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A Phenomenological Study on Reflective Teaching Practice

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Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON REFLECTIVE TEACHING PRACTICE

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Concordia University – Portland

College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership

Committee Chair, Barbara Weschke, Ph.D.

Joanna Gilmore, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers who engage in reflective teaching practice. This study was conducted at two elementary urban charter schools in New York City (NYC). A phenomenological research design was used to investigate the perspectives of twenty-one elementary school teachers who use reflective practice to enhance teaching effectiveness and promote students' learning. Purposeful sampling was used in the selection of the participants. Recommended participants were identified as reflective practitioners by their principal. Data was gathered using semistructured interviews, which were conducted in the fall of 2016. The data collection and analysis followed Moustakas (1994) outlined procedures. After each interview was transcribed significant statements were extracted, the analyzed statements generated six key themes and eighteen sub-themes. Data analysis and results revealed that teachers use reflective teaching practice to create meaning from their classroom experiences and enact necessary steps toward improvement. Through reflective teaching practice, participants were able to examine their teaching, assess students' learning, seek new ideas, and test theories to gain new perspectives on their classroom experiences. This research study is insightful because it adds to the body of knowledge about ways in which reflective practice supports teaching effectiveness and promotes students' learning.

Keywords: reflective teaching, reflective practice, problem solving, teaching effectiveness, student learning outcomes, and teaching practice

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the unsung heroes—the educators—
committed to reflection, growth, and transformation in education.

Thank you for answering the call to inspire and add value to students.

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As I reflect on this journey, all I can do is thank God for divine love and favor. Thank you, Lord, for showing me how to take the limits off so I could reach my full potential. I have been truly humbled by this experience. I know the best is yet to come.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Today's climate of educational reform around teacher effectiveness has made reflective teaching practice vital to improve student learning. Reforms such as No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) adopted in 2010, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed December 10, 2015, requires that teaching practices be of high standards so that K–12 students are prepared for college and careers (Executive Office of the President, 2015). This will require teachers to learn what is essential for instruction and to implement instructional practices conducive to students' learning. In response to these reforms, professional development has been instituted to strengthen teaching practices. However, according to Webster-Wright (2009), “despite changes in response to research findings about how professionals learn, many professional development practices still focus on delivering content rather than enhancing learning” (p. 702). Therefore, it is vital that professional learning include a process that leads to teaching effectiveness and students' learning.

Teachers may improve their teaching in many ways, one of which is using reflective teaching practice. Through reflective teaching practice, teachers can be taken through a process of critical thinking that enables them to examine their teaching practices, assess students' performance, and factor in strategies that can bring them the best results. As reflective teaching practice becomes the norm and part of the daily routine, teachers will be able to examine their teaching practices, implement alternative methods of teaching, and share best practices with colleagues. Researchers (Hall & Simeral, 2015; York-Barr, Somers, Ghore, & Montie, 2006) contended that reflective teaching practice promotes self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-regulation as teachers attempt to address the complexities and demands of their teaching. Therefore, for this study, reflective teaching practice will refer to an inquiry-based approach to

teaching that involves critical thinking and a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement (York-Barr et al., 2006). A phenomenological study sought to explore 20–25 elementary charter-school teachers’ experiences with reflective teaching practice in support of their teaching effectiveness. Examining their lived experiences has the potential of adding to the body of knowledge about ways in which teachers develop as reflective practitioners and the forms of practice that support their continued learning.

Background of the Problem

Darling-Hammond (2008) asserted that, the United States educational system has struggled to strengthen the teaching effectiveness of teachers despite professional development efforts. Therefore, if professional development is to be effective, “teachers need to be able to analyze and reflect on their practice, to assess the effects of their teaching, and to refine and improve their instruction” (p. 93). For this reason, teachers can benefit from instituting reflective teaching practice into the professional development process. For example, taking teachers through processes of reflection that promote self-assessment and collaborative inquiry of teaching practice. As a result of those processes teachers will be able to reflect on and build upon prior classroom teaching experiences. Moreover, teachers will be able to test theories and apply what they learn to refine and improve upon their teaching.

Another key point is the omission of teachers’ voices from the traditional professional development process. Professional development is usually prescribed and provided by outside experts who serve as “knowledge transmitters” that “guide teachers to solutions” (Bradley, 2015, p. 17). However, for professional development to be most effective, teachers will need the opportunity to reflect on their personal challenges and seek learning opportunities that connect to their classroom experiences (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Bradley (2015) also stated, “Perhaps if teachers saw themselves as pro-active knowledge constructors rather than passive knowledge transmitters, an untapped potential might be unleashed” (p. 123). Therefore, as teachers use reflective practice in their teaching, they will be able to identify areas of challenge, set instructional goals, problem solve, and identify resources that support their professional development.

