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THE DIALECTICAL-LEVEL REFLECTIVE HABITS OF MIDDLE-GRADE
TEACHERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Tina H. Boogren

August 2012

Advisor: Dr. Susan Korach

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TEACHERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
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Degree Date: August 2012

Abstract

The literature leads us to believe that an educator must be reflective in order to improve one's practice, and in terms of reflection, Van Manen's (1977) highest level of reflection, the dialectical-level, is presented as a worthy aim for all educators. But should this type of reflection truly be a goal for all educators? This study sought to uncover the phenomenon of dialectical-level reflection. Dialectical, or critical-level, reflection is the process of analyzing, reconsidering and questioning experiences in order to continually adjust one's practice with an eye towards improvement. This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of five middle school educators who exhibit dialectical-level reflective traits. In-depth interviews as well as a videotaped classroom lesson and reflection were utilized in order to determine the dialectical-level reflective habits and tacit knowledge of experienced educators. The findings of this study revealed both positive and negative characteristics of dialectical-level reflection.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I must thank my husband for his incredible patience, support, and belief in me throughout every up and down and every celebration and defeat along this journey. Without a doubt, I would not be here without him. I love you with all of my heart.

A very special thanks to my parents. Their belief in my education and belief in me was the initial catalyst to pursue this crazy dream in the first place. As my first and best teachers, they enabled me to become the very person that I am today. I love you. More.

To the participants in this study, I thank you for doing what you do every single day. You are changing the world one student at a time, and it was an honor and a privilege to peek into your world for a moment in time.

To my committee, I thank you. You pushed me in ways that surprised me and challenged me but in the end, I came out stronger, smarter, and more grateful than I ever imagined. The lessons learned throughout this process run deep and will remain with me forever.

To my friends and family who have been patient enough with me to know that this too shall pass: I'm back. I have a lot of catching up to do with you, my friends. Your patience and understanding are traits that never cease to amaze and astound me.

And finally, a note to myself. You did it. You really did it. Don't ever forget this moment.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“Without reflection, we go blindly on our way, creating more unintended consequences, and failing to achieve anything useful.”

Margaret J. Wheatley (2002)

With a bright light shining on our nation’s public schools today, one question continues to rise to the surface: how does a teacher improve his or her practice? This question serves as the catalyst that drives both educators and researchers working in the field of education. One generally accepted and acknowledged response to this question is the notion of reflective practice. “If we hope to improve teaching we must encourage practitioners to practice their art with an eye towards improvement” (Cruickshank & Applegate, 1981). Richardson (1990) supports this idea by acknowledging that the improvement of teacher practices requires acknowledging and building upon experiences and reflecting on those experiences. Farrell also backs up this support for reflection “Experience itself is actually not the ‘greatest teacher,’ for we do not learn as much from experience as we learn from reflecting on that experience” (2004, p. 7).

In looking more deeply at the broad notion of reflection, Max Van Manen (1977) identified three different levels of reflectivity. These three levels, ordered by level of sophistication, are the Technical-Level, the Contextual-Level, and the Dialectical-Level. By ordering the levels in this way, an assumption can be made that

the dialectical-level of reflection is better than others. To reflect at this level means that educators are thinking critically about their practice, including moral and ethical considerations, in order to make decisions. Evidence of reflection at this level includes systematically questioning one's own practice, suggesting convergent and divergent theories, reflection of both the decisions and the consequences of those decisions during action, considering moral, ethical, and sociopolitical issues on one's own practice, and the ability to express one's self with efficacy and self-confidence both verbally and in written communication.

Problem Statement

While much of the literature identifies reflective attributes as positive traits for teachers, very little empirical evidence can be found in the literature, linking reflection to higher levels of teacher performance and/or higher levels of student achievement. This study sought to look at the phenomenon of this deep-level reflection.

Background

Rationale. It is important to understand the history of reflective practice in order to understand its place in the field of education today. Reflective practice can be traced back to the early in the 20th century, when John Dewey (1933) defined reflective thought as “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it, and the further

conclusions to which it tends” (p. 8). Dewey placed an emphasis on the role of reflection in examining the beliefs and theories that influence our actions “...to reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the next meanings... it is the heart of intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind” (p. 87).

Later in the 20th century, Donald Schön published *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (1983). In this book, Schön applied the concept of reflection to various professions in order to illustrate that professional knowledge is not generated only by researchers, but also by practitioners. According to Schön (1987), knowing-in-action is what separates skilled practitioners from unskilled practitioners. Schön advocates that practitioners of all levels use reflection-in-action as a way to increase their tacit knowledge, and therefore, their skill.

Additionally, Hatton and Smith (1995) outlined four essential issues concerning reflection: (1) we should learn to frame our problems, test out various solutions, and modify our behaviors based on the results of those tests; (2) we should extend our thoughts by looking back on situations after some time has passed; (3) some activities that we label as reflective do not work to solve specific problems; and (4) historic, cultural, and political views should be taken into account in order to reflect at a critical level. The fourth issue here, ties into Van Manen’s (1977) hierarchy of reflection, where historic, cultural, and political views should be taken

into account in what he labels the dialectical-level. Interestingly, the third issue also recognizes that not all reflective activities yield results that solve problems.

Significance. The significance of this study is in the exploration of the phenomenon of dialectical-level reflection for educators. Because the literature emphasizes reflection, much emphasis has been placed on increasing reflective practices with pre-service teachers who are at the novice stage of teaching. According to Loughran (2002), a goal of many teacher preparation programs is for candidates to leave ready to be reflective practitioners. Yost (2006) advocates that if teacher candidates have training in critical reflection, they are much more apt to develop self-efficacy skills which may lead to teacher retention. Both Loughran and Yost strongly advocate for the development of critical reflective traits for pre-service teachers. Hatton and Smith (1995) identify various activities that have been implemented in teacher training programs in order to encourage reflection. These activities include: descriptive writing, descriptive reflection, dialogic reflection, and critical reflection. As noted earlier, however, Hatton and Smith (1995) believe that some activities that we label as reflective do not work to solve specific problems.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards uses a set of five key propositions in its certification process (2002). The fourth proposition states that teachers “must be able to think systemically about their practice and learn from the experience” (p. 16). Similarly, The Council of Chief State School Officers published

Model Core Teaching Standards: A Resource for State Dialogue in 2010, which offered standards regarding what teachers should know and be able to do. Standard #9 in this document specifically addresses reflection “The teacher is a reflective practitioner who uses evidence to continually evaluate his/her practice...” (p. 19). Both of these organizations include reflection in their foundational beliefs. Gu and Day (2007) believe that teachers’ resiliency is related to their effectiveness and note that teachers’ ability to manage their sense of efficacy with their personal and professional identities contributes to their resiliency. Bandura (1986) and Yost (2006) also promote critical reflection as a road to teacher resiliency and retention. Bandura (1986) states that, “Self-reflection is an important personal attribute that contributes to one’s ability to positively alter his/her own thinking and behavior” (p. 61). Yost also believes that teachers need to understand the skills associated with critical reflection as well as the time needed to engage in these activities as this is essential to problem-solving and coping with challenges.

Need for the Study. Dohn (2011) states

Over the past thirty years, reflection has become a buzzword in tertiary and adult education, in continuing professional development, and in the self-understandings and descriptions of practice and practitioners (p. 1).

While the literature offers definitions and suggestions for reflection as a way to increase teacher effectiveness, is it enough to assume that reflective practices that are encouraged and assigned in teacher preparation programs actually contribute to a

teachers' effectiveness in the classroom? Is it also safe to assume that reflection naturally continues for all educators as they move from novice status to professional status? And finally, is it enough to assume that reflective traits lead to improved teaching and the ability to stay resilient during difficult times?

Although reflection is a theme in education, through this study, I sought to understand the nuances of reflection through the eyes of practitioners, as a way to explore the assumptions in the field of education. I became interested in studying those who reflect at Van Manen's (1977) highest level, the dialectical-level, in order to understand the phenomenon from those who live it.

Theoretical Framework for the Study. Van Manen's (1977) three levels of reflection became the theoretical framework for this study.

Again, these three levels, ordered by level of sophistication, are the technical-level, the contextual-level, and the dialectical-level. The technical-level refers to the stage when an educator is only concerned with the technical application of educational knowledge and basic curriculum principles in order to attain a given end result. In the contextual-level, the second level, educators are looking at teacher and student behaviors in relation to determining if their goals were met. For the third and highest level, the dialectical-level, educators are thinking critically about their practice, including moral and ethical considerations, in order to make decisions.

I wanted to learn how teachers who reflected at this level conceptualized their practice and how it impacted them personally and professionally. I sought to give voice to practitioners who currently reflect at this level.

Taggart and Wilson (2005) use the following visual to present Van Manen's model of reflection:

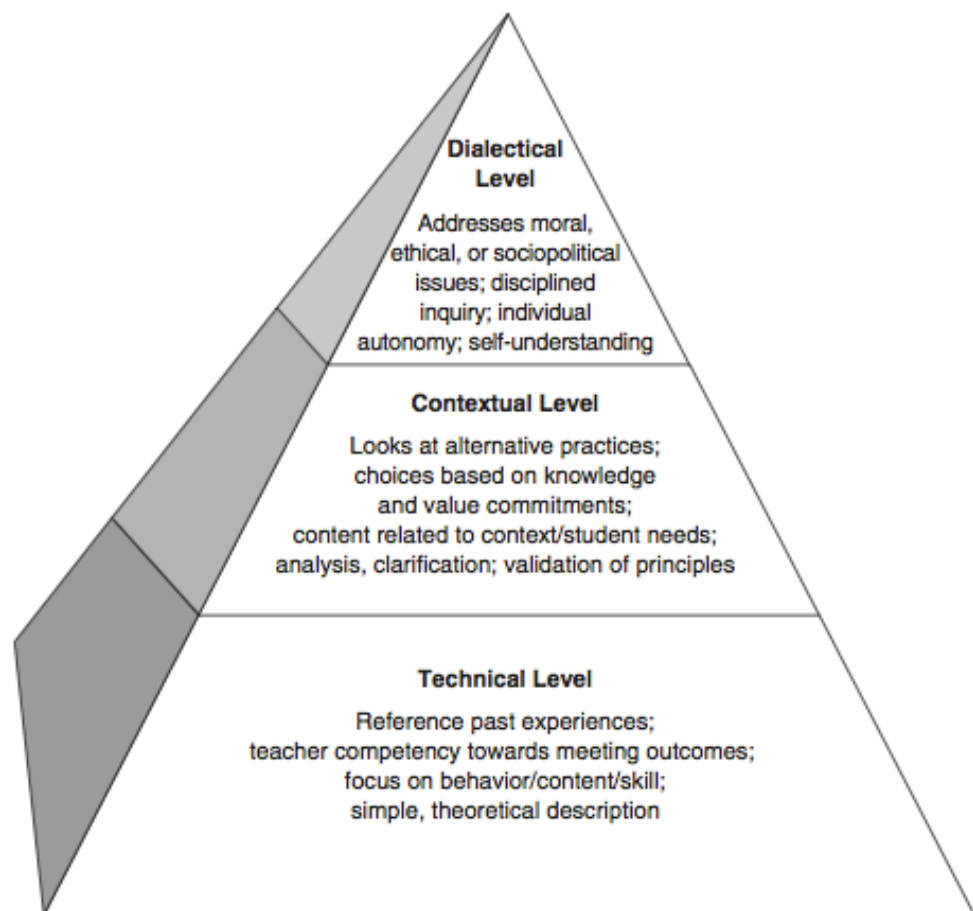


Figure 1: Taggart and Wilson's visual representation of Van Manen's model of reflection (2005).

Here one can see the distinctions between each level of reflection, noting the increasing sophistication as one moves up the pyramid. The dialectical-level of this pyramid is similar to Broofield's (1998) definition of critical reflection where there is a deep level of self-understanding and recognition of moral imperatives as well as Murray and Kujundzic's (2005) definition of critical reflection that defines this type of reflection as a process that includes analyzing, reconsidering, and questioning one's experiences.

Taggert and Wilson (2005) provide further examples of Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level of reflection stating that at this level, practitioners consider ethical and political concerns while thinking about instruction planning and implementation. They also explain that "equality, emancipating, caring, and justice are assessed in regard to curriculum planning" (p. 5) and that while working in this level, practitioners are concerned about students more than themselves and possess an ability to make decisions that are thoughtful, while keeping an open-mind. Practitioners who reflect at this level are introspective and possess intellectual responsibility. Taggert and Wilson describe this level of reflection as contemplative.

Objectives of the Dissertation Research. This research study sought to explore the essence of what it means to reflect at a dialectical-level. As the literature was explored, it became evident that there are many nuances of reflection.

In other words, reflection can range from a basic notion of thinking about something after an event has occurred, to a more analytic level of being able to reflect-in-action while thinking about moral and ethical decisions and implications.

I have worked in education for fourteen years and have continually found myself contemplating about what reflective practice looks like for other educators and if it is always a positive trait. As an instructional coach and administrator, I used activities to help push teachers to become more reflective and, yet, I had no evidence to demonstrate whether these activities actually improved their effectiveness in the classroom. I felt that I could identify teachers who were extremely reflective on their own and noted their frustration when asked to participate in an artificial activity aimed to increase reflection.

The objective of this study is to understand the essence of what dialectical-level reflection means to experienced teachers. I could find no studies that approach Van Manen's (1977) three levels of reflection through the eyes of those who live it.

Specific Research Question. After an extensive review of the literature regarding reflective practice, the following research question was developed:
What are the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced educators?

It is my hope to contribute to a better understanding of dialectical-level reflective practice as demonstrated by experienced educators in order to determine the significance of this level of reflection and explore the assumptions in the field of education.

Assumptions and Limitations. One of the main assumptions that this study was designed upon was the notion that reflection is a positive trait for educators. York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, and Montie (2006) point out that one of the reasons that reflective practice has become a common practice in the United States is because it validates the notion that teachers gain knowledge through practice, and that being reflective, serves to support desires to professionalize teaching. While the literature promotes reflective practice, there is little empirical evidence that directly correlates reflection to improved teacher effectiveness and/or student achievement. Even without this empirical evidence reflective practice is a main push in teacher preparation programs (Loughran, 2002) and in professional development programs provided to schools (Marzano, 2012).

Limitations of this study are that the findings of this study are not generalizable to other teachers, sites, or districts as this data is specific to these five participants in these specific settings. It is also important to note that the small number of participants and their educational backgrounds limited the findings of this study. All five participants came from a large suburban school district in Colorado,

and four of the five participants were female. The purpose of this study was not to generalize, however, rather it was to learn from the work of these educators and tease out the essence of this phenomenon. Further limitations with the methodology are detailed in Chapter 5.

Operational Definitions. The following are operationalized definitions of terms utilized throughout the study.

Critical Reflection – A process that includes analyzing, reconsidering, and questioning one’s experiences (Murray and Kujundzic, 2005).

Dialectical-Level Reflection – The highest level of reflection, where educators are thinking critically about their practice, including moral and ethical considerations, in order to make decisions (Van Manen, 1977).

Reflection – An active thought process aimed at understanding and subsequent improvement (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Tacit Knowledge – knowledge that is expressed or carried on without words or speech (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2012)

Teacher Resiliency - The capacity to bounce back, to recover strengths or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity (Gu and Day, 2007)

Summary. This study attempted to identify the dialectical-level reflective habits and practices of five middle grade teachers in order to determine if this level of reflection is a worthy aim for educators. In seeking to answer this question, a

thorough review of the literature was conducted and a corresponding study was designed. The study identified five experienced middle-level educators who reflect at a dialectical-level. In-depth interviews as well as a reflection on a videotaped lesson were the specific data points used in this study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The theoretical framework of Van Manen's (1997) three levels of reflection is contextualized through a review of the literature with respect to the following areas: the history and key theorists of reflective practice, reflective practice in other fields, and reflective practice in teacher-preparation programs. Tacit knowledge and teacher resiliency also emerged as threads throughout the literature and are also addressed here.

History and Key Theorists of Reflective Practice

To gain a deeper understanding of how reflective practice fits into the field of education, it is first important to trace its history through its key theorists.

Dewey. To begin, John Dewey (1910) is often credited with bringing reflection to 20th-century education. Dewey placed an emphasis on the role of reflection in examining the beliefs and the theories that influence our actions and believed that to reflect was to look back on an event in order to gain new meanings. In 1910, John Dewey published the book *How We Think* and in 1933, he published a revised version of that original book entitled *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of Reflective Thinking to the Educative Process*. According to Fendler (2003), these two bodies of literature “indicate the degree to which Dewey increasingly promoted reflective thinking as an educational aim” (p. 18). He

emphasized the role of reflection in examining the beliefs and theories that influence our actions and schools, today, still hold on to this role of reflection in many of their professional development practices.

Dewey (1933) theorized that reflective thinking gives increased power and control and is worthwhile because it “converts action that is merely appetitive, blind, and impulsive into intelligent action” (p. 19). Stated differently, Dewey proposed that reflective thinking moves one from a mechanistic way of doing things to action that is based in thought. He defines this process of critical reflection as (1) identifying a problem, (2) locating its source, (3) making connections to teacher-education content or research, (4) implementing alternative strategies, and (5) closely observing the results and continuing to alter the strategies if, and when, necessary. This definition varies from Van Manen’s (1977) definition of critical, or dialectical-level, reflection where dialectical-level reflection includes systematically questioning one’s own practice, suggesting convergent and divergent theories, reflection of both the decisions and the consequences of those decisions during action, considering moral, ethical, and sociopolitical issues on one’s own practice, and the ability express oneself with efficacy and self-confidence both verbally and in written communication. Dewey’s definition of the process of critical reflection could more easily be connected to Van Manen’s contextual-level of reflection where one looks at alternative practices and makes choices based on knowledge and value commitments.

Dewey (1933) explains that in every reflection, there are two sub-processes occurring. The first sub-process is a state of perplexity and doubt and the second sub-process is an “act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light further facts which serve to corroborate or to nullify the suggested belief” (p. 10). In other words, the first sub-process is when something triggers a need to think and reflect and the second sub-process is the actual thinking and reflecting about that trigger. This second sub-process is what leads to intelligent action once an event has spurred thought. In relation to Van Manen’s (1997) work, the first sub-process would correlate to the technical-level, where one makes reference to a past experience and the second sub-process would move to the contextual-level of Van Manen’s hierarchy where the reflection moves to a more sophisticated level where one looks at student and teacher behaviors in order to determine if the original teaching goals were met.

According to Dewey, primary experiences are the common activities in life that have some sort of minimal consequence and therefore do not involve intense reflective activity. Secondary experiences, on the other hand, are experiences that do require intense reflection (as cited in Glassman, 2001). It can be stated that many of the activities we engage in on a routine basis do not involve intense reflective activity. For example, for most of us, brushing our teeth, getting dressed, and driving to work does not involve deep thinking. For educators, this may help to clarify the difference between activities that are commonplace and require little reflection and

other experiences (secondary experiences) that do, indeed, require more thoughtful reflection on the part of the teacher. These secondary activities may involve an emotional exchange with a student, planning for a new unit or lesson, and/or working with a student who is having difficulty learning the material. As is true in many aspects of daily life, different experiences call for varied forms of thought and reflection. Van Manen's (1977) technical-level of reflection may correlate with some of the routinized behaviors of a teacher in the classroom. In other words, she or he may only need to reference how something was done in the past in order to note its success and implement a similar process in the future. Secondary experiences, on the other hand, push a teacher to move into Van Manen's contextual-level where one begins to look at alternative practices. In order to move into Van Manen's third level, the dialectical-level, one would need to also consider the moral and ethical considerations of decisions, oftentimes, during the action itself.

While Dewey is often credited with being the originator of reflective practice, Van Manen's three levels of reflection push our thinking in reference to Dewey's work to a different level and increase the rigor in describing critical reflection.

Van Manen. The work of Van Manen (1977), referenced above, is built around three different kinds of knowing: technical, practical, and critical. The first level, technical, is concerned more with the means rather than the end. In other words, someone who is reflecting at this level is thinking about the moment at hand rather

than considering the end result. Practitioners who reflect at this level do so with minimal background knowledge to pull from (Taggart and Wilson, 2005). Many novice teachers are thought to function at this level due to their lack of schemata in dealing with challenges.

In the second level, the contextual-level, reflection is based on the means as well as on the outcomes and goals. Here, the teacher is not only focused on the task at hand, but also has the end clearly in mind. The non-problematic nature of the technical-level, ties into this level where problems may lie (Taggart and Wilson, 2005). These problems may arise from personal biases, framing situations in context, and questioning practices that are based on gained pedagogical knowledge and skills.

Finally, the third level, dialectical, involves social wisdom where morals and ethics are examined based on a particular set of values. This deep level of reflection highlights the need to consider the implications of one's actions while making decisions. At this level, practitioners are thinking critically about ethical and political concerns and keep issues of equality, emancipation, caring, and justice in the forefront of their mind (Taggart and Wilson, 2005). Practitioners who reflect at this level are developing expert knowledge around their practice and are in a state of questioning assumptions that were previously taken for granted.

