending to tasks at work. Reflection was not done only at specified times but was woven into the fabric of their day. Blake described how being around students helps his reflecting. He noted:

I do other things and think on other things. It comes with the job. You have to. The environment doesn't stop for us. I would be doing a walk-through, or I would be spending time with the kids. Both are important. We need to spend time with kids, and it helps especially if it is an emotional decision it helps to be around smiling faces and laughing or hugs. It is the right time to be thinking, and it humbles you.

Richard shared a similar description when he said, "Our jobs are just so challenging that we just don't have the time to slow down. I think the most effective way to do it is to reflect in small chunks." Brian described a situation in which he tried to establish a regular time to reflect with key staff. Because of the busy nature of the job, his attempts were sidetracked. He said:

> *If I had the time to myself that I wanted, I would do that. I tried it, and I think every year I try it again and it just... never fails that a time will come up and we can't meet. It ends up becoming a 'we just don't meet anymore' kind of thing. Thankfully, it's small enough here that I can be in constant communication with my staff.*

Priscilla described reflecting while attending to other tasks. In her description, she detailed being mentally absorbed in her reflection. She noted:

> *I will be on the phone talking to someone and I will stop and have to apologize and ask them to repeat what they were saying because I was thinking about something else. I zone out many times in the middle of things. I can be in the hall watching the students and be thinking about things. I do it constantly. What is scary is when I do it driving home from work.*

All of the principals described difficulty in facilitating more regular on-the-job reflection. The hectic nature of the day made it difficult to engage in private reflection time. When asked how he could create more reflection time, Greg responded that he would have to "delegate more. I wish I could spend more time in my office and close the door to think. I just can't seem to do that. I am always moving." He added:

Anytime I am in my office I do have time to reflect. I am not in the office too much, but when I am there it allows me to unwind and reflect how the day is going. When I am out walking from classrooms or playground and seeing things...at that point I can make some decisions.

Blake shared a similar description when trying to consider facilitating more reflection at work. He shared:

I would literally have to block off an amount of time, pretty much have a conference time. I could, the only thing with that is in my position it's very difficult to set aside time for yourself because typically the minute you want to do something or set aside that time for yourself, something's going to happen. I guess that's why my practice has always been taking that time at home, the one place where there are no interruptions.

Feeling the pressure of leadership and understanding that as principal his actions were closely watched, Blake quipped:

I think I'd feel guilty to what people at school would think of me. 'He's just in his office, He's reflecting.' I don't know how that would be seen or thought of by the people here at work, and I definitely wouldn't want to be seen as negative or it being seen as 'Oh, He's just in his office. He's not doing anything really.' So that's one of the reasons I'd rather take it home.

Brian shared similar feelings of the pressure of being a principal. In his description, he related a responsibility to his campus in regards to his time. He said:

If I were that type of an administrator, that guarded my time, then I would be able to say 'Well on Tuesday mornings, I will reflect for now, from 9 to 10.' But I'mnot

that type of administrator. I don't think I ever could be. I really feel like my time belongs to the campus that I serve.

At another point in the interview, Brian repeated his sentiments more succinctly when he emphatically stated, "My time doesn't belong to me! It's not mine; I wish it was."

Richard described the need to multitask in order to find time to reflect at work. For him, multitasking was done both physically and mentally. Likewise, he described the importance of the position of principal in relation to what the staff observes him doing. First, he stated:

One of the things you have to be able to do as a leader is multitask. You have to also have to be able to do that from a mental standpoint. You have to be able to think about several issues simultaneously.

Later Richard explained that:

A lot of time, I reflect on issues when I am on morning or afternoon duty—or lunch and hall duty. I am able to walk around and my presence is the important component of that task. There is not much cognition taking place in regard to solving problems; I am just managing people and your presence is pretty much going to do that. While I am doing that I can think about things and try to solve issues. When I am driving to and from work, a lot of thinking goes on. I try to keep myself in the here and now when I am dealing with important things, but it those other times when I multitask mentally.

All of the principals agreed that there was a need to solicit opinions from others when facing difficult decisions. While they all shared the same basic answer, the question on this topic did not evoke the same quantity of rich data as the other questioning.

Responses tended to be shorter and more to point. Even when prodded to extend the answer, the answers lacked extensive detail. Blake answered, "I definitely do....Whenever I'm making difficult decisions or something where the balance is 50% can go one way and 50% can go the other way in making a decision, I ask for their expertise." Greg responded, "I think I do, but it also depends on what the case is." His extension added little to the value of the data. Likewise, Priscilla's answer was direct with no extension information given. She replied, "Yes, yes I do. Based on the situation....based on whose opinion I get."

The most detailed data came from Richard and Brian. Both principals described the importance of soliciting opinions of others. Brian commented:

> *Because part of reflection is bringing in other people to reflect with you and bring in their ideas and they help you to see something. You can reflect back but you are still only seeing it from your point of view. You are not seeing it from someone else's point of view. They may have seen something totally different than you did. When you bring in teachers, they may have observed or reflected on something you didn't even count on as important, but it was important to them. So if you want to get the whole thing to run correctly, your reflection is going to change the more people you bring to the reflection table.*

Richard related a similar response. He said:

> *Yes, I do. It is very important, because a lot of times people have different perspectives or expertise in different matters. That is one of the most important things in leadership is to be resourceful and not to get to a situation where you think you know it all.*

When asked about sharing their professional challenges with a colleague or mentor, all of the principals related that they did, but their responses indicated variety in whom they selected. Their selections were people in their professional lives whom they trusted and with whom they had an ongoing relationship. Brian noted, "I have always used my assistant principal and my dean as an equal....We are very helpful to each other. We have a common goal and a common purpose." He later added, "I can always pick up the phone and call my superintendent and ask him questions along the way." Priscilla described her relationship with her confidant. She said:

