MIRROR, MIRROR: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE ROLE OF
REFLECTION IN TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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In this era of increasing accountability in education, teachers are being asked to move away from the role of intuitive guide to being a more deliberate reflective practitioner. The need exists to understand the experience of reflection and its meaning from the perspective of practicing teachers. Existing studies describe an effective teacher as one who reflects upon her/his teaching. However, they do not illuminate the perspective of teachers to assist other teachers in knowing how to reflect effectively.

Guided by works of Dewey (1909/1933) and Schon (1983, 1987), this phenomenological study explored the reflective experiences of practicing teachers in order to understand, from the perspective of teachers, the meaning of reflection in teaching. The central research question was: What is the meaning of reflection in teaching? The purposeful sample included 11 female teachers and 1 male teacher, currently teaching in grades K through 5, with three to 29 years of teaching experience. The data were collected through focus group interviews and subsequent follow-up individual interviews with each participant.

The data analysis followed the procedures outlined by Moustakas (1994). After transcribing interviews verbatim, invariant horizons, or statements significant to the central phenomenon and reinforced by more than one participant, were pulled from the transcripts. The statements were organized into seven themes pertaining to reflection: 1) ongoing learning process, 2) way to solve problems, 3) way to deal with change, 4)
sharing with others, 5) evolving with experience 6) being formal and informal, 7) taking place in a nurturing environment. These findings can help school administrators hear the voices of practicing teachers so that they can better establish, monitor, and evaluate effective reflective practices. As teachers begin to understand the meaning of reflection for themselves and other teachers, they will become empowered to use time in the classroom more efficiently.
DEDICATION

-for Rob, Bobby and John
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Currently, teachers are expected to be highly qualified, act as content experts, understand effective teaching methods, and document progress in every student (United States Department of Education, 2001). In order to accomplish this, teachers must continue being the intuitive guide, while at the same time being the more deliberate reflective practitioner (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1994). Teachers spend the greater part of their day working in isolation from interaction with other educators (Jay, 2004). The ability to reflect upon one’s practice becomes necessary if teachers are to understand the meaning of the actions and reactions that occur within their classrooms. While researchers and educators recognize reflection as an important part of the teaching process and recommend that teachers reflect (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004), minimal research exists that explores the actual day-to-day reflection experiences of practicing teachers.

Scholarly works in the area of teacher reflection bring to light the need for deliberate reflection on the part of the classroom teacher. Mezirow’s (1981) theory of perspective transformation is an adult learning theory that focuses on a change in perspective. Transformative learning comes out of experiences that change the routine thought of the learner or provide a sense of disequilibrium. In addition to the idea of transformative learning, praxis, or a combination of reflection and practice (Freire, 1972), allows the learner to become aware of his or her assumptions and to act on them. According to Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2001), this suggests that reflective
and critical thinking must be encouraged as teachers are educated and steps are taken toward instructional improvements.

Dewey (1933) laid the groundwork for understanding teacher reflection by asserting that in order to accomplish sustained reflective practice, we must foster three attitudes: open-mindedness, whole-heartedness, and intellectual responsibility. Dewey (1933) believed that reflective action would move teachers away from routine activity, highlighting inquiry rather than response. In his definition of education, Dewey (1933) asserted that it was the reconstruction or reorganization of experience in order for the information gathered to be utilized in planning or dealing with future experiences. Dewey’s definition certainly demands that as teacher-learners we reflect upon our experiences in the classroom in order to critically assess both theory and practice. A reflective practitioner has also been described as one who is able to think while acting and respond appropriately (Schon, 1983, 1987).

The preponderance of research regarding teacher reflection tends to focus on the importance of the reflection of preservice teachers while they are participating in student teaching (Mills & Satterthwait, 2000; Posner, 2000; Raines & Shadiow, 1995; Wenzlaff, 1994). The preservice teacher is often expected to reflect on specific activities or events in order to become more aware of his or her own strengths and weaknesses in the classroom. This is an important time to develop the skills and habits of mind necessary for effective reflective practice (Posner, 2000). Although this may be an important time to encourage preservice teachers to think about their practice, Posner (1989) asserted that “reflection with no experience is sterile and generally leads to unworkable conclusions,
while experience with no reflection is shallow and at best leads to superficial knowledge” (p. 22).

Researchers have suggested that reflection should be seen as an integral part of a teacher’s own process of inquiry and is most likely to occur if teachers understand the meaning of reflection within the classroom (Russell, 1993). However, as professionals move into permanent teaching situations, there are often so many demands on their time that reflection may be overlooked. So we must continue to attempt to understand the role of reflection for the practicing teacher and not just for the preservice teacher during student teaching experiences.

Bauer (1991) considered the professional practice of teaching a process of problem solving and noted that reflection is an important part of this process. Schon (1983) described problem setting, in which we interact in order to name the components within a given situation that need to be addressed, and then decide upon the context within which they need to be addressed. As teachers use reflection to help them to solve problems, it may be seen in terms of reflection-in-action (making an immediate decision based on observation) and reflection-on-action (reflecting back on actions in order to make adjustments) (Russell, 1993; Schon, 1987). Both of these types of reflection are demanding, but particularly the ability to reflect-in-action would be affected by prior experience in dealing with similar situations or problems.

The daily experiences of teachers provide them with a foundation upon which they can base future decisions. Dewey (1933) advocated reflective or thoughtful action instead of habitual action, and he identified open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness as characterizing reflective practice. Not all teachers possess these
characteristics described by Dewey (1933) and later by Schon (1983). The fact that not all teachers possess these characteristics brings to light the fact that one is not necessarily reflective simply because he or she is a teacher (Posner, 1989). Reiterating the importance of experience, Sandholtz (2005) asserted that gaining experience is not the same thing as learning from it. While it seems logical that we may not learn from every experience, we continue to ignore this and assume that any experience will lead to teacher learning.

Elbaz (1988) found that in order for the reflective process to become self-sustaining, it is important for teachers to participate in a group process in order to exchange different views and postulate alternative courses of action. In addition to experience in teaching, it is important for teachers to be in an environment that is conducive to reflection (Moallem, 1997).

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) posited that the process of reflection is enhanced by collaboration and dialogue. They also stated that “reflective practice is neither a solitary nor a meditative process and is a challenging, demanding, and often trying process that is most successful as a collaborative effort” (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 19). Administrative support, collegial support, and an overall school climate that supports and encourages reflection allow teachers to explore this part of the process of teaching.

Within a school year, teachers are confronted with many changes. Within a teaching career, the number of changes in expectations, regulations, and curriculum can be overwhelming. Hargreaves (1994) observed that teachers are often asked to make changes without being given the extra time needed to do this effectively. Reflection is part of the process of dealing with changes faced by teachers in both their day-to-day
work and throughout their career. Schon (1973) argued that change is a fundamental feature of modern life and that we must develop social systems that provide for ways of learning and adapting.

According to Finley, Marble, Copeland, Ferguson, and Alderete (2000), teacher learning is central to change in schools and in order for effective change to take place, then teacher learning must be supported. This support is part of the nurturing environment and feeling of trust that is necessary in order for teachers to engage in effective reflective practices.

Reflection can be both formal and informal. More formal types of reflection such as assigned journaling, analysis of videotaped lessons, and formal evaluations are only one aspect of reflective practice (Jay, 2004). Coupled with them is the informal reflection that takes place moment to moment in the classroom. Schon (1983, 1987) described a reflective practitioner as one who is able to think while acting and respond appropriately. He further delineated between formal and informal reflection by asserting that informal reflection would often focus on thinking-in-action, whereas formal reflection would often be part of the process of thinking-on-action.

Because teachers are called upon to reflect, analyze, and compare (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005), the need exists to know more about how practicing teachers experience this phenomenon on a day-to-day basis. Reflective teachers think about their practice. Darling-Hammond (1996) explained that a professional teacher is one who continues to learn. According to Raines and Shadiow (1995), it is important to engage in reflection and continue thinking about the doing.
Existing literature in the area of reflection indicates that it is a multifaceted phenomenon with a wide range of descriptions and definitions. If we are to understand how reflection is to be used to improve the effectiveness of classroom teachers and, in turn, student learning, then it is necessary for us to first explore this phenomenon and the role it currently plays in the practice of teaching.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the reflective experiences of 12 currently practicing elementary school teachers working in a southeastern, suburban school district in order to illuminate, from the perspective of teachers, the meaning of reflection in teaching. Throughout this study, reflection was defined as a deliberate analysis of information gained through observation in order to inform future practice and to promote the development of a philosophy regarding the act of teaching.

Research Questions

This research study was guided by the central research question: What is the meaning of reflection in teaching? This central research question was further supported by the following research sub-questions:

1. In what ways do teachers experience reflection in the context of the classroom?
2. In what ways do teachers experience reflection in contexts outside the classroom?
3. What role does a teacher’s reflection play in the experience of teaching?

4. What role does experience play in a teacher’s reflection?

Because of the exploratory nature of phenomenological research, this initial set of research questions continued to evolve, depending upon the comments and reactions of the participants. Consequently, the following question was added to the list of sub-questions:

5. What role does the school environment play in teachers’ reflective practices?

Assumptions

In the context of this study, it was assumed that:

1. There was a population of teachers to study.
2. Teachers do reflect as a part of the process of teaching.
3. The information obtained from the participants in this study represented their “truth space” (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003, p.369).
4. The participants responded openly and honestly to research questions.
5. The researcher withheld bias in order to allow the meaning of reflection to emerge from the lived experience of the participants.

Terms and Definitions

The following terms and definitions were used throughout the study:

_Epoche_—a Greek word meaning to stay away from or abstain

(Moustakas, 1994).
Gatekeepers—individuals with the authority to grant access to a research site/allow the researcher to recruit participants from a particular site (Creswell, 2007).

Imaginative variation—a process that follows transcendental-phenomenological reduction and aims to grasp the structural essences of experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Professional teacher—a currently practicing teaching professional

Phenomenology—“a qualitative research tradition that attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41).

Preservice teacher—an individual in training to become a teaching professional.

Teacher reflection—a deliberate analysis of information gained through observation in order to inform future practice and promote the development of a philosophy regarding the act of teaching.

Transcendental-Phenomenological reduction—a process in which each experience is considered individually in a fresh and open way, allowing a clear and complete description to be given (Moustakas, 1994).

Theoretical Perspective

The area of transcendental phenomenology has been deeply influenced by theory. The theories and philosophical ideas of Husserl, Descartes, and Kant are of particular
importance, especially when following the transcendental phenomenological model designed by Moustakas (1994); “For Husserl, as for Kant and Descartes, knowledge based on intuition and essence precedes empirical knowledge” (p.26). These ideas necessitate acknowledging one’s own experiences and knowledge in order to be more open to what is observed.

The works of Piaget (1968), Vygotsky (1978), and Mezirow (1981) provided a theoretical underpinning for the ideas that emerged within this particular phenomenological study. Piaget asserted that learners construct knowledge through interactions with the environment, in which the learner experiences what Piaget referred to as disequilibrium, or an imbalance between an idea and a real experience. This disequilibrium leads to curiosity, giving the learner incentive to make meaning. Therefore, a teacher would construct knowledge as they face interactions within the classroom that place them in a state of disequilibrium.

Vygotsky (1978) theorized that an essential feature of learning is that, in the process of learning, a zone of proximal development is created. This zone of proximal development is the difference between what one can do alone and what one can accomplish with the guidance gained from others through instruction and example. This can occur only when the learner is interacting and in cooperation with people in her or his environment. Therefore, collaboration occurring between teachers would allow a teacher to move forward in making meaning through interacting with other teachers with more knowledge and experience.

Mezirow’s (1981) theory of perspective transformation is an adult learning theory that focuses on a change in perspective. Transformative learning comes out of
experiences that change the routine thought of the learner or provide a sense of
disequilibrium. Praxis, or a combination of reflection and practice, allows the learner to
become aware of her or his assumptions and to act on them (Hoffman-Kipp, Artiles, &
theory suggests that reflective and critical thinking must be encouraged as an important
part of teacher learning as well as instructional improvement efforts” (p. 42).

The current study has been influenced by theory in both its design and its
execution. Transcendental phenomenology finds its philosophical underpinnings in the
theories and philosophical ideas of Husserl, Descartes, and Kant. The work of Moustakas
(1994) in the area of transcendental phenomenology has contributed greatly to its current
interpretation. The learning theories of Piaget (1968), Vygotsky (1978), and Mezirow
(1981) provided theoretical support for the ideas that emerged during the study.

Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

Two delimitations (Creswell, 2007) affected this phenomenological inquiry. The
first delimitation was the fact that all of the participants were teachers from the
Southeastern region of the United States. The second delimitation was that all of the
participants were teachers in public school systems. These delimitations narrowed the
scope of the study.

One possible limitation of the study was that teachers who were willing to spend
time in focus group interviews and individual follow-up interviews might be teachers
who had a propensity toward reflection. Another limitation of the study was that some of
the participants were simultaneously participating in a summer school program for
struggling students, which might also indicate a dedication to the field of education and possibly reflective practice. A third limitation of the study was the fact that the participants were selected from only two sites. Although the opportunity to participate was open to all teachers in the summer program, only Caucasian females enlisted as participants. In addition, because of the interpretive nature of qualitative research, there is a lack of generalizability of the findings of this study to teachers and teaching situations other than those experienced by the participants. Finally, because I am a teacher myself, I had to be diligent in my efforts to understand the lived experiences of these teachers without projecting my own thoughts onto theirs.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significance for teachers, administrators and staff development professionals, parents, and students because it allowed the role of reflection for practicing teachers to be revealed. Rather than simply prescribing reflection as an activity, it is important to situate reflection within the current teaching context. Doing so better equips us to strengthen practices that lead to student learning.

Because teachers work in isolation within a classroom throughout the day and have little time to glean knowledge from their colleagues, they will benefit from knowing how reflection is approached by other practicing teachers. Comparing and contrasting our experiences with the experiences of others can lead us to focus on our experiences, which in turn can help solidify our own philosophy of teaching.

Administrators and staff development professionals can benefit from hearing the voices of practicing teachers so they can help them better monitor and evaluate effective
reflective practices, as well as their own effectiveness in providing an environment that encourages and nurtures ongoing reflective practices.

Other stakeholders who can benefit from this study include students and their families. As teachers begin to understand the meaning of reflection for themselves and other teachers, they can be more deliberate in their efforts to use reflection to improve practice. Because improved teaching practices should always lead to improved student learning opportunities, the students and their families will reap the benefits related to academic success.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation contains into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, providing a statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, significance of the study, definition of terms, limitations of the study, and a summary. Chapter 2 reviews literature relevant to the topic. Chapter 3 provides the methodological framework for the study, including philosophical assumptions, design elements, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the research. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the finding and directions for future research.

Chapter 1 Summary

Although most educators agree that teacher reflection has value, it is often not nurtured by providing time and opportunity to practice it in the context of the classroom. Teachers are being called to action without being given the perspective of colleagues who
have engaged in effective reflective practice. The purpose of this study was to explore the 
reflective experiences of practicing teachers in order to understand, from the perspective 
of those teachers, the meaning of reflection in teaching. Other teachers can benefit from 
knowing how reflection is approached, how it is experienced, in what contexts it takes 
place, and the role that it plays in the practice of teaching.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Reflective practice in teaching has been a subject of interest since the days of the ancient teacher-philosophers. With the theme of teacher reflection underlying many teacher education programs and professional development models, one might assume that a clear definition of reflection exists, along with a common understanding of its role in teaching elementary school from the perspective of teachers.

The primary purpose of this review was to ascertain whether a clear definition of reflection and a common understanding of its role in elementary teaching from the perspective of teachers exist. In order to position my research in the broader context of the seminal works and relevant research studies regarding teacher reflection, I reviewed the available literature. The review included professional books relevant to teacher reflection, articles from peer-reviewed journals, articles accessed via the Internet, and articles accessed through databases, including ERIC, Academic Search Premier, and Academic OneFile.

Two initial questions drove the line of inquiry that provided the structure of this review:

1. Is there a common definition of teacher reflection?
2. What is the role of reflection in teaching elementary school from the perspective of teachers?

The pursuit of answers to these questions then led to the emergence of questions that would allow me to delve more deeply into the concept of teacher reflection:
3. What are the levels and forms of reflection?

4. How is reflection utilized in the education of preservice teachers?

5. How is reflection utilized in the professional development of professional teachers?

**Overview of the Chapter**

The review is divided into six sections, according to the six prevalent strands in the literature: (a) reflection defined, (b) levels and forms of reflection, (c) reflection and collaboration, (d) reflection as part of teacher education programs, (e) reflection as part of professional development, and (f) reflection from the perspective of teachers. Reflection from the perspective of teachers is positioned as the last strand to show clearly the dearth of literature in this area compared with the available literature that explores the other five strands.

*Reflection Defined*

Over several decades, the process of reflection has been defined and described numerous ways in the literature, making it difficult to isolate its true meaning. In fact, Rodgers (2002) argued that reflection has lost its meaning by “becoming everything to everybody” (p. 843), and advocated a clarification of the meaning of reflection so that “it might be taught, learned, assessed, discussed, and researched, and evolve in both meaning and usefulness.” (p. 844). If we are to accomplish this clarification of the meaning of reflection, then we should delve into the definitions and descriptions that have developed over the years.
Dewey (1933), who is often considered the first educator to connect reflection with the profession of teaching, advocated reflective or thoughtful action instead of habitual action and identified open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness as characterizing an exemplary reflective teacher. However, according to Posner (1989), not all teachers possess these characteristics and therefore, one is not necessarily reflective simply because he or she is a teacher.

Amulya (2004) described reflection as a process that involves revisiting our experiences in order to develop greater insight into those experiences, whether in teaching or another field such as community-related work. Revisiting our experiences for the purpose of gaining insight allows us to realize that lessons are learned through experience, which is, according to Amulya, the purpose of reflection. She emphasized the value of our struggles, dilemmas, uncertainties, and breakthroughs as holding powerful learning opportunities.

Amulya (2004) noted that in most professions, the practitioner is not provided with the tools and time necessary to develop knowledge by reflecting upon practice. If teachers are to use their reflections to improve student learning, the time to do so must be provided. Understanding the ways teachers are already using reflection in their practice will be necessary if there are to be benefits to the teachers and students.

Cruikshank and Applegate (1981) stated that reflection helps teachers focus on an event, consider why that event occurred, and postulate alternative reactions that may have been more effective in reaching their goals. Schon (1983), who is frequently cited in works in the area of reflective practice, asserted that an interchange takes place between the immediate and the reflective that is difficult to articulate. He referred to this
interchange as the dialogue of the thinking and the doing. Bauer (1991) referred to reflection as a process of problem solving. Lasley (1992) described reflection as the ability to think about the art of teaching in imaginative and creative ways.

Raines and Shadiow (1995) cautioned educators to avoid an oversimplification of reflective practice as simply thinking about doing and consider its pedagogical implications. These include: (a) respecting professional growth as more than simply teachers learning new activities to try with students, (b) being cognizant of the interaction of theory with practice, and (c) recognizing the possibility of developing more deliberate classroom practices through critical reflection.

Adler (1991) reviewed the theories and practices that had emerged from the literature on reflective teacher education. She summarized three different models of reflection posited by the three researchers. These explanations were Cruikshank’s (1987) Reflective Teaching, Schon’s (1983, 1987) Reflection in Action, and Zeichner’s (1981) Reflection as Critical Inquiry. Each of these researchers had a different perspective regarding the definition and purpose of reflection.

The reflective teaching approach applied by Cruikshank (1987) focused on helping preservice teachers become more reflective through practicing a lesson in the presence of peers. This observed practice lesson was followed by small group discussion and later large group discussion, in order to analyze the effectiveness of the lesson. The intended purpose of Cruikshank’s Reflective Teaching Approach is to give preservice and professional teachers the opportunity to practice reflective thinking.

Schon (1983, 1987) described the reflective practitioner in any profession as one who can make adjustments as events arise. This occurs as practitioners become skilled at
problem setting, in which they recognize and name the circumstance or event that is seen as problematic in order to more effectively address the situation. Schon juxtaposed reflective practice with the practice of Technical Rationality. The practice of Technical Rationality emerged from Positivism, the pervasive philosophical view in Western countries during the nineteenth century. Accepted for many years as the most effective way of solving problems, this approach focused on a set end or answer. However, few instances occur in any profession in which problems are always solved in the same way. Diverse approaches to problem solving are particularly necessary in teaching, where the factors influencing problems and their solutions rarely reveal themselves in a predictable format.

Adler (1991) explained that the three approaches offered by Cruikshank, Schon, and Zeichner are guided by similar assumptions. All three approaches focused on the problem of fostering in teachers the ability to think about and respond to various situations in an informed, professional manner. Adler reported that of the three models, Zeichner’s should be seen as the most transformative, focusing on problems in both the immediate context and then going beyond the immediate and taking into consideration the political-social contexts. She considered the models presented by both Cruikshank and Schon more utilitarian, focusing on the technical aspects of teaching.

Zeichner (1981) described reflection as being critical inquiry. He went on to categorize the reflective practice of teachers into three levels: (a) technical reflection, which emphasized efficient use of professional knowledge; (b) reflection in light of situational and institutional contexts, in which teacher is expected to understand and offer an explanation regarding choices of action; and (c) reflection in light of moral and ethical
issues, in which the teacher takes into account justice and equity. The third level of reflection was considered the most sophisticated of the levels of reflection.

More recently, Cole and Knowles (2000) viewed reflection as a process of focusing on various contexts—personal, curricular, pedagogical, intellectual, and sociopolitical—in order to refine one’s own practice. Reflection has also been described in recent years as an inquiry approach associated with a dedication to ongoing learning and the refinement of practice (York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, & Montie, 2001). Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) described reflection as a process of gathering data that is most efficient when coupled with dialogue and collaboration.

Reflection has been described in numerous ways throughout the last several decades. It has been described as a means of solving problems, a way to consider one’s teaching practice and its impact on the learner, and an inquiry approach that is focused on an ongoing learning process that leads to improved practice. However, these definitions do not explain the meaning of reflection from the perspective of teachers. Instead, they offer a judgment regarding teachers’ performance, either on a continuum or compared with a preset expectation.

Levels of Reflection

The categorization of reflection into different levels or types is not surprising, given the enigmatic nature of the concept. A consideration of the various ways researchers have attempted to organize reflection into levels may provide insight into the nature of reflection and the role of reflection in elementary teaching.
Reflection has been categorized into levels or types by several researchers, which has in turn led to intersecting ideas regarding the developmental levels of reflection (Farrell, 2004; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Larrivee, 2004; Van Manen, 1977). Larrivee (2006) described these developmental levels: (a) surface reflection, which tends to be focused upon technical issues (Van Manen, 1977) and descriptive in nature (Jay & Johnson, 2002); (b) pedagogical reflection, which is the level at which a teacher attempts to structure practice so that it aligns with theories of best practice or theories ascribed to by the teacher; and (c) critical reflection, considered the most advanced level of reflection in which teachers consider not only alignment with theories of best practice, but also the moral and ethical issues within a democratic society (Larrivee, 2004).

Henderson (2001) said that one should strive to move beyond what he called craft reflection, a lower level of reflection, and technical understanding, and strive to teach for democratic living. He asserted this would be accomplished by professional artistry through inquiry (p.26). He suggested the integration of five forms of inquiry in order to reach this level of professional artistry: 1) public moral inquiry, in which one considers the tenets of a democratic life; 2) multi-perspective inquiry, in which one seeks to understand the relationship between democracy and education; 3) deliberative inquiry, in which one strives to respond to students with care and respect while also being imaginative in responding; 4) autobiographical inquiry, in which one considers teaching as a calling and examines education as a field that requires a sense of caring; and 5) critical inquiry, in which one works to develop an awareness of social, political, and economic inequities. Moving from reflection that is technical in nature into reflection that is critical in nature will be possible only when it is acknowledged teachers’ existing use
of reflection in their everyday practice and help them express the meaning of this for themselves.

Allen and Casbergue (1996) studied the frequency and level of teachers’ reflections, as well as the thoroughness of the teachers’ ability to recall classroom incidents. The participants were divided into three groups based on years of teaching experience, and was comprised of four novice student teachers, five teachers having 1 to 6.5 years of teaching experience, and three teachers with 10 to 30 years of experience.

The results of the study indicated that although all of the teachers reflected, they reflected on different levels and with differing consistency. The more reflective a teacher was, the more thorough his or her recall of incidents tended to be. In addition, the more experienced teachers demonstrated more thorough recall, provided the consistency and frequency of recall were relatively equal. These results suggested that experience would affect one’s ability to recall and reflect upon important incidents.

Reflection in teaching has been discussed in terms of reflection-in-action, or making an immediate decision based on observations, and reflection-on-action, or reflecting back on actions (Russell, 1993; Schon, 1987). Both reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action are demanding, but both types of reflection would be enhanced by experience. The ability to reflect-in-action, or make immediate adjustments in teaching, was particularly enhanced by the experience of teaching.

An understanding the levels of reflection may be useful in designing teacher education curricula and professional development programs. However, the need still exists to understand the role of reflection from the perspective of classroom teachers with varying years of experience working in varying contexts.
Reflection and Collaboration

The reflection process in some form is often incorporated into teacher education programs for preservice teachers and into professional development programs for professional teachers. In addition, the reflection activities typically prescribed in these programs include collaboration among teachers or teacher candidates.

Many researchers have advocated for the practice of teacher collaboration. Eisner (2002) suggested that teaching should be a process in which professionals would have access to the classrooms of other professionals to understand better the teaching process. Williams (2003) interviewed 12 excellent teachers and reached the conclusion that teachers are renewed through their connections with others.

In a study designed to investigate the effectiveness of regular group discussion in promoting reflective thinking in teachers of English as a second language in Korea, Farrell (1998) formed a teacher development group. The group focused on three areas: (a) the topics of teachers’ discussions, (b) the levels of reflection (descriptive or critical), and (c) the development of reflections over time. Data were collected through researcher field notes, group meeting transcripts, individual meetings, and reflective journaling.

Results indicated that the teachers did reflect, but varied in their levels of reflection. Additionally, their reflections tended to be more descriptive in nature and did not reach the level of critical reflection. Although Farrell’s (1998) study appeared to be designed in the phenomenological tradition, the researcher sought to make a judgment regarding the level of reflection exhibited by the teachers and the development of their reflections over time, rather than attempting to understand the essence of the lived experience of reflection in teaching.
According to Moallem (1997), in addition to experience in teaching, teachers should be in an environment that is conducive to reflection. Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003) examined the community of practice model as it relates to educational research and practice. They posited two central tenets in that model. These tenets are that: (a) knowledge is situated in experience, and (b) experience is understood through critical reflection with others who share this experience (p.267).

Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003) asserted that rather than focusing on the community of practice model as a means of planning basic professional development activities, educators should broaden the scope to include the use of the community of practice model to engage both researchers and practitioners simultaneously and collaboratively in inquiry with the purpose of improving educational practice on a larger scale.

Another model of reflection, reported by Mostert (2002), described the use of the phenomenological research approach as a tool for teacher reflection. Mostert reported that in response to a call to change teacher practice to meet the needs of learners today, a professional organization in Australia, Education Queensland, has instituted the use of productive pedagogy, which is a framework for critical reflection.

Following the implementation of productive pedagogy, teachers participated in learning circles, in which they were required to use a phenomenological approach to record and share situations in the classroom that fit into a theme, which had been chosen by the group (e.g., social support). Through discussions and writing narratives, the participants engaged in a process of reduction (Van Manen, 1997) to remove the layers of
influence and uncover the essence of the lived experience of the chosen theme in the classroom environment.

Teachers participating in the learning circles with the group reported that working in a small group setting allowed them to delve more deeply into the events that occurred in the classroom. Although in this study, the use of an assigned reflection protocol by the teachers was effective, assigning a protocol for reflection may prove to be even more effective if we understand how teachers already use reflection in their classrooms.

In a study that focused on reflection as it relates to teaching in a particular subject area, Passman (2003) organized a research project focused on helping educators examine more closely the everyday occurrences in the teaching of writing. In that study, the participants engaged in several steps, which were focused reflection, modeling, and team planning and teaching.

Through reflective practice discussion groups, the researcher and participants examined student writing samples and commented on the samples independently. The participants then made speculations and asked questions on the basis of the student writing. After this step, the participant who contributed the student work responded to the questions and speculations offered by the other participants. The last step in the process required participants to focus on how this particular discussion influenced their teaching practice.