Pultoak (1993) developed a set of reflective questions to help guide educators in Van Manen's critical third level of reflection. Interestingly, these questions do not seem to correlate directly with the dialectical-level alone. Instead, I argue that the following questions fall within all three levels and I have highlighted and labeled some of the proposed questions accordingly in order to prove this belief.

1. *What were essential strengths of the lesson?* Technical-Level: because here the teaching is referencing past experiences and the teacher's competency towards meeting outcomes.
2. *What, if anything, would you change about the lesson?* Contextual-Level: because here the teacher is looking at alternative practices.
3. *Do you think the lesson was successful? Why?* Technical-Level: here the teacher is again looking at his/her competency toward meeting the learning outcomes.
4. *What moral or ethical concerns occurred as a result of the lesson?* Dialectical-Level: here the teacher is directly addressing both moral and ethical issues in his/her thinking.

While these questions may prove helpful in pushing one towards reflective thinking, it is important to note that not all types of questions push a teacher to reflect at that third dialectical-level.

Schön. Another key theorist in reflective practice is Donald Schön (1987). Schön theorizes that formalized learning is not the only way to increase one's skill as a professional practitioner. Through the ability to reflect-in-action, one can take this newly learned knowledge and apply it immediately, thus increasing one's skills as a professional. Schön believed that textbook learning is only one way to improve one's practice. Much can be said for thinking about one's own actions, while involved in those actions, in order to make thoughtful decisions about one's own practice. Van Manen's (1977) technical-level of reflection would correlate with Schön's notion of formalized learning. At Van Manen's technical-level, an educator is only concerned with the technical application of educational knowledge and basic curriculum principles in order to attain a given end result. Schön's belief in thinking about one's own actions ties to Van Manen's contextual-level of reflection where the educator is looking at teacher and student behaviors in relation to determining if his or her goals were met.

Schön argued that what separates skilled professionals from less skilled ones was the skilled practitioners' knowing-in-action or tacit knowledge.

Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit (Schön, 1983, p. viii).

Similarly, Michelene Chi (2006) points out that one of the key differences between experts and novices is that experts' knowledge is organized and structured differently from that of novices. A less skilled practitioner has a heightened

awareness of nearly every minute of the day because everything is still somewhat new to this person. On the other hand, more skilled practitioners are moving through many routines during the day with very little thought because they have had many experiences similar to this. This ties in to Dewey's (1933) notion of primary and secondary experiences where novice teachers have more secondary experiences than experienced educators. This is one reason why teaching has been called an art. A skilled teacher becomes an artist in the classroom, fluently adjusting and moving in a fluid way. Oftentimes, a skilled teacher has trouble articulating exactly why they make the decisions that they do. An example of this is when a skilled practitioner works with a student teacher and is suddenly forced to articulate why they do, say, and act as they do. This is oftentimes a difficult task as they are forced to put their tacit knowledge into words.

Schön argued for reflection-in-action as a way to help practitioners increase their knowledge-in-action.

What distinguishes reflection-in-action from other kinds of reflection is its immediate significance for action. In reflection-in-action, the rethinking of some part of our knowing-in-action leads to on-the-spot experiment and further thinking that affects what we do—in the situation at hand and perhaps also in others we shall see as similar to it. (Schön, 1987, p. 29)

This belief may have the potential to help teachers become more effective. If one can think about what they're doing while they're doing it, there is a greater chance that positive changes can be made immediately. This can lead to knowing-in-action

because the next time around, the teacher will already know what to do because he or she will have already seen the results of their reflection and know whether or not their decision had a positive impact and will be able to act accordingly. However, because each student, each class, and each day are different, one cannot rely on what was previously done and assume to obtain the same results. In fact, this is where Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection can be an asset because if one is reflecting at this level, one is taking moral, ethical, and political concerns into account.

In order to understand this concept more deeply, Schön made a distinction between reflecting-on-action (looking back after the fact) and reflecting-in-action (reflecting and changing our behavior in the midst of an action). He advocated for reflection-in-action (reflecting in the midst of an action as soon as a problem is perceived) because one can still make a difference to the situation at hand. In other words, one can reflect after the fact and make changes the next time around or one can reflect in the midst of the action and immediately change the course of action to have an impact in the moment. Schön (1987) theorizes that a teacher is able to solve problems masterfully because of his/her ability to reflect-in-action.

Therefore, the ability to reflect-in-action in order to have a hand in making improvements in real time can be seen as an advantage over reflecting-on-action where it's too late to impact the learning in real time. Reflection-in-action likely

occurs more frequently in Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level because here, one is critically thinking about one's practice and decision-making.

Schön (1987) said that once a problem is set, reflection-in-action involves experimentation.

[Experimental action] is initiated by the perception of something troubling or promising, and it is terminated by the production of changes one finds on the whole satisfactory, or by the discovery of new features which give the situation new meaning and change the nature of the questions to be explored. (p. 151)

For example, a teacher may notice that his/her students are having a difficult time answering the questions related to the direct instruction that was just provided (something troubling) and s/he immediately decides to bring the class back together for further instruction. She pauses to have students revisit the questions and notices that this time around, students are able to answer the questions with little trouble (on the whole, satisfactory). This experimental action proved to be a positive decision and demonstrates how reflecting-in-action had an immediate impact on student learning. This also demonstrates work in Van Manen's (1977), dialectical-level reflection, because this teacher has systematically questioned his/her own practice in order to make decisions.

Grimmet. Similar to Van Manen's model, Grimmet (1990) proposed four modes of thinking: technological, situational, deliberate, and dialectical.

Technological, also known as formulaic, thinking is based on a prepackaged

knowledge from an external source and relies on already proven practices. A step up from there is situational thinking, where decisions are based on a specific context at a specific time. This type of thinking is quick and is acted upon immediately.

Situational thinking doesn't look at the root causes of problems, only the immediately observable effects. From there, deliberate thinking refers to thinking that occurs when one seeks additional information beyond what is provided in the immediate situation.

The top-tier in this model, dialectical thinking, is similar to Van Manen's (1977) top tier of his model in that these types of thinking both build on deliberate thinking in order to gain an understanding of the situation and generate solutions. "The greater a teacher's ability to suspend judgment and the broader the repertoire of pedagogical strategies, the more flexible dialectical thinking will be" (Danielson, 2005, p. 1).

Dialectical thinking is characterized by new teaching behaviors that come from how the thinker thinks differently about a situation.

York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie. To add to these previous models, York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006) identify the following elements of a Theory of Action for Reflective Practice which is also very helpful in providing a clear picture of what it means to be a reflective educator: pause, openness, inquiry, thinking, learning, and action in order to reach the ultimate desired outcome of reflective practice, enhanced student learning. In other words, reflective practice is active, not passive. "It is a complex process that requires high levels of conscious

thought and commitments to change practice based on new understandings” (p. 11). A teacher must first *pause* when something promising or troubling occurs in order to be *open* to thinking about that event. From there, the teacher must *inquire* about the situation, *think* about the situation, *learn* more in order to *act* on the situation, and determine if this action had a positive impact on student learning. This can be done both by reflecting-on-action (Schön, 1987) after the fact, or as the literature has stated, it can be done in action, which has an immediate impact on student learning.

A non-linguistic representation of this Theory of Action for Reflective Practice is presented here and demonstrates the uneven path one often takes to reach the ultimate goal of enhanced student learning (York-Barr, Sommer, Ghore, & Montie, 2006).

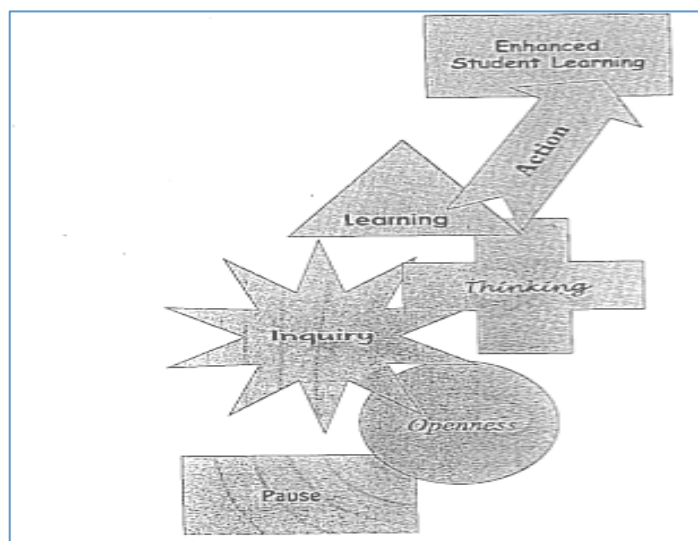


Figure 2: York-Barr, Sommer, Ghore, and Montie’s visual representation of The Theory of Action for Reflective Practice (2006).

To understand why reflective practice is important, York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006) identify some potential benefits of reflective practice. Some of these benefits can be placed in Van Manen's (1977) theoretical framework in order to identify the level of reflection required. Some of the benefits, tied to Van Manen's hierarchy include the following: reflection provides a bridge between theory and practice (technical-level), reflection is one way to consider multiple perspectives (contextual-level), reflection can encourage growth in cultural competence (dialectical-level), and reflection can help in gaining understanding of role and identity (dialectical-level).

Marcos, Sanchez, and Tillema. Marcos, Sanchez, and Tillema (2011) also studied the existing literature on reflective practice and found that it is a process that is both recursive and cyclical and includes the following elements: problem-solving, awareness-raising, and professional knowledge. They also found that to be a reflective teacher, one must be an expert in a specific area, build on previous knowledge of experience, be critical, and work in a collaborative way. In terms of deep-level reflection, or critical/dialectical-level reflection, they discovered, like Van Manen (1977), that there is more involved than professional development. To reflect at a deep level, practitioners must be personally involved in this practice because of the dedicated time and effort required to reflect at this level. Also of note, these

researchers found that there is a gap between what is said in the research and what is found in practice. They advocate for further research around what works in reflective practice, including content-rich accounts on reflective practices that work. This study attempts to provide five such accounts.

Reflective Practice in Other Fields

While studying the literature around reflection in education, many references were made to other professions where reflection is also important. Clearly, reflective practice is not unique to education and is an important practice in other fields that work with human beings at high-stakes levels. Reflective practice facilitates the processing and integration of new knowledge and can help students and practitioners make sound decisions when confronted with unfamiliar situations: this is true in education as well as other fields where on-the-spot decisions making is required.

Writing about the field of law, Anzalone (2010) states “reflective practice helps students vet their own beliefs and value systems against the mores and norms of the legal profession” (p. 86). Like in education, Anzalone recognizes that knowledge is not only gained in the classroom and in textbooks. Students must also reflect on their own beliefs and the field as a whole in order to begin to think like a skilled practitioner.

In nursing, Kim, Clabo, Burbank, and Martins (2010) state that reflective practice has been applied for various purposes including “developing clinical

competency and as a way to narrow the gap between theory and practice” (p. 159). Here, too, one can see the importance of building a bridge between theory and practice in order to increase one’s skills as a nurse, just as an educator must do as one moves from someone’s else’s classroom to one’s own.

Continuing to think about the health-care field, Mann, Gordon, and MacLeod (2009), assert that reflection is important for four reasons: first, to learn from one’s experience is vital to building and retaining competence over many years; second, reflection helps to integrate one’s personal beliefs, values and attitude; third, reflection requires one to build bridges between prior knowledge and new knowledge; and finally, reflection helps one become self-aware and self-monitoring. These four reasons are important in the field of education as well. Again, when looking at this list, one can see the connection to Van Manen’s (1997) three levels of reflection. When health-care practitioners become self-aware and are able to self-monitor, they are moving towards reflection at a dialectical-level.

Social work is another area where on-the-spot decision-making is important and therefore, reflective practice is important. Murphy, Dempsey, and Halton (2010) theorize that reflective engagement “helps workers to respond to the complexity and uniqueness of each new encounter” (p. 176). One can hear the Schön’s (1933) theory of reflecting-in-action in the above description.

When practitioners are able to draw from their previous experiences in order to make a decision in the practice, their knowing-in-action is increased and they are able to succeed in new and unfamiliar situations.

These descriptions of reflective practice in other fields help us to gain a deeper understanding of reflective practice in general as well as how the field of education uses these same ideas in similar and different ways.

Reflective Practice in Teacher-Preparation Programs

This assumption of the importance of reflection in education leads us to exploring how reflective practice is promoted in teacher-preparation programs. According to Korthagen and Kessels (1999), as a reaction to some of the weaknesses of traditional approaches to teacher-education programs, an emphasis on reflective teaching has been implemented into many programs and there is a belief that it should be part of a teacher's competency,

In the last decade, action research, reflective teaching, and reflection-in-action... have become fashionable throughout all segments of the US teacher education community (Gore & Zeichner, 1991, p. 119).

These three ideas: action research, reflective teaching, and reflection-in-action, all tie into the literature review presented here. Reflective teaching is particularly effective when one is able to reflect-in-action (Schön, 1987), and action research requires one to pause, be open, inquire, think, learn, and act in order to enhance student learning, as described by York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, and Montie (2006).

Mann, Gordon, and MacLeod (2009) express

Educators assert that the emergence of reflective practice is part of a change that acknowledges the need for students to act and think professionally as an integral part of learning throughout their courses of study, integrating theory and practice from the outset (p. 596).

This is parallel to the reflective practice in other fields as explained in the previous section. Moving from theory to practice also moves one from Van Manen's (1977) the technical-level of reflection to the contextual one.

According to Loughran (2002)

To counter the likelihood that practice may be routinized, teacher educators and their student teachers need to pay particular attention to the nature of the problems they are confronted by in their teaching about teaching and their learning about teaching (p. 34).

In other words, one must pay close attention to the tacit knowledge in order to help student teachers. Loughran (2002) also asserts,

It is through the development of knowledge and understanding of the practice setting and the ability to recognize and respond to such knowledge that the reflective practitioner becomes truly responsive to the needs, issues, and concerns that are so important in shaping practice (p. 42).

Being responsive to the needs, issues, and concerns that occur in the classroom correlates to Van Manen's (1977) highest level of reflection in his hierarchy.

According to Pultorak (1993), "Preparation of reflective teachers is an important theme in teacher education" (p. 288) and "the facilitation of teacher reflectivity should be a vital part of teacher-education programs" (p. 295). Korthagen and Kessels (1999) also believe that making strong connections between theory and practice will help teacher candidates act based on their knowledge and thus be able to critically reflect on their practice. While this general reasoning is difficult to argue with, one begins to wonder where the various levels of reflection fit into this assertion. Is it good enough to reflect only at a technical-level or is it important to move to contextual and dialectical-levels of reflection?

In 1992, the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium published *Model Standards for Beginning Teacher Licensing, Assessment, and Development: A Resource for State Dialogue*. These standards were developed in response to five major themes that guide the National Board's standard-setting and development work: teachers are committed to students and their learning, teachers know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to diverse learners, teachers are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, teachers think

systematically about their practice and learn from experience, and teachers are members of learning communities. Principle #9 states

The teacher is a reflective practitioner who continually evaluates the effects of his/her choices and actions on others (students, parents, and other professionals in the learning community)... (p. 31).

This indicates a desire to push teachers towards dialectical-level reflection where they are self-aware and conscious of the moral and ethical elements of their decision-making because here, they are evaluating the effects of their choices on all stakeholders. As an update of these Model Standards, in 2010, the Council of Chief State School Officers developed *Model Core Teaching Standards: A Resource for State Dialogue* for all teachers, not simply focusing solely on new teachers. Standard #9 remains the same in this document indicating the importance of reflection for all teachers still today, not just novice teachers.

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2002) also includes reflection in their document, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do*.

Included in Position #4: teachers think systematically about their practice and learn from experience is

Masterful teachers develop specialized ways to listen to students, colleagues, and administrators, and reflect on their teaching in order they might improve their practice (p. 17).

Again, using reflection to improve one's practice is a theme that has come through over and over again in the literature and supports Van Manen's (1977)

hierarchy of reflection where one is moving from simply theory to practice and is instead, reflecting in a specialized way, thinking about the implications of one's decisions on one's stakeholders.

Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge became a thread that I followed as I began to see the connections between tacit knowledge and reflection. Consider the following statement from Nestor-Baker and Hoy (2001): "Tacit knowledge is related to job experience but it is much more than experience," (p.86). In other words, experience alone does not increase one's tacit knowledge. Instead, *thinking about* one's experience increases tacit knowledge. Thus, reflection and tacit knowledge become connected in the way that we know that to reflect is to think about.

Horvath (1994) described three main features of tacit knowledge. First, tacit knowledge is structured procedurally. Second, tacit knowledge is related to the attainment of goals. Third, tacit knowledge is developed on one's own, with very little help from others (as cited in Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001). These three features indicate that, indeed, more than just experience contributes to one's tacit knowledge in any given area. Is reflection the piece that helps to increase one's tacit knowledge, particularly as one thinks about Horvath's second point that states that tacit knowledge is tied to an attainment of goals which ties into Van Manen's (1977)

contextual-level of reflection where the educator is looking at her own behaviors in order to determine if his/her goals were met?

It can be difficult for teachers to articulate their own examples and knowledge of teaching expertise. Sharing tacit knowledge can be a difficult task “because the nature of the tacit knowledge prevented it from being articulated” (Shim & Roth, 2008, p. 5). Tschannen-Moran and Nestor-Baker (2004) believe that tacit knowledge “includes in its parameters informally generated knowledge, impressionistic knowledge, and metacognition” (p. 1487). In lay terms, we might say that tacit knowledge manifests itself as common sense or street smart and most experts agree that this knowledge is significantly developed in experts (Tschannen-Moran & Nestor-Baker, 2004). Feltovich, Prietula, and Ericsson (2006) believe that one develops expertise through “knowledge about one’s own knowledge and knowledge about one’s own performance” (p. 55). Tacit knowledge is this hidden knowledge and reflection is how one is able to explore that hidden knowledge.

Shim and Roth (2008) conclude

Sharing tacit knowledge seemed to require more intended, focused, and longer reflection than sharing explicit knowledge, because it was difficult to find articulated cues and explanations about tacit knowledge. Thus, time was needed for reflection on the tacit knowledge (p. 20).

Stated differently, explicit knowledge, or knowledge that can be found in a textbook, is easier to articulate and share than sharing tacit knowledge as this takes more time to get at and put words to. Bringing tacit knowledge to a level of

consciousness is an important part of understanding reflective practice in order to help unskilled practitioners improve their practice.

How then, does one bring language to tacit knowledge? Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state

Human thought processes are largely metaphorical.... Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system (p. 6).

This notion of how thoughts are metaphorically based, ties into the notion of tacit knowledge as we seek to give voice to what is happening in the mind and thoughts of a dialectical-level reflective teacher. Lakoff and Johnson go on to say

This is typical of emotional concepts, which are not clearly delineated in our experience in any direct fashion and therefore must be comprehended primarily indirectly, via metaphor (p. 85).

This also supports how tacit knowledge can be explored and explained through the use of metaphor. Bringing tacit knowledge to the surface through the use of metaphor became an important part of my research as I sought to have my participants articulate their own hidden knowledge around their craft.

Teacher Resiliency

Teacher resiliency also became a thread that I followed throughout my literature review because connections kept arising between teachers' ability to reflect and their ability to be resilient. As noted in Chapter One, Gu and Day (2007) define

resilience as, “the capacity to bounce back, to recover strengths or spirit quickly and efficiently in the face of adversity” (p. 1) and they believe that resiliency is

Closely aligned to a strong sense of vocation, self-efficacy and motivation to teach which are fundamental to a concern for promoting achievement in all aspects of students’ lives (p. 1).

This definition ties into Van Manen’s (1977) description of a dialectical-level educator who continually questions one’s own practice and has the ability express one’s self with efficacy and confidence. To be a dialectical-level practitioner may then increase one’s capacity for resilience that could be helpful in finding balance for those who reflect at this deep level.

Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011) have a similar understanding of teacher resiliency and state that, “individual attributes such as altruistic and high self-efficacy are key protective factors” (p. 1). They note that resilient teachers possess a sense of self-efficacy, “feeling confident and competent, taking credit for and drawing sustenance from their accomplishments” (p. 6). Stated differently, for teachers to be resilient, they need a strong sense of self-efficacy. They also note that self-efficacy can be enhanced as teachers face and overcome challenges in their teaching through critical reflection. As exhausting as challenges can be, they argue that for each challenge that is overcome, self-efficacy (and tacit knowledge) increases, therefore increasing one’s resiliency. I question the validity of this statement.

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) support Beltman, Mansfield, and Price (2011) and believe, “if teachers do not take time to reflect on their work, they may become prone to burnout” (as cited Farrell, 2004, p. 8). Similarly,

Teachers who do not bother to reflect on their work can become slaves to routine and powerless to influence their future careers (p. 7).

This statement is an interesting area to explore through the lens of the participants in this study who *do* reflect on their work in a dialectical-level way and yet struggle at times with burnout and feelings of exhaustion. While reflective practice may emphasize cognition, it may also trigger self-doubt and emotion, both of which tie into teacher resiliency, as these may be areas where resiliency becomes difficult. These conflicting areas became important data points in the study.