> *The colleague that I share a lot of my opinions and questions with is not currently in the school setting. He is a retired principal.... He is somebody that may not have experienced it, but knows enough to ask questions to get you to know what your next step should be. If I am at a point where I am completely stumped, I will propose the scenario and ask him what he would do. The majority of the time it is pros and cons.*

For Greg, his confidant was his assistant principal. He related that their differences aided in his reflective practice. He quoted:

> *My confidant right now is my AP. We have been together through a lot of issues and obstacles. We are so different in mindsets. Sometimes we don't really see eye to eye, which is good. I would hate for someone to just tell me something they think I want to hear. I need someone to play devil's advocate, and she does that all the time.*

Blake explained that his former boss serves as his professional guide. He stated that

My prior boss... he was my mentor when I was a teacher and he's my mentor now... I will let him know what the issue is...I will give him my side. He always listens and never interrupts and then gives me his take in his terms.

Richard noted that he had two people in his professional life with whom to share. In his description, he spoke of the isolation that a principal feels. He explained:

I have two. My sister is the principal of the Early College High School. I speak with her regularly about the challenges of the job. My assistant principal is my right hand man that I bounce ideas off of and frustrations. Principals are really on an island by themselves

Richard was even more descriptive by relating what a conversation with a confidant would look like. His description included a two–phase approach that served as both an emotional release and an attempt to gain further understanding. He said:

Phase I would be the Venting Phase. I just vent and let out my frustrations. Then Phase II would be What Should I Do/What is Your Professional Opinion Phase. I ask questions like: How should I handle it? What do you think of how I handled it? What can I do to make it better?

All of the principals were asked to relate about sharing their emotions and challenges they encountered in the workplace. Four of the principals said that they share with a close family member. The fifth principal shared with a very close friend. While these relationships involve reflection, they were different from the professional confidants in that there was an increased level of trust that allows the principals to share their emotions. The more intimate nature of these relationships allowed for the principal to hear opinions from someone who was more likely to be purely honest with them.

Another benefit was that this openness allowed the principals to search their own intentions. All of this added depth to fully understanding an issue. Greg noted that his wife serves in this role. He said:

> *We are two different levels. She is at the high school and I am over here (elementary level). We will talk thirty or forty-five minutes about our day. She is going back to school for her principal certificate so she will ask me questions. That does give me a chance to share my emotions and speak honestly about my job.*

Priscilla concurred that her husband allowed her a deep level of openness and honestly. She related:

> *Being in the business, he has a different personality than I do. He is that diverse thinker. We are very different thinkers with the same goal. When I am really having a hard time, we sit down and share ideas, and I share my feelings and he'll tell me and he knows he can. Again it is getting that teacher's view point.*

Brian added that his wife helped him keep things in perspective. He compared their interaction to being with a therapist, and the nonjudgmental nature helped to guide his thoughts.

> *She is a teacher also so it helps me to talk about things that work here so she helps me keep things in perspective as far as how a teacher would feel.... It reminds me to walk a mile in those moccasins before I make those decisions... a lot of times it starts off as just venting. I don't think I am necessarily in a solution seeking mode but in talking with her and her being supportive helps me calm down and look back on the issue and helps me to see how I might have handled it*

> *better. Youneed someone outside of the issue. If you reflect with someone involved with the issue, you are just going to hear opposing points or agreement. If you really want to reflect on you and what you are doing, the best thing to do is reflect with someone outside the issue, someone nonthreatening and nonjudgmental to help guide your thoughts. Ask the right questions—almost like a therapist. To me, that works.*

While Richard's close confidant was not his spouse, his close friend served in that role. He related that the relationship also served to be therapeutic and allowed for a deep level of openness. He stated:

> *I have a very good friend who is a teacher who understands the challenges of the education field. I will share some of the challenges or some of the issues I am dealing with or some of the frustrations. That is the point in the game when I can let my guard down, and I don't have to be "Mr. Tough Principal" who can handle it all. That helps and is therapeutic. Sometimes you get very desensitized because of the job, and you have to remember that you are human and have feeling and stress and all of those things.*

Emergent Themes

When considering how principals construct a setting to utilize reflective practice, two themes emerged. Simply put, the first theme dealt with time and setting for reflective practice. The second theme was the reflective relationships that principals engage in.

The first theme for this research question, time and setting, involved the when and where of reflective practice. The data revealed that principals engaged in reflective practice at work and during free time. The descriptions indicated that reflective practice

was integrated into the hectic day of a principal while he was at work. Furthermore, the descriptions related that when the principals were on free time, they were still mentally at work by engaging in more thoughtful reflection at that time. Reflection was woven into the daily tasks of a principal such as duty and office tasks. Multitasking was an essential skill. Principals were not only required to physically multitask but mentally as well. Richard described the need to "think about several issues simultaneously." The demands of the position made structured reflective practice difficult. Brian noted that his "time belongs to the campus." When asked about having structured time to reflect, Blake stated, "I think I'd feel guilty to what people at school would think of me like 'He's just in his office reflecting.'"

Due to the need to multitask both physically and mentally, deeper reflective thought was engaged in during free time. All of the principals described regularly reflecting during free time with the most popular time being while they are at home. Two elements promoted reflective practice at home. First, there was the ability to have uninterrupted time. This element allowed the time necessary for perspectives to be considered and viewpoints to be developed. Second, many of the principal's confidantes were family members. Time at home facilitated access to these confidantes.

The second emergent theme for this research question was reflective relationships. All of the principals solicited opinions from others when facing difficult issues. They used people in both their professional and personal lives. Using confidantes helped the principals see an issue form another point of view. Brian noted that if an individual only reflects alone, then "you can reflect back but you are still only seeing it from your point of view."