Passman (2003) found that through the course of the study, the way the teachers discussed student work evolved. It turned from a discussion permeated with talk of external pressures and incapable students, to a discussion focused on students as capable
learners. In addition, the teachers began to view themselves as facilitators of learning working alongside the students.

Hollins, McIntyre, DeBose, Hollins, and Towner (2004) conducted a 2-year study aimed at cultivating a learning community. This community, consisting of urban, African American students in a low-performing high-poverty elementary school, was intended to encourage the development of habits of mind, or dispositions that are required for improving the acquisition and development of literacy.

In the study, teachers were involved in a formal study group that followed five steps: (a) delineating the challenges faced by teachers in teaching these students, (b) identifying and implementing a new approach to meet those challenges, (c) evaluating the new approach after implementation, (d) going through a process of role transmutation, and (e) carrying on a continuous dialogue regarding approaches that were viewed as successful.

The researchers used a mixed methods approach, with the research being primarily qualitative in nature. The participants were 12 teachers who taught in kindergarten through fourth grade. The group was made up of 10 teachers of African American descent and 2 teachers of European American descent, with 9 women and 3 men. The teachers each taught classes of approximately 20 children. At least 90% of the children in each class were of African American descent. Study groups were utilized as a means of sharing and encouraging dialogue among the teachers. As selected programs were implemented to improve literacy acquisition in the students, the teachers evaluated the approaches to determine the success of each program.
Similar to the results of the Passman (2003) study, the participating teachers’
conversations evolved. The teachers progressed from discussing the children and their
backgrounds as being very different from their own, to beginning to see the students’
lives as similarities and connections to their own lives.

Lin, Schwartz, and Hatano (2005) were interested in the connection between
reflection and metacognition, particularly in the use of metacognitive strategies. They
questioned the use of conventional metacognitive instruction and strategies with teachers,
arguing that the act of teaching requires reflective adaptation, or adaptive metacognition.
Teachers face situations involving many contributing variables. Therefore, metacognitive
strategies that provide practice with set problems, having known solutions, and occurring
in a stable environment where there are shared values and goals, does not provide for the
need to adapt to each unique situation.

The authors came to several conclusions regarding the use of metacognitive
strategies in teaching. First, the participants’ values vary and therefore, their teaching and
learning goals vary. Second, observing situations involving other teachers with different
values provides participants the opportunity to reflect on their own ideas about how the
situation could be resolved. Third, providing an opportunity for collaboration, while
taking into account social situations, could help foster adaptive metacognition. Finally,
the use of computers may prove beneficial in setting up practice situations and providing
a means of gathering information from others with different values.

Finley et al. (2000) undertook a qualitative research and development effort with
the purpose of identifying how teachers can be supported professionally in order to make
more coherent decisions regarding curriculum and instruction to support student learning.
Operating under a constructivist paradigm, the authors selected five schools from rural, urban, and suburban sites. The teachers who participated were good teachers, but were not considered exemplary teachers. The researchers and participants met in groups to discuss the instructional practices of the teachers. Data were collected by using records of conversations, participant journals, transcribed personal interviews, field notes from classroom visits, and informal classroom conversations.

The study was conducted in two phases. The first phase was exploratory in nature, and its purpose was to identify challenges teachers face when trying to affect student learning. The data collected during this phase was used to develop tools and strategies to facilitate conversations among teachers and, in turn, support the efforts of the teachers to improve practice. The second phase involved the implementation and evaluation of these strategies and tools.

The findings varied somewhat from site to site, with six important dimensions emerging:

1. The teachers relied upon their own expertise and that of colleagues to justify decisions.
2. The teachers recognized they were capable of affecting learning.
3. The teachers thought of themselves as being in a profession rather than just a job.
4. The teachers felt they benefited from collegial dialogue regarding their practice.
5. The teachers believed that knowledge is constructed by learners.
6. The teachers approached instruction in ways that were consistent with their beliefs regarding learning.

Finley et al. reported these dimensions by relating them to the theory of stance (Berghoff, 1997; Cochran-Smith, 1994). The theory of stance has been used to describe the position one takes within a particular context. These include stances toward authority, agency, professionalism, collaboration, knowledge, and instruction. Change was documented in the teachers, who developed a learner-centered stance in each of these areas.

Finley et al. were also designers of professional development and, therefore, had goals in mind regarding the direction the development should take. Although the collaborative activities undertaken in the study proved to reinforce their assumptions, the focus of the study was on the process of change rather than on understanding the perspective of the teacher.

Various interpretations of the reflection process are often incorporated into teacher education programs for preservice teachers and into professional development programs for professional teachers. Many such programs include reflection activities that involve collaboration among teachers or teacher candidates. Few would argue that teachers benefit from the opportunity to collaborate with other teaching professionals. However, if educators are to understand how to implement collaboration so that it is beneficial to teachers and, as a result, improves student learning, then we must first attempt to understand the purpose of reflection for teachers and ways collaboration can support those purposes.
Reflection as Part of Teacher Education Programs

The preponderance of available research on teacher reflection tends to focus on the importance of the reflections of preservice teachers while participating in student teaching (Mills & Satterthwait, 2000; Posner, 2000; Raines & Shadiow, 1995; Wenzlaff, 1994). Reflection is used in teacher education programs as a tool for understanding the transformation of student teachers as they work through a practicum. Assignments requiring preservice teachers to reflect have taken various forms and produced a range of results.

Many times reflection activities in student teaching have been implemented in the form of an assigned journal with the purpose of fostering reflection (Mueller, 2003). The student teacher is expected to reflect on specific activities or meaningful events in order to become more aware of the strengths and weaknesses of her or his classroom practices. Although this may be an effective means of encouraging student teacher to think about their practice, Posner (1989) asserted that reflection without experience is of little value, indicating that the reflections of teachers are likely to increase in quality as the individual gains experiences upon which to reflect.

For instance, Wenzlaff (1994) researched training for student teachers in reflective thinking. The qualitative study focused on training student teachers to become more reflective during their student teaching experience. Data were collected in the form of daily journal entries by the student teacher, weekly student teacher peer coaching journal entries, weekly narratives composed by the supervisor, and surveys completed by the student teacher at the beginning, middle, and end of the practicum. Wenzlaff
concluded that it is important to train student teachers to focus on important teaching events using structured questions, which provide a vehicle for more valuable reflections.

Ryken (2004), a teacher educator, assigned her students the task of writing in a journal. She then conducted a self-study with the purpose of analyzing her own responses to the student teachers’ reflective journal entries. According to the author, this process of self-study helped her to reframe her thinking in two important ways. First, reading the reflections of her students provided her with an experience with three different conversations: (a) the student conversing with himself or herself, (b) the instructor conversing with his or her own instructional goals, and (c) a reciprocal conversation between the instructor and the student. The second way this self-study helped her reframe her thinking was in helping her to more clearly understand the concept of Palmer’s (1999) idea of teaching from the heart.

In contrast to the studies that focus on the positive aspects of reflection, Mills and Satterthwait (2000) took a critical look at reflection. They cautioned educators that the technical rationality of reflection should not be valued at the expense of maintaining an ethic of care while teaching. The authors’ observations of student journal entries revealed that as students moved into teaching situations, they tended to depart from the idea that attributes and dispositions such as fairness, caring, and equity are important. Sandholtz (2005) asserted that the practice experiences of prospective teachers might actually serve to reinforce generic views of teaching rather than challenging those views. Therefore, although student teaching is an indispensable step in the process of teacher education, it should not be assumed that student teachers would display a disposition of caring without the idea of caring being supported and encouraged by their instructors.
In a self-study conducted by Mueller (2003), the teacher educator focused on fostering reflective practice in her students by modeling reflective practices herself. She sought to accomplish this by using journals that she referred to as Seesaw Books. These Seesaw Books served as a place for students to reflect and as a place for the teacher to communicate with the students. Using the Seesaw Books, Mueller was able to communicate with students as they worked through the process of understanding new concepts that were presented.

Mueller 2003 acknowledged that it would be of value to cultivate an environment in which the teacher candidates could discuss with one another their observations and realizations along the way. In addition to understanding the value of cultivating an interactive, collaborative environment, the author saw a need to be intentional in guiding the reflective practice of the student teachers. Their reflections could be guided by responding, in the Seesaw Books, with comments that would challenge them to think about their practice.

In another study involving preservice teachers, Friedus (1997) studied a group of five graduate students at the Bank Street College of Education in New York City. The five graduate students were required to use the portfolio process. This process included several steps.

The graduate students were required to (a) identify and discuss the artifacts that they found most significant in their personal and professional development, (b) identify connections between and among artifacts collected during the process, (c) reflect upon those connections in order to identify a unifying theme, (d) examine the selected artifacts
and unifying themes from both a personal and a theoretical perspective, and (e) participate in public presentations of their portfolios.

As the graduate students worked together throughout the portfolio process, they reported that they had developed a sense of trust in themselves, a sense of trust in others in the group, and a trust in the portfolio process. Additionally, the graduate students reported that as they worked together and began to build a bond they became more willing to take risks in their learning, therefore building a synergy that continued to drive the learning process for them. Friedus (1997) asserted that the findings show the importance of a context of trust for effective reflection to take place.

Breese and Nawrocki-Chabin (2006) conducted a longitudinal study that involved Boyatzis’ (1982) dispositional language, Bandura’s (1977) observational learning, and reflective analysis. The authors sought to show how all three approaches can be used to help student teachers both identify existing dispositions and to develop dispositions considered desirable in teaching.

The sample was composed of 66 teacher candidates over the course of four semesters, with 14 candidates in the first semester, 19 candidates in the second semester, 15 candidates in the third semester, and 18 candidates in the fourth semester. The site, Alverno College, was selected because the use of self-assessment methods is promoted by the faculty as being important in the facilitation of lifelong learning.

By watching videotaped segments of lessons, the teacher candidates assessed themselves and then a fellow candidate, focusing on four dispositional categories: curriculum choice, classroom practice, language use, and body language. The assessment of desirable dispositions was also undertaken in the forms of peer feedback conferences,
written responses to prompts related to the intentions and dispositions, and feedback from instructors regarding digital portfolios submitted by the candidates.

Breese and Nawrocki-Chabin (2006) found that although the candidates’ self-analyses differed in quality, all of the participants developed a greater awareness of how particular behaviors are connected to desirable teacher dispositions. The researchers asserted that these results indicate that an emphasis on the awareness and development of dispositions is of great value in teacher education and cannot be left to chance.

Adler (1991) stated that there was little evidence available to show that critical inquiry was actually promoted by the reflective strategies designed to be used with preservice teachers and proposed by various researchers (Adler & Goodman, 1986; Cruikshank, 1987; Hill, 1986; Gitlin & Titlebaum, 1983; Grumet, 1989; Korthagen, 1985; Zeichner, 1981). However, Amobi (2006) asserted that although the mandates and accountability associated with No Child Left Behind (United States Department of Education, 2001) legislation are important in teacher education, educators must not neglect the challenging task of equipping teachers with the capacity to sustain reflective practice throughout their teaching career.

Interestingly, the literature on teacher education encourages the development of student teachers who are capable of effective reflection, but there is a dearth of literature addressing the role of reflection for practicing professional teachers. While there is a need to educate preservice teachers in a way that leads them to be reflective, educators must also investigate the similarities and differences between the experiences of the student teacher and the experiences of the professional teacher. It would be valuable to compare and contrast the reflective experiences of the student teacher with those of the practicing
professional in order to understand if the purposes of the reflective practices are the same or if reflective practices of the preservice teacher and the professional teacher serve different functions altogether.

Reflection as Part of Professional Development

Much of the research and information regarding teacher reflection relies upon the assumption that reflection is important and is valued and understood by practitioners. Various formal reflection methods, models, and instruments have been developed and applied through various professional development programs with the aim of improving teacher performance.

Nikolic (2002) suggested that reflection should be used as part of an organized, formal, self-evaluation process that could lead practicing teachers to research in the classroom. Nikolic described a cycle of self-study, beginning with questionnaires, videotaping, audiotaping, performance checklists, and guided reflection journals. These data sources would then be used to identify areas that needed improvement. The next phase of the cycle was to establish a systematic self-evaluation based on identified strengths and weaknesses. After this phase, the teacher set priorities for the improvement process. Next, the teacher created a plan that included defining criteria for evaluation. After this, the teacher carried out experimentation within the area of teaching that needed improvement. Finally, the findings were analyzed in order to determine whether the plan had been effective in improving instruction.

McCombs (2003) reported on the use of a guided reflection process in which the Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices surveys (McCombs, 1999) were used to aid
teachers in reflection in three areas: their own beliefs and practices, how those practices were perceived by students, and the effect of both teacher-centered and learner-centered variables on student motivation and achievement. McCombs found that using the Assessment of Learner-Centered Practices surveys and the guided reflections tools provided a means of creating a positive way to assess teacher dispositions and instructional skills. The resulting assessment could be useful in meeting current accountability requirements for teachers and school.

Similarly, Hole and McEntee (1999) suggested using the Guided Reflection Protocol (Tripp, 1993), in which teachers analyze classroom events. The teachers were required to (a) collect stories of classroom events, (b) describe what happened, (c) attempt to formulate an explanation of why the event occurred, (d) explore the possible meanings for the event, and (e) consider various ways that they might change their practice on the basis of their new understanding.

Whereas Hole and McEntee (1999) suggested using the Guided Reflection Protocol for individual reflection, they suggested using the Critical Incidents Protocol (Hole & McEntee, 1999) to guide reflection in a group setting. Following this protocol, small groups of teachers met together. In the first phase of the protocol, group members wrote stories about an event. In the next phase, the group chose a story from those presented in the small group. Next, the group examined what happened, possible reasons it happened, and then discussed what it might mean. Finally, the group considered implications for their teaching that could be based on the information gathered and analyzed by the group.
Gil and Riggs (1999) conducted a study involving 22 teachers in the Chicago Public School System. These teachers were trained to observe their peers and write a narrative that reported the observation and included claims, evidence, interpretations, and judgments they constructed during the observation. These narrative reports provided feedback to the teacher and were used by the observer to evaluate her own teaching in comparison with the teacher being observed. The authors stated that, “Reflection encourages an evaluative approach to determining how one can become a skillful, knowledgeable, and effective teacher” (p.16).

Providing teachers the time and opportunity to observe other teachers may be beneficial in providing a means of comparing and contrasting one’s practices with the teaching practices of others. However, in reality, it is difficult for teachers to find time to accomplish what is required of them each day. Therefore, the opportunity to observe a colleague on a regular basis is, in most cases, an unrealistic expectation. To more effectively reinforce the reflection practices that can lead to improved student learning, educators must understand the role that reflection plays for individual teachers and the ways these teachers experience reflection on a day-to-day basis.

In another study, Gil-Garcia and Cintron (2002) reviewed the use of the reflective journal as a tool for learning and the professional development of teachers and administrators. The purpose of the study was to provide evidence for the effectiveness of using reflective journals. The research sample was composed of graduate students who were pursuing a career in school administration and leadership and were enrolled in two clinical leadership courses, and professional teachers enrolled in two sections of a course in Teaching English as a Second Language.
The participants were trained to identify and record important actions or events that they felt were significant in their particular jobs. The graduate students in administration and leadership recorded significant events related to policy implementation, facilities management, public relations, pupil-teacher interactions, staff development, and curriculum development. The professional teachers enrolled in the English as a Second Language course recorded significant events related to the planning of learning experiences that allow for integration of different subject areas, the use of data in informing instruction, and the application of the use of experiences that exhibit a knowledge of varied approaches in facilitating the construction of knowledge in English Language Learners.

The researchers noted four factors that affected the ability of the participants to reflect: developmental level of the individual, an understanding of the expectations of the journal assignment, the frequency and quality of the reflections, and their perceptions of the work environment. These factors again illuminate the fact that before we can effectively influence the use of reflective techniques in a beneficial way, we must first seek to understand how teachers use reflection in their practice. Simply knowing that variation exists in practicing teachers’ ability to reflect does not provide us with the needed information.

Reflection from the Perspective of Teachers

Teachers are called upon to reflect, analyze, and compare (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 2005). However, a scant number of research studies have delved into the meaning of reflection for elementary school teachers.
In an attempt to understand what factors contribute to the resiliency of novice teachers in their first year of teaching, Yost (2006) conducted a phenomenological study. The researcher collected data through interviews and observations of 10 teachers, all of whom had attended the same small liberal arts university. Data were collected during the teachers’ second year of teaching over a span of two months. Five years after the teachers had graduated, Yost followed with a questionnaire about the interviews and observations.

From the data gathered, Yost (2006) noted several propositions that emerged:

1. Confidence and self-efficacy are enhanced by successful student teaching experiences that are clearly connected to coursework.

2. Successful teachers employ critical reflection as a tool for problem solving during their first years in the profession.

3. Mentoring efforts influence beginning teachers far more than traditional induction programs that focus on knowledge transfer without support being provided.

In a qualitative study by Scanlan, Care, and Udod (2002), three university nursing professors explored the understanding of reflection in teaching from their own perspectives. The research question was ‘How do the research participants understand and use reflection in their teaching?’ The participants were two females and one male, with two of the participants having more than 20 years of experience in teaching and third participant having only 2 years of experience. The researchers’ data sources included written autobiographies, critical incident journals, classroom observations, debriefings after classroom observations, and research team meetings to gather data. The
data were analyzed through content analysis, compared and coded, and themes were identified.

The four themes that emerged from the data were making connections, developmental aspects of reflection, the influence of context on reflection, and the influence of emotions on reflection. Scanlan, Care, and Udod (2002) reported that experience played a role in reflective practices, that teachers need time to develop reflective practices, and that context and emotions play a role in the use of reflection by teachers. In addition, the researchers also reported using reflection as a means of aiding the teachers in making significant connections for students regarding class content.

Another study that attempted to explain the experiences of practicing teachers with reflection was the case study by Moallem (1997), in which the researcher observed the activities and thinking processes of an expert middle school science teacher. In this study, the researcher observed a teacher engaged in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schon, 1987), and concluded that teachers need more opportunities to develop the schema necessary to effectively reflect-in-action. In addition, the findings suggest that it is important for teachers to engage in self-analysis with the purpose of more deeply understanding their own beliefs, assumptions, and philosophy. Moallem (1997) further stated that the social context in which the teacher resides and having time to reflect both have an impact on the reflective practices of teachers.

An ongoing discourse with a group of exemplary teachers regarding why they continue to teach, Neito (2003) observed that the act of teaching was more than the implementation of particular techniques and strategies. The idea that teaching is more than implementation is sometimes difficult for individuals outside the profession of
teaching, and often even preservice teachers to understand. Teaching cannot be condensed into a list of strategies and techniques explained in a textbook.

Jay (2003) conducted a case study involving four participants; all of them experienced high school teachers who had completed the portfolio process designed by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (1994). With a purpose similar to that of my phenomenological study of the role of reflection for teachers, Jay (2003) sought to explore teachers’ perspectives on their teaching experiences and relevant reflective practices. The purpose of the study was to illuminate the teachers’ perspectives and then contrast the reflection activities that the teachers effective with those they considered ineffective.

Data sources in the study included interviews, observations, document, conversational interviews, and simulated recall tasks. Jay’s (2003) analysis of the data revealed five propositions:

1. Reflective opportunities may be dependent upon context.
2. Reflective or non-reflective activities may or may not be considered useful.
3. Teachers may reflect on their own, even when they are not given the opportunity.
4. Teachers perceive reflective experiences to range in value from not valuable to very valuable.
5. Reflective opportunities are limited for a variety of reasons in any context (p. 33).

Although the literature reviewed in this section depended upon the perspectives of practicing teachers to understand the role of reflection in teaching, the fact remains that
little information is available regarding reflection from the perspective of teachers. The many technical, social, cultural, and political variables associated with teaching make it a dynamic profession. If educators are to make meaning of the many ideas related to reflection in teaching, then we must seek out practicing professional teachers who can provide valuable insight regarding those reflective practices they exercise every day.

Chapter 2 Summary

The literature review related to teacher reflection revealed six themes: (a) reflection defined, (b) levels and forms of reflection, (c) reflection and collaboration, (d) reflection as part of teacher education programs, and (e) reflection as part of professional development, and (f) reflection from the perspective of teachers. These themes and the accompanying literature, although enlightening, do not clearly illuminate the meaning of reflection from the lived experience of practicing professional teachers.

The existing research reporting on the meaning of reflection from the perspective of professional elementary classroom teachers is inadequate. Intentionally revealing teachers’ recollections of reflection experiences can help them better understand the function of reflection for themselves personally and can provide a springboard for more effective and efficient reflective practices in the context of elementary school teaching. More and different ways for teacher to reflect have continued to be proposed, without allowing the voices of professional teachers to be heard regarding the reflective practices in which they already engage.

Research in the areas of health care education, preservice teacher education, and formal professional development programs has provided insights into the merits of
reflection. However, it must be recognized that the act of elementary school teaching, with its many variables, cannot be equated with student teaching or the experiences and education of health care professionals. Nor can it be assumed that a one-size-fits-all professional development program will benefit all professional teachers.

The necessity to implement, prescribe, or impose structured reflective practices has been influenced by an overreliance on quantitative research methods in the field of education, which require us to describe the success of an imposed procedure or provide numerical data to show the frequency of reflection on the part of teachers. The meaning of the multifaceted act of reflection in elementary teaching, from the perspective of teachers, cannot be quantified. If we hope to implement approaches that lead to improved teacher reflection and, in turn, to improved student learning, then it is necessary first to understand what is already in place.

Teachers and their educators do not have time to delve into the meaning of each everyday activities associated with teaching. However, taking a few moments to listen to what practicing teachers say about may provide a means of designing effective ways to encourage them to engage in increasingly sophisticated and efficient methods of reflection. In a profession that is laden with responsibility, it is important to give teachers the opportunity to illuminate the role that reflection plays for them before presenting the act of reflection as another requirement.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Qualitative Research and Phenomenology

The very nature of teaching in elementary school makes it difficult to quantify. The world inside our schools reflects the world outside them: dynamic, diverse, and difficult to measure. The number of variables affecting daily life in a classroom requires teachers to be flexible, while at the same time, maintaining structure. As a researcher, I felt it was important to respect the reality of the teacher as I approached this study. My desire to respect the reality of professional teachers as I attempted to explore the central phenomenon, reflection, led me to believe that a qualitative approach would be most suited to such a topic.

In qualitative research, the researcher asks broad, open-ended questions and collects primarily text data through interviews, observations, and written artifacts from the participants, acknowledging that the research is biased and subjective (Creswell, 2005). Qualitative research is invaluable when the focus of the research is to explore the lived experience of an individual or a group of individuals. It is a relatively newly recognized approach in comparison to quantitative methods, with the history of qualitative research being established only since the 1970s (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The qualitative research approach is characterized by: (a) taking place in the natural setting, (b) using multiple humanistic and interactive methods, (c) having an emergent nature, (d) being interpretive, (e) viewing social phenomena holistically, (f) implying a researcher who must understand her own
perspective and bias, and (g) implying a researcher who uses complex, multi-faceted reasoning methods (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

Just like teaching, qualitative research calls for both structure and flexibility (Hatch, 2002). One of the most significant features characterizing qualitative research is the sampling procedure. Rather than using random sampling, the qualitative researcher uses purposeful sampling in order to seek out those participants who would provide the most important information (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Patton, 2002). In addition, the researcher may add more participants to the study as themes begin to emerge. This allows the researcher, as the participants share their experiences, to delve more deeply into the essence of the lived experience of the participants.

The Phenomenological Tradition

The phenomenological tradition of qualitative research lends itself well to understanding the meaning of the lived experience, and particularly well to understanding the meaning of reflection, because phenomenological inquiry requires a great deal of reflection on the part of the researcher. Husserl (1965) stated that “phenomenology is the ‘science of science’ since it alone investigates that which all other sciences simply take for granted (or ignore), the very essence of their own objects” (p. 23). It is one of several human science research methods, including ethnography (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), hermeneutics (Dilthey, 1976), empirical phenomenology (Giorgi, 1985; Van Kaam, 1959, 1966), and heuristics (Moustakas, 1990; Rogers, 1985). According to Moustakas (1994), all of these qualitative methods have several common characteristics, including (a) recognizing the value of
qualitative designs and methodologies, studies of human experiences that are not approachable through quantitative approaches; (b) focusing on the wholeness of experience rather than solely on its objects or parts; (c) searching for meanings and essences of experiences rather than measurements and explanations; (d) obtaining descriptions of experience through first-person accounts in informal and formal conversations and interviews; (e) regarding the data of experience as imperative in understanding human behavior and as evidence for scientific investigations; (f) formulating questions and problems that reflect the interest, involvement, and personal commitment of the researcher; and (g) viewing experience and behavior as an integrated and inseparable relationship of subject and object and of parts and whole (p. 21).

Transcendental phenomenological research is one of the traditions, or designs, situated within qualitative research methods. This tradition has its roots in psychology and philosophy, and sprang from the idea that we must move away from the empirical study of material objects if we desire to understand the lived human experience (Descartes, 1977). It was described by Moustakas (1994) as “a scientific study of the appearance of things, of phenomena, just as we see them and as they appear to us in consciousness” (p. 49). Moustakas posited that the challenge of this method is in extracting the meaning from the data gathered in order to understand the essence of the lived experience. Moustakas (1994) described transcendental phenomenology as possessing all of these characteristics shared by the research traditions that fall under the qualitative approach, but as distinguished from the other human science methods in the launching of the study, the method of data collection, and the method of data analysis.
Data Collection and Analysis in Phenomenology

*Phenomenological Reduction*

In collecting and analyzing data in a phenomenological study, the researcher follows the steps of phenomenological reduction, in which he/she sets aside prior notions, looks at a phenomenon as if for the first time, and attempts to arrive at an understanding of the essence of the phenomenon being studied.

*Bracketing.* The researcher must bracket the focus of the study, setting aside his/her own experiences and biases regarding the central phenomenon. This bracketing process is “epoche”, which in Greek means “to refrain from judgment” (Moustakas, 1994). In transcendental phenomenology, which has been influenced by the work of Kant (1966), Descartes (1977), and Husserl (1965), the researcher must set aside his/her own beliefs as much as possible, becoming open, receptive, and even naïve with regard to the lived experience under exploration. The researcher does this in order to see all possibilities in the information shared by the participants. For instance, in order to understand this phenomenon through the perspective of teachers with varying years of experience, it was necessary for me to bracket any pre-existing ideas, opinions, and knowledge regarding reflection, allowing the words of the participants to reveal the true essence of this lived experience.

The researcher goes through the bracketing process in order to remain focused on the central phenomenon under exploration. Because the primary means of data collection is the in-depth interview (Creswell, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Moustakas, 1994), it is important for the researcher to be able to listen to the participant without judgment or
preconceptions. In the launching of the research, the researcher designs a research question that will reveal the essence of the central phenomenon. Although other data collection methods, such as observations, can be used in a phenomenological study, the in-depth interview is of particular importance because the researcher seeks to understand the essence of the lived experience. Because the participants play such an important part in the research by providing insights that would be otherwise unavailable, they are considered co-researchers.

**Horizontalization.** The researcher then goes through a process of horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994), in which he/she views all statements collected from the participants, or co-researchers as having equal value. These statements are then reviewed and all irrelevant statements and overlapping statements are extracted in order to leave the horizons, or meaning units to be grouped into themes. Grouping the horizons into themes allows the researcher to develop a textural description of the meaning of the phenomenon.

**Imaginative Variation**

Imaginative variation follows phenomenological reduction in this research tradition. In this step of the process, the researcher attempts to imagine all possible meanings by reframing the phenomenon, viewing it from many perspectives and realizing that there are many ways to understand the essence of the phenomenon under exploration. Moustakas (1994) suggested the following steps in imaginative variation:
1. Carefully consider various structural meanings associated with the textural meanings of the experience.

2. Recognize themes and contexts related to the realization of the phenomenon.

3. Consider broader, universal structures, such as time, space, self, and relationships that may influence thoughts regarding the phenomenon.

4. Search for examples that clearly show the structural themes that lead to a structural description of the phenomenon. (p. 99)

It is during imaginative variation that the researcher attempts to synthesize the findings of the research in order to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants.

The phenomenological tradition of inquiry does differ from other qualitative research traditions in several ways, but in all traditions of inquiry, the researcher must be aware of his or her own philosophical assumptions.