Yost (2006) asserts that there are five primacy factors that contribute to a teachers’ resiliency: relationships (mentoring, parental and administrative support), competence and skills in teaching, personal ownership of skills (the ability to solve problems, set goals, and help students), a sense of accomplishment, and a sense of humor. In order to have personal ownership of skills and possess a sense of accomplishment, one must reflect on one’s own practice, otherwise the tacit knowledge does not increase and therefore, one’s sense of accomplishment remains stagnate as well.

Yost also directly states that self-efficacy and reflection are two key components to teacher retention and resiliency and is an important factor to remember for those who work with educators. One purpose of this study is to explore these assumptions.

Yost (2006) notes that novice teachers in particular can benefit from critical reflection practices because these practices help teachers develop the tools needed to handle and effectively deal with the challenges and problems that they encounter. If teachers are exposed to critical reflection practices in their teacher-preparation programs, they are more apt to utilize these skills, thus allowing them to increase their resilience and have the confidence and skill-set to remain in the profession. Yost points out that a teacher's ability to problem-solve and cope with challenges is related to their self-efficacy and that self-efficacy is a key predictor in teacher retention. For participants in Yost's study, the ability to problem-solve and cope with challenges came from the teachers' ability to reflect at a critical level.

Summary

Reflective practice is cited in the literature as being a worthy aim for educators and can be credited to such theorists as Dewey, Shön, and Van Manen among others. Reflective practice is not unique to the field of education and is presented as a positive aim in other professions where on-the-spot decision-making is required (Anzalone, 2010). Because of the push to become reflective practitioners,

teacher-preparation programs have placed a heavy emphasis on practices that help promote reflection (Pultorak, 1993). Tacit knowledge and teacher resiliency became two other areas of interest as the literature began to reveal the connection of these two areas with reflection. In order to increase one's tacit knowledge, one must engage in reflection (Nestor-Baker & Hoy, 2001). Teacher resiliency has been tied in with teacher reflection because as one reflects on their practice, their confidence grows, their tacit knowledge increases, and they begin to possess the self-efficacy skills that contribute to their ability to remain resilient (Gu & Day, 2007).

Even with this as an aim for those in education, very little of the literature cites how critical-level reflection, or dialectical-level reflection, ties into this aim even though it is presented as the highest, most sophisticated level of reflection. There is also little evidence in the literature that explores the negative consequences of reflecting at this level. It is my goal to explore these assumptions through this study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of five educators who reflect at a dialectical-level. As noted in the literature review, there is a strong assumption that reflective practice is a worthy aim for educators and yet there is very little empirical evidence to support this claim. Uncovering the essence of what it means to be a dialectical-level reflective teacher became the focus of this study. Evidence from the literature suggests that engaging in reflective practice helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice and leads to advantages for educators including self-awareness and an increase in resiliency skills (Yost, 2006). This study seeks to explore these assumptions.

Research Question

As I designed this study, my goal was to gain a deeper understanding of the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced teachers. Van Manen's (1977) definition of dialectical-level reflection formed the theoretical framework for the study. After an extensive review of the literature regarding reflective practice, the following research question was developed: What are the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced educators?

It is my hope to contribute to a better understanding of dialectical-level reflective practice as demonstrated by experienced educators in order to determine the significance of this level of reflection and explore the assumptions in the field of education.

Research Design: Phenomenology

According to Moustakas (1994) in *Phenomenological Research Methods*, phenomenology, as a research methodology, is utilized when

The researcher has a personal interest in whatever she seeks to know and is intimately connected with the phenomenon (p. 59).

Using a phenomenological perspective allows me to explore the experiences of critically reflective middle-grade teachers in order to describe the essence of their experiences. The aim of phenomenological data analysis is to “transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence” (Van Manen, 1997, p.36).

It is important to understand the history of this methodology in order to understand how it supports the research questions presented in this study.

Husserl. Husserl is often referred to as the father of phenomenology (Lavery, 2003). His work began in the field of mathematics but transformed into philosophy. Husserl’s view included a concern with the life world as it is lived. Husserl’s goal was to highlight the details and smaller aspects of an experience in order to achieve a sense of understanding and meaning around that experience (Lavery, 2003).

Husserl developed the philosophy of transcendental phenomenology as an alternative to the positive paradigm to understand an experience (McConnell-Henry, Chapman, and Francis, 2009).

Heidegger. Hermeneutic phenomenology, credited to Heidegger, a student of Husserl's, is also concerned with the life world as it is lived (Lavery, 2003). But, different from Husserl, Heidegger believed that

Understanding is a basic form of human existence in that understanding is not a way we know the world, but rather the way we are (Lavery, p. 4).

In seeking to develop meaning and interpret phenomenon, Heidegger went beyond Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and proposed this hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy (Flood, 2010; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Hermeneusin is a Greek verb meaning to understand or interpret (McConnell-Henry, et al, 2009). While Husserl proposed pure description, Heidegger wanted to go beyond pure description, to interpretation, while allowing the lived experience to speak for itself (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). In this philosophical framework, the researcher is a distinct part of the research; both in the use of prior knowledge and in the personal understanding of the topic, and in the ability to accurately interpret the data. In hermeneutic phenomenology it is important for the researcher to be open about one's background knowledge and presuppositions (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009).

Ramberg, et. al (2009), state:

Understanding, in Heidegger's account, is neither a method of reading nor the outcome of a willed and carefully conducted procedure of critical reflection. It is not something we consciously do or fail to do, but something we are (p. x).

Role of the Researcher

As an educator who considers herself a dialectical-level reflective practitioner, it is important that I recognized my personal experiences and attitudes about dialectical-level reflection. Being able to present a fresh perspective can be difficult (Creswell, 2007). Because of this, I sought to achieve an 'inter-subjective attitude' (Giorgi, 2010) whereby, in the end, any other researcher could look at the same data and discover the same results. Due to my ability to interpret the data relied on my previous knowledge and understanding (McConnell-Henry et al., 2009), I chose to utilize the hermeneutic circle methodology of hermeneutic phenomenological philosophy. This methodology allowed me to bring in my intimate knowledge of reflection and utilize that expertise in looking at the data.

Hermeneutic Science

Hermeneutic science involves reading a text in such a way that both the intention and the meaning behind appearances are understood (Moustakas, 1994). Van Manen (1990) described hermeneutic phenomenology as "a human science which studies persons" (pg. 6) and states that phenomenology is "a philosophy or theory of the unique; it is interested in what is essentially not replaceable" (p. 7).

Hermeneutic analysis is required in order to understand the text and involves a circle that allows for movement between parts (data) and whole (evolving understanding of the phenomenon), each giving meaning to the other such that understanding is circular and iterative and consists of the following steps: immersion with the texts, understanding and identifying first-order constructs, abstraction and identifying second-order constructs while grouping in order to create themes and sub-themes, synthesis and theme development, illuminating and illustrating the phenomenon, and integration, testing, and refining the themes (Ajjawi and Higgs, 2007).

Closely tied to the hermeneutic circle, Van Manen (1990) outlined the following activities related to hermeneutical phenomenology: turning to a phenomenon, reflecting on the essential themes, writing a description of the phenomenon, and interpreting the meaning of the phenomenon. This process is similar to the process used in a hermeneutic circle and both of these concepts helped solidify a belief in the notion that human behavior takes place in the context of relationships and language is the central way that meaning is constructed and then conveyed. The meaning of an experience occurs through dialogue and reflection. Each participant in the study formed a relationship with the researcher through engaging in-depth dialogue and reflection in order to gain insight into the essence of their experiences as a dialectical-level teacher. The emphasis was on dialogue, through in-depth interviews between each participant and the researcher. Beyond the

dialogue alone, time was spent, as a researcher, reflecting on the stories shared and the stories not shared, as well as on the larger picture of these teachers as seen through their classrooms and interactions with students. In the end, the essence was unveiled, which according to Van Manen (1990) is

A universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that phenomenon (p. 10).

Rather than removing my presuppositions through bracketing as outlined in the Husserl philosophy, I used my background as part of who I am as a researcher (Connelly, 2010) and believe that this helped my understanding of the experience of the study participants.

Methods and Instrumentation

Data Collection Overview. This phenomenological study was designed to understand the essence of the dialectical-level reflective practices of middle-grade educators. Educators who consistently reflect at a dialectical-level and who teach at the middle level make up the participants of this study. This study mainly involved two in-depth interviews as well as one videotaped classroom observation and follow-up reflective conversation with each of the five participants. The data from all the sources were analyzed and interpreted for significant statements by the teachers and descriptions of the essence of dialectical-level reflection. Step two of the hermeneutic circle involves a structured analysis of all the data looking for themes or patterns of

essential meaning of the lived experienced. Analysis involved listening to the tapes and reading the transcriptions of both the individual and composite responses to the questions asked in each session. As words or phrases began to coalesce into common ideas, the phrases and words were regrouped by theme, as described in step three of the hermeneutic circle process. Further details about this process are provided later in this chapter.

Site Selection.

Two schools in a large suburban school district in Colorado were identified as possible study sites in order to ensure a sufficient number of volunteers for participation in the teacher classroom observations and interviews. My former work with building leaders and teachers in both of these schools and an understanding of the culture in both of these sites informed the identification of the two possible sites. Permission from the school district was sought and granted in order to conduct research. Strict adherence to the approved research proposal by the Institutional Review Board was followed throughout the entire research process. Five dialectical-level practitioners were identified from these two locations, as described below. Five participants became the chosen number as this is the minimum number of participants needed in a phenomenological study (Cresswell, 2007). If five participants could not be identified from these two sites, another site would have been added until five participants were identified.

Participant Selection

Five middle school-level teachers who reflect at a dialectical-level (as demonstrated by their responses to the initial survey) were identified as participants in this study. Once permission was granted from both of the site principals, teachers were invited to participate voluntarily in the phenomenology study via an introductory email (see Appendix D) and initial survey (see Appendix E). The initial email was sent out to every certified teacher in each building and asked for teacher volunteers who identified themselves as highly reflective practitioners and who were willing to answer the survey questions included in the email. If participants agreed to be included in the study, a box indicating interest and a space to include contact information was filled out as well as a separate consent form (Appendix F). If participants chose to complete the survey but did not want to be included in the study, he/she had the option to leave off any identifying or contact information and/or not complete the survey at all. Survey questions were based on Taggart and Wilson's (2005) Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes (Appendix A) and were completed electronically.

According to Creswell (2007), in a phenomenological study, it is imperative that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied (p. 128). Criterion sampling was used as a way to ensure that all individuals in the study represent educators who have experienced this phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007).

Participants needed to score at a dialectical-level on the initial survey and also identify themselves as willing and able to participate in this study. The five participants in this study all indicated both willingness to participate and scores that ranked them as dialectical-level practitioners. Through the follow-up interviews, further acknowledgement of an ability to reflect at a dialectical-level was uncovered based on their responses in relation to Van Manen's (1977) three levels of reflection. Of particular note on the survey was the qualitative response where respondents were asked to cite specific examples of their current reflective practices. These answers, combined with the quantitative score, were used to identify those participants who appeared to reflect at dialectical-levels. In other words, if their score on the survey indicated a dialectical-level, part of their written response on the survey translated to Van Manen's dialectical-level reflection description, and they were willing participants in the study, they were considered to be fitting participants.

Surveys were distributed by the principals who had the email information for teachers in their building, thus keeping the email addresses' names private until permission to be included in the study was granted. Participants were informed that the results of the survey would be sent only to me, the researcher, via email. The survey was created using Google forms and the results were set up to automatically be sent to my email. Once the surveys were collected, the results were analyzed by following the tallying guidelines provided by Taggart and Wilson (2005) to determine

a final score. A score below 75 indicated a technical-level; a score between 75-104 indicated a contextual-level; and a score between 104-120 indicated a dialectical-level. Survey scores between 104 and 120, as well as interest and permission to participate, were chosen to be included in the study.

The survey was available to participants from November 21 to December 6, 2011. This timeframe was in accordance to when I was granted approval by the IRB and only allowed for two solid weeks for interested participants to complete the survey so that the rest of the research could be conducted and completed during the 2011-2012 school year. Perhaps because of the tight timeframe there were only nine total responses to the survey; eight with contact information indicating an interest in being included in the study, and one anonymous survey. Even with such few responses, I was able to easily determine five participants for the study. The five highest scores were chosen as participants along with written responses that indicated classroom practices that correlated to critical-reflection. Additionally, all of these surveys indicated a willingness and interest to participate in the study. A description of the responses in relation to Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection is provided later in this chapter.

Participants

Participants were given pseudonyms in order to humanize the data and the research experience. Participants were coded as April, Bev, Carol, Dana, and Erik.

April, Bev, Dana, and Erik all teach at the same school site while Carol teaches at the other school site. Four of the participants are female and one is male. On the survey, April scored 104, Bev and Carol both scored 109, Dana scored 114, and Erik scored 106. April is in her sixth year of teaching, Bev is in her fifth year of teaching, Carol is in her thirteenth year of teaching, Dana is in her sixth year of teaching, and Erik is in his eighth year of teaching. All of the participants teach in the humanities department of their respective schools (language arts, social studies, drama/yearbook). A visual representation of this data is provided below:

Participant	School	Gender	Survey Score	Yrs. Teaching
April	A	F	104	6
Bev	A	F	109	5
Carol	B	F	109	13
Dana	A	F	114	6
Erik	A	M	106	8

Once the five participants were selected a follow-up meeting was held for the interested participants in order to provide further information regarding the study and to sign the second consent form (see Appendix G). This meeting was conducted individually, on the school site, in order to meet the needs of the participants.

The informational meeting with each participant included an outline of the process (see Appendix H) and timeline for observations and interviews and anticipated commitment on the part of the participants was discussed. All individuals were given the opportunity to ask questions and an appropriate consent letter was provided at the close of the meeting. None of the participants had any questions after hearing about the process and reading the information provided. Original signed copies were given to the researcher prior to conducting the research and participants retained a signed copy for their records.

Researcher Background Context

Van Manen (1990) states, “There is a difference between comprehending the project of phenomenology intellectually and understanding it ‘from the inside’” (p. 8). I have the benefit of understanding this phenomenon from the inside and have, therefore, brought this understanding to my study as a way to enhance the work while being careful to not let this understanding influence my interpretation and presentation of the data. Van Manen also states:

The type of reflection required in the act of hermeneutic phenomenological writing on the meanings and significances of phenomena of daily life is fundamental to pedagogic research (p. 4).

The very act of analyzing the data in a hermeneutic phenomenological study can be dialectical-level reflection in and of itself due to the questions that the researcher needs to ask herself (Cresswell, 2007). These questions include the following:

- Should I write about what people say or recognize that sometimes they cannot remember or choose not to remember?
- Has my writing connected the voices and stories of individuals back to the set of historic, structural, and economic relations in which they are situated?
- How far should I go in theorizing the words of participants?

By answering these questions, I, as the researcher, am engaging in dialectical-level reflection where I am concerned about moral and ethical issues in relation to both the participants and the readers and I am engaging in disciplined inquiry.

Instrumentation

Interviews. According to Moustakas (1994), in a phenomenological investigation, typically the long interview is the main method for data collection (p. 114). In a phenomenological interview, informal, interactive processes are used which allow for open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, 1994).

According to Van Manen (1990), the interview serves very specific purposes:

(1) it may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon, and (2) the interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience (1990, p. 66).

A general interview guide for the first interview was established in order to help facilitate obtaining information regarding the phenomenon but participants were encouraged to use those questions as a starting place, with freedom to move down a different path. They were told that I was going to ask them a series of questions but that they should not be concerned with how long they spent answering each question. In other words, I wanted them to speak as long as they needed/wanted about any given question. While it was important to me to adhere to the time frame I proposed (no longer than 45 minutes) for the sake of respecting the participants' time, I was open to having the conversation go in its own direction for each participant.

The first interview included questions that fell under the following categories: background, history, role models, teaching practices, and personal change (see Appendix H). Each interview was 30 to 45 minutes in length. Each of the interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed.

After the first interview, preliminary analysis was conducted in order to create follow-up interview questions for the final interview (see Appendix I). Field notes

were taken throughout the interviews and were reviewed during the analysis of the interviews.

Classroom Observation and Reflection. Participants were also video-recorded while teaching one class period. I chose to videotape only one class period so as not further disrupt the participants' day. Principal permission was granted for this (see Appendix J) and only the teacher was recorded. During the video recording efforts were made to mitigate disruption of the regular lessons and the participants were given a copy of the tape and the follow-up questions prior to meeting with me in order to allow for enough reflection time when possible. While the Hawthorne effect was a concern, participants all shared that while they had a heightened awareness of being filmed, they did not believe that they changed their behaviors in any way, they were simply more aware of their behaviors. Viewing video with participants can be seen as something of a "media ethnography" (Pink, 2001, p.89). This combines the notion of the researcher discussing the video with the participants while also working to understand how participants situate themselves as they view the video. For both April and Bev, there was an initial resistance to watch the videotape, mainly because they did not want to see themselves on camera. When further questioned on this, both April and Bev expressed a feeling of 'hating to see themselves' on screen. Carol, Dana, and Erik were more outwardly comfortable with viewing the tape but none of the participants expressed joy over watching themselves on video.

During the post-observation meeting with participants, the participant and I viewed the videotape together and questions were also asked (see Appendix K) in order to encourage participants to discuss what they were seeing in their own teaching in order to delve into Schön's (1983) research on reflection in action as it relates to tacit knowledge. Viewing the video with participants helped me, as the researcher, to further develop clear and appropriate representations of each of the participants (Pink, 2011). Using video as an observational tool is one way to help practitioners gain knowledge about their reflective teaching and tacit knowledge (Taggart and Wilson, 2005). The use of Taggart and Wilson's (2005) Video as an Observational Tool questions helped to create the questions used during this stage (see Appendix C and Appendix K). Field notes were also taken during this part of the research and were reviewed while conducting the analysis.

The interviews and observations were staggered and arranged in order to meet the needs of the participants and their availability. All interviews took place in the participants' classroom, during plan time. This set-up worked for most of the participants but there were many interruptions by students while interviewing Erik. While he was quick to rejoin the interview, it should be noted that his mind was constantly shifting between attending to a student and attending to the interview.

A summary chart of the dates of each interview and classroom observation is provided below:

Participant	Interview #1	Videotaping	Video Reflection	Final Interview
April	12/14/11	1/10/12	1/25/12	1/25/12
Bev	12/14/11	1/3/12	1/4/12	1/25/12
Carol	12/14/11	1/31/12	1/31/12	1/31/12
Dana	12/16/11	1/4/12	1/4/12	1/4/12
Erik	1/6/12	2/9/12	2/9/12	2/9/12

All interviews and the videotape reflections were digitally recorded and member checks were conducted to ensure fidelity to each conversation. The member checks were met with agreement from each of the participants.

Data Analysis

Van Manen's (1977) three hierarchical levels of reflection formed the theoretical framework for this study as I sought to answer the following research question: What are the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced educators?

All interviews were transcribed by an outside source and upon return of the documents, the transcriptions were read approximately over a dozen times while also

listening to the audio recordings. This immersion in the data took place in February and March of 2012, approximately one week after the final interview with Erik was conducted. This process was aligned with Heidegger's first step in the hermeneutic circle and Van Manen's (1997) notion of 'immersion' in the data. It was my aim at this time to get an initial sense of the data. During this first stage, notes were taken as the individual interviews were reviewed.

During the second stage, I sought participants' first-order constructs, according to the hermeneutic circle methodology. I began to highlight participants' specific words and phrases that directly aligned to the research questions and pulled these statements apart from the rest of the data. These words and phrases were then coded and recorded separately. As words or phrases began to move into common ideas, the words and phrases were regrouped and another reading took place in order to notice the commonalities. From there, I began to interpret each interview transcript to form a picture of that participant's data as a whole, which then informed understanding of each transcript such that a richer, deeper understanding of the phenomena evolved, thus engaging in step three of Heidegger's work.

During stage four, themes were developed from the first three stages and were verified by again reading all of the data. The themes emerged from the words and phrases that were noted above. This stage involved continuously moving backwards and forward between the literature, the transcripts, and the earlier analysis, moving

from parts to whole. From this process the interpretation of the research phenomenon of dialectical-level reflection evolved and I began to categorize the data. One logical way to categorize the data was by coding according to the outline in the first interview because subsequent conversations revealed further explanations in each of these areas: general definitions of reflective practice, history and role models, professional practices, and core beliefs about education. This in-depth interpretation helped identify meanings that the participants could not articulate, considering the complexity and tacit nature of the phenomenon being investigated, critical reflection.

In determining the universal or essential quality of a theme our concern is to discover aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is (Van Manen, 1990, p. 107).

From the categories, I began to think about theme. I started this process by grounding myself in Van Manen's statements about theme (p. 87) that provided a more in-depth way of looking at Heidegger's (1967) fourth step in the hermeneutic circle:

- Theme is the experience of focus, of meaning, of point;
- Theme formulation is at best a simplification;
- Themes are not objects one encounters at certain points or moments in a text. (Instead, themes are intransitive.);
- Theme is the form of capturing the phenomenon one tries to understand.