Professional confidantes were individuals that currently or in the past worked closely with the principals. These individuals gave insight into issues because of their proximity to the issue or their past experience with similar issues. Likewise, the principals trusted these individuals. This level of trust allowed for open and honest discourse that engendered a full understanding of an issue. Trust was an important element with personal confidantes as well. All of the principals utilized someone close to them in their personal lives. Most often, a family member was used in this role. The personal confidante relationship benefited from the honest discourse and provided a therapeutic benefit. The principals used the personal confidantes to share their emotions with as well. This assisted the principals in recognizing how these emotions influenced their understanding of an issue. Richard noted, "That is the point in the game when I can let my guard down, and I don't have to be 'Mr. Tough Principal' who can handle it all."

How did reflective practice impact leadership practices?

The last research question dealt with how reflective practice impacted the leadership practices of the principals. The principals were asked to describe their leadership style and what areas of leadership reflective practice impacted the most. Finally, the principals related some defining moments in their leadership and how reflective practice played a part.

When asked what areas of their practice of leadership did a reflective approach impact the greatest, the principals had varied responses. Four out of five principals gave information that describes specific areas that impact students. Greg related that:

I would have to say the curriculum issue...when it comes to the instructional part. My teachers know that I am one not to give a quick answer. I really take my time and research my answers because curriculum and instruction are important and how they are going to affect the kids.

Richard's description was similar when he noted that the areas that reflective practice impacts leadership were "the development of the master schedule, curriculum, the game plan with regards to where we are going to place staff the following year, because those issues are so crucial."

Two principals gave descriptions that related how reflective practice was necessary when dealing with people. The complex nature of interacting with people required more reflective thought for effective leadership practices. When discussing the areas of personnel, Brian described that:

I am not doing that person or the students or the community or myself or anybody for that matter any favors by not being willing to make those hard decisions...to reflect on how that person operated in that position that year...to reflect on how what were they able to produce.

Blake also described the nature of reflective practice needed when dealing with people. He related a richer description when he stated:

As far as reflective practices—I reflect—I am 50/50. There are things that you have to manage. You have to manage the budget, you cannot lead the budget...you have to manage the facilities, different areas of the school. But, you have to lead staff—you have to lead children. As far as reflective practices, both managerial and leadership areas require reflection. I will sit down and reflect

over my budget. I look over and see where I may have made mistakes and how I can improve. As far as leadership, you have to take a whole different approach. You have to reflect on how to communicate with staff and students to let them know when you think what they are doing is great and how to encourage them in new directions if needed.

The principals were also asked which areas of leadership reflective practice had the least impact. This question proved more difficult for the principals to answer. All of the answers were quite short and to the point, lacking much description. The impression given to the researcher was that reflective practice was integrated into everything they did, and that it was difficult to isolate items that were not part of their reflective practices. The answers given appeared to be token responses given to satisfy the requirement of answering the question. Three principals gave token responses. One principal, Greg, stated, "That is a tough one. I don't know. I can't answer that one." Priscilla's answer seemed to express the sentiments of all the principals when she stated, "You don't turn it on here and turn it off here."

When asked to describe their leadership style, the principals were each unique; however, they shared some commonalities. All of the principals gave different descriptions of their leadership styles. One principal, Priscilla, gave a very succinct response when she responded, "Focused...structured...disciplined." The other four principals gave descriptions of varying lengths, but all of the descriptions shared the common element of trying to see the complete picture of an issue and modifying the approach towards it. While only one principal used the term "situational leader", most

principals' descriptions contained elements of situational leadership. When asked to describe his leadership style, Blake stated:

> *Situational. Depending on the situation. Depending on the people that are involved... there are times when you have to take a situation and you have to come up with a decision immediately and there are situations where you have some time to think. There are different leadership styles. I have to reflect to see if my style is appropriate and modify it when necessary.*

Richard gave a very specific description of his leadership style by stating, "My leadership style is transformational with one component of transactional, and that is contingent reward." He later elaborated deeper when he compared leadership approaches to managerial approaches. He stated:

> *I think from a manager's perspective it is more mechanistic by nature. It is more bottom line production without the humanistic approach. I think the manager is an individual is pushing forward to get a product out. I think the manager spends less time reflecting and more time managing because it is straight lines. From a leadership perspective, I think the same concepts take place, but it is more instructional and hands on participant. That is when you get into the service-minded approach, the transformational leadership, and empowering people.*

Greg and Brian's descriptions were less specific but still situational in nature. Greg had difficulty giving a description when he stated:

> *That is tough. I have worked with several different leaders, and I have always tried to take what I can from each one. I would have to say some new and unorthodox approach. I try to do a mixture of everything.*

Brian's response was even more concise when he said, "I am a people person, I guess. I am...global in my approach to things."

The final question asked of the principals reviewed defining moments in their professional lives that influenced their ability to be effective school leaders. Four out of five principals gave descriptions of such events that contained reflective elements. While each principal's description of events was unique to their own experiences, all of the defining moments elicited reflective thought. Brian's defining moment described an event that happened at the beginning of his administrative career. He stated:

> *One was definitely was when I first started and I tried to push answers onto our reading department. They felt they had master's degrees in reading; they knew more than I did, so what was I doing telling them how to do things. I really learned that year.*

Likewise, Richard's defining moment was when he decided to start his administrative career. He noted:

> *One of the defining moments was when I decided I wanted to be in the leadership position in the school. I was teaching science at the time. I came to the conclusion that I wanted to have a bigger impact on the system.... It involved a lot of reflection.*

Blake's defining moment was

> *The hiring of our current superintendent... I had been a principal under one superintendent.... I think every leader has their own style--their own way--their own philosophy. This current superintendent— his approach and making himself known to the district and his communication—has changed me. Having*