**Philosophical Assumptions**

The philosophical paradigm, or worldview, within which researchers work dictates the epistemological and methodological choices they make. Operating under the constructivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998), I believe that, ontologically, multiple realities can be constructed by individuals. Epistemologically, I believe knowledge is a human construction. Methodologically, I believe naturalistic qualitative methods are useful in uncovering the essence of a lived experience, and axiologically, I believe research is inherently value laden and these values influence the construction of knowledge (Hatch, 2002). Because of these assumptions, I expected that individuals experience reflection in
different ways, and that an individual interprets its role differently on the basis of values and life experience.

Although transcendental phenomenological research operating under a constructivist paradigm cannot be used to develop theory, law, generalizations, or causal linkages, the inductive logic used allows the researcher to construct the meaning or essence of the experience through the viewpoint of the people who have actually lived it (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, it was the most logical choice for this study because of my philosophical assumptions and the purpose of the research.

Site and Participants

In order to answer the study research questions and in conformity with the qualitative approach to research, a purposeful sample (Creswell, 2007) was used. In phenomenology, the purposeful sampling technique takes the form of criterion sampling, with the criterion sampling in this particular study being that all of the participants were elementary school teachers (Hatch, 2002). The participants varied in the grade level taught and numbers of years having taught. There were two research sites: Site A, an elementary school, and Site B, a summer reading program where teachers from urban, suburban, and rural elementary schools came together to teach children at risk in reading.

Initially, I contacted seven teachers at Site A, via an e-mail invitation. Four were fourth grade teachers, and three were fifth grade teachers. I had worked in the same school with these teachers for 4 months and chose them because I knew that they worked together on grade level teams and were comfortable talking with one another, but did not always agree on every issue. In addition, the teachers’ philosophies varied widely. Some
were more traditional in their approach, while others were more experimental. These teachers also varied in the number of years they had been teaching. After receiving e-mails of acceptance from all but one of the teachers who had been contacted, I sent each a letter (see Appendix A) confirming the invitation to take part in the study and further explaining the participant’s role as a co-researcher in the study (Moustakas, 1994).

Site A was chosen for several reasons. First, the student population of approximately 400 students was diverse, allowing the teachers the opportunity to serve students from varied ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, and providing fertile soil for reflection. Second, the teachers in the school engaged in ongoing professional development in order to improve student learning, again providing an impetus for reflection. Last, the administrators of this school had the expectation that the teachers there would seek out and understand the best teaching practices in order to improve student learning.

A second group of six teachers was recruited from Site B, a summer program that provided reading instruction for struggling readers within the same suburban school district, but housed at a different elementary school than Site A. Site B was chosen because the teachers in the program were from a variety of school districts within the larger metropolitan area. In addition, during the summer program, the students were dismissed at noon, giving the teachers an opportunity to meet for a focus group interview, even though they taught at different schools during the year. This group of teachers was initially contacted at a meeting of the summer program faculty. At this meeting, this planned phenomenological study was discussed, and interested teachers were allowed to sign on as participants. Again, because the questions that guided this study evolved out of
the comments from these teachers, they were considered co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994).

Leedy and Ormrod (2005) suggested that to gain access to a site, the researcher must identify the gatekeeper, or a person who can provide access to the site. At Site A, the gatekeeper was the principal of the school. At Site B, the gatekeeper was the district curriculum coordinator. These gatekeepers were contacted through a person-to-person meeting and by written correspondence in the form of a letter. Each gatekeeper signed a letter of consent (see Appendix B) before allowing the school and its teachers to be a part of the study. Each gatekeeper readily provided access to the site and was supportive of my efforts to study the meaning of reflection to teachers. All participants signed an informed consent document, which was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board prior to the beginning of the study (see Appendix C).

The overall sample included eleven female teachers and one male teacher. The selected participants taught from kindergarten through fifth grade. The years of teaching experience ranged from 3 to 29 years. The teachers’ ages ranged from 24 years to 50 years. All of the teachers were Caucasian. The educational backgrounds of the teachers ranged from a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education to a Specialist of Education in Educational Leadership.
Data Collection

Data collection at both sites was carried out through a focus group interview, which allowed data to be generated through the interactions of the participants (Morgan, 1997), and individual follow-up interviews with each participant. The primary, and often sole, data collection method, of phenomenological research is the interview. Moustakas (1994) explained that the informal, long interview, composed of open-ended questions and carried out with a conversational tone is the most typical form of data collection within the transcendental phenomenological tradition. A focus group interview protocol was developed that outlined the guidelines for carrying out the interview, as well as listing important questions for beginning the discussion and probing further (see Appendix D). The focus group interviews were structured as conversations, using open-ended questions and then probing further into the perspectives of the participants as they revealed information. The interview protocol evolved throughout the interviewing process, guided by the revelations of the participants (Byers & Wilcox, 1991).

The initial interview was in the form of a focus group interview, involving all but one of the participants who could not attend due to illness. The focus group interview at Site A, conducted in a classroom in the school, lasted 1 hour and 40 minutes. The focus group interview at Site B, conducted in the conference room of the summer program site, lasted 1 hour and 54 minutes.

Transcripts of the focus group interviews were reviewed and analyzed, both to get an initial understanding of what reflection meant for the participants, and to identify areas that needed further exploration in individual interviews. An individual interview protocol (See Appendix E) was developed to guide the individual one-on-one interviews. This
protocol provided probing questions that would allow each participant to share information that they had been uncomfortable sharing in the larger group or information that had come to mind since the focus group interview.

The individual interviews at Site A took place in the same classroom as the focus group interview, and data were collected over a 3-week period in the form of audiotapes. Because of conflicts in scheduling with one of the participants, one of the one-on-one interviews was held via e-mail. The individual interviews of four of the Site B participants were held at their respective schools. Individual interviews for the other two participants from Site B were completed via e-mail due to conflicts in scheduling. Each audiotape was transcribed, verbatim, by the researcher and checked for accuracy. The individual interviews at each site were conducted over a 2-month period and each interview lasted an average of 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

As explained above, in contrast to other qualitative inquiry approaches, phenomenology employs a specific procedure of data analysis because the focus is on understanding the lived experience, or central phenomenon from the perspective of the participants. The researcher accomplishes this through Phenomenological Reduction, or the process of bracketing the phenomenon so that it can be the focus of the study, looking at all statements as having equal value, and then gradually reducing all of the relevant information into a statement that capture the essence of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) recommended the following steps for phenomenological data analysis, adapted from the work of Stevick (1971), Colaizzi (1973), and Keen (1975):
1. The transcribed interviews are reviewed for statements significant to the research so that all relevant statements may be viewed as having equal importance.

2. The statements relevant to the research are extracted so that they can be viewed as a whole, allowing multiple dimensions to be detected.

3. All of the overlapping or redundant statements are removed. The remaining statements allow the researcher to begin moving closer to the essence of the experience.

4. Data are horizontalized, with the researcher regarding each horizon or statement that has bearing on the topic as having equal value. Because the researcher desires to understand the phenomenon from the perspective of the participants, it is important to withhold judgment of a particular relevant statement as being more important than another statement.

5. From these horizontalized statements, meaning units are pulled out by the researcher and grouped into themes on the basis of the meaning units. These themes and meaning units reveal the meaning of the experience for the participants.

6. These themes and meanings are then used to develop a textural description, or an explanation of what was experienced, and a structural description, or an explanation of how the phenomenon was experienced.

7. These steps are followed by the researcher attempting to imagine all the possible meanings and viewing the phenomenon from many perspectives with the purpose of integrating the textural and structural descriptions into a
synthesized description of the essence of the phenomenon, which is called imaginative variation.

These steps for analysis through phenomenological reduction were applied in the study in the following way. The data, in the form of transcribed interviews (see Appendix F) were seen as having equal value in the beginning. They were then reviewed in order to achieve horizontalization, or the recognition of each statement that related to the central phenomenon, teacher reflection. In order to accomplish this, each statement related to teacher reflection was highlighted on the computer, then cut from the text of the transcripts and pasted into a separate document. After horizontalization, each statement was viewed as having equal importance to the research (see Appendix G).

The data were reviewed and all overlapping statements were removed. From these statements, the invariant horizons, or meaning units, were highlighted and extracted from the original statements. These meaning units, were then grouped into themes (see Appendix H). In order to accomplish this, I read the list of meaning units multiple times and coded the data in the margins of the text, with numbers that coordinated with the list of themes that emerged.

These themes and the meaning units included within each of them were used to develop a textural description (what the teachers experienced) and structural description (how the teachers experienced it). Finally, through imaginative variation, I considered the textural description and the structural description from many perspectives, while continuing to bracket the phenomenon, in order to synthesize the essence of the participants’ experience with the phenomenon and to write it in the form of an essence statement (Moustakas, 1994).
Verification Procedures

The qualitative researcher has a personal interest in the phenomenon, is considered an instrument of data collection, and in most instances, has to set aside bias, even in very intimate research settings. Therefore, it is important to employ methods of verification in a study so that there is a sense of trustworthiness and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As Leedy and Ormrod (2005) pointed out, “Verification allows a researcher to test the validity of certain assumptions, claims, theories, or generalizations within real-world contexts” (p. 135). Three verification procedures were used to ensure the credibility of this research study: member checking; rich, thick description; and clarification of researcher bias (Creswell, 2007).

The first verification procedure, member checking, is also called respondent validation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This procedure allows the co-researchers, the participants, to read the data and the subsequent report in order to provide feedback regarding any inconsistencies. Each of the participants received, via e-mail, a summary of the transcription of the focus group interview in which they participated and their individual interview so they could verify that I had accurately represented what was discussed. Additionally, they were provided a copy of the findings after the meaning units had been organized into themes. This procedure provided reinforcement of the themes that had emerged throughout the study and the meaning of those themes.

A thick, rich description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) is necessary to reveal an accurate picture of the research findings. This description, which included the setting, the participants, and the participants’ responses, helps in forming a context for the research.
The purpose of forming a context is to help the audience determine the extent of transferability of the findings from this research to similar contexts. From observations of each site, I constructed a description of the setting. From discussion with the participants and through a brief set of biographical questions, I constructed a description of each participant. I developed a thick, rich description of the responses of the participants through careful analysis of the data and through attempting to approach it in various ways with varying perspectives. My interpretations of the participants’ responses were supported by the use of participants’ quotes in the narrative.

Through the process of epoche, or bracketing, I explored and set aside my own bias as a teacher researcher (Moustakas, 1994), an important step in phenomenological inquiry. This was necessary in order to see the data as new and, as much as possible, free from my own beliefs and experiences. My own bias as a researcher described further in “The Role of the Researcher” below.

Role of the Researcher

The phenomenological research tradition calls for the researcher to undertake the process of *epoche*, or bracketing, the central phenomenon, with the purpose of excavating her own assumptions regarding the topic of the study (Moustakas, 1994). In so doing, the researcher is able to acknowledge these assumptions and then set them aside. This is necessary in order for the researcher to suspend any preconceptions that may hinder a full understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

As a teacher for the past 15 years—working in fifth grade, sixth grade, and as a reading coach for multiple grade levels—my own experiences led me to study the
phenomenon of teacher reflection. During those years, I have experienced many changes, both personal changes in my own methods, and institutional changes that affected my students and me. As I contemplated my life’s work, I began to wonder what it was that had been with me from the beginning of my teaching career until now. Even through all of the changes, what had always been there? The answer was reflection.

I have always tended to be a reflective person by nature, considering alternative possibilities, alternative viewpoints. Even though I would have always considered myself a reflective teacher, the processes involved in the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification process led me to a new place in my reflective practices. By viewing videotapes of myself interacting with my students and then analyzing them in depth, I could replay the images and reflect upon them. That replaying and reflection, in turn, allowed me to consider my actions and the students’ actions from various perspectives. I believe that I became more effective in my reflections after that experience because I was more honest with myself about the learning that was taking place in my classroom.

The experience of having children of my own has had an impact on my reflective practices as well. As my children have grown and had various experiences in school, it has caused me to be much more deliberate in my approach to teaching and in how I approach my students. Understanding the importance of the nuances of personal interaction and how we can make a difference in the lives of those around us very quickly, caused me to reflect upon the chances that I have to make a positive impact in the lives of my students.
My reflective experiences have reached far beyond the classroom and into my personal time. There is no hook upon which I hang my thoughts as I leave my classroom for the day. Those thoughts are with me wherever I go, and they become blended together, integrated into all of my goals, plans, decisions, and reactions. Such reflection is an integral part of the teaching process, allowing me to make adjustments in instruction methods in order to better address the needs of individual students and improve learning opportunities. Reflection is also an integral part of the social dimensions of school, informing the relationships that I form with our students and colleagues from year to year.

Because of my experiences, I believe the reflection process provides a platform on which a teachers can shape their philosophy, much as the potter’s wheel keeps the clay in motion as the potter shapes the pot. This belief, then, was the bias that I set aside as I approached this research study.

Ethical Considerations

Before this study was initiated, the proposal was reviewed and approved by the University of Alabama at Birmingham Institutional Review Board (see Appendix I). In order to maintain anonymity of the research study participants, pseudonyms were suggested by the researcher and confirmed by the participants. Each participant read and signed an informed consent form and was informed of her/his right to withdraw from the study at any time. Although the issue of teacher reflection is not considered a particularly sensitive issue, it can be a very personal one for some people. Therefore, after conducting
the initial focus group interview, an individual follow-up interview was conducted with each participant to ensure the opportunity to share information without an audience.

The focus group interview and the individual interviews were audio taped. Before the start of the interview, the participants were aware that they could end the interview at any time. The participants were also given a choice regarding the setting of each of the interviews. The audiotapes and transcribed interviews were stored in a locked metal file cabinet in the researcher’s office.

Chapter 3 Summary

This study sought to explore the meaning, or essence, of reflection in teaching for 12 elementary school teachers with at least one year of experience, using transcendental phenomenological research procedures while operating under a constructivist paradigm. This chapter provided discussions of the nature of qualitative research and phenomenology; my philosophical assumptions; the procedures for selecting the sites and participants; the procedures for collecting, analyzing, and verifying the data; ethical considerations; and my role as a researcher.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter includes a detailed description of the research setting and the 12 research participants. The findings of the research include the themes that emerged from the data, a detailed description of each theme, followed by the textural and structural descriptions and the essence of the meaning of reflection in teaching.

Setting

This research study was conducted in a large, suburban school district outside a large city in the southeastern United States. The district comprised ten elementary schools, three middle schools, and two high schools.

Site A—Elementary School

The first group of participants was chosen from an elementary school located within the district that had approximately 400 students. Although the site was in a bustling suburb near a major freeway, the school building was situated within a beautiful wooded area, with an amphitheater in the front of the school and a creek that wraps around the back of school. The grounds were well kept, and the entrance was flanked with flowers and trees. The playground was inviting, with well-kept equipment, a track, and a basketball court. As visitors walked inside, they were greeted with a slide show that described the many programs available at the school. Once inside, it was suggested from the various displays of student work that the teachers were focused on the learner.
The school’s student population was racially, ethnically and socio-economically diverse. The students, faculty, and staff of the school took great pride in this fact, displaying the flags of the United States, Mexico, India, and Japan in the gymnasium, celebrating a different culture represented by the student population each year. The racial and ethnic diversity of the school was also obvious in the elaborate displays of student artwork, including self-portraits of the children. Multiculturalism was acknowledged and appreciated on a daily basis, rather than simply being highlighted on a particular day or week of the year. This elementary school was referred to as Site A.

The teachers and administrators of Site A participated in an ongoing, informal dialogue regarding best professional teaching and management practices. It was typical to find grade-level teachers meeting informally during planning times or after school in order to solve problems or to address changes that had taken place within the state or district.

Because I was currently a teacher at the school, the participants at Site A decided to meet for the focus group interview and individual follow-up interviews in my classroom. Because of scheduling conflicts, the male teacher was interviewed via e-mail. The participants were interviewed at a large table situated in the center of the classroom.

Site B—Summer Enrichment Program

The second group of participants was comprised of teachers in a summer enrichment program provided by the school district for its struggling readers. In addition to teachers from the district, teachers in the program included students from a local university who were working on advanced degrees in various areas of education and were
required to complete a practicum. All of the practicum student-teachers were currently practicing teachers with at least 9 years of teaching experience.

The summer enrichment program was housed at one of the elementary schools. The enrollment was approximately 300 students in grades 1 through 5 and was reflective of the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the school district. The summer enrichment program was housed at one of the elementary schools. The focus of the program was reading instruction, but the students received instruction and had experiences in all subject areas. The hallways of the hosting school were filled with artwork and writing created by the students. The program was heavily staffed with a ratio of approximately 10 students to 1 teacher. This summer enrichment program, housed at an elementary school within the district, was referred to as Site B.

The participants at Site B chose to have our focus group meeting at the summer program site. Two of the teachers completed follow-up interviews via e-mail. The other four were interviewed at the participants' respective schools during the school year.

Participants

The following section describes each participant, by providing some demographic information, information regarding teaching experience, and insights into their attitude toward classroom instruction. The teachers at Site A and Site B were involved as participants, or co-researchers, in this study. Each participant was given a pseudonym to protect anonymity.
Site A—Elementary School

The teachers at Site A were currently teaching either fourth or fifth grade. They ranged in age from 24 to 50 years old, with a range of 3 to 29 years of teaching experience.

Todd

Todd had been teaching fifth grade at the school for 2 years. He had been employed in two other school districts other than this one, including one in another state. He had experience teaching in third grade as well as spending the 2 years prior to this study teaching fifth grade. Todd was enthusiastic and had high expectations of his students. Todd was serving as the team leader for the fifth-grade teachers. He was moving out of the state at the end of that school year.

Sally

Sally had been teaching fifth grade at this school for 3 years. She taught fifth grade in another district within the state before moving to this school. Sally had an Education Specialist’s degree in Educational Leadership and planned to move into an administrative position at some point in her career. She was well-liked and often pursued for advice. She had high expectations for her students and was always searching for the most effective teaching methods. She had served as team leader of the fifth-grade team.
Emily

Emily had 11 years of prior teaching experience. She returned to teaching this year after four years away from teaching after having children. Emily has had experience teaching fourth and fifth grade. She had begun her career in a school system in another state and had worked in three school systems in this state. Emily was curious and constantly searching for the best way to help her children learn.

Joan

Joan had been teaching for 29 years. She was teaching fourth grade. She had taught first through sixth grades during her career. She had also taught in a multi-grade classroom. Joan had been employed in one other school system in the state. Although she had been teaching for 29 years, it was evident from her actions that Joan had a hunger for learning. She continued to hone her philosophy and methods and took great pride in this fact.

Wanda

Wanda had been teaching in this school for 4 years. She took a teaching position during a maternity leave at this school and was subsequently hired as a faculty member. She had taught second (student teaching), third, and fourth grades. Wanda was young and energetic and had high expectations for her children. She prided herself in having her own opinions about things and did not shy away from questioning the status quo.
Gail

Gail previously had a career in accounting before deciding to stay at home with her daughter. She then decided to pursue teaching as a career. She had been teaching fourth grade for 3 years. Gail expressed relief in having made this decision because she felt much more personally rewarded for the time that she spent teaching. She lit up when she discussed teaching. Her enthusiasm was evident in everything that she did and she was proud of the fact that she enjoyed laughing with her students.

Site B—Summer Enrichment Program

Five of the participants at this site were teachers who worked in the district and chose to teach in the summer program. One participant taught in a nearby school district and was working in the summer program to fulfill university requirements for a doctoral degree in early childhood education. The participants ranged in age from 31 to 50 years old, with a range of 9 to 26 years of teaching experience.

Frances

Frances had been teaching kindergarten for 9 years. The first 8 years of her teaching were in a rural school district in the area. In the current year, she had transferred to a school within the suburban school district to teach kindergarten. Although Frances was new to the school district, she had taken on several leadership positions including being a member of the school’s Literacy Team, a member of the School Improvement Planning Committee, and the grade-level representative for a statewide math initiative.
Sherry

With the exception of one half of a year, Sherry had been teaching kindergarten for 21 years in two different school districts. In addition to those 21 years, she had taken a 6-month maternity leave and a leave of absence for 4 years. Sherry’s classroom was lively and active, and it was obvious that she strove to provide a stimulating environment for her students.

Lydia

Lydia has been teaching second grade and multi-age K-2 in this school district for 13 years. This had been a particularly eventful year for Lydia, who, during the school year, had married, moved into a new home, and found out that she is expecting a baby. Her school year had been professionally interesting as well because she has a hearing-impaired student in her class. Lydia was the second-grade team leader at her school and the chairperson the school’s technology committee.

Barbara

Barbara was a special education teacher pursuing certification in educational administration. She had been teaching for 26 years in two different school districts and had worked with students in kindergarten through grade 9. Barbara was a member of the district Instructional Support Advisory Committee and a member of the CARE team at her school, which was a team that reviewed cases of students who were considered by parents, teachers, or school staff, to be at risk in some way.
**Hannah**

Hannah had been teaching for 22 years. She had taught self-contained first-grade, third-grade, and fifth-grade classes. Besides having taught in three public school systems, she also had experience in a Christian private school, the Department of Defense School System, and in adult education in another state. She had held several leadership positions over the years. This year she was the school technology coordinator, the chairperson of the technology committee, and the webmaster for her school. She had led two system-wide workshops, and had written and received six grants from her school system education foundation.

**Lisa**

This was Lisa’s tenth year of teaching. She had taught first grade for 6 years before teaching kindergarten 4 years. All of her experience had been in self-contained classrooms in three different school systems in the state. Over the years, she had held several leadership positions in the schools, including team leader, planning committee chair, scrapbook committee, cooperating teacher for university student teachers, mentor to new teachers, and textbook committee. She was currently the yearbook advisor, a mentor to a new first-grade unit, a mentor to a student teacher, and a presenter at a professional development seminar held within the school. She planned to marry before the end of the school year.
Themes

After transcribing interviews verbatim, invariant horizons, or significant statements, reinforced by more than one participant, were extracted from the transcripts, as shown in Appendix H. The statements are non-repetitive and non-overlapping and have significance to understanding the central phenomenon explored in this study: the role of reflection in teaching.

These significant statements were organized according to nine themes that emerged from the review of these statements (see Appendix H). These nine themes describe the meaning of reflection in teaching from the perspective of teachers:

1. Reflection is part of an ongoing learning process.
2. Reflection is a way to solve problems.
3. Reflection is a way to deal with change.
4. Reflection involves sharing with others.
5. Reflection evolves with experience.
6. Reflection may be both formal and informal.
7. Reflection takes place in a nurturing environment.
8. Reflection helps to inform instruction.
9. Reflection is a way to self-monitor.

The following sections will describe each theme in detail in the order they are listed above.
Reflection: Part of an Ongoing Learning Process

The teachers in this study revealed that for them reflection was part of an ongoing learning process. The idea that teaching moved to a rhythm of action, observation, and reflection was evident in the discussion and comments of all the teachers. The teachers saw themselves as always in a position to learn from the actions and reactions taking place in their classrooms.

As the teachers gained experience, they began to realize that this was going to be a learning process. Emily described her experience this way, “I didn’t know it was a learning process. I guess I should have known because, you know, growing up you learn, and that’s when I thought, ‘Wow, I’ll become a teacher. It will be great, and I’m going to know everything, and I think you think that even with student teaching, you think that teacher knows everything.” Joan described her feeling of surprise at never feeling that she was finished learning: “Which I think is crazy, I go home and think, ‘I’ve been teaching so long, why am I still worried about am I doing it right?’”

For Emily it was a continuous process that evolved, with her becoming more secure in teaching, She explained: “It was a gradual process that developed over time for me. I’ve always been the kind of person to kind of second guess what I do, and maybe it’s like an insecure thing, I don’t know. Then once I gained more confidence as a teacher it turned into more of a reflection process for me.” Hannah echoed this statement when she shared that, “It’s not something you do for a little while and then stop. If you, if you’re truly reflective about what you’re doing and you’re trying to improve your own methods and trying to make your classroom a better place and that’s your goal, then you will be reflective.”
This act of looking back in order to learn and then move forward was an important part of the definition of reflection for the teachers. The teachers’ various definitions of reflection involved looking back, learning, and then moving forward with improvements in mind. They reflected on the positive and negative aspects of their experiences in order to accomplish this. For example, Joan shared, “Reflection is thinking back over what you’ve done and trying to think of ways you could have done it better.” Wanda also felt that it involved looking back in order to learn from what had taken place. She said, “Reflection to me is just looking back while trying to think ahead at the same time on the good things, the bad things, to try to make it better.”

The teachers learned from the successes in the classroom, which, at times, provided an epiphany, or an unexpected learning, for the teacher. The teachers often recorded this new learning in lesson plans or in notes that they could refer to for future planning. In discussing a particular instance of teaching a lesson and experiencing an epiphany regarding the success of the lesson, Joan said, “You start reflecting on what went well instead of always the negative and I start thinking what went well? Why did it work? And I got out an index card and started writing it down so I could remember it for next year.” The teachers in the study were encouraged by their successes and felt rewarded for their efforts when things went right. Emily said, “And it’s so great when one of the kids will tell you, ‘That was fun.’ That makes it so rewarding, and when you see the light bulb go off, especially when it’s a student who’s struggled and struggled and you finally find that one area, that one strategy, that worked. That makes it all worth it, and that helps me feel better. And it makes me feel like, I can do this, this is a great job.”
The teachers observed their students in order to get feedback from them regarding the effectiveness of their teaching. While they observed their students, they asked themselves a complex series of questions in order to reflect on student understanding while they were teaching. Gail made this clear when she said,

I watch the students and that helps me reflect while I’m teaching. Do I need to change my strategy? Do I need to make it more interesting? Do I need to make it more challenging for those students who are acting up? Do I need to break it down a little bit for those students who need it broken down? So a lot of things go through my head through just one lesson.

Reflection was part of an ongoing learning process that led to improvements, not only within a given lesson or situation, but also in their quality of teaching. The teachers desired to learn more and hold themselves accountable for that learning. They felt that reflection kept them energized in their teaching. In fact, Sally went on to make a comparison with teachers who do not take time to reflect: “I think a lot of times when people are getting a little bit stagnant, it’s because they are not reflecting on the good things that have happened and reflecting on how they can improve.” This idea of becoming stagnant was a concern of more than one teacher. For example, Emily said, “Because I know there are some teachers, who are stagnant, and they’ve given up, and they don’t want to learn anymore. They think that what they do is OK. They’re tired, and enough is enough.”

The teachers had an awareness of greater goals beyond those in the individual classroom and they felt that reflection played a role in allowing them to make improvements in many areas. They reflected on aspects of their teaching that were
connected to their grade-level teams and the school. Joan said, “If you genuinely take the
time to reflect on what’s going on in your classroom--how you are teaching, how you are
interacting with others, students, and your peers and your professionalism--it really gives
you the ability to make changes or to continue things that you feel like will be best for
children, your team, and your work environment.”

For the teachers, the reflection process itself could not be limited to a particular
timeframe, but extended far beyond the initial moment when the reflective process began.
It did not always provide immediate results, but was part of an ongoing learning process
that affected what happened in the future. The teachers relied upon their reflections to
help them make adjustments for subsequent lessons, and often for lessons they would
teach the next year. For example, Sally explained, “I think that’s why in teaching a lot of
times reflection is a process of I’m reflecting now on what I’m going to do better maybe
even the next year rather than tomorrow. I don’t think reflection always happens
overnight. I think sometimes reflection takes you several days or several weeks.”

For the teachers in this study, the reflective process did not always take place at
school, but extended beyond their professional environment and into their personal lives.
It became evident that their reflective thoughts were interwoven into their everyday life
activities. Wanda said, “Teaching is one of those things that you’re always thinking about
it always in the middle of the night, in the shower, in the car, always thinking about it.”
Emily explained, “You go home at night and you think, ‘What could I have done
differently?’” Sally recalled, “And sometimes it’s, it’s sort of generated from other things
even at home. You’ll see something on TV or you’ll see something that is about a certain
type of child very similar to something that you’re dealing with and those kinds of shows generate reflection.”

The teachers also revealed a belief that reflection actually makes a difference between a teacher who cares about the success of her students and one who does not. They believed that the time a teacher takes to reflect on her work affects student learning. Lisa said, “I know that not all teachers give the same amount of time and that is unfortunate for some children. It’s just not a priority to some of them—to some teachers. And I think if you truly want your children to succeed then you do need to think about your day, and you do need to think about your lessons. And I think however you do that is fine, as long as you do it.”

The teachers had a 2-month break from school during the summer months. Summer provided much needed respite from the day-to-day pressures of the school year so that they could use their time to allow their reflections to guide them for the next year. Often these reflections led to larger changes in classroom structure, management techniques, or in pedagogical practices. Lydia, for example, shared this with the focus group: “In the summer is when I look to make changes, you know. That’s a big reflection time. But those are huge jumps, but it’s like, ‘What do I want to change for next year?’ Room layout, anything, just to get a fresh start, fresh look, new kids.”