During step five, these themes were linked back to the literature and sub themes began to emerge. Van Manen (1990) states, “Phenomenological themes may be understood as the structures of experience” (p.79). I continually asked myself the questions posed by Van Manen (1990): *What is going on here? What does this exemplify? What is the essence of the notion of being a dialectical-level reflective teacher and how can I capture this by way of thematic reflection?* Themes were therefore identified by also asking the question: *Is this an essential theme in describing this phenomenon?* Once these themes were identified, I further analyzed this data and continually asked myself, “So what does this mean?” In other words, what have I learned about the essence of the phenomenon of dialectical-level reflective teaching? In considering my research question: What are the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced educators? I began to consider: (a) What are the positive outcomes of reflecting at a dialectical-level? (b) What, if any, are the negative outcomes of reflecting at a dialectical-level, and (c) Is dialectical-level reflection a worthy aim for educators?

During step six, I began to report on the themes and make connections to further recommendations based on the discovered answer to the research questions and in relating the discoveries back to Van Manen’s (1977) theoretical framework around the three levels of reflection.

The themes and the essence of the phenomenon are shared in Chapter 5 as well as recommendations for further studies and a discussion of the limitations.

Limitations and Statement of Bias for Research Purposes

Van Manen (1990) points out various limitations in conducting this type of research (p. 21) that should be noted in terms of this study. These limitations include the following:

Phenomenology is not an empirical analytic science; phenomenology is not mere speculative inquiry in the sense of unworldly reflection; phenomenology is neither mere particularity, nor sheer universality; and finally, phenomenology does not problem solve (p. 21).

The findings of this study are not generalizable to other teachers, site, or districts as this data is specific to these five participants in these specific settings. The purpose of this study was not to generalize, however, rather, it was to learn from the work of these educators and tease out potential strategies for other schools sites, districts, leaders, and educators about the phenomenon of dialectical-level reflection.

It is also important to note that the findings of this study were limited by the small number of participants and their educational backgrounds. All five participants came from a large suburban school district in Colorado, and four of the five participants were female. Further limitations with the methodology are detailed in Chapter 5.

Summary

This phenomenology was designed to understand the essence of the experiences of five dialectical-level reflective middle level educators. A qualitative design was used and included two in-depth interviews and one classroom instruction video reflection of five educators' beliefs and thoughts about reflective practices. Data from the interviews and the reflection on the videotaped lesson were analyzed using qualitative analyses. A discussion of the results in Chapter Four details the essence of the experience of these educators.

Chapter Four: Findings

This qualitative study, grounded in Van Manen's (1977) theoretical framework of three levels of reflectivity, examined the phenomenology of dialectical-level reflection in order to explore the assumptions in the field. The stated research question was: What are the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced educators? Five middle-grade educators who scored at a dialectical-level on Taggart and Wilson's (2005) Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes and who demonstrated dialectical-level thinking in their written responses, used as the initial survey, participated in this study. This researcher sought to give voice to these teachers in order to determine if Van Manen's (1977) highest level of reflective thinking, dialectical-level reflection, was a worthy aim for educators. Heidegger's (1967) hermeneutic circle methodology was used to analyze the data. Data were collected from the initial survey, interviews, and a reflection on a videotaped classroom observation. Each data set was analyzed according to the steps outline in Heidegger's (1967) hermeneutic circle in order to uncover descriptive statements in relation to both the phenomenon and Van Manen's (1977) three levels of reflection. From the categorization and analysis of the rich text, themes emerged from the voices of the five participants.

Initial Survey and Participant Profiles

To help gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants of this study, it is important to provide background information and initial survey findings. The initial survey (Taggart and Wilson, 2005) was used to identify participants who reflected at a dialectical-level (Appendix A). The survey provided 30 statements in which participants had to rate themselves as a 4, 3, 2, or 1 with 4 indicating ‘always always,’ 3 indicating ‘on a regular basis,’ 2 indicating ‘situational’ and 1 indicating ‘seldom.’ All participants scored themselves as a 4 or a 3 for every question with the following exceptions: April, Bev, Dana, and Erik all marked themselves as a 1 on question 29: I use a journal regularly; and Bev also marked herself as a 2 on question 30: I engage in action research. The score scale was as follows: technical-level reflection: a score below 75; contextual-level reflection: a score between 75 and 104; dialectical-level reflection: a score between 104 and 120.

April

April has been teaching for six years and was an eager participant in this study, as demonstrated by her being one of the first to return the survey with the permission form to be included in this study. April scored 104 on the initial survey, indicating dialectical-level reflection and showed indications of reflecting at Van Manen’s (1997) dialectical-level in her written response to the final question that asked for specific evidence of reflective teaching. Here, April wrote:

My question is often how is this student unique? How can I use this uniqueness to help this student achieve the learning objective?

This response alludes to April's ability to demonstrate Van Manen's 'disciplined inquiry' by continually focusing on how each student is unique.

April entered the teaching profession as a second career, has a Master's degree, and currently teaches two elective classes, drama and yearbook, to both seventh and eighth grade students. April spoke with enthusiasm and candor about her work as a teacher during each interview.

On the day of the first interview, before beginning the formal interview process, April was orally reflecting on the drama performance that she was in charge of the night before. She immediately began telling me about all of the flaws and problems and her inability to stop thinking about what she would have done differently. Her words came out fast, she barely stopped to take a breath, and her body language displayed that she was extremely worked up about this particular event. She shared how she had already orally processed the events of the previous evening with fellow colleagues and her supervisor, and through our informal discussion, she was already making plans to improve for next time. During this brief dialogue, April was demonstrating to me Schön's reflecting-on-action, live and in-person as well as her critical thinking about her practice while corresponds to Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection. In fact, April did this each time we met, saying hello and then quickly moving into a breathless account of something that had

recently occurred in relation to her job as a teacher and all of the things she was thinking about. Often these thoughts were highly self-critical and while from an outsider's perspective one would identify this participant as confident, her critical analysis of her own practice was a continual monologue. This systematic questioning of her practice is another example of how April's thinking correlates to Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

Bev

Bev is currently in her fifth year of teaching, has a Master's degree, and scored 109 on the initial survey. This participant was the very first to volunteer for this study and was interested in the entire process from both a participant's perspective as well as from a researcher's perspective. She teaches social studies on a team with both seventh- and eighth-grade students, half of whom are identified as gifted learners. Bev has recently been a cooperative teacher for a student teacher. Her written response on the survey included the following dialectical-level statements:

I evaluate each lesson throughout the day, making tweaks until I am happy with it. I have students reflect at the end of each unit and take their comments into consideration.

Through this written statement, it becomes clear that Bev engages in Schön's reflection-in-action, as she admits to making changes to lessons on a daily basis, not waiting until the end of a particular unit of study. She also takes students' opinions into account, thus demonstrating her commitment to ethical issues in relation to

meeting students' needs, an indication of her dialectical thinking as outlined by Van Manen (1977).

Bev may be described as highly responsive and enthusiastic about the research project. She was the first to respond to any of my emails or phone calls, the first to get each of our meeting dates on the calendar, and she was always fully in-tune during each interview. She was highly organized and neat, everything in her classroom was orderly and had a distinct purpose. During the interviews, this participant made a few references to wishing she had someone else to talk to and reflect with at work and there was perhaps a sense of loneliness in her voice. This participant made numerous references to working extremely long hours, after the audio recorder was turned off, admitted to a need to stay late that night and/or grade papers over a weekend or a holiday. Bev admittedly spoke about having a very difficult time turning things off and making time for herself as a person, not only as a teacher, thus indicating her constant thinking of both the decisions and the consequences of those decisions as outlined in Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection traits.

Carol

Carol is a self-proclaimed avid reader and writer who taught eighth grade language arts. Carol had been teaching for 13 years and also holds a Master's degree. She is also a cross-country coach at the middle level.

On the initial survey, Carol scored 109 and provided the following written statement regarding her reflective teaching practices:

Every lesson I teach is a work-in-progress. This means that I reflect upon and rethink each application of a lesson, often between classes, to ensure that my delivery and expectations are as clear and effective as possible. I am constantly thinking and rethinking, shaping and reshaping everything I say and do so my students can reach the goals I have set for them (and they have set for themselves). Being reflective means that I take the time each day, sometimes minute to minute in a single class period, to gauge the delivery and reception of my lessons—if a change needs to be made, it can be made on the spot. If a lesson does not go well, I ask myself a series of questions, often starting with, ‘What did I do wrong?’ This allows me to slow down and assess the tone, climate, pacing and objectives of a lesson so I can figure out any of the root causes for ineffectiveness.

Here, Carol directly states that she engages in Schön’s (1987) reflection-in-action, sometimes minute to minute, thus demonstrating one way that she reflects at a critical level. She also assesses the tone, climate, and pacing of a lesson, thus alluding to her ability to take into account social wisdom, another characteristic of Van Manen’s (1997) dialectical-level reflection.

The first time I entered Carol’s classroom, I felt completely comfortable. She does not use the harsh overhead lights, instead she has various lamps lit throughout the room. The desks are arranged into groups and there is a plethora of writing supplies available for the students to use in small baskets on each grouping of desks. Each time that we met, Carol ended up showing me some of her own writing, just as she does with her students. In fact, during our initial meeting, after the school day, two male students were still in her room, leafing through her writer’s notebook,

asking her questions about different pieces. Carol is surrounded by close friends at work and made mention of various friends who are also colleagues with whom she engaged in reflective conversations. Even after the audio recorder was turned off, this participant continued to share various instructional practices that she was employing this year, her enthusiasm almost palpable. Her ability to think critically about her practice and her constant questioning of her practice indicate dialectical-level traits of reflective thinking as outlined by Van Manen (1977).

Dana

Dana also has a Master's degree and is in her sixth year of teaching language arts to both seventh- and eighth-grade students, half of whom are labeled gifted and has also recently had a student teacher. Dana is also a self-proclaimed avid reader and writer and often became emotional during the interviews, due to her passion for her job and her students. She serves as chair of the department at her school and scored 114 on the initial survey, with the following written response:

I use a series of tools to collect ideas, attitudes, and understanding from my students. My favorite tool has been Google surveys. The students answer questions, and the system summarizes answers for me so I can make quick modifications to my instruction and/or content responding to their needs and wants. Taking quick surveys and providing time for students to reflect affords me great opportunities to reflect and respond. The content in this language arts classroom is for the students and by the students.

Again, like the other participants, Dana shows us her ability to engage in Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action, using technology to support her teaching. She

also makes no mistake in stating that the focus of the classroom is the students, thus demonstrating her social wisdom and ability to think beyond herself, traits identified as dialectical-level reflection by Van Manen (1977). At various times during our time together, Dana was brought to tears as she discussed her work and her students. Her emotions were very visible, and I felt that she had a strong desire to get across how important students are—not just her students—but all students. Her desire to meet the needs of her students—even those who require a different approach to learning (gifted students)—shone through more than any other trait during our time together. Her belief that students need to be pushed to think deeply and critically was very visible in her emotion, practices and words. In fact, when asked if she was the teacher she imagined she would be her response came quickly, “No, not at all.” And she went on to describe how different she is from the teacher she ‘played’ as a child; the teacher who stood in front of the classroom and taught her stuffed animals by lecturing and asking questions. Instead, she prefers to be a ‘guide on the side’ pushing students to make their own discoveries and uncover their own beliefs. This sense of efficacy and self-confidence are further traits that correspond with Van Manen’s (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

Erik

Erik teaches seventh-grade language arts and also serves as department chair for his department. Erik has been teaching for eight years and spoke with enthusiasm

about how this particular school year was going and admitted to feeling more confident than in previous years. He also has been a cooperating teacher for a student teacher and is the only male in this study. Erik scored 106 on the initial survey and described his reflections in his written response:

I constantly modify my teacher practice based on how the lessons go with the students. After a lesson, I immediately think about its effectiveness for student learning and make adjustments for the next class period. After the school day, I reflect on the entire day and make my plan for the following day accordingly. At the end of every class, I evaluate the lesson success and modify as needed. At the end of the day, I reflect on overall student success, and adjust the lesson for the following day.

Interestingly, this participant's response may indicate that he engages more in Schön's (1987) reflection-*on*-action more than he reflects-*in*-action, but it is difficult to gauge this, knowing that tacit knowledge is oftentimes difficult to articulate. I was interested in listening for examples of reflection-*in*-action as we moved into the interviews. His written response did indicate his systematic questioning of his practice, an indicator of Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

It was difficult having undivided time with Erik as students constantly came into his room to ask questions, seek advice, or get clarification. From an outside perspective, I noted how kind he was to each student and how he took a moment to really listen to their questions and give them a quick answer to placate them until after our interview was done. Erik also shared with me the books he used this semester and how difficult it has been trying to read each book in order to help ensure

that the book groups go smoothly. He was enthusiastic about the ‘theme’ his students were exploring this quarter and shared with me the journey they had been on and where they were heading with sincere excitement. Erik also reflected on his role as a co-chair of his department and his worries about how he was succeeding in this role. His ability to think critically about his practice was another indication of his dialectical-level thinking as outlined by Van Manen (1977).

Participant Reflection

While working with each of the participants, I resonated with their experiences. When these participants shared their own anecdotal stories, I found myself nodding in recognition, barely able to keep my own voice out of the conversation, because I could truly and completely empathize with exactly what they were saying, experiencing, and thinking about. I enjoyed our conversations more than any other part of this process and each time I left the participant and got into my car, I had to turn down the radio because my head was filled with loud thoughts about what I had just heard. Mainly, my thoughts were about how in awe I was of their practice and how excited I was to share their experiences through this study. In fact, I found myself wishing I could somehow connect these five teachers so they could act as supports for one another.

All five of the participants were eager volunteers for this study and readily found time in their schedules to complete each portion of the data gathering process.

During each of the interviews, all of the participants gave their undivided attention and were excited to share their thoughts on each of the interview questions.

Results

Descriptive statements were extracted from 15 verbatim transcripts as I began to explore the research question: What are the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced educators? The descriptive statements and observations were reviewed and analyzed by highlighting phrases that contained recurring images, ideas and actions. These phrases were analyzed and coded into the following categories: general definition of reflective practice (D), history and role models (H), professional practices (P), and core beliefs about education (C) as responses from all interviews seemed to fall within these general categories. Results are reported below, according to the identified categories and in accordance to the transcriptions and review of audiotapes. After coding, rewriting and listening, global themes emerged from an analysis across these categories and will be subsequently reported.

General Definitions of Reflective Practice

It was important to determine a definition of reflective practice through the eyes of each of the participants in order to crystallize this phenomenon from their experiences and perceptions. For all participants, it became clear that reflective teaching was completely interwoven with the students' abilities and needs and the desire to constantly improve one's practice in order to meet these needs.

Each response is directly tied into the needs of the students. Dana described reflective teaching as tightly connected to growth:

It's extremely important to be reflective in that that's where change happens. That's where growth happens, not only for yourself, but for your students. If you're not thinking about how you think or thinking about how you behave or thinking about how your students think and behave, then you're stagnant. And nothing happens in that state. Reflection has always seemed a necessary component to excellent pedagogy.

April echoed this notion of change and commitment to student needs and deepened it by identifying how it is the role of the teacher to adjust to the student

Reflective teaching has more to do with interacting with the children. They are not a book [and] they are not televisions or recorders that you're teaching... Kids don't want to learn about what will never apply to them. It has to apply to them and interest them. It's a dance. It's a dance in your mind going, 'Okay, three steps forward. Oh, I stepped on a toe, it's time to go this way,' and it's always changing. Reflective teaching is being in the present.

Articulating the notion of students taking center stage, Bev described reflective teaching

You can see it [reflective teaching] in the evidence, you know, a classroom where the kids are engaged and they love what they're doing and it's clear that the teacher loves what they're doing.

Carol noted

Reflective practice, for me, is trying something on the fly, reshaping it and fixing it until it really, really works the right way. It's in the relationships because you're reflecting primarily to make sure that your audience is getting what your audience needs.

Making thoughtful decisions regarding what is working for students is also echoed in Erik's response who described it thusly

I would define reflective practice as a teacher taking the time to think about what he or she is doing in the classroom with the students and then more specifically, how that's impacting the students.

Rather than defining reflective practice as looking back on an experience, each of these participants immediately brought up the students and how reflective practice is tied directly to their needs. This ability to consider the students' perspective and immerse oneself in the needs of others aligns with Van Manen's (1977) description of dialectical-level reflection.

For two participants in this study, it was stated that reflective teaching is an essential component of being a successful teacher. Bev stated

I don't know that you can be a fantastic teacher without being a reflective teacher because if you're not thinking about yourself and you're not thinking about them [the students], then you're just on autopilot.

Erik confirmed this:

Reflective teaching shows in the rapport with the kids. The more reflective you can be as a teacher, I think the more in tune you'll be with your students... it's the key to really successful teaching because you're in such a people-oriented business. Everything hinges upon your relationship with the kids.

To push the definition of reflective teaching a bit further, participants noted that reflective practitioners cannot be stagnant; instead, they must work to continually improve, even if that means coming face-to-face with their own flaws. Erik stated:

I just think that you're going to be basically opening yourself up to be a new teacher forever... You're going to get to know a lot of your flaws. And sometimes it's easier just to kind of ignore something really terrible that you did and you might not always look great to your kids or to your colleagues but the truth is, you're going to probably look worse if you think you're perfect.

April also spoke about flaws in this way

The challenge of being reflective is that you actually have to face what you didn't do right and that's hard because then what do you do with that? Reflection gives you something to deal with, whereas you could ignore it if you didn't reflect.

Dana further explained:

It's competition with yourself totally. I want my students to respect me, that's really important, but I have to respect myself. I can't respect myself unless I'm doing everything I need to do to be on top of my game. So if I allow the train wreck to happen over and over again, then it's not what I'm supposed to be doing. Reflection comes in that moment when you fear that you're not doing what's best for kids.

Bev's take on this was

I have to remind myself that there's not one right way to be a teacher. I beat myself up just as much over a bad lesson as I do over a problem with a family member.

For these participants, it is important to create a sense of community in the classroom in order to establish a safe environment to push students' thinking in a way that is relevant to their lives and lets students know that these teachers genuinely care

about them both on a personal level and as scholars in the classroom who reflect themselves. The ability to be open-minded and think about the needs of others to empower students is a further indication of their dialectical-level reflection, according to Van Manen (1977). Dana stated:

For the students, their engagement is directly connected to the fact that they're reflecting and I'm implementing their reflection into the curriculum... I want so badly to help my students see themselves as lifelong learners. I can't tell my students how important it is to read if I'm not able to talk to them about what I'm reading. I can't tell them to write if I'm not able to share with them what I'm writing. The same goes with reflection.

Dana's indication of caring and an activist's need for promoting equity and excellence for students supports her dialectical-level thinking traits.

Carol put it this way, "You carry them [the students] with you every single day. Your heart breaks every single day. But I come back for more." Carol also included this thought

I ask my students to reflect because I'm not going to be sitting next to [them] in their high school classes, but I want to be sitting next to [them] in their high school classes. I ask them, 'So what have we learned here that you're going to do there'?

This level of commitment to improved practice and deep dedication to their students was evident throughout the responses of all participants involved in this study and corresponded with Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflective traits. While the questions asked about participants' own reflective practice, they continually connected it to their students. Their choice to talk about their students

more than their own reflective practices revealed part of the nature of this level of reflection. Van Manen (1990) states that the human scientist “needs to be aware of the silence out of which and against which all text is constructed” (p. 112). The silence that was ‘heard’ here was the silence of talking about their own needs and practices. Stated differently, the participants all spoke immediately about their students. It appeared that they were much more comfortable talking about the object and purpose of their reflections than the actual reflective process.

History and Role Models

Interestingly, all participants engaged in reflection during their teacher-preparation program and were able to recall this practice quickly and easily.

Participants noted that the professors in the teacher-preparation programs not only required reflection but also many modeled reflective practice themselves that had a strong impact on the participants. Carol stated

College was a huge event in shaping my reflection. We had a lot of very, very small classes with a Socratic seminar focus and we were encouraged to think and explain and defend.

Dana even credited her own method of reflection as a teacher to a college professor

I believe that much of the reflection and the way that my reflection takes shape in my classroom comes from what I saw my professor role model. And to me, that was some of the most powerful teacher-preparation that I received.

Erik noted, “I think my professors were pretty reflective people,” and Bev said, “It was, it was a very big focus.”

While most participants had a difficult time attributing their own dialectical-level reflective practices to one specific person, it is of note that Carol immediately identified her father as a role model for reflection:

My dad is probably my mentor in being reflective. He just taught us to grow up and think about everything we do, not regret it, but to think through it and figure out how I'm going to do it the next time. I naturally learn more from mistakes than I do from being told the right way to do something. And I always had a chance as a kid to make those mistakes. So he let me fall down on my face and get scraped up and then let me pick myself back up and figure out how to do it right. I think that is at the heart of my reflection.

No other participant could readily identify a specific person in their lives who provided them with the gift of reflection, feeling more that they have always been reflective and work to surround themselves with other reflective people, both in their career as teachers and in their personal lives as well. Carol noted:

I like to surround myself with very thoughtful people. And I enjoy getting involved in intellectual conversations. Some of my best teachers have been ones who have slowed down and asked, 'Why are you doing that?' And that's in everything from music to teaching English to whatever I happen to be studying.

Dana explained

I think I've always just been a reflector. It's a tendency to wonder about the implications of my actions and the consequences of my behavior. I feel like I'm reflective every minute of the day.