> *someonecome in that has that background, that has that mentality; it's just opened up certain individuals, me being included, to say that 'This is the right approach. This is the right direction where we all should be going. 'It's allowed me to reflect in that way more so.*

For Blake, the influence of the new superintendent had sparked further reflective practice in his own practices. Priscilla described a situation where she needed to change the climate at her school. She used reflective practice to be an agent of change. She noted:

> *I think the biggest thing is climate...changing the climate and making decisions to support that. I have been in situations where decisions didn't support a climate change; it was just kind of the routine or not at all or those decisions were not communicated at all. I think those experiences have made me more cognizant as a leader to communicate my expectations and where we are going. I am reflecting constantly back on my past experience and how I can make things better. I can't image not leading that way.*

Emergent Theme

The last research question looks at how reflective practice impacted the leadership practices of principals. The theme that emerged from the data was that reflective practice was ubiquitous and solutions were situational. This theme addressed the essence of the leadership styles of the reflective principals.

When considering their leadership, the principals noted that reflective practice was a part of everything that they did. Priscilla stated, "You don't turn it on here or turn it off here." When asked to describe areas of leadership least impacted by reflective practice, the principal found it difficult to answer. The ubiquitous nature of reflective

practice extended from the professional part of the principals' lives into their personal. Some of the most powerful reflection about school issues was done during the private time of principals.

The second part of the theme was that the solutions derived from reflection were situational. The nature of the reflective practice described was that the principals considered issues uniquely, fully and from multiple viewpoints. These considerations lead to solutions to issues that were developed within the situation of their unique context.

Because of their reflective nature, the principals described adapting their leadership to meet the changing need of the campus. Blake noted, "I have to reflect to see if my style is appropriate and modify it when necessary." When putting both parts of the theme together, the principal's leadership practice was impacted by their reflective practice in that it was ubiquitous and that solutions were situational.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore the extent and impact of principals' use of reflective practice. An understanding of conditions that surrounded reflective practice in the daily lives of school principals was revealed through examining the accounts of their lived experiences. The previous chapter related how accounts of the principals' lived experiences described the complexity of the principalship and how reflective practice was a tool in navigation through that complexity. Sergiovanni (1991) characterized this situation as "a great deal of uncertainty, instability, complexity, and variety" (p. 5). Short and Reinhart (1993) noted reflective practice as a process that principals can utilize to develop expertise in problem solving, decision–making, and complex thinking.

The final chapter will discuss how the principals of this study used reflective practice to manage the complexity of being a principal. This was done through focusing on four research questions. Those research questions explored how the principals conceptualized reflective practice and how reflective practice impacted their leadership. Also, the research questions looked at how the principals used reflective practice and the mechanics behind its use. The exploration of those research questions created a better understanding of the role and usage of reflective practice by the principals. From this view into their reflective lives, themes emerged that describe and explain the role of

reflective practice within their world. The synthesis of past research, the data gathered, and the emergent themes was discussed in this chapter.

Summary of Data Analysis

The first theme that emerged from the study was that reflective practice was described as an ongoing internal dialogue and visualization. The frequency of reflective practice usage was described as ongoing. All of the principals used words such as "always" and "constant" to describe the frequency. Dewey (1910) and Rudney and Guillaume (1990) described reflective practice as being "persistent." Reflective practice wasnot a process that was systematically turned on and off. Principals were in a constant state of reflection. The intensity of reflection varied depending on situation and the topics of reflection would change within different parts of the day for the principals. The internal dialogue and visualization that was occurring was a critical component towards a more thorough understanding of an issue. Schon (2000) describes this phenomenon as a conversation with a situation. Jay and Johnson (2002) noted insight gained from internal dialogue leads to newfound clarity. Ongoing internal dialogue and visualization was how the principals conceptualized their own reflective practice.

The next theme that emerged was that the principals' reflective practice involved thorough consideration without preconceived solutions. When describing their conceptualization of reflective practice, the principal related the importance of seeing an overall picture of an issue and basing a solution on all of the evidence considered. Dewey (1910), when elaborating on his definition of reflective practice, noted that the process was based on evidence and supported by a disposition of open-mindedness. This process would be corrupted if the principals allowed preconceived solutions to dominate their

reflection. Dewey (1910) encouraged educators not to be followers of prescription or routine. He felt that reliance on existing practices diminished reflection and encouraged mindless imitation. The data gathered from the principals were rich with descriptions of the need to consider as much information and as many viewpoints as possible when facing an issue. It was important to the principals for solutions to be based on the evidence gathered. Past experiences were used as a piece to be considered, rather than guide for preconceived solutions. The thorough consideration without preconceived solutions led to solutions that were custom fitted for specific issues.

The third theme that emerged was that multiple factors initiated the utilization of reflective practice. It was evident from the principals' descriptions that reflective practice was initiated by three main factors. Reflection was not a practice that was turned on and off as certain issues were encountered. The ongoing nature of reflective practice meant that issues were in a constant state of consideration to varying degrees. Many of these issues were interrelated and impacted each other. For the principals, reflective practice was utilized first, to the degree that an issue affected students. Next, reflective practice was utilized with an issue within its relation to campus priorities. Third, reflective practice was utilized with an issue to the degree of its complexity. These elements were considered together to determine the level of reflection that was utilized with an issue.

In Texas, principals are governed by the Texas Standards for Principals (2001). All of the standards are learner–centered. When looking at the three main factors initiating reflective practice by the principals, it was evident that the student is at the center of consideration. According to Leithwood (2006), principal leadership has very

significant effects on student success. The principals related that the utilization of reflective practice impacted the issues being considered.