The teachers realized that there were always new things they need to learn. They were overwhelmed by the many choices to be made regarding their teaching. They found that it was important to narrow the scope of their goals each year, and reflection helped them make decisions about what they might learn in order to bring about a needed to improvement or change. Lydia said, “I usually try to pick one book and try to take one
good idea and implement it the next year in the classroom.” The teachers did not always choose something new to implement, but instead, tried to hone a particular area in which they felt they could improve. Sally said, “But it was like, every year, when I became better, that I would start reflecting on how I could make, how I could make myself better, how I could be a better teacher. And then, of course, how could I help children learn better.” Reflection helped the teachers improve their teaching practices.

To summarize this theme, for the teachers in this study, reflection was part of an ongoing learning process. The teachers learned from observing their students’ reactions and made note of their own learning in order to affect future learning. The teachers reflected immediately and over extended periods. They also reflected during professional and personal time.

The teachers considered their ongoing learning through reflective practices a way to hold themselves accountable for their quality of teaching. This led them to improvements that affected their work with colleagues, their work within the school community, and the success of their students.

*Reflection: A Way to Solve Problems*

Teachers are faced with many problems throughout the day and throughout the school year. The problems can range from minor classroom management or instructional issues, to more complex problems involving decisions regarding a student’s progress. The teachers expressed the idea that they use reflection to help them to solve these problems. Joan said, “Reflection comes when something goes wrong and so maybe you
can’t fix it right that moment, but it just stays in the back of your mind and it kind of eats at you, and when you have some down time you think about it.”

Although the teachers used reflection to help them make adjustments in their curriculum, they also had to reflect on solutions to problems that arose with individual students regarding academic progress or behavior. The teachers used reflection to help them make adjustments for particular students. Sally said, “I know that I’ve specifically changed lessons and curriculum but also I think dealing with some very challenging behavior problems has given me the opportunity to really think about individual children and children as a whole and change the way I did things with some children.”

The teachers used reflection to help them define and categorize a particular problem or issue through thought and discussion. Joan said, “You can sort of categorize it. So, is this a management problem, or is this a procedure problem, or is this just one child that’s stirring up a lot of trouble?” This process of problem identification allowed the teachers to react more productively to the needs that arose. They teachers used reflection to identify not only problems with particular students, but also problems with curriculum or instruction that affected a larger group of children, such as a grade level. There were times when the teachers reflected within their instructional teams, in which teachers could work together to identify a problem and work on solutions. Sally reiterated this idea of reflecting with others in order to identify a problem when she gave the specific example of her team reflecting on their writing instruction. She said, “You know that genuine reflection of “How can we do this better?” has solved a problem for us as far as getting more tools in our toolbox to teach writing and the children were much more
successful in their ability to write because of our real reflection on that being a weakness.”

The teachers discussed problems with others, not only when it affected a larger group of children, but also when they needed to express their concern to someone else and get some feedback. Hannah, in discussing the problems that arise in the classroom, mentioned that the teachers often bring these problems to others. She said, “Usually with my coworkers we’re all very supportive and willing to not only listen to other people help us with those things, but also to be very supportive and offer assistance or ideas that might change things.” Barbara explained that she experienced an inner conversation as she reflected upon a problem: “Well, if that’s a stumbling block, maybe I need to talk to somebody about ‘What’s another way you can think of to help me get around that stumbling block with that child?’”

To summarize this theme, the teachers in this study used reflection both to identify and to help solve a variety of problems. The teachers reflected individually, as well as in formal instructional teams and through informal conversations to devise possible solutions.

*Reflection: A Way to Deal with Change*

The teachers used reflection as a tool to assist them in dealing with the many changes they faced in teaching. They dealt with changes in state and local requirements, changes in curriculum, changes in instructional materials, changes in their own philosophy, and even changes in the dispositions and abilities of the children they taught.
The teachers had to make decisions regarding how to teach particular learning objectives so that they could document progress in every child. They felt the need to reflect in order to make sure they were meeting those objectives. Lydia provided the following comment related to this use of reflection: “You do need to reflect and see if what you’re doing is getting those objectives met so that you can answer to your system and in the state and whomever else.”

Demands from the state and national government for greater student gains each year had brought changes in the learning goals at each grade level. The accelerated goals at each grade level created a situation that required the teachers to reflect upon these changes and consider what they were required to teach. Regarding the changes that had taken place, Sherry, who was currently teaching kindergarten said, “I also think because we’ve pushed the level down, like basically when I first started teaching 21 years ago we concentrated on socialization. I would say that what I teach now is probably more like a first-grade classroom would have been.”

Not only did the teachers use reflection to help them understand and process outside changes that affected them, they also used reflection to help bring about their own important changes in attitudes or approaches that affected the way they taught. Having thought about reflection after the focus group interview, Joan said, “To me reflection is something that’s going to change the way you teach, change the way you respond to children, change your attitude. It’s going to be, it’s going to be important, and it’s probably going to make a major change.”

A teacher’s philosophy is not established at the onset of teaching, but develops over time. As the teachers reflected, they considered their beliefs and had an awareness of
the evolution of their philosophy of teaching over time. Their philosophy was shaped by the decisions they made about the changes they faced. Joan said, “Reflection, lots of times, is when I’m at a crossroads with my philosophy and what I’m physically, and mentally, and emotionally able to do.” When faced with a new idea or mandate, she asked herself the question, “Does it fit my philosophy, or how can I make it fit my philosophy?”

At times, the changes teachers faced were related to the curriculum materials they had selected to use or materials that had been selected for them. The magnitude of the change actually affected the extent to which a teacher reflected. For the teachers, changes created situations that required more reflection. Joan went on to give some specific examples of changes that might influence reflection. She said, “A change in textbooks or science kits generates more reflection than something that you have taught for several years.”

Not only did changes come about through new expectations of teachers or changes that a teacher wanted to make in her classroom, but also teachers expressed that the abilities and dispositions of students had changed over the years. The students’ experiences outside of school influenced their learning, and because many children were exposed to so many different stimuli before beginning kindergarten, most came to school with a number of experiences that have affected their abilities and interests. The teachers have had to adapt to these changes and reflection helped them to do this. Sherry said, “I think due to computers and things, children have changed. They come, most of them come, with more knowledge than they did because of what they’re exposed to.”
To summarize this theme, the teachers saw reflection as a way to deal with different types of changes they faced, including new state and local mandates regarding requirements at each grade level and apparent changes in the abilities and dispositions of their students. They felt that the magnitude of the changes they faced increased the extent of their reflections, allowing them to situate the proposed changes within their philosophy of teaching and allowed them to shape their philosophy over time.

Reflection: Involves Sharing with Others

Sharing with others is an important part of the reflection process. The teachers continued to reiterate the fact that sharing with others and collaborating on possible ideas or solutions to problems was an invaluable part of their reflection process. Reflecting with others allowed the teachers to compare and contrast their teaching with others, and to learn from considering different perspectives.

The teachers learned from observing other teachers and reflecting on ways they might implement similar activities or techniques in their own teaching. Emily, who was always looking for more effective ways to do things in the classroom, said, “I think I’ve learned more watching others, other professionals teach certain lessons and I can compare that with how I teach and change it for my class.” Sally expressed a similar sentiment when she said, “Reflection involves interacting with other professionals and getting their points of view and their perspectives and learning about other people’s pedagogy and how their philosophies of education are.”

The teachers also said that they could reflect with others at times in order to define a particular problem that had come up. As they had explained, they reflected on
their own to define or frame a problem, but they also reflected with others to accomplish this. By discussing the problem with others, the important aspects needing attention were illuminated. Sally said, “A lot of times your reflection with other people is seeking to actually define the problem.”

The teachers also engaged others in their reflections for feedback regarding their reaction to a situation after it had occurred. Gail described one way that she shared with others with the purpose of reflection “I will take a situation at recess or at lunch [and say] ‘All right. Let me tell y’all what happened. How would you have handled this?’ I’ll come right out and say that and then get their input on how I handled it and how they handled it.” This expression of curiosity regarding how another teacher would have handled a situation opens up the lines of communication.

Not only had the teachers shared their reflection with others for the purpose of defining problems and getting feedback regarding difficult situations, they shared their reflection with others in order to clarify for themselves what they had done successfully in their teaching. Sally said, “Reflection can also be the form of orally reflecting with someone else about the great kids in your class or the great things that they’ve done or the exciting parts of it. And, so, therefore that does provide that self reward about what you’re doing in the classroom.”

Reflecting with others regarding their problems and their successes allowed the teachers to learn from others beyond the walls of their own classrooms. They appreciated being able to learn from the successes and pitfalls that occur in other classrooms. Lisa, for example, said, “If they are a few lessons ahead of me, it really helps me out because then that let’s me know that I need to watch out for those warning signs or I need to make
sure that I take care of my kids and not let that happen. That’s really helpful. So, they reflect on what their children did just a few days before and I will go and talk with them about it.”

Some schools allowed teachers to take advantage of their desire to share their reflections in order to bring about schoolwide improvements. For example, the teachers at Site A were embarking on a schoolwide project in which the teachers would work together to align their various curricula. Lisa explained, “We are about to meet on Friday to set up curriculum mapping, where we’ll be able to reflect on everything that we have done, share ideas, what works, what doesn’t work, and things like that.” Working as a team allows teachers to strengthen professional relationships.

The teachers worked in grade-level teams and they found this to be a forum that allowed them to reflect on issues they faced. This process of sharing provided an opportunity for the teachers to bond through their learning experiences. Frances, when discussing working with her team said, “I think it made us stronger. You know, you built that bond where you could trust them and go to them with your problems and your ideas and say, ‘How can you help me make this work better?’”

The teachers also reflected with other teachers who provided academic support for their students, revealing the fact that sharing with others extended beyond the grade level or team as teachers utilize the human resources available to them. Hannah commented, “As I reflect, I often run to the computer and send a quick email to our ELL [English Language Learner] instructor to get her opinion or advice. Since I knew that I would be getting a high number of ELL students, I took time this year to make it more inviting for these students and their parents.”
To summarize this theme, sharing with others was an important part of the reflection process for the teachers in this study. They continued to reiterate that observation and collaboration were invaluable parts of their reflection process, which allowed them to identify problems and possible solutions, compare and contrast their teaching, and learn from considering the perspectives of others. The teachers also reflected with others in seeking feedback regarding their reactions in the classroom, and to share their successes. They shared with others on a one-to-one basis, in grade-level teams, with learning support teachers, and schoolwide.

Reflection: Evolves with Experience

In most learning situations, performance or achievement improves with experience. This can certainly be said of these teachers as learners. As the teachers in this study gained experience, the focus of their reflections changed. It became evident throughout the interviews that the teachers felt that reflection for them had evolved with experience. Emily, for example, explained this process for her in this way, “It was a gradual process that developed over time for me. I’ve always been the kind of person to kind of second guess what I do. Like, ‘Did I do it right? Was that ok?’ And then once I gained more confidence as a teacher, it turned into more of a reflection process for me.”

The teachers shared that, as beginning teachers, their reflections had been focused on management and procedures. They felt that they were trying to make it through the day. Sally said, “Reflection to me, as a young teacher, was almost ‘How can I survive? What can I do to make it through the year?’ Not ‘How can I improve math, how can I incorporate reading circles?’ It was almost the procedural, survival type of
reflection.” The teachers not only experienced a different focus in their reflection, but a difference in the time they spent reflecting. Linda framed it like this, “I think the more I teach, the longer I teach, the more I learn what I can do for children, and so that tends to make me reflect more. I think that when I was a first-year teacher that I was very satisfied with making it through the day.”

The teachers explained that sources of frustration for them as a new teacher took priority in their reflections. First-year teachers often felt frustrated over unexpected obstacles, and one of these can be the differences in ability among their students. In describing her first year of teaching, Lisa said, “Well, I was very frustrated because not every child was there. I thought, ‘Gosh. What am I doing wrong? Not every child is here.’ Then, you get a couple of years under your belt and you get the discipline taken care of and the classroom management, all that good stuff, and you can focus more on the curriculum that you’re there to teach.” Barbara offered the analogy that, “It’s almost like a physician as they come into practice learning how to put people in waiting rooms and manage the day.”

As the teachers grew, so did their reflective practices. Their focus shifted from procedural and technical kinds of issues, because they felt they had mastered these, to new ideas, curriculum issues, and possible obstacles. Joan explained it like this: “That basic reflection might not change but the maturity of your reflection changes. Now I don’t reflect very much on procedures and class management because it comes so naturally. But it’s the new ideas, the new obstacles, and it’s keeping up with everyone around you, too.” The teachers expressed the idea that reflection had more value when partnered with experience. Joan went on to say, “The more experience you have, and the
more education that you have, and the more that you connect with other people, your reflection increases and becomes more valuable.”

Not only teaching experience, but also life experience, such as having children, affected the reflections of the teachers. The teachers became more aware of the parents’ perspective once they became parents themselves. Sally explained how the experience of having a child of her own affected her teaching: “I’ve always reflected on ‘What would I think if my child was in this class? What would my perception be?’” Emily discussed her feeling of empathy toward the parents of her students: “Being a parent you’re so sensitive, and I’m so much more sensitive during conferences[with my student’s parents]. I always say at least one really great thing about their kid but before I really don’t know if I did that. But now that I have kids, when I have conferences I better hear they love my kid.”

Some of the teachers increased their understanding of children through pursuing advanced degrees in education, and this experience affected their reflection. Hannah commented, “As the years have passed, and I’ve furthered my own understanding of children, and my own understanding of curriculum, and as I’ve grown in a lot of different ways, I’ve found that I am changing the way I reflect. And the fact that I do reflect because I didn’t really do a lot of it at the beginning, but now I do.”

Individual life experiences such as having children or taking university courses affect a person’s reflections, but it is also affected by the collective of life experiences that have shaped the teachers’ philosophy. Todd said, “Reflection is usually driven by your whole philosophy and teaching and life.” As the teachers gained experience, they were able to better recognize and question their own faults. Gail, who had begun teaching
as a second career, said, “I think that the ability to reflect on shortcomings comes with maturity. Because I think, 20 years ago, if I’d been in the same position, I might not have been as receptive to reflection as I am now.”

The teachers in the study explained that as they grew, their philosophy had changed. Joan explained the connection between her growth as a teacher and its connection to her philosophy of teaching: “I think your philosophy, over time, does change. It would almost have to change as you grow. Certainly your philosophy would grow and become more meaningful, and, hmm, there’s that word again, deeper.” As the teachers gained professional experience, they also felt a change in their need to be in control. This shift of the locus of control resounded in the comments of several teachers. Lydia certainly revealed this when she shared that, “I’ve loosened the reins a little bit on the controlling part of that. Then I got into looking at the learning and what they are actually getting. ‘Who needs extra? Who needs more?’ So, what I’ve looked for when I was reflecting has changed over the years of teaching.”

To summarize this theme, for teachers in this study, reflection had evolved with experience. The focus of their reflections changed as they gained professional experience. Their practices of reflection also changed as they built up life experiences.

**Reflection: Formal and Informal**

The teachers described reflection as formal or informal, depending upon the context and the reason for the reflection. Generally, reflection activities that had been assigned during teacher education experiences or for the purposes of formal evaluations of practicing teachers fit into the category of formal reflection. The reflections carried out
by teachers independently, and even spontaneously, in their particular context, fit into the
category of informal reflection.

The teachers remembered reflection assignments from their teacher education
programs. Several of the teachers mentioned that when they first thought of reflection
they thought of a formal process, such as journaling to reflect on their performance
during student teaching. Wanda shared her experience with journaling in student
teaching, by saying, “I had to write five different things. One was knowledge of myself
and pedagogy and just different things. We had to do that every week student teaching.”
Sally had a similar experience in a graduate class, but in this instance, the purpose of the
assignment was to call attention to the different perspectives of the students in her class.
She explained, “Every night after class, we had to reflect that night and send in a one-
page reflection on what we talked about and that was a very enriching experience because
you do pick out certain things. And as we read everyone else’s it was amazing how many
people reflected on a different aspect of the class.”

As the teachers began to think about it and to share with the other teachers in the
focus group interviews, they decided that reflection is both formal and informal.
However, they viewed their informal reflections as having more value or more potential
for producing a result. Wanda said, “I think, commonly, when you say the word
reflection, you think of it in a formal way, and I think some of your best reflection
happens in the shower, or in the car, or after you’ve just taught a lesson.”

The informal reflection experiences of the teachers did not have the structure, or
protocol, of their formal reflection experiences. They revealed that much of their informal
reflections occurred when they were thinking alone. Linda said, “Obviously, a formal
reflection with an evaluator or something is much more formal and you sit down, you know, and reflect, and discuss with them. But a lot of times you don’t have that peer to discuss, so it’s just within your own head and you kind of know what works best in your classroom and how your kids responded.”

The teachers experienced informal reflection on a frequent, ongoing basis as a process of thinking as they taught. Linda said, “And that’s how it happens more often than formal. I mean, on the spot, informal, you know, just even in your head, real quick, and it can be in the middle of the lesson. You know, you can change something in the middle of the lesson and say, ‘This is not working. I’m going to go this [other] way.’”

The formal reflection experiences of the teachers occurred at scheduled times during the year, and the teachers did not view these as having the same value as their informal reflections. The formal reflections were seen as more evaluative, and so the teachers felt that they were more likely to discuss their performance with an observer than they were to make decisions that would make a difference in the classroom. Lydia said, “I mean the formal reflections and evaluations are two, maybe three a year, and those are great, but it’s the day-to-day, on the spot thing, that I think helps me grow as a teacher more than the formal, because you’re going to put on your best show.”

To summarize this theme, the teachers in this study categorized reflection as formal or informal, depending upon the context and the reason for the reflection. Generally, reflection activities assigned during teacher education experiences, or for the purposes of formal evaluations of practicing teachers, fit into the category of formal reflection. The reflections carried out by teachers independently, and even spontaneously, in their particular context, fit into the category of informal reflection. The teachers
viewed the informal reflections as more useful to them because they felt that their formal reflection experiences usually occurred following a scheduled observation and focused more on their performance than on student learning.

Reflection: Takes Place in a Nurturing Environment

One recurring theme in my conversations with the teachers was the idea that reflection was most likely to occur in an environment that nurtures and encourages it. The teachers understood that every teaching environment is different and some environments were more nurturing than others were. Emily, who had worked in different schools said, “You don’t have that [nurturing environment] everywhere and it’s disappointing when you don’t.”

The teachers needed to feel comfortable reflecting spontaneously with others around them at unscheduled times. Wanda said, “I think it would be totally different reflecting if we didn’t have the support we have here. I mean, it’s easy to go to lunch and say these things or it’s easy to go to recess, but it wouldn’t be if there wasn’t so much support here, or if I knew that I would be criticized for what I did or things like that. I think that reflection would be much different if that were the case.” Gail, who had worked only at this school, realized that things would be different if she did not feel supported. She said, “It’s just so natural here for us to talk about it and what have you done what did you try and things like that. But I don’t think that it’s like that for everyone.”

The teachers found that working with a team of teachers at their grade level gave them a group with whom they could reflect. Emily said, “It’s very important to have a
strong team that can support you and help you when you need it. At a different school, I had the experience where I didn’t have anyone to talk to so I called a former coworker that was a very good team worker and she would talk to me just about every week and she helped me through it for 5 months.”

It was important to the teachers to know that the person with whom they reflected actually took time to consider what they were reflecting upon. Joan said, “I remember going into a teacher’s room and saying I’m having trouble with a child and I have tried all of this. What do you think? Off the top of her head she told me one or two things and then she came back to me the next day and said, ‘I’ve been thinking about it…’ . And she sat down, and she had another conversation with me, and that was so valuable.”

Another issue related to the nurturing environment was trust. The teachers expressed a need to be able to trust the people with whom they shared information. Wanda said, “I think you have to pick people who you feel like you can reflect with in a positive, easy environment instead of trying to defend what you would have done or what you think or your philosophy. You don’t want somebody who just agrees with everything you say, but you want somebody who has been there or at least has an open mind about what’s going on.” This feeling of trust made it easier for them to reflect together in a more spontaneous way. Gail explained the way her team works together to do this: “We reflect a whole lot first thing in the morning when the kids are coming in so we’re all available for each other.”

The teachers who had worked in other schools realized that there were differences between an environment that was nurturing and one that was not. The teachers related negative experiences in which they did not feel they were in a nurturing environment.
Emily explained her concern that other teachers can affect her attitude: “I’ve been in a situation where I thought, ‘I’ve got to get out of this school because the teachers around me are influencing my attitude towards the children.’” The teachers needed to feel nurtured by both the teachers and the administrators. Frances had moved to the school district the year this study was conducted from a school in a rural area that had three different principals in the last 8 years. She did not feel that her previous environment fostered sharing and reflection. She did not feel that her administrators could be trusted to keep her confidence. She said,

Well, you didn’t feel like you could go to them. With the last one, she was not a very trustworthy person because she may talk about you to another teacher behind your back. You may have asked her a question or something, and asked her thoughts or whatever, and she would turn around and degrade you to another teacher. So, it wasn’t very supportive at all.

Time influenced the opportunities that the teachers had for reflection. A nurturing environment is one that allows time for the teachers to reflect. Even in a school environment that provided planning time it was difficult to have time to reflect. Barbara said, “Allow teachers time, during the day, maybe one of their planning times, to do it where as many could meet together as possible to think about it more than once a week. I think once a week is hard.”

To summarize this theme, the teachers revealed that for them, reflection was most likely to occur in an environment that nurtured and encouraged it. The teachers wanted to be able to reflect spontaneously with others, and grade-level teams gave them a group with whom they could do this. It was important to the teachers to know that the person
with whom they reflected actually took time to consider what they were reflecting upon and that the person could be trusted to listen without judgment and maintain confidentiality. The teachers expressed concern that time limited their opportunities to reflect.

**Reflection: Helps Inform Instruction**

If reflection was defined as a deliberate analysis of information gained through observation, in order to inform future practice and to promote the development of a philosophy regarding the act of teaching, then it was only logical that teachers would describe reflection as an activity that helped to inform their instruction. The teachers referred often to their reflective experiences that had occurred when they were contemplating next steps in their instruction.

The teachers reflected upon their observations of student reactions in order to determine the skills and needs of students. They depended upon these reflections to help guide them decide upon the most effective ways to teach their children. Their observation and reflection helped them determine where to begin in their instruction, as well as helping them determine the subsequent steps they would take.

Their initial planning was influenced by assessing and reflecting upon the abilities of their students. Sherry said, “I have to meet each child where they are and start with what the child knows and build his knowledge from there and try.”

The teachers used their informal, spontaneous reflections to determine when they needed to change their instruction. Frances related a story that illustrated this use of reflection:
One time, I forgot the lesson we were doing, but we had talked about things at a mall. One of the kids had been to the mall and talked about an escalator. None of the kids knew what it was, except for the little girl who had been to the mall just recently. So, I had to go and figure out how you teach “escalator” to the children. And I tried to think about ways to do it and then go and find pictures and go on the computer and look for pictures of it moving so that they could just see that it is moving stairs instead of stairs you walk up.

Her sensitivity to the lack of comprehension among the children gave her reason to rethink what she had planned. She realized that if the children did not understand the concept of “escalator” then their comprehension of any connected information would be unlikely. In fact, Frances went on to define reflection as, “Looking back at what you have done, where you need to go with it, how the kids are doing and if they are getting what you taught them or if you need to continue what you are doing with them.”

The teachers had to be flexible in order to allow their reflections to inform their instruction. Frances identified one of the frustrations with this need for flexibility: “If you like it the way it is, but the kids aren’t getting it, but you like it, then it is hard because you need to change if they are not getting it.” This required teachers to formulate and reformulate plans throughout the day. Hannah said, “Reflection takes place throughout each planning step, deciding which activities will offer the best learning experiences.”

Meeting the needs of children did not refer only to immediate academic needs, but also to the long-term needs associated with becoming a lifelong learner. Hannah said, “Reflection also helps teachers to think about their students’ needs and interests, to plan
activities that impact their lives, and to strengthen their dispositions toward learning.”

This ongoing reflection could at times, be at odds with the planning requirements of the school since the schools required teachers to turn in weekly, monthly, or even yearly plans. Lydia shared her viewpoint this way:

You can’t, I mean, you can’t plan a month in advance, and a lot of times my week in advance gets changed all around, too. You can, you can look at long range goals and kind of where you want to be, but as far as day-to-day lessons, you can’t do that. You’ve got to let the kids guide a lot of that. That’s why reflecting is important because you’ve go to go back and look at what they learn.

The teachers in the study had to be attentive to the particular needs of their students and understand that they are all unique. Barbara added, “If they were all reading at the exact same level and they all had the exact same home life, and they all had the exact same set of circumstances around each of them, you might be able to do a little bit farther into the future, but you just never know what’s going to pop up.”

To summarize this theme, the teachers reflected upon their observations of student reactions in order to determine the skills and needs of the students as well as the most effective ways to teach their children. The teachers also used informal, spontaneous reflection to adjust their instruction, which required flexibility and could, at times, be at odds with advance-planning requirements of the school.

*Reflection: A Way to Self-monitor*

The teachers viewed reflection as a means of holding themselves accountable. Their reflections evolved with experience, moving beyond a focus on the technical issues
of teaching. However, the reflection experiences of the teachers continued to be a way for them to monitor their own performance as a teacher. Gail said, “If you have that desire to do better, to be better, to always be improving, then that’s why you reflect because you want to improve.” Sally expressed it this way:

    I’ve always been a person who wanted to do things well and who strives to do things at the best of my ability, and so, therefore, I think my reflection is something that is accountability, or a conscience. Without reflection there is no accountability or looking at what you’re doing and trying to improve it.

Although a prominent idea was that of monitoring student understanding and development in order to inform instruction, it became apparent that the teachers also used their reflection to gain insight into their own effectiveness in doing this. Lydia said, regarding the role of reflection in her teaching, “I think one thing I always look at is whether I met all the needs of all my kids--the different learning styles and the learning needs of my kids in my class.” Gail explained that she was always in the process of self-monitoring through reflection, “Or always, really, thinking of how I can help those kids that are doing well, how I can push everybody a little bit further, trying to remember those kids that are always doing the right thing and always quiet, and maybe they don’t get the attention that they deserve.”

The teachers desired to be improving continuously, and they depended upon their reflections to help them do this. Sherry, a veteran teacher of 21 years, expressed her desire to continue to improve when she said, “I think as a teacher you can always grow. You can always change things around. I mean, if it’s something you did 21 years ago,
you can still do it, but you can change it around to where it is an effective lesson or an effective activity for these children.”

The teachers reflected on their performance in specific areas, such as parent communication, in order to make improvements. Sherry said, “As I’ve reflected over the years, I thought I didn’t do a good job letting parents know about this so I needed to increase my communications or make sure I’ve remembered to communicate in this area better to my parents.”

As was evident throughout the interviews, the teachers were their own critics and evaluators. Lydia put this into perspective as she discussed how she assessed herself as a teacher. She said, “This past year was a trying year and you know, we had administrator changes. We had a lot of school turnover. And it came down to the fact that the big picture was yes, I was still getting through to my kids. And I felt like I was making a difference in that classroom with those 18 kids.” Hannah, a veteran teacher of 22 years, reinforced this idea when she defined reflection and its role in her teaching: “My personal definition of reflection is to see myself, what I am doing, and what I need to change, what I need to keep the same. With this reflection, I can only be a stronger, more confident teacher.”

To summarize this theme, the teachers viewed reflection as a means of holding themselves accountable. The teachers reflected on their performance in the classroom as well as on their performance in specific areas, such as parent communication, in order to make improvements.
Imaginative Variation

After the data were analyzed, textural and structural descriptions were constructed, allowing the essence of the role of reflection for teachers to be revealed.

*Textural Description*

What did these teachers experience (i.e., textural description)? The teachers who participated in this study had experienced reflection in their teaching, and they viewed reflection as part of the ongoing learning experience and the ever-changing profession of teaching. The teachers understood reflection as having several different roles. Reflection was part of their problem-solving, part of their strategy for coping with changes, a way to inform their instruction, and a way for them to self-monitor in order to hold themselves accountable.

They reflected when they were considering possible solutions to problems that arose. They did not simply go from problem to solution, but reflected on their observations, their prior experience, the needs of the student, and the dynamics of their classrooms. Often, they reflected on their own to do this, but they also included others in their reflections, communicating the problem to them in order to gain insight from other perspectives.