This theme of being 'self-critical,' which is aligned to Van Manen's (1997) dialectical-level reflection, was also present when participants were talking about the definition of reflective practice and noted that reflective practitioners cannot be

stagnant; instead, they must work to continually improve, even if that means coming face-to-face with their own flaws. Erik thought about the type of people who tend to be more reflective and stated:

There's that kind of introvert stereotype of a person who's going to be a little bit more reflective and that used to be me. And now I can see that extroverts can be equally as reflective. So I've kind of, throughout different phases of my life, have been more extroverted or introverted. And after I got to a certain point in my life and I got a little bit older and a little bit more experienced, not just with teaching but with life, I realized how to make a conscious effort of being reflective. And that's really where I started to see a lot of results, not just with teaching but with my own life, with my personal life, my marriage.

Here, Erik recognized that reflection is a conscious choice where he seeks to work at an autonomous state, a trait identified as dialectical by Van Manen (1977). For the participants in this study, being around other reflective people was extremely important. In fact, most of the participants noted that they were sorry to see our time together end because they had so thoroughly enjoyed this time to reflect and talk with me. Rather than being put out by the time taken to conduct each of the interviews, they were saddened to see it end.

Reflective Habits

All participants talked extensively about how reflection was connected to certain professional practices. Providing specific examples of classroom behaviors associated with being reflective came easily for these teachers. In fact, specific professional practices made up the majority of the conversations with participants,

even when the audio-recorder was not taping. The participants provided detailed descriptions of classroom decisions that revealed values and metacognitive thinking examples consistent with Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflective traits. There was a great deal of congruence among their responses regarding student empowerment, reflective methods, work ethic, support structures, continuous improvement, responsive practice, and classroom communities, as described below.

Student Empowerment. Each of the participants provided numerous examples of how deeply they listened to students and allowed students to guide their practice. April recalled one specific example of how she did not let students opt out of engaging in the work of learning:

One kid had been kicked out of two groups in class and finally, I went, 'What are you good at?' I pulled him aside because I was getting frustrated and he was getting frustrated of getting in trouble. He goes, 'Well, I'm good at reading.' And I said, 'Are you good at reports?' He goes, 'Yeah.' And I said, 'Would you like to read my favorite Shakespearean play?' And I said, 'Are you advanced?' He said, 'Yes,' and I said, 'How about Othello?' And so I told him the story of Othello because I love the scene where he's strangling Desdemona. And I told him about that scene. And he went home and he got halfway through. He said, 'It's pretty hard to read. I kind of get it, but can I just read the last twenty pages and perform that?' And that was the whole point I was trying to get out of him in the first place! And so he ended up getting a 4 on the project because it was the scene that I had told him I loved. And he got it.

One can see that rather than reprimanding this student, April was able to empower him by seeking his perspective and focusing on his individual strengths. She supported him to make a positive experience out of a negative one. This example

shows her dialectical-level thinking about what is best for this particular student and her positive emotions were visible when she shared her story. This demonstrated how individual student successes fueled her passion for teaching, again a dialectical-level trait (Van Manen, 1977).

Bev shared that she sought student feedback and used it to make instructional decisions, thus demonstrating her willingness to be open-minded, a dialectical-level reflective trait as outlined by Van Manen (1977):

When I do skits to learn, I ask the kids, ‘Does this work for you? Do you feel that you learned? How well do you feel you learned your own chapter? How well do you feel you learned the other groups’ skits? Should I do this again?’ Some of the kids like it, some of the kids are okay with it and some of the kids don’t like it because no lesson will reach every kid. But if you’re being very reflective about your teaching practice and if you’re being very purposeful, then within a two-week period, every kid should feel that their learning style has been met.

For Bev, it was important to make sure that each student had his/her needs met within a focused amount of time. She spoke about consciously planning her lessons to ensure that she was utilizing every learning style, paying particular attention to those that don’t come as easily for her. This contemplation of students’ concerns relative to instruction planning indicates her ability to reflect at Van Manen’s (1977) dialectical-level.

Carol described one way that she placed students in the position of reflection. The way she chose her words indicated the respect that she had for students and her

concern with worth of knowledge, a dialectical-level trait described by Van Manen (1977):

I say, 'Tell me what you would tell me if you got to sit next to me when I graded this. If we were sitting out together in a coffee shop and you could say, 'I tried this right here. Did you see? Does it work?' You know that conversation. That's their chance in the reflection to really show off and be proud of the piece in front of them, and then to use it as sort of a scale for the next piece that we do. We can say, 'Okay, I tried this and it was successful or unsuccessful. And next time, I want to try this piece.'

Carol's ability to incorporate dialog within her response indicates a specific reflection, a critical reflection, where she is able to gain a deep understanding of a situation and generate solutions, exactly as Van Manen (1977) describes dialectical-level reflection.

Carol actively pushed students to think beyond just an activity and model reflections. She articulated the power of giving students a voice in the classroom. This willingness to care and put students first is further demonstration of her dialectical-level reflective abilities as outlined by Van Manen (1977).

Dana also spoke of giving voice to her students through their reflections:

I ask students all the time how could we improve certain systems. Independent reading, for example, I started with these kids in 7th grade and their independent reading program has literally been designed by them. And I think—I suspect—that my students participate in Independent Reading regularly because they are designing it and they know that I'm responding to their reflection and their suggestions.

Like Carol, Dana honored students' voices in the classroom as a high priority, thus demonstrating her ability to reflect at a dialectical-level as outlined by Van Manen (1977).

Erik also puts students first and continually empowers his students to inform him if his lessons are going well or not. "The feedback that you get from the cues of the students determines if the lesson's effective or not." This ability to care for the students and to systematically question his practices aligns with Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

All of the participants interacted with students in definitive ways. In other words, these teachers asked students to reflect on their work and then were able to make adjustments to their lessons and assignments based on this feedback from students. This ability to analyze one's own teaching and to reflect on decisions and consequences during the course of action is in tune with Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflective traits.

Methods of Reflection. In terms of professional practices, participants were quick to say that they did not have a formalized method of reflective practice. They stated that they did not journal in a formal way, a method commonly used in teacher preparation programs to encourage reflection. "Journaling feels fake. A journal feels like a diary where I would sit down and say, 'Dear Diary, I did this this today,'"

stated Carol. However, it is interesting to note that three of the participants found themselves reflecting in other written ways—and often. For Dana

I'm a sticky-note person. I'll take notes throughout the week and throw those in my planner and on Sunday, I take all of those notes into consideration for the next week. I usually call them 'considerations.'

For Carol, it looked like this:

I have my board, and I have my notebooks and all of my plans, my calendars. I mentally map out what I'm going to do and through my day. What am I going to do? How am I going to do this piece, how am I going to do that piece? How can I make it better than last time? That's all the conversation that I'm having in my head.

Bev kept track this way

I keep track every day of what I teach. I put little notes like, 'took too long' so that I can go back and look at it. It's not a formal journal but it's like real quick notes.

These are all examples of how these participants systematically question their own practices and reflect on decisions and consequences, as outlined in Van Manen's (1977) description of dialectical-level reflection.

For the other two participants, reflection was more of an oral or mental process than a written process. April described it in this way

I'm an oral processor... To me, it's communication and going more [*sic*] and finding out... I orally pick brains.

Erik talked about how reflection occurs like this, "Mostly it's happening in my head." Even though these participants didn't reflect in as systematic a way as the other three participants, this oral communication and critical thinking are still

examples of dialectical-level reflection as described by Van Manen's (1977) who states that systematically questioning practice is one indication of dialectical-level reflection.

Reflection, as a practice, took on many different forms for the participants in this study. There was not one single method that each participant engaged in; instead, the process of reflection appears to be more organic. Rather than planning the reflection and the method of reflecting, participants in this study just incorporated reflection into their everyday activities, in a natural, yet systematic way.

Work Ethic and Self-Efficacy. All participants expressed that they worked too many hours and were not able to turn off their minds. The responses to these questions began to answer my research sub-question that asked what the negative impacts of dialectical-level reflection might be. All participants reported that they work well beyond standard clock hours and mentioned regularly work in the evenings, on the weekends, and over breaks. An inability to shut off their own thinking about school and their students was prevalent among all participants, who were all very aware of this tendency and shared how they dealt with this.

Dana discussed the difficulty of working in this way:

I mean there are those dark moments. And I think it goes back to always wondering what the grass is like on the other side and that idea of, 'Oh, life would be so much easier if I could clock out at 5:00.' But then again, there's no reward to the kind of challenge that comes to being a lifelong learner. One of the purposes of reflection is to be able to understand you can't do all of this and everything will still be okay.

The tension between working long hours while recognizing the unhealthiness of that practice was evident in the participants' responses. Carol stated it thusly:

I have the luxury and the curse of not really having a family and I'm not married. And so I can do this all day long, and I will do this all day long. And I'll get myself completely lost in a dark room with my notebook and my ideas. And I won't eat. And I'll just completely forget. And that, one of those days, hopefully I have come face-to-face with the reality that this can't be a 24-hour job because right now it is. I think one of the dangers of being overly reflective is getting too emotionally attached to what we do.

Bev simply stated, "I'm awfully hard on myself." April is aware of her inability to turn school off and stated

I start getting frustrated. And I have to step away from it, enjoy life a little, bring positive things back in. And then I can go back to it objectively.

A work ethic without boundaries has the potential to be unhealthy and may indicate a negative outcome of reflecting at Van Manen's dialectical-level. This is a challenge that each of the participants in this study faced.

Participants also shared many details about their professional practices and beliefs that demonstrated a sense of self-efficacy, another trait of Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection. For example, both Dana and Erik are currently co-chairs of their departments and both felt confident in that role, sharing ways that they were leading their department. All of the participants shared their desire to continue teaching for years to come and all felt confident in their abilities as demonstrated in their sharing of student achievement results on the state test and common

assessments. These are all the traits of self-efficacy that may be contributing to their ability to stay resilient in the face of challenges (Gu and Day, 2007). Yost (2006) promotes critical reflection as a road to teacher resiliency and retention and the participants of this study demonstrate both critical reflection and resiliency.

Support Structures. Four of the participants specifically spoke about seeking colleagues to reflect with at both a personal and a professional level as another commonality in terms of professional practices. Taggert and Wilson (2005) suggest that facilitators who work with dialectical-level teachers should provide a forum where these teachers can explore their actions and analyze their decisions. Engaging with other practitioners may prove to be one such way to provide this support. Among the participants, there was a desire to surround oneself with fellow reflective practitioners and people for these participants. Erik highlighted, with enthusiasm, as demonstrated through his tone of voice and physical gestures, the structures in place at the school to support this need:

We have implemented structures—as a school—to help teachers reflect. It’s great to have time and space to do this. We have a little format we use in our PLCs that got things [*sic*] broken down into essential questions and an assessment prompt and we rate the skills in some of their readings that we’re going to try to attack together.

For Carol, reflecting with others was vital. This participant was also grateful for structures at school to help with this:

I've got a number of different people [to reflect with]. I've got family members who will listen and repay the favor reflecting on their own... and also my teammates. When we can pair off and just two of us can disappear and talk about an assignment and say, 'Look at this, this is what I did, this is what happened, this is how it didn't work, this is how it worked,' those are the most beneficial days.

April sought certain people in the school that she reflected with while Bev had this desire but not as many opportunities, "It would be nice to process with somebody else." As Taggert and Wilson (2005) suggest, it may prove helpful to Bev if her administrator worked to provide this connection for her.

Having one or two other professionals, in the same building, was seen as a desired structure for all participants of this study and I had this same need when I was a teacher in a building. Being able to share one's story with another person who 'gets it' is a great gift, one that will be considered as a recommendation for other educators and those who work with educators.

Continuous Improvement. Three of the participants specifically discussed being in a competition with themselves to continually do better. They were able to monitor their progress by seeking feedback from colleagues and superiors and observing student behaviors and achievement. Because of this competitive nature, participants were keenly aware of their own mistakes and misgivings as referenced earlier in this chapter.

While there was a sense of self-confidence and efficacy from each of the participants, there was a need to continually push oneself further still. Dana stated:

If I'm reflecting and I don't know the answer to something, I generally almost always will go seek the answer to the question that comes out of any kind of reflection. And I think that that comes from my competitiveness, the competitive edge to my reflection.

Carol described this theme of competition like this: "It's a constant battle of one-upmanship with yourself." This can also be exhausting for participants. In fact, Dana went on to say

You don't have to run around and do jumping jacks and do a tap dance to be exhausted. You can be exhausted because it's just like mentally how do I switch this so that it works?

April added to this parallel of physical exhaustion but in a slightly different way

It's the difference between working-out tired and sitting at a table all day at a conference tired. I can handle this tired but it's still tough.

The participants in this study were intrinsically competitive and this nature drove them to continually improve their own practice. This need to continually improve may also prove to be a negative consequence of reflecting at Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level. This exhaustion that comes from never being satisfied may not be a place that we should push all educators to go.

Participants sought out various ways to continue to grow and develop in their professional practices. For April, researching instructional strategies was key. For Bev, engaging in a district-wide book study was important. For Carol, being a part of

the Colorado Writing Project was a way to develop professionally. For Dana, being part of the Digital Educator Program was a way to continually push herself. And finally, for Erik, reading Young Adult novels in order to stay ‘current’ with the students was essential. While participants expressed positive emotions around these professional practices, this may be another place where reflecting at Van Manen’s (1977) dialectical-level has negative consequences. Engaging in these professional practices is time consuming and may contribute to participants’ inability to ‘turn it off’ and feelings of exhaustion. While we oftentimes push teachers to engage in further professional practices, we may need to be careful about how much pushing we give to those who reflect at a dialectical-level.

All participants could readily identify a specific area of focus that he/she was working on and could describe the actions he/she was taking to improve in those areas. This was all self-motivated rather than mandated by the school or district and indicate their willingness to look at alternatives and competing theories, traits that indicate dialectical-level reflection, according to Van Manen (1977).

Responsive Practice. All participants shared that they did not teach the same thing twice, but they made immediate changes and improvements from one class to another. Three of the participants described their first class of the day as the ‘guinea pig class’ and acknowledged that each class improved based on feedback from the previous class. This finding regarding their ability to fluidly respond and adjust their

practices to student needs came through in the video reflection interviews and is indicative of dialectical-level reflection as described by Van Manen (1977) where these practitioners reflect on decisions and consequences during the course of the action. This can also be referred to as reflection-in-action, as described by Schön (1987).

Dana described this professional practice, “The first period of the day... they’re like the little pancake, the first pancake.” Bev had a similar description and stated

The first class of the day is always the one that I’m paying the most attention to. And that’s where I’m making those on-the-go corrections, watching faces, you know is it working, do I need to go faster or slower, where can I emphasize...

In fact, Bev caught herself during the video reflection and said

First period it didn’t occur to me that groups would finish at different times. I changed a lot of things later in the day. There’s so much stuff that you can’t really plan for.

April had a similar view as the other participants, “My first class is always my guinea pig class.” For each of the participants in this study, changes are made between each class, in order to continually improve the lesson and indicate their ability to remain open-minded, another trait of Van Manen’s (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

Participants also routinely reflected-in-action during their lessons, based on students’ reactions to the work. These reactions included students’ level of engagement and their behavior. Some of this practice emerged during the interviews

when they defined reflective practice, but the discussions about the videotaped lessons demonstrated the breadth and depth of their reflection-in-action. Their tacit knowledge emerged as they viewed the videotapes. “I look at faces,” stated Bev. These types of non-obtrusive formative assessment were continually used in the participants’ classrooms as noted in the videotaped lessons. In doing so, Bev is again demonstrating her ability to reflect on decisions and consequences during the course of the action as described in Van Manen’s (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

Participants were able to articulate why they checked in with specific students or groups of students during our videotape reflection conversation. For example, Dana said while watching her videotaped lesson

It was obvious that they [a group of students] hadn’t discussed so that’s why I immediately bee-lined over there just to make sure that they knew I was aware.

These teachers worked diligently to seamlessly respond to student needs through their teaching practices, indicating a desire to bring moral and ethical issues regarding their students, to bear on their educational practices, as described in Van Manen’s (1977) third-level of reflection.

Classroom Communities. For all participants, there was a shared professional practice of taking extreme pride in their students’ work and creating a sense of community in their classrooms. In the videotapes one can see the participants taking time to check in with each student or groups of students during various places

in the lesson. This indicates participants' critical thinking and disciplined inquiry, traits of Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection. Participants also know their students well and understand that relationships are vital in their classroom.

Participants were seen greeting students at the door, checking in with students about their activities outside of school, and placing their hands on the shoulders of students at various points throughout the lesson. April shared, "You have to get students comfortable [in front of the class]. This comes first." By having this mindset, April is indicating her willingness to bring moral and ethical issues with her students to bear on her educational practices, a dialectical-level trait as described by Van Manen (1977).

Carol noted a particular student while watching the videotaped lesson. This demonstrated this teacher's ability to recognize even the smallest details, knowing how much these minute aspects of the day can impact students, another indication of her ability to dialectically reflect, as described by Van Manen (1977), as she was willing to bring moral and ethical issues around this student to bear on her educational practices:

The kid that was talking so much today isn't the one who usually engages like that. So I don't know exactly what it was that brought him into the conversation today other than the fact that he had a really rough weekend and didn't have his poem done yesterday and asked for an extra day and I gave it to him. So I think he just felt... ok, she's giving me a break and so he was totally into it.

For this participant, having a strong relationship with this student gave him the gift of feeling accepted in class and therefore wanting to make up his mistake of not having his work done by participating in class.

The development of classroom communities extended to various student groupings being utilized in each of the participants' classrooms as well as incorporating physical movement in order to increase students' engagement. When asked how students were grouped in Dana's classroom, she noted

Students do well in groups because I group them. And I know the kids. And I know that if left to their own devices, these guys would have been talking about something complete off-task.

By systematically questioning her own practices in terms of the best way to group students, Dana was demonstrating dialectical-level reflection as described by Van Manen (1977).

Engagement was recognized over compliance in the videos, as there was constant student participation and check-ins, thus demonstrating open-mindedness on the part of the participants, another dialectical-level trait as defined by Van Manen (1977). April said

The minute I'm doing something too long, I know it's got to change or else I'm going to have classroom management issues and they're not going to get it. They've got to be active because if they're sitting too long, I'm going to lose them.

It was clear that participants truly believe in their students and genuinely liked being around them. While I was in each of the participants' classrooms for the

videotaping, I could feel the community structure that was in place. Each of the classrooms felt relaxed and safe and yet there was a definite emphasis on thinking and learning and engaging with others. The teacher seemed to be a part of the class rather than 'above' the class, but still commanded the room and the respect of the students. The classes were all organized yet they weren't rigid. They were places that I could have stayed for a long, long time. Participants were able to reach this level of community because of their dialectical-level traits, as outlined by Van Manen (1977). In other words, by systematically questioning their practices, engaging in disciplined inquiry, and remaining open-minded, the participants in this study seemed to create welcoming and caring environments for their students.

All participants talked extensively about how reflection was connected to certain professional practices and there was a great deal of congruence among their responses regarding student empowerment, reflective methods, work ethic, support structures, continuous improvement, responsive practice and classroom communities. Without a doubt, participants' responses consistently and repeatedly represented Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection where participants were able to critically self-analyze and kept a clear focus on students.

No matter what the question was that was posed, the participants continually found a way to discuss the students and share their own critical thinking about their own practices in the classroom and thus demonstrated, again and again, traits that aligned with Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

Core Beliefs About Education

When participants were asked about their core beliefs about education, some similarities emerged among the responses. First, the importance of respecting students and caring about students—all students—came through for each of the participants almost immediately as noted through this chapter. This demonstrates an ability for these participants to bring moral and ethical issues around students to bear on their educational practices, a dialectical-level reflective trait, as outlined by Van Manen (1977).

Bev stated it like this

Kids need to know that their teachers care passionately about them and the subject they're teaching, no matter the student's inborn abilities.

Carol shared a similar thought

No matter who a student is, what a student's background is, they deserve to be loved and they deserve to be taught. They deserve to have the opportunity.

Three participants quickly identified the need for school to be relevant to students, also indicating a need to bring moral and ethical issues around students and

student learning to bear on education practices as outlined in Van Manen's (1977)

third-level of reflection. April stated

Kids don't want to learn about what will never apply to them, about what they don't care about. It has to apply to them and interest them.

Bev echoed this and stated

Learning has to be interesting and relevant for this generation or they're just not going to care which means it's really hard on a teacher to find those things that are interesting and relevant and hands-on.

Two participants discussed their belief in the capacity of students and a deep desire to move beyond rote memorization in order to help students become true learners and consumers, again, another example of how they are bringing moral and ethical issues to bear on their educational practices. Carol said

They will rise to a challenge. I can give them something that's pretty conceptual and pretty difficult...and they will rise to the challenge.

Dana got straight to the point, "I can't stand rote memorization. I think it's bullshit. I think it's stupid. You can quote me on that."