The next two themes emerged when considering how principals constructed a setting to utilize reflective practice. The two themes that emerged dealt with the time and setting for reflective practice and the reflective relationships that principals engaged in. These themes looked at the when, where, and with who questions of reflective practice.

Time for reflection was a concern shared by the principals. The importance of thorough and deliberate consideration of issues was in conflict with the hectic schedule of the principal's day. Davis (2005) noted that opportunity for orderly and deliberative thinking could be hard to come by due to the frequency and seriousness of problems facing principals. While it is evident that reflective decision–making is preferred, time restraints often impact decision–making. Greenfield (1987) noted that principals are often forced into making on-the-spot decisions because of their hectic schedule. Because of time restraints, the principals adapted their reflection to occur during daily tasks and extended into the free time of the principals. The principals were required to multitask both physically and mentally during daily tasks. Due to the difficulty of multitasking, deeper reflective thought was engaged in during fee time. The most common location for reflection done during free time was at home. This location allowed uninterrupted time to reflect and access to confidants that were family members.

The next theme that emerged was reflective relationship. Jay and Johnson (2002), Merickel (1998), Polite (1997), Greenfield (1987), and Ashby and Krug (19998) identified the importance of utilizing other individuals in the reflective practice of the principal. The principals of this study used people in both their professional and personal

lives. Individuals that were close to the principals also served as confidants. While principals solicited viewpoints from a wide array of people, the confidants provided a level of trust that allowed for open and honest discourse. This level of openness allowed the principals to share emotions and assisted the principals in understanding how their emotions influenced an issue.

The last theme that emerged was that reflective practice was ubiquitous and solutions were situational. The principals described reflective practice being engaged, in varying degrees, at all times and in all situations. The ultimate products of this ubiquitous reflection were situational solutions to issues. Problems faced by the principals were better solved when the solutions were created specifically for the problem and within the context that the problem existed. Sergiovanni (1991) recognized that few problems faced by principals lend themselves to predetermined solutions and that tailored treatments to these problems must be the norm. Principals would have created the knowledge they use as they practice it. Brill (2008) noted that "decision–making is the engine of education leadership" (p. 99). The reflective nature of the principals was at the core of their leadership practices.

Conclusions

The results of the study have implications for recognizing how principals can effectively operate in the school setting. The nature of a typical school day is hectic. Issues facing the principal are not static, but dynamic in nature. With the advent of high stakes testing and increased accountability, decisions made by school principals carry increased implications. If expectations of principals are to increase, then an examination of how principals effectively make decisions should be understood. Reflective practice is

a tool that principals use to navigate through the hectic day while creating effective solutions to issues.

The first two emergent themes gave insight into how the principals conceptualized reflective practice. Knowing what reflective practice looks like to the principals was essential to understanding the role reflective practice plays within decision–making. Ward and McCotter (2004) noted that reflection is often viewed as after-the-fact introspection. While introspective thought is part of reflective practice, the study showed that principals engaged in much more when they reflected. Van Manen (1991) related that in education reflection involves deliberation, making choices, and making decisions. Dewey (1910) added taking action to this view of reflection.

The nature of reflective practice for the principals was an ongoing internal dialogue and visualization involving thorough consideration without preconceived solutions. This statement summarized what the principals related when trying to describe what reflective practice looked like. This description of the actual practice of reflection is supported by the literature and when compared to the literature, gives insight into the bridge between theory and practice.

The principals considered the utilization of reflective practice. The theme that emerged from this consideration was that multiple factors initiated the utilization of reflective practice. Principals must reflect on many items during the day. To ascertain which items received deeper reflection, the principals considered three main elements. The elements of an issue that were most often utilized were the impact on the student, the relation to campus priority, and the degree of complexity of an issue. While these three elements were not the sole considerations, they made up the core of what the principals

related. Because time is valuable to a principal, priority must be given to issues that the principal determine are worthy of deeper reflection. Consideration of the three elements listed assisted principals in keeping the focus on learning.

The study looked at the setting in which reflective practice was utilized. As discussed in the literature, a principal's day is full of interruptions. An understanding of the when, where, and with whom questions is valuable in determining the concrete mechanics of the utilization of reflective practice. The principals described that reflection was most often done while performing multiple tasks when at work. Free time was the source for much of the deepest reflection. Most of the reflection done, both at work and at home involved others. While the work relationships and the home relationships served differing roles, the insight gained from each was valuable. The literature was rich with information regarding the involvement of others in reflection. The insight provided by the principals gives understanding into making reflective practice part of a busy day and highlights the importance of those individuals with whom reflective practice is shared.

When considering the relationship between reflective practice and the principals' leadership, the theme that emerged was that reflective practice was ubiquitous and solutions were situational. The literature described the importance of principal leadership in regards to student and school success. The study described how reflective practice impacted the leadership of the principals. The ubiquitous nature of reflection described the core of the principals' leadership. Value was placed on attempting to create the most effective solution to every issue. By making a part of all that was done, the principals showed the importance of issues encountered and their relation to school success. Creating solutions that are specific for each issue involved much effort and time. Using

predetermined solutions to issues would be easier and take much less time for the principals. Effectiveness would suffer from such an approach. The reflective principals recognized that solutions created situationally for issues lead towards more success. For this reason, reflection was an ubiquitous component of their leadership.

Recommendations

As supported by the review of literature and the analyzed data, reflective practice is a tool that school principals can utilize to be more effective. School principals operate in an environment of complexity. Reflective practice assists principals in creating effective responses to complex issues. The following recommendations were based upon the analysis and conclusions of the study.

The themes that emerged from the description of how reflective practice was conceptualized provided insight into a practice that is often ambiguously defined. Because of variations in theoretical design and practical usage, further study is recommended to bridge this gap. It is also recommended that preservice educator training contain elements of education in the usage of reflective practice. By training preservice educators, a common core understanding of the nature and benefits of reflective practice will serve as a foundation for integrating reflection into everyday school practice.