The participants reflected when they were faced with changes in their classroom, changes in curriculum, changes in instructional materials, and changes in what was required of them by administrators at the school, district, and state level. Because the teachers faced many changes each year, they found it valuable to reflect upon the changes
they were facing and how those changes fit with their philosophy of teaching. They accomplished this by reflecting.

The teachers described a process of reflecting on formal assessment data while also considering the affective needs of the child. They reflected on their formal assessments, but more often reflecting on the informal observations they made in the classroom either of the child or the child’s work. These informal observation observations were important in helping them reflect in order to make an informed decision regarding instruction.

Finally, the teachers saw reflection as a way to self-monitor their own performance in their dynamic, responsibility-laden work. Through reflecting on what they had done in an activity, a lesson, or even across a school year, they were able to self-monitor in order to make improvements in their teaching. They referred to the use of reflection for this purpose as being their conscience, or a way of holding themselves accountable.

*Structural Description*

How was the phenomenon of reflection experienced by the teachers (i.e., structural description)? The participants described their reflection experience as being ongoing and taking place in a nurturing environment in both formal and informal ways. They also revealed that sharing with others was an important part of their reflection experiences. However, it was evident that they spent a great deal of time reflecting on their own. They described their reflection experiences as changing as they gained experience in teaching.
The teachers described their schools as environments where reflection was encouraged. They emphasized the teaming approach, in which teachers in a grade level work closely together to plan and have similar daily schedules, as being very important to the process of reflection. The opportunity to work with a team of teachers provided them with an environment in which they could share their ideas, problems, and advice. This ability to share with others whom they trust allowed them to verbalize their experience as reflective practitioners.

They acknowledged the value of formal reflections, such as administrative observations and discussions, but they placed more confidence in their informal reflections as being more beneficial. Their ongoing, spontaneous reflections did not have to be planned and fit better into their day-to-day experience. They experienced reflection in the context of the classroom, but they also emphasized the fact that they reflected when they were driving home, when they were washing dishes, and even in the shower. It became clear that reflection for teachers was ongoing and had become part of who they were. One teacher even said, “It encompasses so much--being a teacher--that I can’t imagine not having it. It guides you throughout your day and throughout your year.”

*The Essence of Reflection*

Reflection is part of the rhythm of teaching. It is so much a part of being a teacher that, often, teachers cannot verbalize their experience with it. Much of the reflecting that teachers do is a type of thinking on one’s feet, allowing the response from students to inform their instruction, and make adjustments on the spot. Along with reflecting upon student learning, teachers also use reflective practices to monitor their own teaching.
Effective teachers will reflect on their practice in any setting, but a caring, nurturing, trusting environment is the most conducive to the effective reflection that helps teachers solve problems, adjust to changes, and become lifelong learners.

Chapter 4 Summary

Twelve teachers representing four different suburban elementary schools were selected as participants in this study. Nine themes emerged from this study of reflection from the perspective of elementary school teachers:

1. Reflection is part of an ongoing learning process.
2. Reflection is a way to solve problems.
3. Reflection is a way to deal with change.
4. Reflection involves sharing with others.
5. Reflection evolves with experience.
6. Reflection may be both formal and informal.
7. Reflection takes place in a nurturing environment.
8. Reflection helps to inform instruction.
9. Reflection is a way to self-monitor.

A textural description and a structural description were written and then synthesized into a statement of the essence of the phenomenon of reflection.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore, from the perspective of teachers, the role of reflection in teaching in elementary school. This research study was guided by the central research question: What is the meaning of reflection in teaching? The central research question was further supported by the following research sub-questions:

1. In what ways do teachers experience reflection in the context of the classroom?
2. In what ways do teachers experience reflection in contexts outside the classroom?
3. What role does a teacher’s reflection play in the experience of teaching?
4. What role does experience play in a teacher’s reflection?
5. What role does the school environment play in teachers’ reflective practices?

This chapter presents a discussion of the major findings of the study, the overall significance of the study, and the implications for future research.

Major Findings

Analysis of the data revealed that the meaning of reflection for teachers is multifaceted, and nine themes emerged:

1. Reflection is part of an ongoing learning process.
2. Reflection is both formal and informal.
3. Reflection evolves with experience.
4. Reflection takes place in a nurturing environment.
5. Reflection involves sharing with others.
6. Reflection is a way to solve problems.
7. Reflection is a way to deal with change.
8. Reflection informs instruction.
9. Reflection is a way to self-monitor.

Through continual analysis of these themes, it became evident that the themes fit into three categories representing different dimensions of the central phenomenon, reflection: A) the nature of reflection, B) the context of reflection, and C) the purpose of reflection, with each of the nine themes situated within these dimensions.

A) Nature of Reflection
1. Reflection is part of an ongoing learning process.
2. Reflection is both formal and informal.
3. Reflection evolves with experience.

B) Context of Reflection
4. Reflection takes place in a nurturing environment.
5. Reflection involves sharing with others.

C) Purpose of Reflection
6. Reflection is a way to solve problems.
7. Reflection is a way to deal with change.
8. Reflection informs instruction.
9. Reflection is a way to self-monitor.
The Nature of Reflection

Reflection is part of an ongoing learning process. Darling-Hammond (1996) described a professional teacher as “one who learns from teaching rather than one who has finished learning how to teach” (p.9). Reflection was part of an ongoing learning process in which the teachers looked back, learned, and moved forward. The teachers learned from observing their students while they were teaching, and they spoke of becoming more adept at looking for opportunities to scaffold and challenge them.

Amulya (2004) described reflection as a process that involves revisiting our experiences in order to develop greater insight into those experiences, whether this is in teaching or another field such as community-related work. This allows us to realize lessons are learned through experience, which is, according to Amulya, the purpose of reflection. Although reflection took place in immediate situations in the classroom, the teachers in this phenomenological study also reflected over extended periods. These reflections were not confined to the hours they were at school, but as they continued to revisit important events that prompted their reflections, reflections became interwoven into their daily activities and personal time.

The teachers considered their ongoing learning through reflection a means of holding themselves accountable for improving the quality of their teaching, and even referred to their reflection as a conscience. Holding themselves accountable led them to improvements that affected their work with colleagues, their work within the larger school community, and the success of their students. According to Finley et al. (2000), teacher learning is central to change in schools and in order for effective change to take place, teacher learning must be supported.
Reflection can be both formal and informal. Reflection is often categorized as formal or informal, depending upon the context and the reason for the reflection. Generally, reflection activities assigned during teacher education experiences, or for the purposes of formal evaluations of practicing teachers, fit into the category of formal reflection. The reflections carried out by teachers independently, and even spontaneously, fit into the category of informal reflection.

Schon (1983, 1987) described a reflective practitioner as one who is able to think while acting and respond appropriately. He further delineated between formal and informal reflection by saying that informal reflection would often be considered as thinking-in-action and formal reflection would be often be considered as thinking-on-action. The teachers in this study had reflection experiences that were both formal and informal. They experienced reflection in formal ways, such as scheduled observations and evaluations with administrators, and in informal ways, such as thinking on their own about their classroom and their students in order to make decisions. However, they found the informal reflections more useful because they did not always have someone with whom they could reflect, as was usually the case in the more formal reflections. They found the more formal reflection experiences to be evaluative in nature, and because of this, the lessons they presented during those observations were less likely to represent a commonplace day in their classroom.

Reflection evolves with experience. In most learning situations, our performance improves with experience. This was true of the teachers in this study. They described some specific reflection experiences differently depending upon their years of experience. Several of the teachers described their experiences as a first-year teacher as
being in survival mode and reflecting only on the mechanical parts of teaching, such as classroom management.

Posner (1989) called reflection without experience sterile and experience without reflection shallow. As the teachers gained experience, the focus of their reflections moved away from the technical and procedural issues they focused on during the first year of teaching. The teachers in this study went on to describe their reflections as evolving with experience. As the teachers gained more experience, they tended to spend more time reflecting on issues such as curriculum, effective teaching strategies, and the needs of individual children. The reflective practices of the teachers were affected not only by teaching experiences, but also by life experiences. They spoke of having children of their own as being a turning point in the way they viewed their students and their students’ parents. They felt more empathy for the parents when they came for conferences or had questions about their child.

Reflection has been categorized into levels or types by several researchers, which has in turn led to some intersecting ideas regarding the developmental levels of reflection (Farrell, 2004; Jay & Johnson, 2002; Larrivee, 2004; Van Manen, 1977). Larrivee (2006) summarized these developmental levels: (a) surface reflection, which tends to be focused upon technical issues (Van Manen, 1977) and descriptive in nature (Jay & Johnson, 2002); (b) pedagogical reflection, which is the level at which a teacher attempts to structure practice so that it aligns with theories of best practice or theories ascribed to by the teacher; and (c) critical reflection, which is considered the most advanced level of reflection, in which teachers consider not only alignment with theories of best practice, but also the moral and ethical issues within a democratic society (Larrivee, 2004).
The teachers in this study had moved beyond surface reflection as described by Larrivee (2006). It was evident that they had moved into reflection patterns that we would expect to see in pedagogical reflection. While this may be speculated, the purpose of this research study was to understand the lived experience of reflection, rather than attempting to place the teachers into a particular level.

**Context of Reflection**

*Reflection takes place in a nurturing environment.* Schon (1973) argued that change is a fundamental feature of this modern life and that we must develop social systems that have ways of learning and adapting. These systems can help provide the support that is part of the nurturing environment and feeling of trust that is necessary for teachers to engage in effective reflection practices. Administrative support, collegial support, and an overall school climate that supported and encouraged reflection allowed teachers to explore this part of teaching.

According to Moallem (1997), in addition to experience in teaching, it was important for teachers to be in an environment that is conducive to reflection. A recurring theme in our discussions was the idea that reflection was most likely to occur in an environment that nurtured and encouraged it. The teachers understood that every teaching environment was different and some environments were more nurturing.

They were comfortable reflecting spontaneously with others around them at unscheduled times, but they also needed time provided in the schedule to reflect. The teachers worked in grade-level teams and found that doing so gave them a group with whom they could reflect. It was important for them to know that the person with whom
they reflected, whether an administrator or a peer, took time to consider the issue they discussed and that the person could be trusted to listen without judgment and to maintain confidentiality.

*Reflection involves sharing with others.* Elbaz (1988) found that in order for the reflective practices to become self-sustaining, it was important for teachers to participate in a group process in order to exchange different views and postulate alternative courses of action. Additionally, Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) described reflection as a process of gathering data that is most efficient when coupled with dialogue and collaboration. Collaborating and reflecting with others was important to the teachers, and they continued to reiterate that sharing with others and collaborating on possible ideas or solutions to problems was an invaluable part of their reflection process.

As the only adult in the classroom, elementary teachers can have a sense of isolation. Larrivee (2006) said, “Peer conversation helps to break down the isolation many teachers feel” (p. 30). The teachers in this study expressed that being able to talk with someone else was so important that they would find someone with whom they could reflect, even if they did not feel comfortable doing so within their own school. Observing and reflecting with others allowed the teachers to compare and contrast their teaching, and to learn from considering alternative perspectives. They spoke of having discussions not only during planned meetings, but also on the playground, at lunch, and in the hallway. The teachers reflected with others in order to define problems, receive feedback, consider alternative perspectives, and to share their successes. The teachers found sharing to be important, and it was less important that someone always agree with them.
Buysse, et al. (2003) examined the community of practice model as it related to educational research and practice and posited that there are two central tenets in this model: 1) knowledge is situated in experience, and 2) experience is understood through critical reflection with others who share this experience (p. 267). Because each teaching context varies greatly from all others, it is important for teachers to have time to meet with other teachers in the same or similar contexts in order to reflect and collaborate.

**Purpose of Reflection**

Reflection is a way to solve problem. Teachers must learn to survive in an environment where they have a limited amount of time and an endless supply of uncertainty, problems, and new experiences with which to interact. Bauer (1991) considered the professional practice of teaching a process of problem solving. Cruikshank and Applegate (1981) stated that reflection helps teacher focus on an event, consider why that event occurred, and postulate alternative reactions that may have been more effective in reaching their goals. Lasley (1992) described reflection as the ability to think about the art of teaching in creative, imaginative, and creative ways.

Throughout the study, teachers explained their experiences of sharing with others in order to both define and solve various problems that they encountered. The problems encountered by the teachers ranged from difficulties with particular students to problems with teaching using new curriculum materials. Schon (1983) described problem setting, in which we interact in order to name things that need attention, along with the appropriate context in which the problem might be solved. The teachers described the process of seeking help in defining a problem in order to solve it effectively.
Reflection is a way to deal with change. The teachers in this study described reflection as a way to deal with change. Within a school year, the teachers faced many changes. In fact, within a teaching career, the number of changes in expectations, regulations, and curriculum could be overwhelming. The changes these teachers faced included mandates from their school districts and from their state regarding requirements at each grade level and changes in the abilities and dispositions of their students. They felt that the magnitude of the changes they faced also affected the extent of their reflections. The greater the change, the greater the time spent reflecting on it. Their reflections allowed them to situate proposed changes within their philosophy of teaching and allowed them to shape their philosophy over time.

Hargreaves (1994) observed that often teachers are required to do more and to make changes without being given time to do this effectively. Reflection is part of the process of dealing with the changes faced by teachers in both their day-to-day work and throughout their career, and it is important they be given time to be reflective, especially regarding changes. Patterson (1995) asserted that organizations could better facilitate effective change, and reduce the stress of the people involved, if they provide time to think about the changes ahead, allow people to understand how the changes relate to the values of their organization, and allow time for them to look at change as an opportunity to solve an existing problem. The teachers manage to do this through the time they take to reflect, but it is important to recognize the importance of their reflection and give them time to do it.
Reflection helps to inform instruction. Schon (1983) asserted that reflection-in-action actually poses a threat to the way a school operates, proposing that a teacher’s lesson plan should be viewed as a rough outline to support the various ways that she will facilitate student learning. The teachers in the study expressed this same idea when they were discussing the long-range plans required by their schools. They felt that long-range planning was difficult if you were truly a reflective teacher. Reflecting on instruction and on student performance each day made it much more likely that a teacher would need to make adjustments in her instruction to meet the needs of her students, rendering the long-range plans much less useful to the teacher than was intended by the administration.

However, the teachers used on-the-spot reflection to inform their instruction during a lesson as well as in planning for subsequent lessons. They maintained an awareness of the reactions of their students so they could determine the most effective next steps. This awareness informed the instruction of, at times one student, and at other times, the entire class.

Reflection is a way to self-monitor. The teachers in this study saw reflection as integral to the process of constantly becoming more effective. According to Raines and Shadiow (1995), it is important to engage in reflection and to continue thinking about the doing. Often the teachers’ reflections turned inward, as a way to monitor their own performance as teachers. The teachers referred to this reflection as their conscience, or accountability.

Larrivee (2000) asserted that the classroom demands and changes involving curriculum, collaboration, interactive dialogue, and teaching for meaning, required a
teacher to take on the role of social catalyst, facilitator of learning, and reflective practitioner. Larrivee (2006) maintained that in order for a teacher to be effective in these roles, she must have a sense of self-awareness and be willing to embrace the processes of self-inquiry and self-reflection and that, if teachers did this, the students would be affected by their efforts to teach for a democratic society.

It may be our desire that teachers teach in ways that promote a democratic society, but in reality, this is a monumental leap. Taking time to understand the meaning of reflection for teachers can help us know where to begin leading them to this end. We often believe that teachers need only be reflective in order to teach in a way that promotes a democratic society, but that is much like saying that if a child is curious, then she or he will be a scientist. Just as the child needs support and encouragement to become a scientist, the teacher needs support and encouragement to become an effective reflective practitioner.

Research Questions Answered

What is the meaning of reflection in teaching?

Reflection, for these teachers, was an ongoing, multi-faceted process in which they looked back, learned and moved forward. Their reflections evolved over time as they gained experience in their teaching and in their lives. Much of the reflecting that the teachers did was a type of thinking on one’s feet, allowing the response from students to inform their instruction, and making adjustments on the spot.

Along with reflecting upon student learning, teachers also use reflective practices to monitor their own teaching. Beyond the classroom, the teachers used reflection to help
them in solving problems and adapting to changes in their state or local school environment. The teachers felt that effective teachers will reflect on their practice in any setting, but a caring, nurturing, trusting environment is the most conducive to effective reflection that helps teachers to solve problems, adjust to changes, and become lifelong learners.

*In what ways do teachers experience reflection in the context of the classroom?*

The teachers learned from observing their students during a lesson. The reactions of the students provided immediate assessments of the students’ understanding. The teachers made note of their own professional learning as well, in an effort to self-monitor. The reflections carried out by teachers independently, and even spontaneously, fit into the category of informal reflection. They felt that long-range planning was difficult for a truly a reflective teacher. Reflecting on instruction and on student performance each day made it much more likely that a teacher would need to make adjustments in her instruction to meet the needs of her students, rendering the long-range plans much less useful to the teacher than was intended by the administration.

*In what ways do teachers experience reflection in contexts outside the classroom?*

The teachers experienced reflection in contexts outside the classroom. These reflections in contexts outside the classroom fell into three categories: formal reflections with administrators, reflections with colleagues, and personal reflection that extended beyond the immediate situation.
First, they reflected with administrators following scheduled observations. They said these types of reflections were less useful to them than the less formal reflection experiences because they perceived the observations as being evaluative. Therefore, they were less secure in their reflections.

Second, they reflected with colleagues throughout the school day, often reflecting with colleagues at lunch, on the playground, or in the hallway, to share successes or to get an alternative perspective. The teachers reiterated their feeling that sharing with others and collaborating on possible ideas or solutions to problems was an invaluable part of their reflection process.

Third, although reflection took place in immediate situations, the teachers also reflected over extended periods and time, and not always at school. As they continued to revisit important events that prompted their reflections, their reflections blended into their daily activities and personal time. They reflected in the shower, while they were driving, and with family members and friends. The teachers considered the summer an important time for reflection, when they could think about larger adjustments they wanted to make.

*What role does a teacher’s reflection play in the experience of teaching?*

The teachers considered ongoing learning through reflection a way of holding themselves accountable for improving the quality of their teaching. This led them to improvements that affected their work with colleagues, their work within the larger school community, and the success of their students. The teachers explained their experiences of sharing with others to define and solve various problems they encountered. They reflected upon proposed or mandated changes, and their reflections
allowed them to situate changes within their philosophy of teaching, allowing them to shape their teaching philosophy over time. The teachers in this study saw reflection as integral to this process of constantly becoming more effective.

*How does the school environment affect teachers’ reflective practices?*

According to Larrivee (2006), one key element of reflective practice is “a deliberate pause, a purposeful slowing down, to allow for higher-level thinking processes.” (p.8). Most teachers would not deny the value of a pause, but time to pause is a luxury that most teachers do not enjoy. Teachers need to be encouraged to pay attention to their own rhythms and take opportunities to reflect as they arise.

A recurring theme in our discussion was the idea that reflection was most likely in an environment that nurtured and encouraged it. They needed to feel comfortable reflecting spontaneously with others around them at unscheduled times, but they also needed to feel that there was time provided in the schedule to reflect. They found that working with a team of teachers at their grade level gave them a group with whom they could reflect. It was important for them to know that the person with whom they reflected took time to consider the issue and that the person could be trusted to listen without judgment and to maintain confidentiality. In addition, their sense of trust in their administrators affected how nurtured they felt in their school environment.
Overall Significance

This phenomenological research study provided insight into the role of reflection in teaching in elementary school. The phenomenon of reflection has been studied and defined in many ways, but little qualitative research focuses on the meaning of reflection for teachers from their perspective.

The necessity to implement, prescribe, or impose structured reflective practices has been influenced by an over-reliance of quantitative research methods in the field of education. This is not surprising given our current political climate, in which qualitative research is rarely used as a foundation for new educational programs or methods. However, the meaning of the multifaceted act of reflection in elementary teaching, from the perspective of teachers, is not quantifiable. Teacher education programs and teacher professional development programs propose new and different ways for teachers to reflect without hearing the voices of professional teachers regarding the reflective practices in which they already engage.

This study provided several insights that are significant to the field of education because they were gleaned from the thoughts of practicing teachers. First, the role that the nurturing environment plays in fostering effective reflection should be closely attended. Often, teachers are moving from place to place, from activity to activity, bombarded with new ideas and mandates and given little, if any, time to process these demands. Most schools do little to cultivate trust among faculty members.

Taking a closer look at teachers who have experienced the frustration of having little or no time to reflect is of great value to administrators and teachers who would like to move toward effective reflective practice. Just as we expect teachers to differentiate
their instruction depending upon the needs of their students, administrators and designers of professional development need to differentiate as well.

Second, teachers often tend to be self-deprecating, giving themselves very little credit for their accomplishments. As this study began, these teachers had to remind themselves that they reflect all the time, as part of the rhythm of their teaching. Simply being aware of their reflective actions caused them to think more about it. In order to move teachers into a more formal and measured reflective practice, we need to acknowledge and celebrate the value of their reflections. Helping teachers to be aware of what they are doing can assist them in being more deliberate in their practice.

Third, teachers use reflection to help inform their instruction. Currently, there is much discussion surrounding the use of assessment to inform instruction. However, the teachers revealed that reflection is an important step in using assessment to inform instruction. The assessments are of little value if the teacher does not reflect upon the meaning of the assessment results for the student.

Implications for Future Research

One issue that continued to emerge throughout the research process was the differentiation between formal and informal reflection. The teachers became interested in the difference between formal and informal reflection. They did not realize how much they reflected on a daily basis until they began to talk about it with their colleagues. Most of them related reflection only to assigned formal reflection, such as journal writing or professional evaluations. Future research addressing the difference between formal and informal reflection would be helpful to teachers and administrators.
Another issue that emerged was that of the nurturing environment. Each of the teachers mentioned many times the importance of a nurturing environment. This emerged as one of the themes in this study, and future research that concentrates specifically on the characteristics of the environment that nurtures reflection would be beneficial to teachers and to school administrators when planning and monitoring the school climate.

In addition, a study focusing on the effect of teacher reflection on student learning would be beneficial to administrators and teachers. Understanding more clearly the effect of reflective practice will be beneficial in working toward the goal of improved professional practice.

It is likely that the results of this phenomenological study could inform the design of a grounded theory (Creswell, 2003) research study that would generate a theory related to teacher reflection grounded in the perspectives of the teachers. Delving more deeply into the phenomenon of reflection might lead to a greater understanding of how the themes in this study are interconnected.

Because this phenomenological study focused on teachers in a suburban setting, further exploration of the reflective experiences of teachers from different types of school environments would be beneficial. This would allow more perspectives to be vocalized so that comparisons could be made between the meanings of reflection for teachers in different settings.

Finally, a study the differences between the reflection experiences of student teachers and practicing teachers would be beneficial in helping educators understand ways to scaffold teachers’ transition from student teaching into the profession of teaching. While much research explores the use of reflection activities with student
teachers, these are formal reflective practices and do not often transfer into the professional teaching situation. Also, the teachers in this study were less likely to utilize more formal reflection methods.

Conclusion

It would not be practical to delve deeply into the meaning of all the everyday activities associated with teaching. However, in a profession that is laden with responsibility, it was important to give teachers the opportunity to illuminate the role that reflection plays for them before presenting reflection as another requirement. These professionals provided invaluable insight into the meaning of reflection in teaching. It is imperative that teaching professionals be given a voice to share the wealth of knowledge that will guide the novice and affirm the expert teacher, allowing us to realize that the act of reflective teaching is a process, not an event.
LIST OF REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT CONFIRMATION LETTER
March 4, 2005

Dear ________________________________,

Thank you for your interest in my qualitative research study on the meaning of reflection in teaching. I value the contribution that you can make to my study and I am excited about the possibility of your participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate some of the things that we have already discussed and secure your signature on the participation consent form that you will find attached.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experience. In this way, I seek to understand the meaning of reflection for upper elementary school teachers, allowing me to answer my question: From the perspective of teachers, what is the meaning of reflection in teaching?

Through your participation as a co-researcher, I hope to understand the essence of reflection as it reveals itself in your experience. You will be asked to recall specific episodes, situations, or events that you have experienced as a teacher. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for you: your thoughts, feelings, behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with your experience.

I value your participation and thank you for the commitment of time, energy, and effort. Your participation in the study will require approximately one hour of your time for a focus group interview and one hour of your time for an individual interview. If you have any further questions before signing the release form or if there is a problem with the date and time of our meeting, I can be reached at (205)978-6990 or (205)936-7958.

Sincerely,

Amy Morgan
APPENDIX B

GATEKEEPER CONFIRMATION LETTER
Dear _______________________________:

I am planning to conduct a qualitative research study on the meaning of reflection in teaching. I value the contribution that your teachers at Rocky Ridge Elementary School can make to my study and I am excited about the possibility of their participation in it. The purpose of this letter is to reiterate some of the things that we have already discussed and secure your signature as consent to conduct this research at your school.

The research model I am using is a qualitative one through which I am seeking comprehensive depictions or descriptions of your experience. In this way, I seek to understand the meaning of reflection for upper elementary school teachers, allowing me to answer my question: From the perspective of teachers, what is the meaning of reflection in teaching?

Through the participation of your teachers as co-researchers, I hope to understand the essence of reflection as it reveals itself in their experience. They will be asked to recall specific episodes, situations, or events that they have experienced as teachers. I am seeking vivid, accurate, and comprehensive portrayals of what these experiences were like for them: their thoughts, feelings, behaviors, as well as situations, events, places, and people connected with their experience.

I value the participation of the teachers at Rocky Ridge Elementary School and thank you for your consideration. If you have any further questions before signing the attached consent, I can be reached at (205)978-6990 or (205)936-7958.

Sincerely,

Amy Morgan
Consent of Site Administrator

By signing below, you agree to allow the investigator to conduct the described research study, Mirror, Mirror: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Reflection in Teaching, at Rocky Ridge Elementary School. Teachers from this school will be involved in the study.

____________________________________________________________________
Signature of Administrator     Date

____________________________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator       Date
APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
CONSENT FORM

Title of Research

Mirror, Mirror: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Reflection in Teaching

Investigator

Amy Morgan

UAB Faculty Supervisor

Dr. Nataliya Ivankova
205-996-7909
nivankova@uab.edu

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES

You are being asked to participate in a phenomenological research study that will explore the meaning of reflection for teachers. You will be part of a group of six fourth and fifth grade teachers of varying gender and ethnicity. You will be asked to participate in at least one, and not more than two, focus group discussions and also to participate in an individual interview regarding the role of reflection in your teaching. The location and the times of these meetings will be designed to accommodate your schedule.

UAB - IRB
Consent Form Approval 3-11-05
Expiration Date 3-11-06

3/4/2005
Page 1 of 3

Participant Initials _______
RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participation in this research study should not cause any risk or discomfort to you greater than the risks and discomforts of day to day living.

BENEFITS

You may not personally benefit from participation in this research; however, your participation may provide valuable information to teachers that could provide insight into the phenomenon of reflective teaching.

ALTERNATIVES

You may choose not to participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information gathered during this study will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. The information that you provide through focus group and individual interviews will be included in the research, but your identity will not be revealed. The UAB Institutional Review Board for Human Use may review the research records for auditing purposes.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT PREJUDICE

You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice.

SIGNIFICANT NEW FINDINGS

Any significant new findings that develop during the course of the study that may affect your willingness to continue in the research will be provided to you by Mrs. Morgan.

COST OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in the study will not involve any cost to you.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

There will be no compensation for participation in this research study.

PAYMENT FOR RESEARCH RELATED INJURIES

There has been no provision made for compensation for research related injuries.

3/4/2005
Page 2 of 3
Participant Initials _____
QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about the research, Mrs. Morgan will be glad to answer them. Mrs. Morgan’s number is (205)978-6990. If you have any questions about your right as a research participant, you may contact Ms. Sheila Moore, Director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB). Ms. Moore can be reached at (205)934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. Press the option for the operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday.

LEGAL RIGHTS
You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this consent form.

SIGNATURES
Your signature below means you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed informed consent.