Two participants identified the importance of reading for all students. April put it this way, "A child that reads, learns... that shoulder-to-shoulder reading is so import. That's all there is." Erik said, "Kids should be learning through reading, writing, doing, and thinking." These statements represent April and Erik's moral opinions about students and education, which is again, a trait of Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

Finally, the importance of engaging students shone through as a core belief. Knowing the difference between compliance and engagement was important for the participants of this study. All participants described compliance as being ‘well-behaved’ and engagement as being ‘in-tune’ with the learning and teaching that is happening at any given moment. For Carol, engagement showed up as novelty, “Novelty belongs in every classroom. And novelty means to mix it up, it means to keep students on their toes. It means to give them something interesting.” By incorporating novel, or unusual situations into her classroom, she was able to keep her students engaged and in-tune with the learning and this was important to her. By recognizing students’ needs, Carol is again demonstrating her willingness to bring her moral and ethical issues to bear on her educational practices, as described in Van Manen’s (1977) highest level of reflection.

Again, the responses of the participants show a deep dedication to students and a strong desire to continually do what is best for them. The participants’ humility continued to shine through, and I felt myself feeling proud of these teachers as I listened to their responses.

Imagery of Reflective Teaching

During the final interview with the participants, I added a question that asked participants to provide a metaphor—on the spot—for reflective teaching. George Lakoff (1992) said this about metaphors, “The metaphor is not just a matter of

language, but of thought and reason” (p. 3). He also pointed out that metaphors are central to human thought. The metaphors that were shared by the participants while answering this question were more profound and more dialectically indicative in nature than the other interview questions. Metaphorical thinking requires one to make connections and compare, “the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another” (Lakoff, 1992, p. 1). I agree with Lakoff and believe that the use of metaphor helped to truly reveal the essence of Van Manen’s (1977) dialectical-level reflection in a new way.

When asked to provide a metaphor for reflective teaching, each participant paused only briefly and then responded with thoughtfulness, as demonstrated by their body language and facial expressions. Because of the in-depth responses to this question, each answer will be provided in full to be experienced and enjoyed by the reader.

April:

Driving. People that have been driving for a long time will often, they even say they can, driving drunk is not as much of a problem with a little bit of alcohol if you’ve driven for a long time because you do so much of it subconsciously that you don’t have to be a conscious driver [*sic*]. New drivers have to drive consciously all the time, which means—and teachers need to be conscious all the time. And that’s that in the moment, with-it-ness stuff. You have to be conscious in a way, looking around, being there. It’s give and take. Take what they’re giving. Don’t just subconsciously drive.

Through this metaphor, the dialectical-level thinking begins to show in her connection to being in the moment, reflecting in action, and thinking about others

rather than just yourself, all traits that Van Manen (1977) categorizes as dialectical. She also notes how new drivers, and new teachers, are much more conscious of their thoughts and actions while more experienced drivers, and teachers, can move into autopilot more easily which ties into Dewey's (1993) beliefs around primary experiences that do not involve intense reflection and secondary experiences that do require intense reflection. For novice teachers, their days are spent in numerous secondary experiences while those with more experience may encounter less secondary experiences and more primary experiences as they move to 'autopilot.' April identifies the importance of not staying in autopilot as a teacher and demonstrates dialectical-level reflective traits including the important of being aware of one's decisions as well as the consequences of those decisions, as described by Van Manen (1977).

Bev also chose a driving metaphor, but made a different connection:

It's like the difference between driving an automatic and a stick shift. You have to be so much more involved in being a driver if you drive a stick shift. You have to be aware of your speed and your pacing all the time. And you have to pay attention to the sound of the engine and more dials and you've got more pedals. You're juggling more things if you're a reflective teacher if you're driving a stick shift.

Again, Bev is taking her tacit knowledge, and is making it visible, through this metaphor. By noting to the importance of being aware of speed and pacing is like noting how one has to be aware of moral and ethical considerations all the time as well. Dialectical-level reflective practitioners, as described by Van Manen (1977),

juggle many things, like the impact of decisions on students and their ability to form their own voice and develop independent skills. This also aligns with Dewey's (1933) explanation of the two sub-processes that occur in every reflection. The first sub-process is a state of perplexity and doubt and the second sub-process is the actual thinking and reflection on the trigger. When a driver notices something going awry with their speed or pacing, this is the first sub-process. When one reacts to that concern accordingly, this is the second sub-process. These sub-processes also occur in the classroom, as Bev describes.

Carol, who is also a middle-school coach, shared this:

So many things are athletic or an athletic metaphor for me. And so, their materials for class are their notebooks and their books but we also talk about endurance, stamina, and willingness. And so everything is like running a race and figuring out how to get to the end of that race and be where you wanted to be. And how often do you check in? In my coaching I talk about not running a three-mile race, instead, run three individual miles. And the end of each mile, start again. For reflection, you get to the end of that first mile and you look back and think, all right, I'm not exactly where I want to be. What can I adjust? How can I change? Here comes a hill, what am I going to do? And that's the on-the-spot reflecting. At the end, hopefully when you look back over it, you ended up where you wanted to go.

For Carol, the notion of running a race is similar to teaching and demonstrates her dialectical-level reflection because here, she demonstrates her ability to think about moral and ethical decisions when she faces challenges, like running up a hill. She continues to think about her decisions, both during the race and afterwards, similar to how she behaves in her own classroom. This response also demonstrates her self-

efficacy and self-confidence, or her belief in conquering that hill and also the challenges faced in her classroom, also traits that describe someone who reflects at Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level.

Dana created this metaphor:

It's almost like taking a picture because I'm weird with taking pictures. I almost took a digital photography class because I want to become better at seeing something and saying, 'That's going to be a damn good picture,' and being able to just tweak my lens a little bit and take it. But I guess for me, it feels like photography would be a good metaphor because especially with a digital camera because you can look at it and you can say, 'Oh no, I don't have the right light,' or, 'Oh, wait a second, what if I got this angle?' or, 'What if I just move this branch over a little bit,' and then I go back and take it. And so I guess for me, the reflective teaching is like having that digital camera. Because you can look at the picture right way and say, 'Oh this is not right,' and then try to get it from a different angle.

This particular metaphor was especially poignant to me because the dialectical-level reflection is so clear. When this participant makes reference to asking questions while attempting to get a quality photograph, this is like asking moral and ethical questions in order to ensure best practices for students, essential components of Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection. She discussed how one must take both the decisions and the consequences into account when taking a photograph; similar to the same path dialectical-level reflective teachers take in their classrooms. By continually tweaking and altering one's view, Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action occurs and changes can be made in time to make a difference for students. And when she notes

how one might look at a digital photograph and immediately say, “Oh, that’s not right,” this is an example of thinking critically about one’s own practice, another trait that aligns with Van Manen’s (1977) dialectical-level reflection.

Finally, Erik:

The thing that comes to my mind is like taking a sober look at yourself in the mirror. I have my lights in my bathroom that are above the mirror, like right above the mirror. So it’s a very unflattering mirror to look at. Like I’ll go into the other bathroom in our house if my wife’s sleeping and I’m brushing my teeth in there, you don’t notice necessarily every little crow’s foot or blemish or the bags under my eyes as much. But in my bathroom mirror in my room, because of the way the lights are situated, you notice every flaw. And it’s kind of like that. You have to be able to look at your flaws.

This metaphor shows how looking in the mirror forces you to take a critical look at your own practices, another trait of Van Manen’s (1997) third-level of reflection. By being aware of both the good and the bad (or the flaws), one is able to move to deeper levels because every decision has a consequence and it is important to take the time to reflect on those decisions, even if the results were not what one was hoping for.

These responses were much deeper than some of the responses shared earlier in this chapter. Answering the metaphor question opened up a different way of thinking and brings to life Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) statement, “The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). Van Manen (1977) described dialectical-level reflective educators as those who think critically about their practice, including moral and ethical considerations, in

order to make decisions. Evidence of reflection at this level includes systematically questioning one's own practice, suggesting convergent and divergent theories, reflection of both the decisions and the consequences of those decisions during action, considering moral, ethical, and sociopolitical issues on one's own practice, and the ability to express one's self with efficacy and self-confidence both verbally and in written communication. These traits emerged from the articulation of metaphorical thought on the part of the participants.

These metaphors are examples of the deep level reflection and thinking that these participants engage in on a regular basis and took the study to a different place than the other questions seemed to take it. While the other interview questions helped to start the initial painting of these participants, it is only with the anecdotal stories, the things that are not said, and the metaphorical thinking that we begin to truly understand the essence of the phenomenon (Lakoff, 1992).

During the final interview, Erik said this, thus giving voice to the deep level of reflection that is continually going through his mind even though it may not have come through in the other questions.

Here, he clearly shares how moral and ethical issues come to bear on his educational practices, a dialectical-level trait as described by Van Manen (1977):

I'm constantly learning... [I'm working on] training the students how to think. I told them at the beginning of the year that I don't want to teach them what to think. And I know that many of them have a radically different worldview than I do and that's great. As long as I can help teach them how to think, I want them to have their own worldview.

Dana also articulated some of this deep-level reflection that is in her mind at all times, even though we may not have been able to push to that place due to the structure of the formal interview. Here she spoke directly to self-efficacy, a dialectical-level trait that Van Manen (1977) describes.

Education is about teaching students how to know the difference between a reliable source and a poor source, it's about teaching them self-efficacy...like I can give them a temporary shot of self-confidence. If I'm not teaching them how to look at a goal that seems impossible to achieve and giving them the tools and the stamina to get there, then I'm not doing my job.

The descriptions and metaphors shared here provided a richer, deeper look into the reflective minds of these participants. What these metaphors shared, then, began to paint a picture of an important theme and therefore essence that was uncovered through this study: these dialectical-level reflective teachers continually engaged in critical self-analysis and humility rather than a focus on their own achievement. These traits demonstrated their dialectical-level reflective habits, as described by Van Manen (1977). They were constantly focused on and thinking about their students and worked long hours in order to make sure that they were doing the

very best that they could at all times. While this focus and attention to the moral and ethical issues of educating students is a positive trait, some the negative impacts of dialectical-level reflection also emerged and will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Summary

The findings presented here included data from three interviews and a videotaped classroom lesson. Descriptive responses were pulled from each interview individually as well as from all participants as a whole and were sorted according to the following categories: general definition of reflective practice, history and role models, professional practices, core beliefs about education, and metaphors for reflective practice. These categories were articulated as findings in this chapter as a way to begin to allow the essence of the phenomenon of dialectical-level reflection for middle-grade educators to emerge from their lived experiences and perceptions.

To be with these teachers is to feel their passion and commitment to their job as an educator of children. To witness the way their eyes light up when they make note of a particular lesson or students, to see how they lean forward as their excitement grows as they discuss a particular incident, is to begin to understand the essence of this phenomenon and proved to demonstrated their dialectical-level behaviors as outlined by Van Manen (1977).

In Chapter Five, I will discuss and interpret the data through the themes that emerged and the important essences that eventually define this phenomenon. I will

also further address the research question and sub-questions and discuss the limitations discovered through the methodology, and provide recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

This qualitative study sought to explore the dialectical-level reflective habits of experienced educators. Additionally, the following sub-questions were pursued through this study: (b) What are the positive outcomes of reflecting at a dialectical-level? (c) What, if any, are the negative outcomes of reflecting at a dialectical-level?

Five middle level educators who scored at a dialectical-level and demonstrated dialectical-level written responses on the initial survey participated in this study. The findings attempted to look at the phenomenology of Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level reflection in order to explore the assumptions in the field of education. The essence of the participants' experiences of being dialectical-level reflective educators was explored and hermeneutic phenomenological research methods were used to analyze the data. Each data piece was analyzed to uncover descriptive statements in relation to the phenomenon of dialectical-level reflective thinking. The previous chapters described the research methods used to analyze the data. This analysis yielded the following categories from the integrated data: general definitions of reflective practice, history and role models, professional practice, and core beliefs about education. The metaphors that participants provided around reflective teaching proved to become its own category in how the responses to this question yielded deeply dialectical-level thinking as defined by Van Manen (1977).

In this chapter, I will describe further analysis and interpretation of the data that yielded global themes for this phenomenon as well as paint a more robust picture that describes the essence of the phenomenon of reflecting at Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level. Additionally, the research questions will be addressed in order to discuss the implications of the findings and recommendations for future research will be discussed.

Global Themes

From the data presented in the categories that were detailed in Chapter Four, themes began to emerge that began to fill in the final portrait of what it means to be a dialectical-level reflective teacher. These themes are: being present and engaged with students, critical analysis about practice, and the ubiquitous and tacit nature of reflection. These themes will be discussed below, followed by a description of the final essence that was revealed through this entire research process and the implications of these findings.

Being Present and Engaged with Students. To reflect at a dialectical-level means to be fully present, in the moment, totally engaged with students and the content, and being willing and able to adjust instruction as needed to meet the needs of the students. Van Manen (1977) describes this as disciplined inquiry, reflection-in-action, and open-mindedness that allows teacher to address moral, ethical, and sociopolitical issues in teaching. All of the participants in this study displayed this

behavior either through their videotaped lesson and/or during the interviews as well as in our casual conversations that took place before or after the formal interviews.

According to Van Manen (1977), to be a dialectical-level reflective educator means that practitioners have progressed to an autonomous state where each individual is in control of their own disciplined inquiry, reflection-in-action, self-actualization, and open-mindedness that allows them to address moral, ethical, and sociopolitical issues in teaching. In seeking to define reflective practice, York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, and Montie (2006) point out that one of the common themes found in the literature on reflective practice is thinking of reflection as “an active thought process aimed at understanding and subsequent improvement” (p. 4). The participants noted this as well, “It’s that continuous improvement cycle,” stated Bev. Carol articulated, “Reflection is a constant process.” To continually improve means to attend to these questions again and again, constantly striving to make improvements that will be beneficial to the students. While improvement is seen as a positive trait, for the dialectical-level practitioners in this study, this self-competitiveness and inability to turn off one’s reflection and critical thinking may be a negative attribute of reflecting at Van Manen’s (1977) highest level.

“If we hope to improve teaching we must encourage practitioners to practice their art with an eye towards improvement” (Cruickshank & Applegate, 1981). The ease at which the participants responded about their practices and their ability to

speak in specifics as well as being student-centered shone through in all of the interviews, for each of the participants and this was a positive trait of being a dialectical-level reflective practitioner. To note, participants did not say things like, “My students listen when I talk,” or, “I think my students are motivated,” instead they used specific examples that demonstrate their ability to be fully present while teaching and emphasis the importance they place on meeting the needs of their students. These teachers demonstrated how they were ‘in the moment,’ when they were teaching and I was able to witness this during the videotaped class. It was powerful to observe the teacher through the lens of a video camera. While each of the participants seemed a bit ‘nervous’ at the beginning of the class, within minutes I could see their shoulders relax and they appeared to be in ‘flow,’ fully enveloped in the nuances of the class, no longer thinking about the video tape and my presence in the classroom. Instead, they were acting as teachers, guides, caregivers, and supporters of both the content they were teaching and also the students that were working with. The danger in this, however, is that these dialectical-level practitioners are unable to ‘stop’ this thinking, even after the students leave the classroom and the school day ends. Each of the participants commented on a tendency to work very long hours and feelings of exhaustion at the end of the day. And so while the autonomy of reflecting at Van Manen’s (1977) highest level has some positive traits, it can also have some negative traits as well.

Critical Analysis of Practice. As noted in the literature review, for the third level of reflection, Van Manen's (1977) dialectical-level, educators are thinking critically about their practice, including moral and ethical considerations, in order to make decisions. Evidence of reflection at this level includes systematically questioning one's own practice, suggesting convergent and divergent theories, reflection of both the decisions and the consequences of those decisions during action, considering moral, ethical, and sociopolitical issues on one's own practice, and the ability to express one's self with efficacy and self-confidence both verbally and in written communication. This is the deepest level of reflection. The participants in this study all demonstrated these traits through their questioning of their own practices, an inability to 'turn it off,' and the articulate, self-confident, responses they provided during the interviews. These participants fully live their lives—their whole lives, both professionally and personally—as dialectical-level reflectors. The question then becomes: Is this a positive trait or are there negative consequences to this as well?

Carol provided an example of this:

I can think of this [reflection] in both aspects of my life, my teaching life and my regular life. In my teaching life, when I first started, when I student taught, I actually put together a portfolio and my theme for my portfolio was reflecting. It was about running the Pikes Peak ascent and on the way up stopping to look behind me.

To reflect at a dialectical-level also means that one must accept mistakes that will inevitably be made and learn from those mistakes. Erik reflected on this

If something went wrong, there will be this kind of nagging feeling that I have and I might not understand it until hours later. And then I realize that maybe I said the wrong thing and then I ask myself, ‘How would I do that differently next time?’”

This type of dialectical-level contemplation can be considered a positive trait as it may lead to improved practice. The danger in that nagging feeling is that for dialectical-level reflectors, this nagging feeling can lead to exhaustion, over-exertion, and an unhealthy balance between one’s personal and professional lives.

April put it this way

Reflection gives you something to deal with. The challenge of being reflective is that you actually have to face what you didn’t do right.

How one handles this challenge can vary from person to person and can therefore be a positive trait at times and a negative trait at times. If one loses the self-confidence and self-efficacy that are aligned with Van Manen’s (1977) highest level of reflection, then an inability to remain resilient may ensue. Gu and Day (2007) assert that feelings of self-efficacy can lead to teachers’ resilience. However, it can be a slippery slope to be constantly aware of one’s mistakes and misgivings and continue to remain confident and resilient, particularly when one is exhausted from the effort that it takes to reflect at a dialectical-level.

Carol reflected on this as a positive trait when speaking about her father as a role model and her sense of self-efficacy and confidence in her abilities is evident here

I always had a chance as a kid to make those mistakes. So he let me fall down on my face and get scraped up and then let me pick myself back up and figure out how to do it right.

The question then becomes: How do we allow dialectical-level reflective teachers to make mistakes and face the challenge of dealing with those mistakes while also remembering the other traits of these practitioners, including an inability to turn it off and a tendency to work to exhaustion.

The Ubiquitous and Tacit Nature of Reflection. For the participants in this study, Schön's (1987) notion of reflection-*on*-action and reflection-*in*-action was represented in various forms. Schön distinguishes between reflection-*in*-action (reflecting and changing one's behavior in the midst of action) and reflection-*on*-action (looking back after the fact). Reflecting-*in*-action ties in with Van Manen's (1977) description of dialectical-level reflection in that this type of reflecting in the moment occurs during this most sophisticated level of reflection.

In terms of reflecting-*on*-action, some of the participants reflected in an abbreviated written fashion, some needed to orally process with other people, and some commented on the mental aspect of reflection that took place in quiet moments during the day.

The key was that all participants had a systematic way to question their practice, a dialectical-level reflective trait as outlined by Van Manen (1977). Bev explains

I have a nice long drive home so I've got that time to think about how yesterday went. And then in the morning I've got the shower and the commute to think about what today is going to look like.

Regardless of the method of reflection, all participants noted that reflection was continuous and ever-present. This type of reflection-on-action can help with one's tacit knowledge, opening the doors for reflection-in-action where one has the ability to make changes in the moment. Reflecting-on-action may prove to be a solid starting place to make the act of reflecting a conscious choice and therefore easier, and more natural, to reflect-in-action and seems to connect with Van Manen's (1977) contextual-level of reflection where practitioners reflect on practices as they affect students' learning and on decisions relative to the context of the situation. One key difference between contextual-level reflection and dialectical-level reflection is the ability to reflect-in-action, during the course of the action.

For the participants in this study, contextual-level reflection (Van Manen, 1977), as demonstrated through reflection-on-action, was a large part of their teacher preparation programs and continues to be an important part of their practice today, as experienced teachers. According to Pultorak (1993), "Preparation of reflective teachers is an important theme in teacher education" (p. 288) and "the facilitation of

teacher reflectivity should be a vital part of teacher education programs” (p. 295). “It [reflection] was a pretty big deal. They had us write a lot of reflections,” explained Erik. And while other participants also had to complete written reflections, the authenticity of these assignments was questioned. “I was forced to have a journal for a couple of my class... I wrote them at the end. That’s not how I process,” Bev. For these participants, being mentored by professors who *modeled* reflection-in-action stood out more positively than being asked to reflect-on-action.

Dana noted

When I decided that my emphasis was education, I took many classes from her [a reflective professor] because she role modeled that reflection.

And so while the artificial nature of some of the assignments in the participants’ teacher preparation program may have felt unauthentic, the habit of this type of reflection has carried through as noted in the explanations of how participants take and find time to both reflect on the events of the day as well as preparing for the day ahead. The ‘forced’ activities helped to promote contextual-level reflection, while the modeling helped to promote dialectical-level reflection for these participants.

So then, what sets these participants apart as dialectical-level reflective teachers (Van Manen, 1977) was their ability to not only reflect-on-action, but to consistently reflect-in-action, much like the role models they had in their teacher preparation programs.

Schön (1987) states that when we reflect-in-action

We can still make a difference to the situation at hand—our thinking serves to reshape what we are doing while we are doing it (p. 26).

Schön argued that what separates skilled professionals from less skilled ones was the skilled practitioners' knowing-in-action or tacit knowledge

Competent practitioners usually know more than they can say. They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit (p. viii).