When considering how principals utilize reflective practice, the study indicated that usage was proportional to student impact, campus priority, and issue complexity. It is recommended that principals focus on the school's mission and vision. The mission and vision of a school provides a common purpose and focus for the school's educators. This focus should be extended into the principal's utilization of reflective practice.

Creating a setting to utilize reflective practice proved to be a difficult task for principals. Because time is such a valuable commodity for principals, daily practices should be structuredto provide for tasks that allow for mental reflection while being attended to. Reflection is done both alone and with others. Likewise, time should be structured for regular reflection with others. It is also recommended that principals actively engage in reflective relationships with individuals from their professional and personal lives. This behavior would provide for more diverse viewpoints to consider and add emotional support to stressful situations. Further study into the role that reflective relationships within the principals' personal life impacts the emotionally therapeutic benefits for the principal should be considered.

The study indicated that the utilization of reflective practice influenced leadership practices. The ubiquitous nature of reflection was central to the core of the principals' leadership. It is recommended that reflective practice be taught alongside leadership theory in administrative and leadership coursework. Reflective practice should not be viewed as a standalone technique that is part of a principal's tool kit. Instead, reflective practice should be viewed as a companion integrated into the various leadership theories and practices.

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APPENDIX A

STANDARDIZED OPEN–ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Standardized Open–Ended Interview Questions

(Developed from Brill's (2008) book *Leading and Learning*).

1. How do you conceptualize reflective practice in your decision–making?

    a.) What does reflective practice look like to you?

    b.) In what ways do you consider diverse points of view?

    c.) How do you ensure that you fully and deeply understand problems that you are faced with?

    d.) What role do past experiences play in strategically trying to solve a problem?

2. How do you utilize reflective practice?

    a.) What kinds of issues are you most likely to take on as a challenge that could benefit from a reflective approach?

    b.) How do you determine which kinds of challenges are worthy of your time and energy?

    c.) Do you slow down and extract yourself from a challenging situation to thoughtfully consider the next steps?

3. How do you construct a setting to utilize reflective practice?

    a.) Do you have established structured and regular time to engage in reflection on your decisions and actions? What does this entail?

    b.) What could you do differently to facilitate more regular on-the-job reflection?

    c.) When facing difficult decisions, do you solicit opinions from others?

    d.) Do you have a colleague or mentor with whom you share your professional challenges and wonderings?

e.) Do you have someone, in your personal or professional life, that provides you with opportunities to reflect on the challenges and emotions you encounter in the workplace?

4. How does reflective practice impact your leadership practices?

a.) In what areas of your practice of leadership does a reflective approach impact the greatest? The least?

b.) How would you describe your leadership style?

c.) What are some of the defining moments in your professional life that have influenced your ability to be an effective school leader? Was personal reflection a part of that?

Possible Questions to Illicit Response Extension

1. Why? Who?When?What?Where?

2. Can you describe in more detail?

3. What would that look like?

4. How do/did ...?

5. Can you elaborate more?

Final Question

1. What question(s) should I have asked you that I didn't to gain deeper insight into the role of reflective practice on your leadership capacity?

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FORM

FORM A

DATE: _____

LOG NO: _____

TEXASA& MUNIVERSITYKINGSVILLE

APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF INVESTIGATION

INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
(Original + 1 Copy Required for Expedited Review)
(Original + 10 Copies Required for Full-Board Review)

PLEASE TYPE

1. Principal Investigator's Name: Dennis Amstutz

   Department & Campus Address: Department of Education, MSC 223

   Campus Phone No.: 361-593-2980; Home No.: 956-793-6824

   Associates: N/A

2. If you are a student, provide the following:

   Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Gary Low; Ext.: 593-2203

   Is this your thesis or dissertation research? Yes X; No __

   What is your academic status? Doctoral _X_; Graduate ___; Undergraduate ___

3. a) Title of the project: Reflecting on Reflection: A Phenomenological Inquiry Into Principals' Use of Reflective Practice

   b) Project Time Line: From December 2008to May 2009

4. Has this project previously been considered by the IRB?

   Yes ___; No __X_

5. Is a proposal for external support being submitted?

   Yes ___; No __X_

If "yes", you must submit one complete copy of that proposal as soon as it is available

And complete the following:

a. Is notification of Human Subjects approval required?

Yes __; No __X_

b. Is this a renewal application?

Yes __; No __X_

c. Sponsor's name and identification number:

Dr. Gary Low

d. Total project period: From December 2008 To May 2009

6. Description of human subjects: Number: 10; Age: 25-75

Sex: F __Unknown__; M __Unknown__

7. Does your project fall under one of the categories eligible for expedited review as listed in Section VI of the IRB guidelines?

Yes _X_; No __

If "yes" indicate the category number and page in this manual of the expedited Review category: #2, pg. 29

8. I have included copies of all pertinent attachments including, but not limited to: questionnaire instruments, informed consent(s), letters of approval from cooperating institutions, copy of external support proposal if application, etc.

Yes _X_; No ____

(If no, explain below):

9. Describe the source(s) of subjects and the selection criteria. Specifically, where did you obtain the names of potential subjects (i.e., agency files, hospital records,

local organizations, etc.)? Where and how will you contact them?

The names of potential subjects will be obtained from recommendations given to the researcher by superintendents. They will be contacted by mail, email and telephone.

10. Brief description of proposed research: include major hypotheses and research design.

The purpose of the qualitative study is to explore the benefits and extent of principals' use of reflective practice. An understanding of conditions that surround reflective practice in the daily life of a school principal will be revealed through examining the accounts of their lived experiences. The study will further the research onreflective practice and its use by school principals.