Signature of Participant: ____________________________ Date: _____________

Signature of Witness: ______________________________ Date: _____________

Signature of Investigator: __________________________ Date: _____________

3/4/2005
Page 3 of 3
CONSENT FORM

Title of Research

Mirror, Mirror: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Reflection in Teaching

Investigator

Amy Morgan

UAB Faculty Supervisor

Dr. Nataliya Ivankova
205-996-7909
nivankova@uab.edu

EXPLANATION OF PROCEDURES

You are being asked to participate in a phenomenological research study that will explore the meaning of reflection for teachers. You will be part of a group of twelve teachers of varying age and ethnicity that teach grades K-5. You will be asked to participate in at least one, and not more than two, focus group discussions and also to participate in an individual interview regarding the role of reflection in your teaching. The location and the times of these meetings will be designed to accommodate your schedule.

UAB - IRB
Consent Form Approval 04/12/06
Expiration Date 04/12/07

3/9/2006
Page 1 of 3

Participant Initials _____
RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

Participation in this research study should not cause any risk or discomfort to you greater than the risks and discomforts of day to day living.

BENEFITS

You may not personally benefit from participation in this research; however, your participation may provide valuable information to teachers that could provide insight into the phenomenon of reflective teaching.

ALTERNATIVES

You may choose not to participate in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information gathered during this study will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. The information that you provide through focus group and individual interviews will be included in the research, but your identity will not be revealed. The UAB Institutional Review Board for Human Use may review the research records for auditing purposes.

WITHDRAWAL WITHOUT PREJUDICE

You are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice.

SIGNIFICANT NEW FINDINGS

Any significant new findings that develop during the course of the study that may affect your willingness to continue in the research will be provided to you by Mrs. Morgan.

COST OF PARTICIPATION

Participation in the study will not involve any cost to you.

PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

There will be no compensation for participation in this research study.

PAYMENT FOR RESEARCH RELATED INJURIES

There has been no provision made for compensation for research related injuries.
QUESTIONS
If you have any questions about the research, Mrs. Morgan will be glad to answer them. Mrs. Morgan’s number is (205)978-6990. If you have any questions about your right as a research participant, you may contact Ms. Sheila Moore, Director of the Office of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB). Ms. Moore can be reached at (205)934-3789 or 1-800-822-8816. Press the option for the operator/attendant and ask for extension 4-3789 between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. CT, Monday through Friday.

LEGAL RIGHTS
You are not waiving any of your legal rights by signing this consent form.

SIGNATURES
Your signature below means you agree to participate in this study. You will receive a copy of this signed informed consent.

Signature of Participant: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Signature of Witness: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

Signature of Investigator: ___________________________ Date: ___________________________

3/9/2006
Page 3 of 3
Participant Initials ______
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
FOCUS GROUP
Focus Group Interview Protocol
(Focus Group with Teachers)

Date: ____________________________

Time: ____________________________

Site: _____________________________

Participants:  ___________________________
  ___________________________
  ___________________________
  ___________________________
  ___________________________
  ___________________________

Note to moderator:
- have participants sign consent/acknowledgement video taping form and make a nametag
- invite participants to help themselves to food

I. Introduction:
A. Personal introduction
B. Thank you for agreeing to participate in the focus group. You were invited to this focus group in order to begin exploring the meaning of reflection in teaching. The aim of doing this will be to better inform other teachers and administrators of the meaning and importance of reflection in teaching. You were chosen because of your expertise and dedication to the field of teaching.

II. Ground Rules:
“We have several questions to go through and we want to try to let everyone answer them in approximately 1 hour. Let’s follow some guidelines in order to make the best use of our time.”
- there are no right or wrong answers. All thoughts are important, so please
- don’t be afraid to give your opinion;
- please speak up so everybody can hear;
- please speak one at a time;
- this conversation is confidential. Your names will not be identified with the comments you share with us today;
- we won’t take a formal break, but feel free to go to the restroom or get more food;
we’re videotaping tonight’s session so we can make sure we remember and reflect on your comments.”

[make sure video recorder and tape recorder are turned on]

“Are there any questions? OK, let’s start.”

III. Icebreaker
“Let’s go around the room and tell us your name. Please explain who you are and what grade you teach, and how long you have been teaching.”

IV. In-depth: Questions about reflection in teaching
1. You were selected to be in this focus group because each of you has knowledge about teaching and reflective practices of teachers. Please tell us what you think reflection means with regards to teaching.
2. How do you reflect on your own teaching?
3. When do you reflect on your teaching?
4. Can you give me some examples of your own reflective experiences?
5. What results from you reflective practices?

V. Closure
“Thank you for your time. If you would like to add to what you said today or you like to know how I am using the information you gave me, please contact me at school or by phone at 936-7958. I would like to invite you to participate in an individual follow up interview within the next week.
APPENDIX E

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
Mirror, Mirror: The Role of Reflection in Teaching

Interview Protocol

Date: __________________________

Site: __________________________________________

Participant Name: __________________________________________

Interviewer Name: __________________________________________

Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

2. How long have you been teaching in this school?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

3. Why did you decide to go into teaching?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

4. What are the most rewarding aspects of teaching for you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

5. What are the most challenging aspects of teaching for you?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

6. How would you define reflection?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
7. Describe a reflective teacher.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

8. How do you reflect on your teaching?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

9. What results from your reflective practices?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX F

TRANSCRIBED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW
Teacher Reflection
Individual Interview
Holly Sutherland
Rocky Ridge Elementary
April 1, 2005

1. AM: Good morning, Holly, thank you for meeting with me again after we had met with the focus group. I just had a few more questions and then I wanted to give you an opportunity to tell me anything that came up since then that you might want to say. Um, several different things came out of the discussion that we had with all the other teachers and one was that different people around you and different events in your life or their lives had influenced the way that they reflect and sometimes that’s something that happens just at a particular moment or sometimes it is something that has happened in their life in general. Are there any other examples that you have or have you thought about it at all the things that influence your reflections?

2. HS: Um, well, I mean I think anytime reflection is usually driven just by your whole philosophy of teaching and life and um you know I’ve always been a person who wanted to do things well and who you know strives to do things at the best of my ability and so therefore I think my reflection is something that is almost like an accountability or a conscience you know when you reflect it really holds you accountable for what you want to be or how you want to teach and what you want to be perceived as and how you want things to go because without reflection you know there is no self accountability I guess or you know looking at what you’re doing and trying to improve it so I guess it holds me accountable for my expectations of myself as well as you know other’s expectations of me and um you know trying to do the best that you can and how can I improve what I’ve done or you know almost even sometimes giving yourself credit for what you have accomplished or you know what you were trying to do. Reflection can also be a positive and keep you motivated and keep you you know fresh and I think a lot of times when people are you know getting a little bit stagnant it’s because they are not reflecting on the good things that have happened and reflecting on how they can improve you know they just sort of showing up and working and not doing that extra reflection that really can improve their curriculum and their teaching and you know what they’re doing for children.

3. AM: Right. Well, I’ve heard people say that before that that um the rewards are different in teaching than they may be in other jobs. They don’t come in the form of advancement necessarily or bonuses or that sort of thing. So do you feel like this is a way that you celebrate what’s happening in your own classroom and during your career.

4. HS: I think so and reflection also in the positive side of reflection when someone maybe comes to you and has a problem or someone comes to you with ideas you know you can reflect on things that work well for you and things that you have
done well and feel good about what you are doing so reflection doesn’t always have to be correcting what you’ve done wrong or you know mulling over problems. Reflection can also be the form of you sort of orally reflecting with someone else about you know about the great kids in your class or the great things that they’ve done or you know the exciting parts of it and so therefore that does provide you know that self reward about what you’re doing in the classroom.

5. AM: What about changes that have taken place in your own teaching. That came out in our discussion a few days ago that reflection may come from change or reflection may actually cause change and what are some changes that have taken place, first of all, in your teaching that have caused you to be reflective?

6. HS: Well, you know in the initially when you start out for teaching like I said earlier you’re reflection is just on procedures but I think as you grow as a professional through professional development through things like Ruth Parker’s math courses and things that you participate in and writing conferences and things like that they the more you learn the more in depth and insightful your reflection is. Also, I think just from experience, the more times you work with different types of students, you know and just the more students you work with, the more you find very similar to other situations you have dealt with so therefore you have more of a base to reflect on how I’ve done some things in the past. Um, also, in my personal, um, education and career, just going back to school and um, interacting with other professionals and getting their points of view and their perspectives and learning about other people’s, you know, pedagogy and how their philosophies of education are and even professors and you know people who I’ve interacted with so I guess a lot of my change has come from professional growth in the classroom myself as a learner because, you know, as you see people and how they do things different or their perspective sometimes your perspective changes, um,

7. AM: uh-huh. But it’s not necessarily career changes or things like that necessarily it could just be seeing another person’s perspective or um the way that they look at things has made you reflect sometimes.

8. HS: It has, and just learning the more you learn the more valuable and enriched your reflection is the more experience you have and the more education that you have and the more that you connect with other people your reflection increases and becomes more valuable.

9. AM: What are some things and I know it may be difficult to pinpoint these but are there any specific changes that you know you have made in your teaching because of reflecting?

10. HS: I know that I’ve specifically changed lessons and curriculum but also I think through dealing with specifically over the last three years some very challenging behavior problems have given me the opportunity to really think about you know
individual children and children as a whole and change sort of the way I did things with some children I you know some children I you come out of school or you come out of some situations thinking that you handle all children in the same way I guess and so I think a lot of my change has come or my problem solving has come because I have dealt with children and sort of changed the way I thought about my philosophy of you know um behavior and you know just working with children in different ways so I guess you know difficult children and that type of thing um I guess that’s one of the main things.

11. AM: That you’ve changed as far as your teaching goes? And you mentioned that that was a way that you solved problems.

12. HS: Right, have used those experiences to solve problems that I was having now and really to prevent some problems that I could have handled a different way.

13. AM: uh-huh

14. HS: Um, I guess also my reflection as far as problem solving we had three years ago had really had some trouble with our writing scores and through lots of reflection and oral reflection and personal reflection we got together as a team and made some decisions about hiring a writing coach about revamping our curriculum, and really doing some things that really were better for the children than we had been doing and I think that took a lot of reflection on how we were doing things how we could do things better what had happened in the past what we were doing in our curriculum so I think through that reflection we did solve you know a lot of problems because our writing scores went up and you know the children were more successful so I think that through the reflection of not only through proven data of you know our test scores need to go up but also us not feeling comfortable enough with our ability in teaching writing at the time. You know that reflection on that and that genuine reflection of how can we do this better has solved a problem for us as far as getting more tools in our toolbox to teach writing but also the children were much more successful in their ability to write because of our real reflection on that being a weakness.

15. AM: I can see where that would happen and so you had to reflect personally and with the group.

16. HS: As a group, mm-hmm.

17. AM: Um, how would you describe the meaning of reflection for you in your teaching? And I know that you have given some really good examples here but as far as a tool for teaching or as just part of the essence of teaching for you how would you describe what reflection is and what it means?

18. HS: Well, like I said earlier, reflection to me is a real accountability. I think you know if, positive or negative, to genuinely take the time to reflect on what’s going
on in your classroom, how you are teaching, how you are interacting with others, students, and your peers that you work with team members to reflect on your whole aspect of teaching and your professionalism really gives you the ability to make changes or to continue things that you feel like will be best for children and your team and your work environment some things you know have to change for everything to work run smoothly and then some things you decide through your reflection you know that’s the way you believe and that’s your philosophy so I think reflection also commonly after a situation has happened reflection gives you the ability to change a situation in some instances and to go back and to really make things right if it’s a wrong or to you know if you have a situation that you might have in the haste of the day just overlooked or if you know you were told something and you felt like you just needed to do it right then because you know if it was an administrative decision and then later through your reflection you may decide that you’re just really against that or it doesn’t fit into what you believe and so I think reflection can also be a means of going back and fixing things or just at least discussing things further that you may not have had the chance to do with the time restraints of the day.

19. AM: Right, and do you think that that’s an issue with teachers in terms of reflection that you’re day is very scheduled and moving from one thing to another very quickly.

20. HS: and I think sometimes that why we do reflect later. We reflect you know in the car or later that night because of the time restraints of the day there is so much to do you’re trying to get everything in and I think a lot of times you know that’s why we have to reflect and say I’m going to do this next year because of the time restraints a lot of times we can’t go back immediately and redo something the right way or improve what we had done because there’s just not time do that. So I think that’s why in teaching a lot of times reflection is a process of you know I’m reflecting now on what I’m going to do better maybe even the next year rather than tomorrow.

21. AM: Great. Well, is there anything else you want to tell me about reflection that you haven’t said?

22. HS: No, the one thing though I did think about from the other day that we had talked about you asked the question if we if you have to define what you’re reflecting on and you know I thought about that because you know I don’t know why that question stuck in my mind but I thought to me too commonly I reflect in order to define the problem I think I don’t really know maybe and maybe that’s when I reflect with others I don’t maybe even know what the problem is or what or how to solve the problem so I think commonly you don’t have to define it initially but a lot of times your reflection with other people is you seeking to actually define the problem or for them to help you define it or get a definition of you know what is going on so that there can be a solution and so that was really something that stuck in my mind and like I’d said to you I feel like just this
discussion this focus group has almost you know led you to reflect on how is your reflection meaningful when commonly you just reflect and change something or you reflect and do something different but I think it’s beneficial because you really if you think about how you’re thinking and how you’re reflecting it can you know be even more enriching I guess and be more meaningful to change.

23. AM: Great, well thank you so much for sharing all this. It was very helpful.
APPENDIX G

HORIZONTALIZATION
Thinking back over what you’ve done and trying to think of ways you could have done it better.

I think about which students got it and which students didn’t and how I could improve upon the lesson and how I could make it better for those students who didn’t do it and those who didn’t get it.

I think commonly when you say the word reflection you think of it in a formal way and I think some of your best reflection happens you know in the shower or in the car or after you’ve just taught a lesson you think you know I should have done something so I think it just depends on you know I think reflection happens all the time as a teacher not just in a formal way and sometimes just in the middle of teaching too it’s just like oh, let’s do that do that a little different or whatever let me change this up real quick and that usually helps me a lot too when I’m thinking no this isn’t this isn’t getting it let me see what I can do

I was going to say reflection comes from not only from reflecting but also observing you know just immediate observations of what’s going on

I make notes on things so that I say next year hand out this thing to go with that or whatever just little notes

Reflections come from the end instead of the beginning you know, I mean it’s coming from the assessment or coming from the end product looking back a lot of times I think you’re just constantly thinking about school and you know what can I have done better I think sometimes reflection comes with worry too. Did they get this am I doing what they need?

One thing lot’s of time reflection comes when something goes wrong and so maybe you can’t fix it right that moment but it just stays in the back of your mind and it kind of eats at you and when you have some down time to think about it

at the very end it all came together for me so that’s where all that reflecting is you start going oh that’s why I did this and that’s why I did that and I’ve got to remember next year to do it this way because it works better

write notes on stickies everywhere

just on my notes on my lesson plans just wherever I know I’ll find it
Decimals, introducing decimals, and just on the spur of the moment I used my grids in a different way and it turned out beautiful and so I just kept going through the lesson with the way I started and I think you know then you start reflecting on what went well instead of always the negative and I start thinking what went well why did it work and I got out an index card and started writing it down so I could remember it for next year.

I think that’s what makes a good teacher and too the way you did it last year may not work with the group that you have this year and so you have to think on your feet and change quickly.

Well, I think too, with the whole idea of reflection too like you’re saying you talking to each other that generates so much of that personal reflection of well she’s tried this and I’ve done it this way which way so you almost just start churning out those ideas of what everybody else is doing so it happens any time you’re interacting with any other you know professionals because of the generating of things that they’ve done and they’ve tried and you know, how you did it.

I think I’ve learned more watching others, other professionals teach certain lessons and I can compare that with how I teach and change it for my class.

Even with academically, but also with behavior, you know as people talk about you know certain behavior issue that they’re having with certain children as they talk about things that are going on in their classroom too you think about what you’re doing as far as you know how am I encouraging how am I promoting this child and so it’s not only academically it’s just you know in everything, every aspect.

I think some of the most day to day reflection I’ve had though is when I’ve had an extremely difficult student because I mean you go home at night and you think what could I have done different that’s what you always say what could I have done different.

What could I try and then it’s always OK tomorrow’s a new day you know that’s the most important thing to come up when you reflect Ok let today go and start over tomorrow but I think that is what probably day in and day out you reflect about.

And, again, I love to reflect with someone else and so what do you think about this discipline problem I learned a lot from you [Holly] just with the problems that you’ve had in class and how you’ve handled them so well I’ve learned from that just watching you so reflecting it helps me and I know the next day I can go and I can ask others if I’ve had a problem.

Oh, yea, you don’t have that everywhere and it’s disappointing when you don’t.

So that comes in with the teaming and that sort of thing.

It is very important to have a strong team
That can support you and help you when you need it.
I think you do struggle with that but the whole idea behind reflection is you’re looking for improvement so I think even if you’re with your team and let’s say you’re griping about it there’s still that underlying thought of how can we make this better? What is the best way to handle this?

And I think a lot of times that starts out as a gripe or just a getting off your chest but then it gets deeper as you talk about it you know it may start out as a sarcastic comment or this but as you talk about it somebody always makes that comment that really is meaningful even if it starts out a little funny or sarcastic I mean I think you get to the you know sometimes you have to have that release and then get to the problem so that you can sort of let it go and then learn from it.

But you can sort of categorize it, OK, so this is a management problem, or this is a procedure problem or this is just one child that’s stirring up a lot of trouble so let’s go back and isolate that one little problem sometimes I think we do that sometimes we go back and isolate the problem

I don’t think you always have to define it specifically but I think to get a lot of input from others there has to be a definition of what the struggle is or what the problem is or what the concern is that you’re trying to reflect on

a lot of times I will take a situation at recess or whatever at lunch alright let me tell ya’ll what happened how would you have handled this I’ll come right out and say that and then get their input on how you know how I handled it how they handled it just for my reflection

We were told to keep a journal that I always thought it was a great idea but I’ve never been a diary kind of person I just never could.

We had to I had to write every week um five different things you know one was like knowledge of myself and pedagogy and just different things, we had to do that every week student teaching and at first it started out and I was thinking what am I going to write about and then I just found myself you know just going on and on and on with these thoughts and you know this didn’t work because or I talked to this teacher about this and I still have those and I have looked back and thought Oh, my gosh you know this is where I was and this you know I mean it was good to look back and see that too but at first I thought I’m not going to be able to do this but then it just came so easy just thinking and reflecting

every night after class which is a three hour class had to reflect that night and send it in by like midnight just a one page reflection on what we talked about and that was a very you know enriching experience because you do you know you pick out certain things and as we read everyone else’s it was amazing how many people reflected on a different aspect of the class that may not have meant anything to me but when I read how someone else perceived it it was very meaningful so I think a lot of times when we do see how other people are reflecting you get things out of classes or situations that you would’ve never thought of or that weren’t important to you but you see the importance of someone else’s view
I don’t always feel like it takes a lot of time you know you think about things and you don’t realize your like at lunch we talk the whole time and it’s mostly about school things but I don’t feel like it’s a nuisance or that you know I wish we could talk about something else though because it’s important and it and you know it’s so much of our day and it just helps to hear what everyone is thinking but I don’t feel I’ve never thought that ohh it takes a lot of my time you know.

I’ve never felt that teaching was something that you could leave at school either

I think that as a profession it’s with you 24 hours a day I mean once you’re a teacher you’re always the teacher I mean it’s always with you.

if you have that desire to do better to be better to always be improving then that’s why you reflect because you want to improve.

you just always want to do a better job

we enjoy what we do.

we care

Well, and you have 20 people depending on you for their life I mean it’s not like something that you can enter in a computer and leave and go home at 5:00 you know you have 20 little minds that depend on you to enrich their life you know and that’s a huge responsibility

I was thinking the other day when I was reflecting on these things (questions) I used to be an accountant and sit in a cubicle all day long forty hours a week sometimes longer and I’d think hmm if somebody asked me why I left that and it’s like it’s not personally rewarding at all what benefit am I you know I’m helping some company make some money but and I’m getting paid but other than that there’s no personal fulfillment there’s no personal reward like there is in this job.

a lot of times with reflection though although it is you do share with other people a lot of it is just internal and so it doesn’t just wipe out all your family time you know while you’re washing dishes I mean a lot of it’s just you know things that you’re thinking about but it’s not really as much sharing as you know as it would seem to be

I think that reflection sometimes is spurred by change like you said a problem or something that is different that causes even more reflection you know than something you’ve done for a long time a change like in textbooks or science kits a lot of that thing generates more reflection than something that you have taught for several years.

I’m choosy with who I reflect with. I reflect with you (AM) for science definitely and I reflect with you just about everything organizing, discipline, and so and with Chris my husband it’s mainly complaints.
I think it would be totally different reflecting if we didn’t have the support we have here I mean it’s easy to go to lunch and say these things or it’s easy to go to recess but it wouldn’t be if there wasn’t so much support here or if I knew that I wouldn’t be criticized for what I did or things like that I think reflection would be much different if that were the case.

At a different school, I had the experience where I didn’t have anyone to talk to so I called a former coworker that was a very good team worker and she would talk to me just about every week and she helped me through it for five months.

I think commonly reflecting with other people depends on their receptiveness I mean if you’ve ever reflected with somebody and had a negative response or they’ve said that they would have done it this way and you know they have no idea how they would have done it they have no idea how to handle those kinds of situations and you stop reflecting as much I think.

I think you have to pick people who you sort of you know feel like you can reflect in a positive easy environment instead of trying to defend what you would have done or what you think or your philosophy you tend to reflect with people who not always agree with you but who are good listeners and support you and you can bounce things off you don’t want a yes person you don’t want somebody who just agrees with everything you say but you want somebody who has been there or at least has an open mind about what’s going on

I think that trust is a major component of reflection with other people I think being able to trust somebody with because you know reflection is commonly a very personal thing you know I’m having trouble with this you know this is something that I’m doing wrong or that I’m struggling with so trusting somebody is a major component.

ways to make a lesson better to me that’s not personal that’s just kind of help me out here what do you do but maybe if I’m not managing my class well or something that might be more personal to me.

it depends on the person how much of your identity and your confidence and what you are about comes from your success and what you’re doing you know if some people have problems some people have trouble stepping back and actually admitting that they’re weak not me but some people wouldn’t dare say um you know I’m not doing a good job with this I need some help.

I’ve got my network of folks and we just say I can trust them to listen and just think to themselves that I’m any less of a person because I’m having this trouble and I get new ideas.

I think what we’re saying too is that we value our friends’ reflections too. When I first came here I was teaching third grade and I’ll never forget I remember going into a teacher’s room and saying I’m having trouble with such and such with a child and I have tried all of this
what do you think and you know off the top of her head she told me one or two things she came back to me the next day I still remember this she came back the next day and said I’ve been thinking about it and she sat down and she had another conversation with me and that was so valuable to me.

You learn through other people you know how they handle situations.

reflection to me as a young teacher was almost how can I survive? What can I do to make it through the year, you know, not how can I improve math, how can I incorporate reading circles, it was almost the procedural, survival type of reflection, you know, how can I am I doing what I’m supposed to with parents what are their perceptions am I laying the foundation even in a new school that am I being that team member and am I doing the things I need to do to be successful in the future whereas now my reflection is much more deeper into philosophy and research and things that I can actually do more of so I think it changes but it doesn’t change in the fact that I constantly think am I doing everything I can do for those 20 kids? You know that basic reflection might not change but the maturity of your reflection I guess changes.

now I don’t reflect very much on procedures and class management because it comes so naturally but it’s the new ideas, the new obstacles, you know and it’s keeping up with everyone around you too that’s a big thing when you can’t stay in school 29 years so you’re always reflecting in do I want to take this step do I want to try this? You know, does this idea fit my philosophy or how can I make it fit my philosophy.

just even comments that people don’t even think affect you affect your reflection. You know something somebody just says off the cuff can make you can really change your whole philosophy on an issue without you even planning on that happening.

I constantly reflect on even before I had Whitt I’ve always reflected on you know what would I think if you know if my child was in this class? What would my perception be? And I also think what would my perception be if I were a parent in a parent conference in a phone call you know how would I receive this person?

and being a parent you’re so sensitive and when you do have parent conferences that’s one other thing I’m so much more sensitive during conferences I always say at least one really great thing about their kid but before I really don’t know if I did that but now that I have kids when I have conferences I better hear they love my kid.

I think that I would say that it is probably a constant examination of all aspects of teaching in order to refine and improve and strive to become the best teacher that I can be.

reflection is usually driven just by your whole philosophy of teaching and life and um you know I’ve always been a person who wanted to do things well and who you know strives to do things at the best of my ability and so therefore I think my reflection is something that is almost like an accountability or a conscience you know when you reflect it really holds you accountable for what you want to be or how you want to teach and what you want to be
perceived as and how you want things to go because without reflection you know there is no self accountability I guess or you know looking at what you’re doing and trying to improve it so I guess it holds me accountable for my expectations of myself as well as you know other’s expectations of me and um you know trying to do the best that you can and how can I improve what I’ve done or you know almost even sometimes giving yourself credit for what you have accomplished or you know what you were trying to do. Reflection can also be a positive and keep you motivated and keep you you know fresh and I think a lot of times when people are you know getting a little bit stagnant it’s because they are not reflecting on the good things that have happened and reflecting on how they can improve you know they just sort of showing up and working and not doing that extra reflection that really can improve their curriculum and their teaching and you know what they’re doing for children.

in the positive side of reflection when someone maybe comes to you and has a problem or someone comes to you with ideas you know you can reflect on things that work well for you and things that you have done well and feel good about what you are doing so reflection doesn’t always have to be correcting what you’ve done wrong or you know milling over problems. Reflection can also be the form of you sort of orally reflecting with someone else about you know about the great kids in your class or the great things that they’ve done or you know the exciting parts of it and so therefore that does provide you know that self reward about what you’re doing in the classroom.

when you start out teaching like I said earlier you’re reflection is just on procedures but I think as you grow as a professional through professional development through things like Ruth Parker’s math courses and things that you participate in and writing conferences and things like that they the more you learn the more in depth and insightful your reflection is. Also, I think just from experience, the more times you work with different types of students, you know and just the more students you work with, the more you find very similar to other situations you have dealt with so therefore you have more of a base to reflect on how I’ve done some things in the past. Um, also, in my personal, um, education and career, just going back to school and um, interacting with other professionals and getting their points of view and their perspectives and learning about other people’s, you know, pedagogy and how their philosophies of education are and even professors and you know people who I’ve interacted with so I guess a lot of my change has come from professional growth in the classroom myself as a learner because, you know, as you see people and how they do things different or their perspective sometimes your perspective changes, um,

the more you learn the more valuable and enriched your reflection is the more experience you have and the more education that you have and the more that you connect with other people your reflection increases and becomes more valuable.

I know that I’ve specifically changed lessons and curriculum but also I think through dealing with specifically over the last three years some very challenging behavior problems have given me the opportunity to really think about you know individual children and children as a whole and change sort of the way I did things with some children I you know some children I you come out of school or you come out of some situations thinking that you handle all children in the same way I guess and so I think a lot of my change has come or my problem
solving has come because I have dealt with children and sort of changed the way I thought about my philosophy of you know um behavior and you know just working with children in different ways so I guess you know difficult children and that type of thing um I guess that’s one of the main things.

have used those experiences to solve problems that I was having now and really to prevent some problems that I could have handled a different way.

we had three years ago had really had some trouble with our writing scores and through lots of reflection and oral reflection and personal reflection we got together as a team and made some decisions about hiring a writing coach about revamping our curriculum, and really doing some things that really were better for the children than we had been doing and I think that took a lot of reflection on how we were doing things how we could do things better what had happened in the past what we were doing in our curriculum so I think through that reflection we did solve you know a lot of problems because our writing scores went up and you know the children were more successful so I think that through the reflection of not only through proven data of you know our test scores need to go up but also us not feeling comfortable enough with our ability in teaching writing at the time. You know that reflection on that and that genuine reflection of how can we do this better has solved a problem for us as far as getting more tools in our toolbox to teach writing but also the children were much more successful in their ability to write because of our real reflection on that being a weakness.

reflection to me is a real accountability. I think you know if, positive or negative, to genuinely take the time to reflect on what’s going on in your classroom, how you are teaching, how you are interacting with others, students, and your peers that you work with team members to reflect on your whole aspect of teaching and your professionalism really gives you the ability to make changes or to continue things that you feel like will be best for children and your team and your work environment some things you know have to change for everything to work run smoothly and then some things you decide through your reflection you know that’s the way you believe and that’s your philosophy so I think reflection also commonly after a situation has happened reflection gives you the ability to change a situation in some instances and to go back and to really make things right if it’s a wrong or to you know if you have a situation that you might have in the haste of the day just overlooked or if you know you were told something and you felt like you just needed to do it right then because you know if it was an administrative decision and then later through your reflection you may decide that you’re just really against that or it doesn’t fit into what you believe and so I think reflection can also be a means of going back and fixing things or just at least discussing things further that you may not have had the chance to do with the time restraints of the day.