Through the videotaped observation reflection sessions, participants were able to articulate their tacit knowledge and pinpoint the exact places where they were reflecting-in-action. You can hear this type of reflection in Carol's response here, "...and that, *that* was just gauging where the room was. And they didn't seem very confident. They weren't looking at me, and so we worked as a whole class on that." Here, Carol is able to bring her tacit knowledge to the surface and identify her thinking at one specific moment during the class period.

While viewing the videotapes with the participants, they were able to articulate what was going through their minds when they moved to certain places in the room, talked with particular students, and changed course in the middle of a lesson.

Schön (1987) argued for reflection-in-action as a way to help practitioners increase their knowledge-in-action:

What distinguishes reflection-in-action from other kinds of reflection is its immediate significance for action. In reflection-in-action, the rethinking of some part of our knowing-in-action leads to on-the-spot experiment and further thinking that affects what we do—in the situation at hand and perhaps also in others we shall see as similar to it (p. 29).

The participants in this study all spoke at length about the changes they make, mid-stream, in their classrooms because of the reflecting-in-action that takes place in their mind while teaching. April said this while viewing her videotaped lesson, “That’s what I was doing there... I was going, “Oh, I’ve got kids sitting here that don’t need to be here for this part. Why would I have them sitting here?” While watching her videotaped lesson, Bev noted

I was thinking that we would do them [the readings] in order, but that didn’t make any sense at all. So I didn’t do that again.

They were eager to point out places where they were thinking about specific students and what extra support that student might need, thus demonstrating their ability to reflect on decisions and consequences during the course of the action, a dialectical-level reflective trait as outlined by Van Manen (1977). In the videotapes one can see the teacher move to sit next to a particular student or check in with a specific group of students and to hear the participant articulate their tacit knowledge

about what was happening is to hear them describe how they were conscious of what this student or this group might need to help reach success.

Taggart and Wilson (2005) suggest that facilitators who work with dialectical-level teachers should provide a place where they can assist these teachers in deciding the worthiness of their actions. In terms of what I discovered through the participants of this study, I would support these suggestions and would recommend the use of video taped lessons to help facilitate these conversations. In other words, dialectical-level teachers could use the videotape to make their tacit knowledge explicit and provide evidence for their decisions made in the moment. Taggart and Wilson (2005) also suggest that action research should be an outcome of reflective thinking at the dialectical-level and I would support this suggestion as well, also believing that the video taped lesson could provide evidence as to where to start one's research in the classroom.

The work of dialectical-level reflection seems to be composed of thinking that deconstructs process and results and reconstructions with student feedback. The metaphors shared in the previous chapter pulled the phenomenon together a bit more by providing imagery of the process of critical self-analysis and humility rather than achievement, all signs of dialectical-level reflection (Van Manen, 1977). The focus of dialectical-level reflection through the eyes of these teachers seems to be continually assessing the means rather than celebrating the end.

The Essence of Dialectical-Level Reflection

To pull the themes together and create a full, robust, and in-depth picture of these teachers is to share the lasting essence of what it means to be a dialectical-level teacher according to the traits provided by Van Manen (1977). The essence of this phenomenon lies in putting all of the pieces together as a whole in order to unveil the deeper meaning as touched on in the answers to the metaphor question in the final interview. Beyond the transcribed responses lies the bigger picture of these participants that includes their classroom, their natural interactions with students, their body language, and their willingness and openness to respond to the questions asked in this study. When taken together, as a whole, an essence emerges that can be used to pull all of this work together in a more solid way. From the structural and textural descriptions, this essential, invariant structure emerges (Creswell, 2007)

Being present and engaged with students, critical analysis of practice, and the ubiquitous and tacit nature of reflection that was expressed by these five middle-grade dialectically reflective teachers indicate that part of the essence of dialectical-level reflection is being ‘self-less.’ It means that the students come first, that nothing ever seems to be enough, and at times, it can be difficult to turn it all ‘off.’ Every interview question and discussion painted a picture of five individuals who focus on each individual students’ needs above all else, who are self-critical in that they were not looking at what they do well but instead, they continually focus on what is not going

right and how to make immediate changes to those problems, and who have extreme difficulty pulling away from the students and their work. While these traits align with Van Manen's (1977) description of dialectical-level reflectors: those who systematically question practices, reflect on decisions and consequences during the course of the action, demonstrate disciplined inquiry, and are concerned with equality, emancipation, caring and justice, what Van Manen doesn't address is the negative impact these traits can have on these teachers. Continually focusing on what is not going well and having a difficult time balancing personal lives with their professional lives are two ways that being a dialectical-level practitioner may NOT prove to be a worthy aim for all educators. Although we highlight and applaud the efforts of those who continually put students first and who are willing to go above and beyond, we may forget to take into account the negative implications these traits can have on these dialectical-level reflective practitioners.

What has been uncovered in studying these five dialectical-level reflective teachers, in accordance with Van Manen's theoretical framework (1977) is that they are not in this profession for themselves; instead, they are in this profession for the students. When reflecting at a level that includes moral and ethical decision-making and reflection (dialectical-level reflection), they are thinking about their students on a continual and constant basis. They believe that they can make a difference, because they are self-confident and possess a sense of self-efficacy, and they work tirelessly

day in and day out to do just that. They are fully committed to their work and while they face the same challenges as other teachers do, their self-efficacy and dedication to the profession and to their students contribute to their resiliency and allows them to keep going, which is a positive result for the larger context of the world of education. Thus far, the picture paints a compelling argument for making this level of reflection an aim for other educators.

However, the fear rests in what may be a slippery slope between self-efficacy and self-doubt when one is continually concerned with what did not go well and the challenges faced in the classroom. An inability to turn off their thinking, working extensive hours because they not only plan ahead, they take what limited time they have to reflect upon and rarely present the same lesson twice because they continually make changes based on students' feedback and their own perceptions of the lesson, may paint a slightly different picture of the dialectically reflective teacher.

While they are fully present in their classes, reflecting-in-action to ensure that each moment of each day is spent in honor of the students in their classroom, we are grateful for this trait and assign a positive label to it. However, because they place their students on a pedestal that may be higher than the pedestal they themselves stand on, we are at risk of losing these teachers to burn-out and exhaustion, a not-so-positive trait that is aligned with Van Manen's highest level of reflection (1977).

The participants in this study fit the exact description provided by York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, and Montie (2006) to describe a reflective educator. A reflective educator is someone who:

Stays focused on education's central purpose: student learning and development; Is committed to continuous improvement of practice; Assumes responsibility for his or her own learning—now and lifelong; Demonstrates awareness of self, others, and the surrounding context; Develops the thinking skills for effective inquiry; Takes action that aligns with new understandings; Holds great leadership potential with a school community; And seeks to understand different types of knowledge, internally and externally generated.

p. 16

It should be noted, however, that being dialectical-level reflectors, the participants in this study share traits that go above and beyond York-Barr et al.'s description. To be a dialectical-level practitioner means that the effective inquiry remains 'on.' It means that the need to understand different types of knowledge may lead to an imbalance between work and self. The teachers in this study never spoke (during the data collection of this study) about what would make their lives easier, as teachers; instead, they continually discussed how to make improvements and changes for their students, the true stars of the classroom. And while this can be noted as a positive trait, it must also be explored with caution as once can see how this need to continually improve can lead to exhaustion and a feeling of burnout.

This essence of 'servitude' is a result of these participants' ability to reflect at a critical-level. In order to fully serve their students, these participants must engage in

the traits Van Manen (1977) defines at the dialectical-level and involves social wisdom where morals and ethics are examined based on a particular set of values. This deep level of reflection highlights the need to consider the implications of one's actions while making decisions. They critically analyze their own practices and are able to articulate their work with self-confidence and a sense of self-efficacy. The participants in this study demonstrated, through their oral and survey responses, their ability to consider the implications of their actions while making decisions, in order to do what is best for their students. Therefore, on one level, it is indeed a worthy aim for other educators to reach for this level of reflection. However, the mirror image of this essence is a more negative image that includes exhaustion, long work hours, and an imbalance of personal and professional lives. It is these traits that make resist fully endorsing other educators to pursue becoming dialectical-level reflective practitioners.

Discussion of Limitations

While the essence has been revealed, it is still very important to note the limitations of this study. First, as Van Manen (1990) states

Experiential accounts or lived-experience descriptions—whether caught in oral or written discourse—are never identical to lived experience itself. All recollections of experiences, reflections on experiences, descriptions of experiences, taped interviews about experiences, or transcribed conversations about experiences are already transformations of those experiences (p. 54).

In this study, the participants eagerly responded to the interview questions and in doing so, provided a clearer picture of what it means to be a dialectical-level reflective middle school teacher. The global themes that emerged: being present and engaged with students, critical analysis about practice, and reflective patterns and habits give voice to the essence of this phenomenon as shared by all five of the participants in this study. The responses, taken with the bigger picture, lead to the fuller picture of the essence of the phenomenon.

That being said, as noted in the literature review, Shim and Roth (2008) conclude that

Sharing tacit knowledge seemed to require more intended, focused, and longer reflection than sharing explicit knowledge, because it was difficult to find articulated cues and explanations about tacit knowledge. Thus, time was needed for reflection on the tacit knowledge (p. 20).

A distinct challenge in this study was getting to the heart of the phenomenon through a somewhat artificial and limited method of interviewing. Rather than being able to fully immerse myself in the lives of the participants, I was limited to engaging in rather contrived question and answer sessions, even during the classroom videotape observation reflection. The methods employed here were clearly more artificial than a true phenomenological study where time and cost would not prohibit me from spending a considerable amount of time with each participant, learning about their dialectical-level reflective habits by observing their natural interactions and hearing them naturally articulate their tacit knowledge rather than in the ‘forced’ situations

that my methodology called for. And while the metaphors lead to deeper level reflection, this was only one question among many others.

As Creswell states in *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design* (2007)

A phenomenological study describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (p. 10).

I believe that this study is comprised of what the participants experienced and how they experienced it in relation to the phenomenon of Van Manen's highest level of reflection (1977). While I believe that my study was able to describe *what* the participants experienced, it perhaps came up short in describing *how* they experienced it. And while an essence can be shared, it is important to not the limitations in relation to the research questions.

While the participants in this study provided thoughtful answers and responses to each question, it became increasingly evident that dialectical-level reflective practices are in themselves tacit, and being able to fully articulate that tacit knowledge in a somewhat forced, somewhat artificial setting of an interview during plan time of a regularly scheduled school day was a challenge. Creswell (2007) points out that conducting interviews is taxing and

Asking appropriate questions and relying on participants to discuss the meaning of their experiences require patience and skill on the part of the researcher (p. 140).

This was a challenge for me, as an inexperienced researcher, and it was surely a challenge for the participants as well who faced constant interruptions from students

and colleagues during our limited time together. While the participants were also focused during our time together, the fact that this was during the school day, during a hectic time of year, cannot be ignored.

It should also be noted that in the interviews, there is a natural hierarchical relationship that is formed between the interviewer and interviewee. While I am currently working outside of this school district, I was once a part of the lives of these participants, either as a fellow teacher, mentor, and/or administrator. These considerations led to the following questions that must be reflected upon by me, the researcher, as identified by Weiss and Fine (2000):

- Are your interviewees able to articulate the forces that interrupt or suppress or oppress them?
- Do they erase their history, approaches, and cultural identity?
- Do they choose not to expose their history or go on record about the difficult aspects of their lives?

While I cannot answer these questions, I appreciate the pushing they do to my own reflexive thinking. These questions point to the important challenges that must be noted in this methodology. Again, while I do not know the exact answers to the questions, they become distinct limitations to this study and should be noted.

What *was* captured in this study was explicit reflection rather than natural reflection which mirrors what Shim and Roth (2008) conclude:

Sharing tacit knowledge seemed to require more intended, focused, and longer reflection than sharing explicit knowledge, because it was difficult to find articulated cues and explanations about tacit knowledge. Thus, time was needed for reflection on the tacit knowledge (p. 20).

While themes and recommendations and ultimately the essence of the phenomenon could be culled from the data, recommendations for further, in-depth, more natural methods of learning about the phenomenon will be provided in the hopes that the work that was started in this study will be continued through the work of other researchers.

Recommendations for Future Research and Educational Practices

Being present and engaged with students, critical analysis about practice, and reflective patterns and habits were common characteristics of the dialectical-level reflective practices of the participants in this study and led to the final conclusion that dialectical-level reflections challenge teachers to be relentless in their focus on student needs and engage in critical inquiry. This level of reflection is also ubiquitous and tacit in nature. John Dewey (1933) defined reflective thought as

Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends (p.8).

The emergent themes found in this study support Dewey's definition because the participants in this study all engaged in reflective thought. They demonstrated active,

persistent, and careful thinking and the implications of that thinking. From these emergent themes and the ultimate essence of this phenomenon, some implications and therefore recommendations can be made for further studies and research in this particular area in relation to the research questions.

Support. For participants of this study, the ability to fluidly move between personalization and de-personalization of the work was essential in maintaining a sense of overall balance in one's life. Bev explained it like this:

Too many people came into this profession because they thought it would be easy, because they thought well, I can go home at 3:00, which is definitely not me. If I just shove worksheets at them, technically I'm teaching. But the classrooms that I walked out of appreciating the teachers the most, appreciating what I'd learned the most... they were people who were very reflective and people who were very deliberate about what they did and then always were like, 'Ok, how can I make this different? How can I make this better? How can I make your life better as a student?'

The challenge, then, lies in being able to keep the above perspective but also letting go; the willingness to go 'above and beyond' for the sake of the students and yet not burn out. Interestingly, this finding contradicts a finding in the literature that stated, "If teachers do not take time to reflect on their work, they may become prone to burnout" (Farrell, 2004, p. 8) but fits with Gu and Day's (2007) work and Yost's work (2006) on teacher resiliency that recommends reflection as part of building resilience. One might think that the participants in this study could be at risk for burnout due to their inability to stop reflecting. However, none of them indicated a desire to leave the profession, their commitment and moral purpose might contribute

to their resiliency. We cannot assume that highly reflective teachers are not prone to burnout especially in relation to their admitted inability to turn their thinking off at times. A recommendation for those who work with these dialectical-level reflective teachers is to periodically check in with them in order to check on their balance and provide support in order to ensure their resiliency and keep them in the classroom. Knowing that self-efficacy is an important trait for resilience, it is important to help promote that self-efficacy and confidence among dialectical-level reflective practitioners in order to avoid the slippery slope into exhaustion and burn-out, two negative traits of this level of reflection.

Think about Carol's response to the question: Can you be too reflective?

It can feel like too much when you just never can settle and when you can't let good enough be good enough.

Because of this negative side of dialectical-level reflection, it is important to help dialectical-level reflectors know when it is ok to let go and not burn out due to perfectionism. There is a fine line between thoughtful reflection and burnout and we must be careful to ensure that we promote resiliency. Where some less reflective teachers may need a push to 'do more,' it is wise to not put this same pressure on dialectical-level reflective teachers as it could push these educators to burnout.

Embedded Time. For some of the participants, the ability to have time during the school day for authentic reflection with colleagues is an important piece to consider and a recommendation for schools and leaders. The use of Professional

Learning Communities and the time to talk with a colleague were both cited as specific advantages for two of the participants. Having time built into the school day is an essential piece in supporting deep-level reflection.

Erik stated

It's awesome, we have implemented, as a school, an actual structure to help teachers reflect. We can really get into the reflective discussion and start comparing what we're doing on a weekly basis and still have that structure to be reflective, which has been really helpful and encourages us all to spend a little bit more time doing that.

Being thoughtful about the pairings is an important consideration for administrators. Simply allowing time for reflection does not guarantee that reflection will indeed take place. Instead, it is important to think about how reflection will be promoted, assessed, and utilized. While structured activities seemed to promote reflection-on-action, a trait associated with contextual-level reflection (Van Manen, 1977), modeling what this reflection actually looks like, may contribute to dialectical-level reflection (Van Manen, 1977) and should be attended to by those who are setting up this time for teachers.

A further recommendation under 'time,' would be to allow time at the beginning and the end of regular meetings for teachers to capture or share their thoughts. Being able to reflect with others was an important gift for the participants of this study and so utilizing already scheduled time during the school day is one way to allow for this shared reflection time. Even setting up an expectation that teachers check in with a partner or teammate at the beginning of the day to set an expectation

for themselves and their students and then checking back in with one another at the end of the day would be one to support the reflective habits of educators in a building. These conversations could be recorded in a written fashion (linguistically or non-linguistically) or through an audio or video recorder in order to keep track of the progress of the teachers in an informal, qualitative way. This type of action supports Taggart and Wilson's (2005) recommendation that facilitators provide time for collegial support, input, and discussion in order to promote contextual-level reflection.

Opportunities for Reflection. One implication that came as a surprise was the timeline around videotaping the lesson and then discussing that lesson with the participant. What became evident was the power of not allowing too much time to pass between the taping and the discussion. Participants who had the time and the opportunity to reflect on the same day that the lesson was filmed, were more aware of their tacit knowledge than those who had multiple days or weeks between the taping and the discussion. When too much time had elapsed, participants seemed 'over' the lesson and didn't want to spend as much time pinpointing the tacit knowledge. Conversely, for those that reflected shortly after being filmed, their excitement level was still high and they were eager to share what was going through their mind as it was still very fresh and recent. This aligns with Taggart and Wilson (2005) who state that prompt feedback is vital to learning. Therefore, when videotaping teachers, a

common practice in schools, a recommendation would be to schedule the follow-up reflection sooner rather than later in order to keep the tacit knowledge fresh.

Implications for Mentoring and Coaching. For participants in this study, while they have a lot of practice with the skill of teaching, their dialectical-level reflectivity, as defined by Van Manen (1977) pushes them beyond unconscious competence (Kirkpatrick, 1994) where they have so much practice that the skill becomes second nature and can be performed without much thought. This also aligns with Dewey's (1933) theory of primary and secondary reflection where novice teachers have many more secondary experiences (experiences that require reflection) than those who have more experience. The participants in this study continue to have many secondary experiences because of their constant reflection. They were keenly aware of their every move and were ready to make changes and corrections as needed at any given moment. This attribute seemed to indicate that they were consciously competent about things that others might perceive as unconscious competence. How then, does a school maximize their strength to support teacher growth and development?

The survey used in this study could be used to indicate teachers' levels of reflectivity. Some teachers would be encouraged to reflect-on action (contextual-level reflection, according to Van Manen, 1977) while the dialectical-level teachers would be pushed to capture their reflections-in action (dialectical-level reflection). The

awareness of their actions indicates that these teachers could serve as mentors and coaches for other teachers. A common coaching practice is for the subject of coaching and mentoring to be observed. The results from this study indicate that mentoring and coaching could emanate from the observation of and debrief with a dialectical-level reflective teacher.

Deep-Level Questioning. The on-the-spot metaphors that were articulated by each of the participants reflected connections they were able to make because of the deeper level of questioning. What questions are we asking teachers to get to this type of thinking? Is there an opportunity to process in this deep way within the school day? A recommendation would be to pose questions such as these during staff times or via communication with teachers during team meetings or electronically, etc. and to not be afraid that this type of question or thinking is too much or too difficult. By probing and/or prompting our teachers to think at deeper levels may encourage them to reflect at deeper levels as well.

Modeling in Teacher Prep Programs and Beyond. Teacher preparation programs should continue to incorporate reflection into their curriculum. They would also be wise to encourage their professors to *model* this type of behavior in order to encourage Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action. The same can be said of leaders in a school. Knowing the strong impact this had on the participants involved in this study alludes to the notion of continuing this modeling both within teacher preparation

programs and beyond. Some participants specifically mentioned a staff member that coaches other staff members, particularly new teachers. April recalls, “The model of having a [coach] for new teachers’ did help.”

Honor Dialectical-Level Teachers. Finally, school and leaders should honor the dialectical-level teachers in their buildings. Dewey’s three characteristics of reflection, open-mindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness (as cited in Farrell, 2004), help us identify reflective teachers. These qualities all indicate that being a reflective teacher is a positive attribute in the field of education. Dewey states

To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the next meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealings with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind (1933, p. 87).

School leaders should thank the reflective practitioners in his/her building because like the participants in this study, they may be reflecting-in-action, and therefore continually making a difference in their practices for the sake of the students in the classroom. Seek these educators out as mentors and leaders and encourage them to open their classrooms to others while also being very careful to not overburden them.

According to York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006), the following traits are potential benefits of reflective practice and should be utilized with those who practice at a dialectical-level: Guidance for new teachers, or educators in new roles; Continuous learning for experienced educators; acting as bridges between

theory and practice; Taking into consideration multiple perspectives; Modeling the use of embedded formative assessment; Growth in cultural competence; Understanding of role and identity; Individual and collective efficacy; Strengthened connections among staff; Greater professionalism and voice. Rather than leaving these teachers alone because they've 'got it,' tap into their expertise and use it in a positive way but be careful to ensure that these teachers are finding a healthy balance between their work and their own life.

Presence. For participants in this study, being present with students came out as a clear finding. For those who work with dialectical-level reflective teachers, this same idea of the importance of being present for these teachers is also a recommendation. In other words, it is important to truly be there for these teachers, in the classroom, during reflective conversations, and in supporting these teachers to help them achieve balance and avoid possible burnout. By being present with these dialectical-level reflective teachers, leaders can remain in-tune with the level of balance of these teachers and perhaps help to remove some extraneous responsibilities, initiate cognitive coaching strategies to allow these teachers to process in deep ways, and determine how to utilize these teachers in encouraging reflective practice with other teachers.