The study will be guided by the following central research question: What is the value of reflection towards principals' decision–making effectiveness? The following questions were incorporated for this study:

5. How do principals conceptualize reflective practice in their decision–making?
6. How do principals utilize reflective practice?
7. How do principals construct a setting to utilize reflective practice?
8. How does reflective practice impact leadership practices?

The sample will be principals from the Rio GrandeValleythat exhibit characteristics of being reflective.Qualitative data for this study will be

gatheredthrough interviews and observation. The first instrument that will be used will be standardized open-ended interviews. The strength of this approach comes from the increased comparability of responses due to respondents answering the same questions. The second instrument that will be used will be the interview guide approach. The strength of this approach lies in the ability to close gaps of data that may have resulted from the standardized open-ended interviews.Observation will be the other instrument used to gather data for this study. This allows the researcher to enter into and understand the context in which the study participants operate.

11. Procedures: Provide a step-by-step description of each procedure, including the frequency, duration and location of each procedure.

The first step in the data collection procedures will entail contacting the superintendents of the school districts within the Rio GrandeValley. A letter describing the study and a description of a reflective principal will be sent to all of the superintendents and will ask the superintendents to recommend principals in their school district that they feel meet the description of a reflective principal. One week after mailing the letters, a follow-up email will be sent to the superintendents as a reminder. Responses will be gathered and a list of recommended principals will be created.

Next, contact with the recommended principals will be made. A letter describing the study and a description of a reflective principal will be sent to all of the principals that were recommended by the superintendents. This letter will request

their participation in the study. Along with the letter, a questionnaire for descriptive information and a consent form will be included. A follow-up email will be sent one week later as a reminder. From the positive responses obtained from the principals, a selection of 5-10 individuals will be purposefully selected for the study and contacted to set up meetings for the standardized open-ended interview.

A standardized open-ended interview will be conducted with each of the selected principals. The interview will be recorded for later transcription and field notes will be taken. At the conclusion of the standardized open-ended interview, an appointment will be made to conduct the interview guide approach and observation. During and after the time span that encompasses the interviews, transcription of the interviews will be occurring. Copies of the transcripts will be sent to the participating principals for verification. Transcripts and field notes will be reviewed to assist in creating questions for the interview guide approach as well as for data analysis.

12. Informed consent: Describe the consent process and attach all consent documents.

    Consent will given when the participants agree to participate. The research requires the use of interviews and observations. These components require willing participation on the part of the research participants.

13. Benefits: Describe the anticipated benefits to subjects, and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result.

    Participation in the research will serve as a method of reflection for the research participants. The participants will be required to reflect on their own use of

reflective practice. This process will provide the research participants with insights into their own decision–making practices and the reasoning behind them. From this insight, the research participants will gain effectiveness in their decision–making and their schools should profit from this as well.

14. Risks: Describe the risks involved with these procedures (physical, psychological and/or social) and the precautions you have taken to minimize these risks.
Anonymity of research participants will be maintained by the researcher. All documents and transcripts will be handled only by the researcher and will be kept secure.

15. Addition to or changes in procedures involving human subjects as well as any problems connected with the use of human subjects once the projects has begun must be brought to the attention of the IRB. I agree to provide whatever surveillance is necessary to ensure that the rights and welfare of the human subjects are properly protected. I understand that I cannot initiate any contact with human subjects before I have received approval and/or complied with all contingencies made in connections with that approval.

_____

Signature of Principal Investigator Date

16. Approval by Faculty Sponsor (required for all students): I affirm the accuracy of this application, and I accept the responsibility for the conduct of this research and the supervision of human subjects as required by law.

_____

Signature of Faculty Sponsor Date

17. Approval by Department Chair/Dean/Director (not required for applications for Expedited Review):

I confirm the accuracy of the information stated in this application. I am familiar with, the approve of the procedures that involve research on human subjects.

Name of College/Department Date

Signature of Chairperson of Department Date

Signature of Dean of College Date

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND GRADUATE STUDIES
700 UNIVERSITY BOULEVARD, MSC 118
KINGSVILLE, TEXAS 78363-8202
361/593-2808 · FAX 361/593-3412

To: IRB Members

From: Dr. Thomas A. Fields, IRB Chair

Re: **IRB Application**

Please review the attached IRB application from Dennis Aututz
(Applicant's Name)

for procedural omission and compliances with policy, and return to me the application and this form within 48 hours of receipt with your recommendation approving the application as either:

(Check only one) ✓ Expedited
_____ Exempt; or
_____ Requiring full board review

IRB Reviewer's Name (Print): Dr. Cathy Lee Low

IRB Reviewer's Signature: _____ Date: 12-15-08

/cad

IRBcp

(Revised 98/28/08)

APPENDIX D

SUPERINTENDENT LETTER

Superintendent of Schools:

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Dennis Amstutz, a principal at La Feria I.S.D., and I am currently working on my doctoral dissertation at Texas A & M University-Kingsville. The study investigates the reflective practices of school principals and the title of the study is *Reflecting on Reflection: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Principal's Use of Reflective Practice*. The population of the study is school principals from the RioGrade Valley. I am soliciting recommendations from superintendents for principals that they feel meet the criteria of being reflective.

This study is designed to investigate the value of reflection towards principals' decision–making and leadership effectiveness. While examining the perceptions of principals themselves the following questions will be incorporated into the study:

1. How do principals conceptualize reflective practice in their decision making?
2. How do principals utilize reflective practice?
3. How do principals construct a setting to utilize reflective practice?
4. How does reflective practice impact leadership practices?