We reflect you know in the car or later that night because of the time restraints of the day there is so much to do you’re trying to get everything in and I think a lot of times you know that’s why we have to reflect and say I’m going to do this next year because of the time restraints a lot of times we can’t go back immediately and redo something the right way or improve what we had done because there’s just not time do that. So I think that’s why in
teaching a lot of times reflection is a process of you know I’m reflecting now on what I’m going to do better maybe even the next year rather than tomorrow.

you asked the question if we if you have to define what you’re reflecting on and you know I thought about that because you know I don’t know why that question stuck in my mind but I thought to me too commonly I reflect in order to define the problem I think I don’t really know maybe and maybe that’s when I reflect with others I don’t maybe even know what the problem is or what or how to solve the problem so I think commonly you don’t have to define it initially but a lot of times your reflection with other people is you seeking to actually define the problem or for them to help you define it or get a definition of you know what is going on so that there can be a solution and so that was really something that stuck in my mind and like I said to you I feel like just this discussion this focus group has almost you know led you to reflect on how is your reflection meaningful when commonly you just reflect and change something or you reflect and do something different but I think it’s beneficial because you really if you think about how you’re thinking and how you’re reflecting it can you know be even more enriching I guess and be more meaningful to change.

I would say people and it might not be that I was going to start reflecting with these people but when they’re sharing other things it makes me think back to things I’d been through or situations I’ve been in and whether it be with lessons or with children and um that would make me think back because they’re usually offering asking for advice so I would think back and reflect so that I can offer them the advice um which because I’m very opinionated about things but um people definitely.

who you’re around at the time and who you’re comfortable with um I’m very comfortable with my team but I might not be as comfortable with another grade level in the school or even you know some friends that might teach at another school because you know the environment can play a part in so many things when you’re reflecting.

You sometimes want to be with people who won’t always agree with you but listen.

I guess situations make me want to reflect or cause me to reflect whether it just be comparing a situation or just thinking about what I did before or if I’m planning and think about what I did last year and what didn’t work before if it’s a crunch for time and I’m thinking about you know what do I have what do I need to teach? What can I leave out? Those things also influence my reflection.

But I knew that I was going to possibly have some um behavior problems coming to me and so Samford was doing this thing and it was how to deal with a defiant student and I thought that is perfect and throughout the year I would try something with this one particular student and um you know it would work for so long and then I would go back to my notes and I would think about what they said and think about things they said to try or I would you know reflect back even to just notes that I had taken because they give you so much information I was jotting notes that I thought would work for me too.
Other professional developments maybe that I might have to go to it still does make me reflect more than you know sometimes I go and I think I don’t need to hear this I’ve heard this before like ESL things we go to a lot of things on that but I’d never had a student that it would matter to. Well, now I do and so now I’m thinking back to all those things and I’m pulling out my files and um really using that more so.

It does bring about change you know I mean I talked the other day about my journals that I wrote student teaching and um this being my third year you know well technically my fourth by my third, it wasn’t too long ago but um when I look back to the things that I you know if I was looking back and reading things I wrote about I used to be very ohhh the noise doesn’t bother me the kids can do whatever I want them to be able to talk while they’re working if that helps them focus you know if they can still focus I wasn’t thinking about the children that couldn’t focus, yes. So I have changed drastically in that sense. Now I you know I don’t know that I think that I’m strict but I’m very you know let’s be quiet let’s get our work done or whatever and before I wasn’t that way so when I look back and I see that you know that big change because I used I would never thought that would have been a change that I would’ve had.

the change in grades and the change of curriculum maybe and the requirements of me with a different grade levels and it just really made me you know and I don’t know that it was a change that I realized I was making at the time but now looking back I think OK well when did that start when was I when did I start being more strict or expecting or having better expectations for my students? So and I think that just comes with teaching experience too.

you don’t realize that you’re a certain way until you look back on it because it’s just habit or it’s just how you are and so once you look back and you start observing other classes or other teachers that’s when you really start to learn or I did start to learn how I really am or things that I really do.

talking to the teacher they had last year and thinking about what they did and thinking how would that work for me would that work for my room and my expectations um or you know just talking to the parent even realizing thinking about how they do things and then you know I reflect on how they handle it and that can tell me a lot sometimes too so you know getting the parents involved and different things like that.

To me, it is a very natural process. However, I don’t know that everyone is as good a situation like I am you know as far as the school and getting along with my coworkers so well I don’t think that everyone is as fortunate to be at a school like this so well I don’t know that they will do that as much maybe and if they don’t then I think that they should um cause it’s just so natural here for us to talk about it and what have you done what did you try and things like that but I don’t think that it’s like that for everyone.

I’m just very comfortable with who I work with or reflect with.

You know, I thought a lot about it because it was just so nice being able to be in here and hearing everyone and knowing they’re thinking the same thing and um, just what a good
experience it was too just to be with everyone about something so easy to talk about and um,
you know, I think I realized from then that we reflect so much more than I ever thought, than
I’d ever imagined.

I was like I don’t reflect, I’ve got to start reflecting for this and then I thought yes you do all
the time and I started noticing how much I did it once I read the questions and even when I
left here the other day you know we were joking we said we reflected on the reflection of our
meeting.

reflection to me is just um, looking back while trying to think ahead at the same time on the
good things, the bad things, um, to try to make it better or try to have a better outcome or just
the best situation that it can be and whether that be just thinking to myself, reading things on
the Internet, um, looking at books, talking to people, um, any of those things.

So you know and good things that you do you remember and you want to do it again but you
I still think is there anything else I can do to make it better you know to make them
remember this more?

I didn’t realize how much I reflected and how much everyone else did too but teaching is one
of those things that you’re always thinking about it always in the middle of the night, in the
shower, in the car, always thinking about it I’ll see something at Wal-Mart and think oh, we
can use this for this so you’re just always thinking and reflecting.

I basically like to watch the students and that helps me reflect while I’m teaching do I need to
change my strategy? Do I need to make it more interesting? Do I need to make it more
challenging for those students who are acting up and its too easy for them? Do I need to
make it break it down a little bit for those students who need it broken down? So a lot of
things go through my head just through one maybe simple lesson

I reflect all through out my teaching process everyday.

I think my first year I didn’t really know what to look for.

Sometimes you do have to pat yourself on the back and say, Ok, I am good and that lesson
really worked. And it’s so great when one of the kids will tell you, that was fun. That makes
it so rewarding. And when you see the light bulb go off. That is the best reward.

I think the more I teach the longer I teach, the more I learn what I can do for children. And
so that tends to make me reflect more. I think that when I was a first year teacher that I was
very satisfied with making it through the day.

every year, when I became better, that I would start reflecting on how I could make, how I
could make myself better, how I could be a better teacher, and then, of course, how could I
help children learn better.

I think reflection for me is… when I sit down with just myself.
Reflection always leads me to a plan I can implement.

But when I’m talking about something that is intense and deep and important to me, that I need a plan for it, that’s when I sit down and reflect. And I don’t think reflection always happens over night. I think sometimes reflection takes you several days or several weeks. And I think that reflection is full of trial and error.

You know, talking on the playground, that is very helpful, but I don’t consider that a deep reflection.

I think for when we’re really talking about formal reflection it really learns to uh, it really lends to learning. I’m going to go back to that word, deep learning, to me, uh, you know, life changing learning. Uh, uh, to me reflection is something that’s going to change the way you teach. Change the way you respond to children. Change your attitude. It’s gonna be, it’s gonna be important, it’s probably going to make a major change.

Reflection lots of times is when I’m at a crossroads. With my philosophy, and what I’m physically, and mentally, and emotionally able to do. Because, you know, you want to save all the children.

But every child is going to learn. And I think the reflection comes in, what can I do to help that child?

I think your philosophy over time does change. It would almost have to change as you grow, certainly your philosophy would grow and become more meaningful and, hmm, there’s that word again, deeper.

I question what I’m doing all the time.

But you’re going to have to change it to meet the children’s needs.

You’re just trying to put out fires and fix little things. I’d much rather be able to reflect on my dreams. Dreams for me, dreams for my kids, that kind of thing.

For me, reflection, I’ve come to think of it as being something very personal. And what I decide, what I come up with through my reflections, I don’t expect that of anyone else, too. I, I consider it mine, I own it.

The first thing that come to mind when, when I think about that is things that go wrong. Umm, lessons that don’t work out right, umm, behavior problems with kids, conflicts between a couple of kids or three kids, those kind of problems.

Who’s going to respect where I’m coming from and understand that I’m new, fairly new, at some of this.
somebody who’s willing to share their ideas. And, but the environment, when you say environment, I was thinking of environment of the school, environment of the team, environment of just our hallway, environment of the whole school, environment of umm, the kids. It’s just, just from what I hear I get the feeling that this particular school is a good environment for that. It does promote that.

if we didn’t reflect together, it just wouldn’t be effective teaching. It wouldn’t be as effective.

I think some with me, that’s come with maturity. Because I think 20 years ago if I’d been in the same position I might not have been as receptive to reflection as I am now.

Looking back at what you have done, where you need to go with it, how the kids are doing and if they are getting what you taught them - or if you need to continue to do what you are doing with them.

I think it made us stronger. You know, you built that bond where you could trust them and go to them with your problems and your ideas and say, “How can you help me make this work better?”

Changing. If you like the way it is but the kids aren’t getting it but you like it, then that is hard because you need to change if they are not getting it. It’s just the change.

We had three principals in the eight years I was there – three different principals. One of them – she was more of a junior high principal, so she wasn’t very good. The other one, it was her first principals job, and she wasn’t happy to be there either. The last one, she was a very negative person so she didn’t help.

Well, you didn’t feel like you could go to them. With the last one, she was not a very trustworthy person, because she may talk about you to another teacher behind your back. You may have asked her a question or something, and asked her thoughts or whatever, and she would turn around and degrade you to another teacher. So, it wasn’t very supportive at all.

I have thought about how if I got the objective across to the children and if you know they were learning what I thought they should learn.

I guess basically are they really connecting to the letter and are they connecting that sound with that letter so that I’ll know that they’re getting the whole picture and are they really. Are their ears trained where they can hear those sounds and do they have that foundation of phonological awareness? Where they’re ready to go on to that next step or if they’re not getting it, why aren’t they getting it and what do I need to, as a teacher, go back and maybe help their hearing train or maybe train them to be able to recognize that.

…usually when I first started teaching, I was preparing them to read. Now there’s an expectation that they do read. So I’m really having to make sure that they are picking up on each step. I’m really having to start them in books earlier so I’m really having to reflect more
on how to get them to a spot so they will be ready to read and recognize words and pick out words and letters and hear sounds.

I think due to computers and things children have changed. They come, most of them come with more knowledge than they did because of what they’re exposed to. I also think because we’ve pushed the level down, like basically when I first started teaching 21 years ago it was very socialization concentrated on that. I would say what I teach now is probably more of a first grade classroom.

We start right on into the colors where I didn’t used to start recognizing color words until maybe after Christmas, like in January. But now, like this year, we started right on into recognizing color words and most of them are ready due to the technology they’re exposed to, the type of day cares now that they’re exposed to or preschools because it’s all been pushed down.

I’m always writing down notes so I can look back and see where do, what do they know so that I can rebuild on that not necessarily what they don’t know but what do they know and how can I expand that?

I’m probably more of a visual teacher. Um, so, I’m more of a visual teacher so it does better if I keep samples of their work. I keep a portfolio running whether it’s a self-portraits like I can look back and see how were they developing. Are they catching, are they developing, because like drawing a self-portrait and even drawing like a tree like if you have them every month draw a tree or draw themselves every month it just shows how they’re developing, and so I keep a portfolio on them so I can look back. In that portfolio, has a self-portrait, it has like cutting and coloring so I can tell how their fine motor skills are developing so I can look back and see do we need more activities like with more fine motor activities. Maybe manipulating play dough, maybe anything those basic things then also I keep a record on how they are with rhyming sounds just that phonological awareness foundation. And so it helps me know because they’re so, and at a kindergarten level there are so many activities and so many things they have to know, to me I can’t keep it in my head. I have to have it written down and I have to kind of group them with you know and my groupings can change like this week I’m working on this strategy and so I need to pull these four children you know.

Well, we’ve started in math introducing them to the counting jar and teaching them about what estimation is that estimation is a guess, so this time when I did I thought back used to I used to give them a piece of paper and I would have them do it with me well that just doesn’t work so this year I thought how can I make that where it’s more controlled so I ran the paper that they usually did on a transparency so we did it on the overhead and they watched me so I’ve modeled that exactly for them cause looking back with them having a paper they didn’t understand about an estimation, they didn’t understand about how to fill out the paper and how to draw the pictures.

Well, I think one of the main things it makes me a better teacher. It makes me really think like what went right about it what could I change because I don’t like to do the same thing
every year so how could I like if there’s one child that really got it, really caught onto it quick, well what could I have done to have taken him or her further in that lesson.

Well, I think it makes me a more creative teacher because I don’t like to do things the same every year so I can reflect back on what this did wrong and I don’t like to be one of those teachers that says well this is how we do it I’ve done it like for 21 years you know how can because I think as a teacher you can always improve, you can always grow, you can always change things around, just because, and I mean even if it’s something you did 21 years ago you can still do it but you can change it around to where it is an effective lesson or an effective activity for these children.

Parents, I have a better communication with parents now as far I think they understand because I’ve had to explain to them the seriousness that their child needs these skills to go on. You know, we’re tested within the first two weeks of school and so we need to work on their skills some. As I’ve reflected over the years I’ve thought well, I didn’t do a good job letting parents know about this so I’ve needed to increase my communication or make sure I’ve remembered to communicate in this area better to my parents.

No, I like having somebody to reflect to say I did this with a lesson this is how I did it and reflect back and tell them the steps I did because they may see something that I missed and they might say and they might pull in something else and say well you know I’ve done that before and I did this step and this step but then I added this and I thought well I’ve never thought of that before. So to me it always helps talking to a colleague about reflecting on a lesson with a colleague just really brings in something maybe I’ve never thought about before.

We do meet, we have team meeting every week so if there’s an idea then we can put it on the agenda and we can talk about a specific lesson. Usually it does focus right now around reading or math because but we do bring in like because we are doing some new things in Science things that we’ve found that have worked with a science lesson and then also just sometime in the afternoon if you know I know a colleague is in their room I might say you know I did this today and this is what I did and this is how I handled this lesson and a lot of my reflections too I’ve been working with a teacher on writing. Getting ideas on what on how to help her help me develop some writing so I’ll go in and reflect on a lesson with her and say well this is how I did this and this is how I’m handling this in writing.

I probably look for somebody that I feel like probably has more my teaching style. I guess that’s staying in your comfort zone.

I might sit with them and I do this with my student teachers after they’ve taught a lesson I will sit with them and say tell me about your lesson and I might say what do you think went well what do you think didn’t go well? And if it didn’t go well or if it did go well, why do you think it happened like that? Why do you think it went so well or why do you think it didn’t go well could you have been more prepared? Could you have had the materials ready?
Do you think the children really understood your concept or the objective that you were trying to get across to them?

Seeing how effective the lesson was. Was it effective? Did it reach the goals that I needed to be reached? Did it serve its purpose?

What do I need to change about a lesson I prepared? Did it work well? Did I need to change the way I presented it? Did I need to restructure the materials? Did I gather everything? Did I plan well enough? All of those things go into the reflection.

Did they stay with the task? Did they stay involved? If they’re not enjoying it, they’re going to venture off and do something else.

I think one thing I always look at is whether I met all the needs of all my kids the different learning styles and the learning needs of my kids in my class. Um, that’s changed over the last couple of years. We’ve had such varying needs in my class that when I reflect on a lesson, that’s one of the main things, the first things that I look at is did I get you know, my high kids, my mediums, you know, my strugglers, make sure that everyone was addressed in that one lesson.

I think it depends on who’s doing it. If you’re doing self-reflecting then you know it may be journaling you know in a notebook. And a lot of times in my lesson plans I just write down you know went well, extend to next day, or go further something. That to me is just little notes to myself that I need to either go further with it you know I’ve written down don’t do this lesson again I mean.

Obviously a formal reflection with an evaluator or something is much more formal and you sit down you know and reflect, discuss with them but a lot of times you don’t have that peer to discuss so it’s just within your own head and you kind of know what works best in your classroom and how your kids responded.

Although sometimes the reflection does involve that peer in the hall where at the end of the day, and you’re out there and finally the kids are gone and you’re going over what kind of day it was you know just talking about the day. Good day, bad day, what could I have done differently kind of day? And a lot of times we share a lesson for example that did kind of fall flat and you go wonder why what could I have done differently and usually with my coworkers we’re all very supportive and willing to not only listen to other people help us with those things but also to be very supportive and offer assistance or ideas that might change things. And I’ve actually done the same lesson the next day again a different way because it did fall flat that day and knowing that it was something they really did need and it was a really good lesson I just needed to make some adjustments in the presentation.

Right, you just make changes in the way that I presented or better yet even involve the children more. A lot of times the ones that fall flat are the ones are the lessons that I’ve tried to direct and not let the kids be the ones to pull it in and make it their own.
I’ve also asked my kids to reflect on a lesson. You know, and I just, if the lesson flops, I’ll just go back and say, “You know, I really didn’t like that. What do ya’ll think we can do to make that better?” And they’re more than willing to tell me. (laughter)

and I think a lot of times too reflection is sharing good things that happen too. It’s not just going over and saying, you know this lesson flopped, but it’s look what they did today or look what happened you know I know we do a lot of that because they’re right there on the hall and you know my second graders the kindergarten teachers love to know how far they’ve come or what they’ve done. So I can easily go out and say you know I do that a lot go back and say look how well they’re reading or look how they solved this problem so that’s reflection too is that you’re looking at the growth they’ve made and you’re sharing the successes as well as the not really failures, but the bumps in the road.

Just kind of playing it over in your head or even if its just something sometimes things will nag and I go what could I have differently or what could I help the teacher with for them to do it differently. And then sometimes it is in the car or just it may be days later and you go ohhh, aha, I need to share this.

I’ll write it down because I take records with me, a notebook kind of as a log, and I write it in the log so I can go back and have that to reflect on with the teacher.

Mine is more weekly when I’m planning for the next week. You know, I’ll kind of look back over where we were and where we’re going, you know, what I need to do because I try to plan week to week although they’d like for us to plan month to month.

You can’t, I mean you can’t plan a month in advance and a lot of times my week in advance gets changed all around too but um, and if you are a reflective teacher and really looking at what’s best for your kids that you have that year not any other year but those 18 or 19 that you have and really trying to meet the needs of all the kids in that class, you can’t, you can look at long range goals and kind of where you want to be but as far as day to day lessons, you can’t do that, you’ve got to let the kids guide a lot of that. That’s why you know reflecting is important on that because you’ve got to go back and look at what they learn and there may be lessons that you taught that they got right away so you don’t need to spend the next three or four days on it so you can jump ahead in that area or you may need to spend another week on it so it can’t be long term planning.

I just, you can’t, I mean if they were all reading at the exact same level and they all the exact same home life, and they all had the exact same, you know, set of circumstances around each of them, you might could do a little bit further into the future, but you just never know what’s going to pop up. And how it’s going to impact or something that will come up that you know you have to spend three days you think ok they’ll get this right away and then we’ll move on here and then you go ah, what happened?

So you think, so you do it on the spot also then, weekly you may go back and meet with someone formally but it also happens on the spot and not necessarily taking notes and things.
And that’s how it happens more often than the formal. I mean, the on the spot, informal, you know, just even in your head real quick and it can be in the middle of the lesson. You know, you can change something in the middle of the lesson and say this is not working I’m going to go this way, you know, but um, that’s what happens most of the time, I mean you know the formal reflections and evaluations are two maybe three a year and you know and those are great but it’s the day to day on the spot thing that I think helps me grow as a teacher more than the formal, because you’re going to put on your best show then.

I would agree, it’s everyday. It’s not something you do for a little while and then stop. If you, if you’re truly reflective about what you’re doing and you’re trying to improve your own methods and trying to make your classroom a better place and that’s your goal then you will be reflective.

I’ve discovered I’m not a journaler. I can’t journal. I’ve tried to write down things and I do it for two days and then it’s gone I mean there’s too many other things to get done at the end of the day or the at the beginning of the day.

I’m a post it note journaler. OK. I may I thought of it, I write it down, and I’ll put it there. I mean that’s the best way for me to describe what kind of a journaler I am. Because actually sitting and journaling sometimes can be cumbersome and we spend so much of our time taking a left hand turn when we thought we were going straight or a right hand turn when we thought we were going left with our students these days that I think you have to be you know able to change quickly.

I just make little side notes in my lesson plans, but if you truly want your children to succeed and you want your children to do well, then you’re going to think about how you can hit each group of children, your high, your medium, and your low and that takes a lot of time and you know I’m not sure how much, well I know that not all teachers give the same amount of time and that is unfortunate for some children it’s just not a priority to some of them to some teachers and I think if you truly want your children to succeed then you do need to think about your day, and you do need to think about your lessons and I think however you do it is fine, as long as you do it.

Every child needed to be on this level. There was no up there was no middle there was no low. You know, I didn’t see that but now that I’ve taught for nine years I do see how important it is to differentiate your instruction for the high learners, the medium learners, and the low learners, but um, you know when I first taught I just thought every child needed to be on the same level.

Well, I was very frustrated because not every child was there. (laughter) you know, I thought gosh what am I doing wrong not every child is here and then you know after you get a couple of years under your belt and you get the discipline taken care of and the classroom management all that good stuff and you can focus more on the curriculum that you’re there to teach.
I think what I looked for in reflection has changed you know my first couple of years I was looking for the management of it and the not necessarily the discipline but did everything flow OK. Did I have everything? Did I have everything out or did I have to stop and go pull something out. And as I’ve gotten more accustomed to that and let a lot of that go and I’ve let the kids be in charge of that more (laughter) you know they know where things are now. They go get them so as I’ve loosened the reins a little bit on the controlling part of that then I got into looking at the learning and the you know, what are they actually getting, who needs extra, who needs more? So what I’ve looked for when I was reflecting has changed over the years of teaching.

When I first started teaching, I taught fifth grade, and to me, teaching fifth grade was a lot different than teaching first grade, but even at that time, um, the many years, direct teaching was the was more the format for doing things you know it as direct instruction was the way to do it and behavior modification and everything else that’s up there you know that was the way. As the years have passed and I’ve furthered my own understanding of children and my own understanding of curriculum and as I have grown in a lot of different ways, I’ve found that I am changing the way I reflect and the fact that I do reflect because I’d say no I didn’t really do a lot of it at the beginning, but now I do. Maybe that’s because I’m so deep into the educational system now that I find myself doing that more and I am more aware of theory, of the way, and the why, and the how, than I did when I first graduated from college many years ago.

I also think there’s more um, coming down to us from up above. Such as you know your system. All the pressures and everything from the system and the state and what not I think.

You do need to reflect and see if what you’re doing is getting those objectives met so that you can answer to your system and in the state and whomever else.

Accountability is a big part of what we do now and also the fact that children today and this is one thing that I do share with people. Children today are so different than children when I first started teaching.

The prioritizing has to be based on really what’s coming down from the state, from the system, you know, on a national level. Just in the last 12 years that I’ve been teaching, there’s been huge changes in what our requirements are and what children are required to do and now with No Child Left Behind and everything it’s almost like a lot of the reflection is a forced reflection. You know, it’s good, I mean, I take from each assessment that I’m required to do or whatever, what I, you know, the parts that I think are beneficial to me and what I need to know about that child as a learner. But it’s been forced on us to do. I do reflection any way and I probably would not have done some of the things that I’m asked to do now but I still try to take away from it what I can that’ll help me.

Well, when you’re told you have to teach reading for 90 minutes, you have to teach math for 60 minutes, and that’s just really tough.
To better service the children. My special ed kids. To provide better services for them. To make sure that they have such difficulty any way so what do I need to do to facilitate their learning even more.

And it’s probably at the point where I am right now and um, but my reflection for me on a day to day basis, and even on an end of the year reflection and everything is you know, am I still meeting the needs of my kids? Am I getting through to them? You know, and am I still enjoying it, you know, because I’ve always said you know if it gets to a point where I stop enjoying it then I’m stopping because like you said if you don’t enjoy it the kids, you know, it affects everything I mean you know you come in you’ve had a bad morning or something and the kids know. They… you are on stage the whole time you’re in that classroom.

I’ll tell you this past year was a trying year you know we had administrator changes, we had a lot of school turnover but you know, it came down to the big picture was yes, I was still getting through to my kids and I felt like I was still making a difference in that classroom with those 18 kids. I kind of had to take the big picture out of it for a little while because I am just one person you know I couldn’t make a difference as much as I wanted.

But I always see hope with the next year. I’m going to have a new group of kids, you know, slough off the bad stuff, bad vibes, going to be a great year, and I’m going to do the best I can do.

And you always look in the summer is when I look to make changes, you know, that’s a big reflection time but those are huge jumps you know but it’s like what do I want to change for next year? Room layout, anything, just to fresh start, you know, fresh look, new kids, you know, one you know, I usually try to pick one book and try to take one good idea and implement it the next year in the classroom.

Well, and it’s, summer’s a time for you to kind of rejuvenate and you know, kind of recoup and relax, but you know I think most teachers at least, I, am always looking for what one thing do I need to change? What one thing do I want to try? And it’s usually my own. It’s not something that somebody said you need to read this book or you have to read this book and you have to try this next year.

I think new teachers, even very gifted new teachers, are new teachers and are so worried about OK, I have 87 minutes of reading and not 90 and this and that and getting to the lunchroom and they’re so caught up in those and managing. It’s almost like a physician as they come new into practice learning how to put people in waiting rooms and manage the day.

And I think the environment that you work in you know, your administration, um and how many years you’ve been at that school when you become comfortable with the school, when you become comfortable with the administration, I think your day probably runs a little smoother every year because you know what’s accepted, what’s wanted from you.
I had a very good mentor my first year that said pick one thing that you want to work on. It can be management, it can be spelling, it can be anything and just make that your focus because my personality was you know I’ve got to have everything. I wanted everything perfect that first day of my first year you know I think I got to school at 6:00 that morning but and she just said just pick one thing and the rest will come. And that’s kind of the little rule I’ve lived by every year. I pick one thing and try to improve on it and try it and I’ve gone back and what I did three years ago I may do again next year, there may be changes I want to make in that, but that’s been really good advice for me and I’ve given that to every person that I’ve mentored along the way. Pick one thing and stick with it and then you know you can’t do reading and math the same year, you can’t do reading and spelling and something, you’ve just got to pick one, so that’s kind of been my focus from the beginning.

I have one situation. For the last five years I have done an animal project because we had to discuss habitats in first grade. And so I have each child research an animal, do the project; answer five out of the eight questions that I give them. Then they have to come up a few at a time for like a week or so and tell the children about their animal. They have to go home, they have to research, they have to practice, they have to do all that stuff. Well, I had been doing it in September I guess around the end of September the first of October and they were still new with me they were new with the children they weren’t as outgoing as I hoped that they would be at that time and so when they would get up to talk about their animals they would just sit there. (laughter) and I had to pull the information out of them so what kind of animal do you have? And they wouldn’t say anything and I thought goodness gracious, well it so happened that this year I did it in end of January, first of February and I couldn’t get them to stop talking about their animals so it was much better doing at the end, toward the beginning of the second semester than doing it at the beginning of the first because they were more comfortable with the class, um, they were, they could write and actually read what they had written, so I will from now on do it at the beginning of the second semester instead of the first semester so that was my reflection. Ah ha. This is what needs to be done.

My kids do portfolios during the year at the end of each nine weeks they reflect on their own work and then I go back and look at their work and I have evaluations for them to do. And they look at where they came from and what they want to work on during the next nine weeks and at the end of the year I take their portfolios and really look through them and I write them letters about the year and that’s when I get the most reflection because it’s really coming from the kids, they’re telling me how they see themselves as a mathematicians, how they see themselves as a reader, you know, what they think they’ve grown the most in this year, and for me, that reflection of seeing their thoughts on their growth is what helps me think, you know, this was really a good year.