Recommendations for Professional Development. As an educational consultant who conducts professional development trainings for educators, I believe it

is important to consider the varying levels of reflection in teachers while planning for professional development opportunities. For those who reflect at technical- and contextual-levels, basic reflective-building activities such as journal writing and self-surveys make for a solid starting place. However, to truly push teachers to reflect at deep levels, I recommend utilizing more authentic activities, such as visiting dialectical-level reflective teachers' classrooms in order to witness what reflection-in-action looks like. For this type of authentic professional development, it would be important to ask dialectical-level reflective teachers to share their original thinking for the day's lesson and then follow-up with them as they explain if/how things changed and what decisions were made during the lesson and why. This type of modeling proved effective for dialectical-level reflective teachers and therefore, may prove to be an effective strategy to utilize within schools as a way to help teachers become more reflective and to honor those who implore high levels of tacit knowledge and who use that knowledge to make decisions on-the-spot in order to increase learning for students.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Lessons learned from this study will be shared with the participants and the principal at each site as well as with district leaders in the hope that the findings will help inform future practices within schools in this district.

Suggestions for further studies include the following:

- expanding the study to include a greater number of participants and/or school sites and levels in order to further explore commonalities among dialectical-level reflective practitioners;
- incorporating quantitative research by correlating participants' level of reflectivity with student achievement scores;
- comparing less reflective educators with dialectical-level reflective educators in order to determine where these teachers share common traits and where they differ;
- in-depth narrative and/or case studies that focus on individual participants in order to create an even clearer picture of what dialectical-level reflection looks like both professionally as well as personally;
- a case study that also includes student data in order to determine what students say about these teachers;
- further phenomenology that utilizes data collection methods that uncover more natural ways that teachers reflect than through the use of more artificial means like the interviews used in this study;

- further investigate the possible correlation between teacher resiliency and reflection.
- further investigate how to ‘protect’ dialectical-level reflective teachers.

It is recommended that the educational field encourage further exploration of teacher reflection in order to ensure positive experiences and learning for all students.

Conclusion

This study examined the research question: What does it mean to reflect at a dialectical-level? Additionally, the following questions were pursued: What do dialectical-level reflective teachers reflect on? What does it look like to reflect for these educators? The findings of this study have important implications for educators who seek to reach dialectical-level reflection and for those who work with these educators.

The results showed that teachers who reflect at this level are able to not only reflect-on-action, but are able to reflect-in-action as well. These teachers were reflective not only in their professional life, as teachers, but in their personal lives as well, as explained in the interview sessions. To reflect at this level comes naturally for these participants and in fact, the challenge often becomes knowing how and when to ‘turn it off.’

Through this study, it was discovered that these dialectical-level reflective teachers reflected both on the content they were teaching as well as on their students.

There is a need to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom and lessons are often tweaked, revised, and altered in order to ensure that student learning and student engagement are taking place.

These teachers provided examples of a variety of ways to reflect at various levels. There were times when these participants made written notes, on sticky notes and/or in their plan books but more often than not, reflection occurred in the quiet moments of the day, particularly during the commute to and from school.

The voices of the participants in this study have stayed with me long after the interviews were completed. Their dedication to their students and to the profession inspired me and I find myself thinking of these educators, fondly, and often. These are the teachers that I want our policy makers and decision makers to make note of and observe and talk to. These are the educators that have made the profession of teaching so much more than simply a job; this is a calling. These are the classroom leaders that I want my nieces to have as teachers as I know that their voices will be heard in the classrooms of these participants and that their struggles will be recognized and addressed. I also worry about these participants. I fear that they will burnout too early and become overwhelmed by this profession.

The phenomenon of being a dialectical-level reflective teacher is powerful. To reflect at this level is a phenomenon where every student matters and that every lesson is essential. To spend months with these teachers was a gift that I hope others

will engage in through ongoing studies as well. It was both a sincere honor and privilege to give voice to these dialectical-level reflective teachers and to provide a space where their voices might be heard.

It should also be noted that through this work, I began to think about my own reflective practice in different ways, not just in remembering my role as a teacher in the classroom. In fact, the global themes that emerged across all participants rang true for myself as well. I noted that I, too, am fully engaged and present with my ‘students’ while I’m conducting a professional development workshop (my students are adult learners); I am continually engaged in critical analysis about my own practice often unable to turn off my thinking long after a workshop has ended; and I employ many of the same reflective patterns and habits as the participants in this study. I often find myself reflecting-in-action based on immediate feedback from my participants as well as reflecting-on-action through thoughtful time in the car or on the airplane after a workshop. I am aware of the dangers of burnout due to an inability to ‘turn it off,’ and I find myself drawn to those who are also reflective and are interested in engaging in reflective discussion and dialogue. I am a servant.

I am forever grateful for the opportunity to conduct this study with these participants and I look forward to continued work in the area of reflective teaching both in my own life and in the greater context of the field of education.

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Appendix A

Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes, Taggart and Wilson (2005)

Form 2.1 Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes

To explore your current level of reflective thinking, respond to the following questions. For each statement, circle the number of the indicator that best reflects your agreement:

- 4 = Almost always
- 3 = On a regular basis
- 2 = Situational
- 1 = Seldom

When confronted with a problem situation,

1.	I can identify a problem situation	4	3	2	1
2.	I analyze a problem based upon the needs of the student	4	3	2	1
3.	I seek evidence that supports or refutes my decision	4	3	2	1
4.	I view the problem situation in an ethical context	4	3	2	1
5.	I use an organized approach to problem solving	4	3	2	1
6.	I am intuitive in making judgments	4	3	2	1
7.	I creatively interpret the situation	4	3	2	1
8.	My actions vary with the context of the situation	4	3	2	1
9.	I feel most comfortable with a set routine	4	3	2	1
10.	I have strong commitment to values (e.g., all students can learn)	4	3	2	1
11.	I am responsive to the educational needs of students	4	3	2	1
12.	I review my personal aims and actions	4	3	2	1
13.	I am flexible in my thinking	4	3	2	1
14.	I have a questioning nature	4	3	2	1
15.	I welcome peer review of my actions	4	3	2	1

(Continued)

Form 2.1 (Continued)

When preparing, implementing, and assessing a lesson,

16.	Innovative ideas are often used	4	3	2	1
17.	My focus is on the objective of each lesson	4	3	2	1
18.	I feel there is no one best approach to teaching	4	3	2	1
19.	I have the skills necessary to be a successful teacher	4	3	2	1
20.	I have the knowledge necessary to be a successful teacher	4	3	2	1
21.	I consciously modify my teaching to meet student needs	4	3	2	1
22.	I complete tasks adequately	4	3	2	1
23.	I understand concepts, underlying facts, procedures, and skills	4	3	2	1
24.	I consider the social implications of so-called best practice	4	3	2	1
25.	I set long-term goals	4	3	2	1
26.	I self-monitor my actions	4	3	2	1
27.	I evaluate my teaching effectiveness	4	3	2	1
28.	My students meet my instructional objective when evaluated	4	3	2	1
29.	I use a journal regularly	4	3	2	1
30.	I engage in action research	4	3	2	1

Tally how many times you circled each indicator, write the number of each tally below, multiply by the indicator number, then add the subtotals to reach an overall score.

Indicator 4 × _____ = _____

Indicator 3 × _____ = _____

Indicator 2 × _____ = _____

Indicator 1 × _____ = _____

Total = _____

Practitioners mark the Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes instrument, tally the number of circled indicators, place the numbers on the line after the appropriate indicator on the second page, then multiply the indicator by the tally number to arrive at a subtotal. Practitioners then add the four subtotals together and write the score in the space indicated. Use the following scale of totals to determine the appropriate level of reflection.

Technical level = Below 75 Contextual level = 75 to 104 Dialectical level = 104 to 120
--

Provide for discussion following the use of this instrument. Here are some possible debriefing questions:

- What level(s) of reflection was (were) most evident? Why do you suppose this level was most prevalent?
- Which of the attributes do you consider to be the most indicative of a reflective practitioner?
- How might the information gleaned from completing this profile help you in achieving growth of reflective thinking?

Using the "Attribute Clarification" or "Card Sort: Reflective Thinking Attributes" activities in this chapter will support the use of the Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes and assist practitioners in defining a reflective practitioner. Stress to practitioners that this is only one indication of a baseline level of reflection. There are no right or wrong answers. No stigma should be attached to reflection level.

The following activities may be used after practitioners have completed the Profile of Reflective Thinking Attributes. The activities are intended to validate the attributes found in the profile and clarify reflective thinking and levels of reflection.

Appendix B

Rubric for Assessment of Reflection Taggart and Wilson, 2005

<i>Conceptual framework</i>	<i>Below expectations/ unacceptable</i> 1	<i>At expectations</i> 2	<i>Exceeds expectations</i> 3	<i>Greatly exceeds expectations</i> 4
Technology	Response indicates lack of adequacy to provide instruction utilizing appropriate resources and technology	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to provide instruction utilizing appropriate resources and technology at a technical level for the given situation	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to provide instruction utilizing appropriate resources and technology at a contextual level considering the suitability for each child and/or alternative situations	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to provide instruction utilizing appropriate resources and technology at a level that embraces the school culture
Assessment	Response indicates lack of adequacy to use formal and informal assessment that compliments instruction and supports the learning environment	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to use formal and informal assessment that compliments instruction and supports the learning environment at a technical level for the given situation	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to use formal and informal assessment that compliments instruction and supports the learning environment at a contextual level considering the suitability for each child and/or alternative situations	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to use formal and informal assessment that compliments instruction and supports the learning environment at a level that embraces the school culture
Reflection	Response indicates lack of adequacy to reflect critically and utilize the constructive comments from others	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to reflect critically and utilize the constructive comments from others at a contextual level considering the suitability for each child or alternative situations	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to reflect critically and utilize the constructive comments from others at a contextual level considering the suitability for each child or alternative situations	Response indicates thoughtful consideration of adequacy to reflect critically and utilize the constructive comments from others at a level that embraces the school culture

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Appendix C

Video as an Observational Tool, Taggart and Wilson, 2005

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REFLECTIVE
THINKING IN
TEACHERS

Task 45 Video as an Observational Tool

Topic: Reflective teaching; Using a videotaped lesson

Objective: The practitioner will analyze and reflect on videotaped episodes of his or her teaching to develop skills for recognizing levels of student achievement.

Materials: Lesson Plan Format (Table 5.9); Rubric for Assessment of Reflection (Table 9.4)

Time: 10 minutes preteaching; 30 minutes teaching; 15 minutes reflection

Procedure: Reflective teaching requires the development of a variety of abilities, attitudes, and knowledge. The best way to gain knowledge about reflective teaching is to observe what is happening with your own teaching episodes. Additional support may be obtained by requesting a mentor or colleague to evaluate the videotaped lesson using the same criteria for evaluation. This type of reflection on practice directly affects classroom instruction and student learning.

Videotaped classrooms can provide practitioners with a common framework for discussion, allow multiple viewings of the same classroom, and support multiple perspectives as all practitioners watch and reflect on the same video. The viewing and reviewing of classroom episodes can offer a powerful opportunity for reflecting on one's practice and articulating one's epistemological and pedagogical beliefs (Barnett et al., 2002; Freidus, 2000).

1. Use the Lesson Plan Format to prepare a lesson that you feel fits the academic needs of the students in your classroom. Videotape your lesson and review it to observe how well the strategies fit the subject and your students' needs. Use the evaluation questions below to assess the effectiveness of your lesson. Write a reflective narrative that evaluates your teaching. If possible, allow a mentor or colleague to evaluate the lesson using the same list of questions. Discuss openly the two sets of evaluations.
2. Replan the lesson, making adjustments as necessary. If possible, re-teach it to the same or a different group of students to see how effective the changes were. Re-videotape the lesson.
3. Add to your narrative reflection. Were the changes you made for reteaching effective? How do you know that all students learned the concepts or skills written in your objective?
4. Use the Rubric for Assessment of Reflection to analyze your reflection. Set a goal for the next lesson you will teach.

Evaluation: After viewing the videotaped lesson, the practitioner and mentor wrote a reflective evaluation of the practitioner's first lesson, describing the effects of each teaching strategy used. The following questions will help guide discussion and reflection:

1. What were the strengths of the lesson?
2. What were the weaknesses of the lesson?

Appendix D

Informational Email Text

Dear Staff,

The purpose of this email is to invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting through my doctoral program at the University of Denver. In order to volunteer to participate, you must identify yourself as a reflective practitioner and/or exhibit behaviors that support reflective practices. Participation will involve completing the survey attached to this email as well as attending one informational meeting where you will be given detailed information regarding this study. If you choose to participate, you will be committing approximately three to four hours of your time—total. Participation will involve a minimum of two interviews (30-45 minutes each) plus one videotaped lesson and follow-up discussion (30-45 minutes).

This study is examining the reflective habits of middle school teachers and will help further the field of education.

The attached survey must be filled out completely in order to be considered for this study. The survey should take no more than _____ minutes of your time.

If you are interested in participating, please complete the attached survey and provide your contact information in the space provided at the close of the survey.

If you have any questions, please contact me at tinaboogren@live.com or 303-931-5079.

Thank you for your time,

Tina Boogren

Appendix E

Initial Survey

Thank you for your interest in filling out this survey regarding reflective practices.

Please read the directions provided and allow approximately _____ minutes to complete this survey.

Directions:

Please respond to the following questions.

For each statement, circle the number of the indicator that best reflects your agreement:

- 4 = almost always
- 3 = on a regular basis
- 2 = situational
- 1 = seldom

1. I can identify a problem situation.
2. I analyze a problem based upon the needs of the student.
3. I seek evidence that supports or refutes my decision.
4. I view the problem situation in an ethical context.
5. I use an organized approach to problem solving.
6. I am intuitive in making judgments.
7. I creatively interpret the situation.
8. My actions vary with the context of the situation.
9. I feel most comfortable with a set routine.
10. I have a strong commitment to values (e.g., all students can learn).
11. I am responsive to the educational needs of students.
12. I review my personal aims and actions.
13. I am flexible in my thinking.
14. I have a questioning nature.
15. I welcome peer review of my actions.
16. Innovative ideas are often used.
17. My focus is on the objective of each lesson.
18. I feel there is no one best approach to teaching.
19. I have the skills necessary to be a successful teacher.

- 20. I have the knowledge necessary to be a successful teacher.
 - 21. I consciously modify my teaching to meet student needs.
 - 22. I complete tasks adequately.
 - 23. I understand concepts, underlying facts, procedures, and skills.
 - 24. I consider the social implications of so-called best practice.
 - 25. I set long-term goals.
 - 26. I self-monitor my actions.
 - 27. I evaluate my teaching effectiveness.
 - 28. My students meet my instructional objective when evaluated.
 - 29. I use a journal regularly.
 - 30. I engage in action research.
31. I consider myself a reflective practitioner: YESNO
As evidenced by: *(please provide examples)*
32.
____ Yes, I am interested in being part of a study on reflective practices of middle level educators. Please contact me:
- Name:
 - Email:
 - Phone:
 - Address:
- ____ No, I am not interested in being part of a study on reflective practices of middle level educators.

Appendix F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (1) The Dialectical-Level Reflective Habits of Middle Level Teachers

You are invited to participate in a study about the reflective habits of middle level grades teachers. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The study is conducted by Tina H. Boogren who can be reached at tinaboogren@live.com. This project is supervised by Dr. Susan Korach, Assistant Professor, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208 (skorach@du.edu).

This study will be conducted over several months, from October, 2011 through March, 2012. The study will include the survey included in this email, two 60 minute interviews and one videotaped lesson with follow-up discussion. This consent form is for the survey attached to this email. A second consent form will be provided for the interviews and videotaped lesson.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue participation at any time. The researcher respects your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S.

University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called The Dialectical-Level Reflective Habits of Middle Level Teachers. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in the survey portion of this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____ Date

Contact Information:

Email:

Phone:

Other:

Appendix G

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (2) The Dialectical-Level Reflective Habits of Middle Level Teachers

You are invited to participate in a study about the reflective habits of middle level grades teachers. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The study is conducted by Tina H. Boogren who can be reached at tinaboogren@live.com. This project is supervised by Dr. Susan Korach, Assistant Professor, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208 (skorach@du.edu).

This study will be conducted over several months, from October, 2011 through March, 2012. The study will include the survey included in this email, two 60 minute interviews and one videotaped lesson with follow-up discussion. The consent form for completing the survey is already on file. This consent form is for the interviews and videotaped lesson.

Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue participation at any time. The researcher respects your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Paul Olk, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-4531, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S.

University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-4820.

You may keep this page for your records. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called The Dialectical-Level Reflective Habits of Middle Level Teachers. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in the survey portion of this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have received a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____

Date _____

____ I agree to be audio-recorded. (Please sign.) _____

____ I do not agree to be audio-recorded. (Please sign.) _____

____ I agree to be video-recorded. (Please sign.) _____

____ I do not agree to be video-recorded. (Please sign.) _____

Contact Information:

Email:

Phone:

Other:

Appendix H

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

CLASSROOM RESEARCH

You are invited to participate in a phenomenological study that will study the reflective habits of middle level teachers. In addition, this study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This study is conducted by Tina H. Boogren. Tina can be reached at 303-931-5079 or tinaboogren@live.com. This project is supervised by the course instructor, Dr. Kent Seidel, Associate Professor, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, kent.seidel@du.edu.

Participation in this study should take about 3-4 hours of your time beyond today's informational meeting. Participation will involve a minimum of two interviews (30-45 minutes each) plus one videotaped lesson and follow-up discussion (30-45 minutes). The purpose of the videotaping is to prompt discussion between you and I. The camera will be directed at you, the teacher, and not the students and the regular lesson will not be impacted on the day of the filming. Permission will be requested from your principal in order to videotape and I will be the one who conducts the filming. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue your participation at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be kept confidential. I will be the only one who will have access to your responses.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please fill out the informed consent form.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records.

Appendix I

Interview Protocol #1

Teachers Interview Questions	
Question or Prompt/Category:	Response Notes
General: How do you define reflective practice? How do you know if someone is reflective? Is it important to be reflective?	
History: Describe your history with reflection. Have you always been reflective? In what ways?	
History: When did you become reflective? Was there a certain event that triggered your reflection?	
Rolemodels: Did anyone model reflection for you? Who and why?	
Rolemodels: Who provided you with the 'habit' or 'tool' of reflection?	
Teaching Practice: What does reflection look like for you as an educator? Can you share specific examples—what was the trigger, what was the process, how did you respond/react/change?	

<p>Teaching Practice: What are the benefits and challenges of reflection?</p>	
<p>Personal Change: In what ways has reflection changed you as a person/educator?</p>	
<p>Personal Change: How has reflection impacted you personally?</p>	
<p>Additional Questions: Are you open to sharing artifacts that support your reflection? (Journal entries, etc.)</p>	
<p>Interview Summary</p>	

Appendix J

Final Interview Protocol

Teachers Interview Questions	
Question or Prompt:	Response Notes
Is there a particular area that you are reflecting upon currently?	
How do you continue to grow and develop professionally?	
Have you continued your formal education in graduate school? Other venues? Do you have further future plans for this?	
Have you intentionally changed your job/school to work in a situation more in line with your beliefs?	
Are you the practitioner that you envisioned yourself being? How do you know?	
Are you initiating reflection within your learning community? (Team, department, etc.)	
Are you participating in collective reflection with staff, parents, and/or students?	

<p>Are you looking for ways to expand your influence past the learning community to the larger community of your profession, district, city, etc.? Do you believe this is important?</p>	
<p>Where do you seek evidence of your own effective teaching?</p>	
<p>Do you agree with the statement, “When people write about something, they learn it better”? Explain.</p>	
<p>Please provide three to five personal beliefs about educating students.</p>	
<p>Can you create a metaphor for reflective teaching?</p>	
<p>What is your understanding of action research? Is this a strategy you use in your classroom? Why or why not?</p>	
<p>Please share any final thoughts regarding your experience as a reflective practitioner.</p>	
<p>Additional Questions:</p>	

Interview Summary

Appendix K

Principal Permission for Videotaping

I, _____ (principal), allow Tina Boogren to videotape
_____ (teacher) during the regularly scheduled day at
_____ (name of school). I understand that Tina will film the teacher
only and the tape will be used only for discussion purposes with the teacher as part of
a research study being conducted by Tina in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Doctor of Philosophy. Filming of the class will not interrupt the regularly planned
lesson.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix L

Videotape Reflection

Teachers	
Interview Questions	
<i>*This interview will take place after a class period has been videotaped. The principal investigator and subject participant will view the videotape together and the principal investigator will ask the subject participant the following questions.</i>	
Question or Prompt:	Response Notes
Can you point out places where you were reflecting in action? How do you know?	
Were you aware that you were reflecting in action at the time that the reflection was taking place?	
Did you reflect after this lesson? What did that reflection look/sound like?	
What are the implications of reflecting on the type of practitioner you want to be?	
Additional Questions:	

Interview Summary

[Empty box for interview summary content]