A principal that engages in reflective practice is exemplified by characteristics described in the following quote from Thomas Sergiovanni (1991). He stated that reflective principals

> do not passively accept solutions and mechanically apply them. They do not assume that the norm is a one best way to practice, and they are suspicious easy answers to complex questions. They are painfully aware of how context and situations vary, how teachers and students differ in many ways, and how complex school goals and objectives actually are; they recognize that, despite difficulties, tailored treatments to problems must be the norm. At the same time reflective professional practice requires that principals have a healthy respect for, be well informed about, and use the best available theory and research and accumulated practice wisdom (p. 10).

I would be grateful if you would consider assisting me by recommending one or more principals that you feel demonstrate the characteristics described above. To do this, complete the attached recommendation form and return it to me in the self-addressed stamped envelope. From the returned forms, principals will be purposefully selected for the study.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter. It is my hope that the study will illuminate the impact that reflective practice has on campus leadership. Should you have any questions regarding the study, you may contact me at (956) 797-8550 (work) or (956) 793-6824 (home).

Sincerely,

Dennis Amstutz
Principal, David G. Sanchez Elementary
Doctoral Candidate-Educational Leadership
Texas A&M University-Kingsville

Recommendation Form

After having read the description of a reflective principal in the attached letter, I submit the following principal(s) for your consideration:

1. Name: _____

   School: _____

   District: _____

2. Name: _____

   School: _____

   District: _____

3. Name: _____

   School: _____

   District: _____

4. Name: _____

   School: _____

   District: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Name (printed): _____

District: _____

APPENDIX E

PRINCIPAL LETTER

Dear Colleague,

Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Dennis Amstutz, an elementary principal in La Feria Independent School District. Currently, I am a student at Texas A&M University-Kingsville working on a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership. My dissertation is a study of principals and their use of reflective practice in their leadership capacity. The title of my dissertation is "Reflecting on Reflection: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Principals use of Reflective Practice". You have been recommended by your superintendent as a principal who exhibits strong reflective characteristics. I would be honored if you would consider participating in the study.

The purpose of the qualitative study is to explore the extent and impact of principals' use of reflective practice. An understanding of conditions that surround reflective practice in the daily life of a school principal will be revealed through examining the accounts of their lived experiences. The study will further the research on reflective practice and its use by school principals.

Participation in the study would entail the following:

1. Participate in an audio-taped, standardized open-ended interview to be conducted at the participant's school. The interview will occur at a mutually agreed upon time and should take between thirty minutes and one hour.
2. Participate in an audio-taped second interview using the interview guide approach. This interview will be conducted at the participant's school and will occur at a mutually agreed upon time. The interview should take between thirty minutes and one hour.
3. Be shadowed by me at the participant's school during naturally occurring events. This session will take approximately two hours and will occur at a mutually agreed upon time. The activities in which the participant engages in will be recorded in field notes by the researcher.
4. All data collected for the study will be used only for this dissertation research. Participants will have the opportunity to review the transcripts of the interviews to insure their accuracy. All information about the participants will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be used in the dissertation study.

As a fellow principal, I am well aware of the time constraints that are felt each and every day. Participation in this study should not be burdensome and has the potential to add insight into our profession. I encourage you to reflect upon your decision to participate in the study.

Should you agree to participate in the study, you would need to complete the enclosed form and return it to me in the self-addressed, stamped envelope. After compiling a list of principals whom have agreed to participate in the study, I will schedule the interviews

and observation with the participants that have been purposefully selected for the study. Thank you for your consideration of participating in the study and I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Dennis Amstutz

Reflecting on Reflection:
A Phenomenological Inquiry into Principals Use of Reflective Practice

Participant Information

Name:_____

Campus Name:_____ Campus Size: _____
(# of students)

District: _____

Gender: ☐ male ☐ female

Years of experience as principal: _____

Contact Information

Address: _____

_____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Preferred contact time: _____

Place and **X** in the appropriate box:

☐ I wish to participate in the study.

☐ I do not wish to participate in the study.

Signature: _____

Printed Name: _____ Date: _____

Thank you for your consideration in participating in the study. If you have any questions you would like to ask or do not understand any portion of what you are being asked to do, please feel free to contact me at home or school.

Dennis Amstutz

School:
David G. Sanchez Elementary
1601 S. Main
La Feria, Texas78559
(956) 797-8550
(956) 797-8530 Fax
Email: dennis.amstutz@laferiaisd.net

Home:
25352 N. Bixby Rd.
La Feria, Tx78559
(956) 793-6824
Email: dennisamstutz@aol.com

APPENDIX F

NOTIFICATION OF PARTICIPATION LETTER

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study, "Reflecting on Reflection: A Phenomenological Inquiry into Principals use of Reflective Practice". You have been selected to be a participant. I will be contacting you to set up times that we can meet to begin the process. I hope that you find this process to be beneficial towards your growth as a professional. Your participation is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Respectfully,
Dennis Amstutz, Principal
David G. Sanchez Elementary
La Feria I.S.D.

VITA

DENNIS SCOTT AMSTUTZ
25352 N. Bixby Road
La Feria, Texas78559

EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

University of Texas-Brownsville, Brownsville, Texas, M.Ed. in Educational Administration, May 2000

University of Texas-Brownsville, Brownsville, Texas, B.A. in History, May 1993

CERTIFICATIONS

Teacher-Generic Special Education
Teacher-History
Mid-Management

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

2009-2011	Principal, La Feria High School, La Feria I.S.D.
2003-2009	Principal, David G. Sanchez Elementary, La Feria I.S.D.
2000-2003	Assistant Principal, La Feria High School, La Feria I.S.D.
1998-2000	History Teacher, La Feria High School, La Feria I.S.D.
1994-1998	History Teacher, William B. Green Middle School, La Feria I.S.D.
1993-1994	Special Education Teacher, C. E. Vail Elementary, La Feria I.S.D.
1990-1993	Paraprofessional, La Feria High School, La Feria I.S.D.