There’s usually that one child you know that you know you’ve got to take so far even in their self-confidence in their belief and whether they believe in it. Um, in this past year I had one of those, a little in math and she just came in, I cannot do math, I’m not good in math and you know I think I just identified so with her because I felt like that when I was in elementary school and um, you know, by the end of the year, her thing, it said how do you feel about yourself as a problem solver, and she said I think I am a good problem solver and I just thought well there you go. You know, it was a successful year if I did nothing else I
made her believe in herself in math and you know that kind of the real reflection and I guess the validations that I needed that I looked for but looking back at their portfolios from the beginning to the end and I know as a teacher what I see, I can just imagine the parents when they look through it.

My personal definition of reflection is to see myself, what I am doing, what I need to change, what I need to keep the same… With this reflection, I can only be a stronger, more confident teacher.

But reflection also helps teachers to think about their students’ needs and interests, to plan activities that impact their lives, and to strengthen their dispositions towards learning.

With so many students having such varied needs, I reflect constantly about what I must do to make sure I am doing what is best for them. This is especially the case with my ELL’s.

As I reflect, I often run to the computer and send a quick email to our ELL instructor to get her opinion or advice.

Reflection takes place throughout each planning step – deciding which activities will offer the best learning experiences.

One of my biggest obstacles for reflection is time alone. I am constantly being bombarded by outside influences including family and school responsibilities. My school responsibilities include all of the paperwork, testing, and other hats I wear at my school. There are times that I think I’ll be able to set aside about 30 minutes to reflect and think about what I need to do, but that time is taken away by a colleague needing help, a family member calling me to ask when I am getting home – or to tell me they need me to do something for them, or just my responsibilities for doing the paperwork that I never seem to be caught up on. I need a quiet time with my door closed and no interruptions, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. So instead, I reflect in my car when I am driving home in the evening or on my way to school. I like to jot things down as I reflect on these things because that is often when I am the most creative. To have this time taken away from me by all of these distractions increase my stress levels and create a negative reaction when I try to reflect.

So, I basically keep track of my formal assessments, and my observations are just in my head. I don’t have anything that I really jot down. Except for their reading….I do keep a log in their reading to see how well they are reading and comprehending and when to move them up a level in reading.

Well, like I was saying before in my lesson plans, I will write down, “Was it a waste of their time?” – “Did I get frustrated trying to convey the message and teach it to them?” – “Did they get frustrated trying to do the activity?” – “Were they bored?” – Things like that. That is what I look at, and those are the kinds of things that are written down in my lesson plans about the things we do. “What was the interaction like?” I don’t want the kids to sit here and go home and say, “Gosh, it was so boring. I didn’t learn anything.” I love when the parents come to me and say, “Oh, so and so loved what you did. They really enjoyed it.
They won’t stop talking about owls or they won’t stop talking about whatever it is we’re talking about.” Then, I know I have made an impact on at least one child. And, I know most of the other children like it as well. They are just sometimes not as verbal.

When I began teaching, I don’t think I did that much reflecting at all. I just thought, “I’ve got this lesson to get done. I need to get it done. I got it done. Alright, let’s move on to the next thing.” I don’t think I really looked at, “Do the children understand what I am teaching?” I look back at my first year, and I think to myself a lot, “How did those kids make it? Did they learn anything?” I must have been the worst kindergartner teacher ever.

If they are a few lessons ahead of me which really helps me out because then that let’s me know that I need to watch out for those warning signs or I need to make sure that I take care of my kids and not let that happen to my kids. That’s really helpful. So, they reflect on what their children did just a few days before, and I will go and talk with them about it. We also use team meetings to talk.

We are about to meet on Friday and set up curriculum mapping, which will be able to reflect on everything that we have done, share ideas, what works, what doesn’t work and things like that.
APPENDIX H

INVARIANT HORIZONS GROUPED INTO THEMES
INVARIANT HORIZONS ORGANIZED WITHIN THEMES

Theme 1: Reflection is part of an ongoing learning process.

- I was going to say reflection comes not only from reflecting but also from observing what’s going on.
- You’re just constantly thinking about school and could I have done it better?
- I’ve never felt that teaching is something that you could leave at school.
- I think that as a profession it’s with you 24 hours a day. Once you’re a teacher you’re always the teacher.
- It’s not like something that you can enter in a computer and leave and go home at 5:00. You have 20 little minds that depend on you to enrich their life and that’s a huge responsibility.
- We reflect in the car or later that night because of the time restraints of the day.
- Reflection to me is just looking back while trying to think ahead at the same time on the good things, the bad things, to try to make it better.
- Teaching is one of those things that you’re always thinking about it always in the middle of the night, in the shower, in the car, always thinking about it.
- I reflect all throughout my teaching process every day.
- I don’t think reflection always happens overnight, I think sometimes reflection takes you several days or several weeks.
- As I’ve reflected over the years I’ve thought well, I didn’t do a good job letting parents know about this so I’ve needed to increase my communication or make sure I’ve remembered to communicate in this area better to my parents.
- I would agree, it’s everyday. It’s not something you do for a little while and then stop.
- But I always see hope with the next year. I’m going to have a new group of kids, you know, slough off the bad stuff, bad vibes, going to be a great year, and I’m going to do the best I can do.
- And you always look in the summer is when I look to make changes, you know, that’s a big reflection time but those are huge jumps you know but it’s like what do I want to change for next year? Room layout, anything, just to fresh start, you know, fresh look, new kids, you know, one you know, I usually try to pick one book and try to take one good idea and implement it the next year in the classroom.
- Well, and it’s, summer’s a time for you to kind of rejuvenate and you know, kind of recoup and relax, but you know I think most teachers at least, I, am always looking for what one thing do I need to change? What one thing do I want to try? And it’s usually my own. It’s not something that somebody said you need to read this book or you have to read this book and you have to try this next year.
- I had a very good mentor my first year that said pick one thing that you want to work on. It can be management, it can be spelling, and it can be anything and just make that your focus because my personality was you know I’ve got to have everything. I wanted everything perfect that first day of my first year you know I think I got to school at 6:00 that morning but and she just said just pick one thing and the rest will come. And that’s kind of the little rule I’ve lived by every year. I pick one thing and try to improve on it and try it and I’ve gone back and what I did three years ago I may do again next
year, there may be changes I want to make in that, but that’s been really good advice for me and I’ve given that to every person that I’ve mentored along the way. Pick one thing and stick with it and then you know you can’t do reading and math the same year, you can’t do reading and spelling and something, you’ve just got to pick one, so that’s kind of been my focus from the beginning.

**Theme 2: Reflection is a way to solve problems.**

- Reflection comes when something goes wrong and so maybe you can’t fix it right that moment but it just stays in the back of your mind and it kind of eats at you and when you have some down time to think about it.
- I think some of the most day to day reflection I’ve had though is when I’ve had an extremely difficult student.
- You can sort of categorize it. So is this a management problem, or is this a procedure problem, or is this just one child that’s stirring up a lot of trouble?
- I know that I’ve specifically changed lessons and curriculum but also I think dealing with some very challenging behavior problems has given me the opportunity to really think about individual children and children as a whole and change the way I did things with some children.
- You know that reflection on that and that genuine reflection of how can we do this better has solved a problem for us as far as getting more tools in our toolbox to teach writing but also the children were much more successful in their ability to write because of our real reflection on that being a weakness.
- A lot of times your reflection with other people is seeking to actually define the problem.
- I think reflection can also be a means of going back and fixing things or just at least discussing things further that you may not have had the chance to do with the time constraints of the day.
- I’ve actually done the same lesson the next day again a different way because it did fall flat that day and knowing that it was something they really did need and it was a really good lesson I just needed to make some adjustments in the presentation.
- Right, you just make changes in the way that I presented or better yet even involve the children more. A lot of times the ones that fall flat are the ones are the lessons that I’ve tried to direct and not let the kids be the ones to pull it in and make it their own.

**Theme 3: Reflection is a way to deal with change.**

- I think that reflection sometimes is spurred by change.
- A problem or something that is different, that causes even more reflection than something you’ve done for a long time.
- A change in textbooks or science kits generates more reflection than something that you have taught for several years.
- But when I’m talking about something that is intense and deep and important to me, that I need to plan for it, that’s when I sit down and reflect.
Reflection lots of times is when I’m at a crossroads with my philosophy, and what I’m physically, and mentally, and emotionally able to do.

…usually when I first started teaching, I was preparing them to read. Now there’s an expectation that they do read. So I really have to make sure that they are picking up on each step. I really have to start them in books earlier so I really have to reflect more on how to get them to a spot so they will be ready to read and recognize words and pick out words and letters and hear sounds.

I think due to computers and things children have changed. They come, most of them come with more knowledge than they did because of what they’re exposed to.

I also think there’s more coming down to us from up above. Such as you know your system. All the pressures and everything from the system and the state and what not, I think.

You do need to reflect and see if what you’re doing is getting those objectives met so that you can answer to your system and in the state and whomever else.

Accountability is a big part of what we do now and also the fact that children today and this is one thing that I do share with people.

Children today are so different than children when I first started teaching.

The prioritizing has to be based on really what’s coming down from the state, from the system, you know, on a national level. Just in the last 12 years that I’ve been teaching, there have been huge changes in what our requirements are and what children are required to do and now with No Child Left Behind and everything it’s almost like a lot of the reflection is a forced reflection. You know, it’s good, I mean, I take from each assessment that I’m required to do or whatever, what I, you know, the parts that I think are beneficial to me and what I need to know about that child as a learner. But it’s been forced on us to do. I do reflection any way and I probably would not have done some of the things that I’m asked to do now but I still try to take away from it what I can that’ll help me.

Well, when you’re told you have to teach reading for 90 minutes, you have to teach math for 60 minutes, and that’s just really tough.

I’ll tell you this past year was a trying year you know we had administrator changes, we had a lot of school turnover but you know, it came down to the big picture was yes, I was still getting through to my kids and I felt like I was still making a difference in that classroom with those 18 kids. I kind of had to take the big picture out of it for a little while because I am just one person you know I couldn’t make a difference as much as I wanted.

Theme 4: Reflection involves sharing with others.

I think I’ve learned more watching others, other professionals teach certain lessons and I can compare that with how I teach and change it for my class.

I love to reflect with someone else.

I’ve learned a lot from you.

It may start out as a sarcastic comment, but as you talk about it somebody always makes that comment that really is meaningful.
• I don’t think you always have to define it specifically but I think that a lot of input from others there has to be a definition of what the struggle is or what the problem is or what the concern is that you’re trying to reflect on.

• I will take a situation at recess or at lunch [and say] alright, let me tell ya’ll what happened. How would you have handled this? I’ll come right out and say that and then get their input on how I handled it and how they handled it.

• I think a lot of times when we do see how other people are reflecting you get things out of classes or situations that you would’ve never thought of or that weren’t important to you but you see the importance of someone else’s view.

• At lunch we talk the whole time and it’s mostly about school things but I don’t feel like it’s a nuisance or that I wish we could talk about something else.

• I’m choosy with who I reflect with.

• You learn through other people how they handle situations.

• Comments that people don’t even think affect you, affect your reflection.

• Something somebody just says off the cuff can make you can really change your whole philosophy on an issue without you even planning on that happening.

• Reflection can also be the form of orally reflecting with someone else about the great kids in your class or the great things that they’ve done or the exciting parts of it and so therefore that does provide that self reward about what you’re doing in the classroom.

• Reflection involves interacting with other professionals and getting their points of view and their perspectives and learning about other people’s pedagogy and how their philosophies of education are.

• A lot of my change has come from professional growth in the classroom myself as a learner because as you see people and how they do things different or their perspective sometimes your perspective changes.

• I think it made us stronger. You know, you built that bond where you could trust them and go to them with your problems and your ideas and say, “How can you help me make this work better?”

• So to me it always helps talking to a colleague about reflecting on a lesson with a colleague just really brings in something maybe I’ve never thought about before.

• We do meet, we have team meeting every week so if there’s an idea then we can put it on the agenda and we can talk about a specific lesson.

• I probably look for somebody that I feel like probably has more my teaching style. I guess that’s staying in your comfort zone.

• I might sit with them and I do this with my student teachers after they’ve taught a lesson I will sit with them and say tell me about your lesson and I might say what do you think went well what do you think didn’t go well? And if it didn’t go well or if it did go well, why do you think it happened like that? Why do you think it went so well or why do you think it didn’t go well could you have been more prepared? Could you have had the materials ready? Do you think the children really understood your concept or the objective that you were trying to get across to them?

• and I think a lot of times too reflection is sharing good things that happen too. It’s not just going over and saying, you know this lesson flopped, but it’s look what they did today or look what happened you know I know we do a lot of that because they’re right there on the hall and you know my second graders the kindergarten teachers love to know
how far they’ve come or what they’ve done. So I can easily go out and say you know I do that a lot go back and say look how well they’re reading or look how they solved this problem so that’s reflection too is that you’re you know looking at the growth they’ve made and you’re sharing the successes as well as the not really failures, but the bumps in the road.

• As I reflect, I often run to the computer and send a quick email to our ELL instructor to get her opinion or advice.
• If they are a few lessons ahead of me which really helps me out because then that let’s me know that I need to watch out for those warning signs or I need to make sure that I take care of my kids and not let that happen to my kids. That’s really helpful. So, they reflect on what their children did just a few days before, and I will go and talk with them about it. We also use team meetings to talk.
• We are about to meet on Friday and set up curriculum mapping, which will be able to reflect on everything that we have done, share ideas, what works, what doesn’t work and things like that.
• Just kind of playing it over in your head or even if its just something sometimes things will nag and I go what could I have differently or what could I help the teacher with for them to do it differently.
• Sometimes it is in the car or just it may be days later and you go ohhh, aha, I need to share this.

Theme 5: Reflection evolves with experience.

• Reflection to me, as a young teacher, was almost how can I survive? What can I do to make it through the year? Not how can I improve math, how can I incorporate reading circles, it was almost the procedural, survival type of reflection.
• Now my reflection is much deeper into philosophy and research and things that I can actually do more of.
• That basic reflection might not change but the maturity of your reflection changes.
• Now I don’t reflect very much on procedures and class management because it comes so naturally. But it’s the new ideas, the new obstacles, and it’s keeping up with everyone around you, too.
• Does it fit my philosophy or how can I make it fit my philosophy?
• I constantly reflect on even before I had [a child], I’ve always reflected on what would I think if my child was in this class? What would my perception be? And I also think what would my perception be if I were a parent in a parent conference in a phone call, how would I receive this person?
• Being a parent you’re so sensitive and I’m so much more sensitive during conferences. I always say at least one really great thing about their kid but before I really don’t know if I did that. But now that I have kids when I have conferences I better hear they love my kid.
• Reflection is usually driven by your whole philosophy and teaching and life.
• The more you learn the more in depth and insightful your reflection is.
I think just from experience, the more times you work with different types of students, the more you find it very similar to other situations you have dealt with so therefore you have more of a base to reflect on.

The more you learn the more valuable and enriched your reflection is.

The more experience you have and the more education that you have and the more that you connect with other people, your reflection increases and becomes more valuable.

You come out of school or you come out of some situations thinking that you handle all children the same way so I think a lot of my change has come or my problem solving has come because I have dealt with children and changed the way I thought about my philosophy of behavior and just working with children in different ways.

I have used those experiences to solve problems that I was having now and really to prevent some problems.

I think the more I teach, the longer I teach, the more I learn what I can do for children, and so that tends to make me reflect more. I think that when I was a first year teacher that I was very satisfied with making it through the day.

Every year, when I became better, I would start reflecting on how I could make, how I could make myself better, how I could be a better teacher, and then of course, how I could help children learn better.

I think reflection for me is…when I sit down with just myself.

I’ve come to think of it [reflection] as being something very personal. And what I decide, what I come up with through my reflections, I don’t expect that of anyone else. I consider it mine. I own it.

I think that’s come with maturity. Because I think 20 years ago if I’d been in the same position I might not have been as receptive to reflection as I am now.

Every child needed to be on this level. There was no up there was no middle there was no low. You know, I didn’t see that but now that I’ve taught for nine years I do see how important it is to differentiate your instruction for the high learners, the medium learners, and the low learners, but um, you know when I first taught I just thought every child needed to be on the same level.

After you get a couple of years under your belt and you get the discipline taken care of and the classroom management all that good stuff and you can focus more on the curriculum that you’re there to teach.

So what I’ve looked for when I was reflecting has changed over the years of teaching.

As the years have passed and I’ve furthered my own understanding of children and my own understanding of curriculum and as I have grown in a lot of different ways, I’ve found that I am changing the way I reflect and the fact that I do reflect because I’d say no I didn’t really do a lot of it at the beginning, but now I do.

I think new teachers, even very gifted new teachers, are new teachers and are so worried about OK, I have 87 minutes of reading and not 90 and this and that and getting to the lunchroom and they’re so caught up in those and managing.

It’s almost like a physician as they come new into practice learning how to put people in waiting rooms and manage the day.

When I began teaching, I don’t think I did that much reflecting at all.
Theme 6: Reflection may be both formal and informal.

- I think commonly when you say the word reflection you think of it in a formal way and I think some of your best reflection happens in the shower or in the car or after you’ve just taught a lesson.
- I think reflection happens all the time as a teacher not just in a formal way.
- You have to think on your feet and change quickly.
- I had to write five different things. One was knowledge of myself and pedagogy and just different things, we had to do that every week student teaching.
- Every night after class, we had to reflect that night and send in a one page reflection on what we talked about and that was a very enriching experience because you do pick out certain things and as we read everyone else’s it was amazing how many people reflected on a different aspect of the class.
- I think it depends on who’s doing it. If you’re doing self-reflecting then you know it may be journaling you know in a notebook.
- And a lot of times in my lesson plans I just write down you know went well, extend to next day, or go further with something.
- Obviously a formal reflection with an evaluator or something is much more formal and you sit down you know and reflect, discuss with them but a lot of times you don’t have that peer to discuss so it’s just within your own head and you kind of know what works best in your classroom and how your kids responded.
- I’ll write it down because I take records with me, a notebook kind of as a log, and I write it in the log so I can go back and have that to reflect on with the teacher.
- So you think, so you do it on the spot also then, weekly you may go back and meet with someone formally but it also happens on the spot and not necessarily taking notes and things.
- the formal reflections and evaluations are two maybe three a year and you know and those are great but it’s the day to day on the spot thing that I think helps me grow as a teacher more than the formal.
- I’ve discovered I’m not a journaler. I can’t journal. I’ve tried to write down things and I do it for two days and then it’s gone I mean there’s too many other things to get done at the end of the day or the at the beginning of the day.
- Because actually sitting and journaling sometimes can be cumbersome and we spend so much of our time taking a left hand turn when we thought we were going straight or a right hand turn when we thought we were going left with our students these days that I think you have to be you know able to change quickly.
- So, I basically keep track of my formal assessments, and my observations are just in my head. I don’t have anything that I really jot down.

Theme 7: Reflection takes place in a nurturing environment.

- You don’t have that [nurturing environment] everywhere and it’s disappointing when you don’t.
- It’s very important to have a strong team that can support you and help you when you need it.
I think a lot of times that starts out as a gripe or just getting it off your chest but then it gets deeper as you talk about it.

I think it would be totally different reflecting if we didn’t have the support we have here. I mean, it’s easy to go to lunch and say these things or it’s easy to go to recess but it wouldn’t be if there wasn’t so much support here or if I knew that I wouldn’t be criticized for what I did or things like that. I think that reflection would be much different if that were the case.

At a different school I had the experience where I didn’t have anyone to talk to so I called a former coworker that was a very good team worker and she would talk to me just about every week and she helped me through it for five months.

I think commonly reflecting with other people depends on their receptiveness.

I think you have to pick people who you feel like you can reflect with in a positive, easy environment instead of trying to defend what you would have done or what you think or your philosophy.

You tend to reflect with people who not always agree with you but who are good listeners and support you and you can bounce things off.

You don’t want somebody who just agrees with everything you say, but you want somebody who has been there or at least has an open mind about what’s going on.

I think that trust is a major component of reflection with other people.

I think being able to trust somebody because reflection is commonly a very personal thing.

I’ve got my network of folks I can trust.

When I first came here I was teaching third grade and I remember going into a teacher’s room and saying I’m having trouble with a child and I have tried all of this what do you think? Off the top of her head she told me one or two things and then she came back to me the next day and said I’ve been thinking about it and she sat down and she had another conversation with me and that was so valuable to me.

I don’t know that everyone is in as good a situation like I am as far as the school and getting along with my coworkers so well.

I don’t think that everyone is as fortunate to be at a school like this so I don’t know that they will do that [reflect] as much.

It’s just so natural here for us to talk about it and what have you done what did you try and things like that, but I don’t think that it’s like that for everyone.

We had three principals in the eight years I was there – three different principals. One of them – she was more of a junior high principal, so she wasn’t very good.

Well, you didn’t feel like you could go to them [principals]. The other one, it was her first principals job, and she wasn’t happy to be there either. The last one, she was a very negative person

Although sometimes the reflection does involve that peer in the hall where at the end of the day, and you’re out there and finally the kids are gone and you’re going over what kind of day it was you know just talking about the day. Good day, bad day, what could I have done differently kind of day? And a lot of times we share a lesson for example that did kind of fall flat and you go wonder why what could I have done differently and usually with my coworkers we’re all very supportive and willing to not
only listen to other people help us with those things but also to be very supportive and offer assistance or ideas that might change things.

- when you become comfortable with the administration, I think your day probably runs a little smoother every year because you know what’s accepted, what’s wanted from you.
- My kids do portfolios during the year at the end of each nine weeks they reflect on their own work and then I go back and look at their work and I have evaluations for them to do.
- One of my biggest obstacles for reflection is time alone. I am constantly being bombarded by outside influences including family and school responsibilities.
- I need a quiet time with my door closed and no interruptions, but that doesn’t seem to be the case. So instead, I reflect in my car when I am driving home in the evening or on my way to school.
- I like to jot things down as I reflect on these things because that is often when I am the most creative.
- To have this time taken away from me by all of these distractions increase my stress levels and create a negative reaction when I try to reflect.

*Theme 8: Reflection helps to inform instruction.*
- Reflection takes place throughout each planning step – deciding which activities will offer the best learning experiences.
- Reflection also helps teachers to think about their students’ needs and interests, to plan activities that impact their lives, and to strengthen their dispositions towards learning.
- I watch the students and that helps me reflect while I’m teaching.
- Reflection always leads me to a plan I can implement.
- The way you did it last year may not work with the group you have this year.
- If you like the way it is but the kids aren’t getting it but you like it, then that is hard because you need to change if they are not getting it.
- So I keep a portfolio on them so I can look back.
- I think one thing I always look at is whether I met all the needs of all my kids the different learning styles and the learning needs of my kids in my class.
- You can look at long range goals and kind of where you want to be but as far as day to day lessons, you can’t do that, you’ve got to let the kids guide a lot of that.
- That’s why you know reflecting is important on that because you’ve got to go back and look at what they learn and there may be lessons that you taught that they got right away so you don’t need to spend the next three or four days on it so you can jump ahead in that area or you may need to spend another week on it so it can’t be long term planning.
- I just make little side notes in my lesson plans, but if you truly want your children to succeed and you want your children to do well, then you’re going to think about how you can hit each group of children, your high, your medium, and your low and that takes a lot of time.
I know that not all teachers give the same amount of time and that is unfortunate for some children it’s just not a priority to some of them.

I think if you truly want your children to succeed then you do need to think about your day, and you do need to think about your lessons and I think however you do it is fine, as long as you do it.

To better service the children. My special ed kids. To provide better services for them. To make sure that they have such difficulty anyway so what do I need to do to facilitate their learning even more?

reflection also helps teachers to think about their students’ needs and interests, to plan activities that impact their lives, and to strengthen their dispositions towards learning.

With so many students having such varied needs, I reflect constantly about what I must do to make sure I am doing what is best for them. This is especially the case with my ELL’s [English Language Learners].

Reflection takes place throughout each planning step – deciding which activities will offer the best learning experiences.

Theme 9: Reflection is a way to self-monitor.

My personal definition of reflection is to see myself, what I am doing, what I need to change, what I need to keep the same… With this reflection, I can only be a stronger, more confident teacher.

Thinking back over what you’ve done and trying to think of ways you could have done it better.

You start reflecting on what went well instead of always the negative and I start thinking what went well? Why did it work? And I got out an index card and started writing it down so I could remember it for next year.

If you have that desire to do better, to be better, to always be improving, then that’s why you reflect because you want to improve.

With reflection, although you do share with other people, a lot of it is just internal.

I think that I would say that it is probably a constant examination of all aspects of teaching in order to refine and improve and strive to become the best teacher that I can be.

I think my reflection is something that is accountability, or a conscience.

When you reflect it really holds you accountable for what you want to be or how you want to teach and what you want to be perceived as and how you want things to go.

Without reflection there is no accountability or looking at what you’re doing and trying to improve it.

Reflection can also be a positive and keep you motivated and keep you fresh.

I think a lot of times when people are getting a little bit stagnant it’s because they are not reflecting on the good things that have happened and reflecting on how they can improve.

If you genuinely take the time to reflect on what’s going on in your classroom, how you are teaching, how you are interacting with others, students, and your peers and
your professionalism, it really gives you the ability to make changes or to continue things that you feel like will be best for children and your team and your work environment.

- I think that’s why in teaching a lot of times reflection is a process of I’m reflecting now on what I’m going to do better maybe even the next year rather than tomorrow.
- To me reflection is something that’s going to change the way you teach, change the way you respond to children, change your attitude.
- I have thought about how if I got the objective across to the children and if you know they were learning what I thought they should learn.
- I think one of the main things it makes me a better teacher. It makes me really think like what went right about it what could I change.
- I think it makes me a more creative teacher.
- I think as a teacher you can always improve, you can always grow; you can always change things around.
- Seeing how effective the lesson was. Was it effective? Did it reach the goals that I needed to be reached? Did it serve its purpose?
- What do I need to change about a lesson I prepared? Did it work well? Did I need to change the way I presented it? Did I need to restructure the materials? Did I gather everything? Did I plan well enough? All of those things go into the reflection.
- Did they stay with the task? Did they stay involved? If they’re not enjoying it, they’re going to venture off and do something else.
- I’ve also asked my kids to reflect on a lesson.
- If you’re truly reflective about what you’re doing and you’re trying to improve your own methods and trying to make your classroom a better place and that’s your goal then you will be reflective.
- I’ve always said you know if it gets to a point where I stop enjoying it, then I’m stopping.
- My personal definition of reflection is to see myself, what I am doing, what I need to change, what I need to keep the same
- With this reflection, I can only be a stronger, more confident teacher.
APPENDIX I

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL
UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office of
Human Research Protections (OHRP). The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP
Guidelines. The Assurance became effective on November 24, 2003 and the approval period is for three years. The
Assurance number isFWA00005960.

Principal Investigator: MORGAN, AMY F
Co-Investigator(s):
Protocol Number: X050211006
Protocol Title: Mirror, Mirror: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Reflection in Teaching

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 3-11-05. The review was conducted in accordance with
UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject
to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.

IRB Approval Date: 3-11-05
Date IRB Approval Issued: 3-11-05

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review
Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities
may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

Any modifications in the study methodology, protocol and/or consent form must be submitted for review and approval
to the IRB prior to implementation.

Adverse Events and/or unanticipated risks to subjects or others at UAB or other participating institutions must be
reported promptly to the IRB.
Form 4: IRB Approval Form
Identification and Certification of Research
Projects Involving Human Subjects

UAB's Institutional Review Boards for Human Use (IRBs) have an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). The UAB IRBs are also in compliance with 21 CFR Parts 50 and 56 and ICH GCP Guidelines. The Assurance became effective on November 24, 2003 and expires on February 14, 2009. The Assurance number is FWA00005960.

Principal Investigator: MORGAN, AMY F
Co-Investigator(s): X050211006
Protocol Number:
Protocol Title: Mirror, Mirror: A Phenomenological Study of the Role of Reflection in Teaching

The IRB reviewed and approved the above named project on 04-12-06. The review was conducted in accordance with UAB's Assurance of Compliance approved by the Department of Health and Human Services. This Project will be subject to Annual continuing review as provided in that Assurance.

This project received EXPEDITED review.
IRB Approval Date: 4-12-06

Date IRB Approval Issued: 04-12-06

Marilyn Doss, M.A.
Vice Chair of the Institutional Review Board for Human Use (IRB)

Investigators please note:

The IRB approved consent form used in the study must contain the IRB approval date and expiration date.

IRB approval is given for one year unless otherwise noted. For projects subject to annual review research activities may not continue past the one year anniversary of the IRB approval date.

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