In light of the need for teaching effectiveness, empirical studies have been conducted in support of teachers’ professional development. During the 2013–2014 school year, an educational reform organization, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) (Jacob & McGovern, 2015), whose mission is to offer solutions to school districts on how to approach and navigate quality education, researched three large school districts and one Charter Management Organization (CMO) in the United States. They found that despite the billions of dollars spent for professional development, teachers did not exhibit adequate progress in their instructional performance. The TNTP study found that although the districts studied were invested in providing teacher training, they were still unfamiliar with how to unlock teachers’ potential. From the teachers’ perspective, professional development appeared not to be tailored to their needs or the needs of their students. Teachers in the study also reported that follow through, coaching support, and opportunities for practice were infrequent. Subsequently, TNTP reported that teachers need forms of reflective practice that are consistent, support continuous professional inquiry, and provide actionable feedback to improve their teaching effectiveness.

Supporting their claim, TNTP found that teachers from the Charter Management Organization (CMO) showed more of an improvement than the district and that their school culture supported actionable feedback to teachers that informed instruction, teacher reflection, teaching practice, and student data (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). TNTP suggested that prescribed

interventions might prove insufficient in helping teachers to improve, and that what teachers really need is to be given a clear, deep understanding of their own performance and progress (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). Reflective teaching practice provides an avenue for teachers to identify their strengths and areas in need of improvement based on their classroom experiences. This practice can thus lead to a more personalized structure that promotes deep learning and a growth competence based on internally directed learning (Korthagen & Vasalos, 2010, p. 529). Having the ability to reflect on his or her experience can help the teacher to build a repertoire of strategies and skills that can be accessed as needed.

Although self-reflection can prove beneficial to teaching, reflection in collaboration with administrators, coach, mentors, or peers can provide teachers with even more new understandings about their teaching practice. According to York-Barr et al. (2006), reflective teaching practice in collaboration helps to expand a teacher's learning about his or her practice given the different perspectives of another person and when coached through a process of reflective inquiry. This can be done in partnerships, in a small group, or school wide. However, according to Wiener (2013), "Teachers in the U.S. spend less time in collaborative professional interactions than their peer countries" (p. 11). Therefore, creating opportunities for collaboration regarding reflective teaching practice can enable teachers to view multiple perspectives, acquire new knowledge, apply it to practice, and share outcomes with colleagues. Reflective teaching practice, whether in solitude or in collaboration, can thus support continuous growth in teachers and result in better student learning outcomes (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Although much of the literature concerning reflective teaching practice describes the importance and potential benefits of such practice, limited studies describe how teachers reflect

in the classroom or how to develop reflective practitioners (Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2011; Williams & Grudnoff, 2011). Consensus does not exist regarding how reflective teaching practice is defined and practiced among teachers (Tannebaum, Hall, & Deaton, 2013). Pre-service teacher education still dominates the topic of reflective practice (York-Barr et al., 2006). Marzano (2012) reported that K–12 education has not fully embraced reflective teaching practice; however, he expressed the belief that reflective practice can promote critical thinking and inquiry among teachers as they work to improve teaching effectiveness and students' learning. In view of this, reflective teaching practice can afford teachers the opportunity to evaluate their teaching, apply research-based methods, and deepen their understanding of content and instructional techniques that promote students' learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore 20–25 elementary, charter-school teachers' experiences using reflective teaching practice to promote students' learning. The information-rich description of their experiences can provide insight into how teachers reflect upon and engage in reflective teaching practice. These practices can then be embedded in teachers' professional development. York-Barr et al. (2006) affirmed professional development that incorporates reflective teaching practice could have a profound effect on a person's teaching. Therefore, insight into teachers' experiences can offer strategies in support of their continuous learning using reflective teaching practice. The following research questions guided this phenomenological study, allowing the researcher to arrive at the essence of teachers' approach to reflective teaching and the forms of practice that support their reflection.

1. How do elementary school teachers define reflective teaching?
2. In what ways do teachers reflect on their teaching?

3. What value, if any, do elementary school teachers place on reflective teaching practice?
4. What forms of reflection do teachers use? How do teachers report that reflection informs their teaching?

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its capacity to add to the literature concerning teachers' reports on the approaches and forms of reflective teaching practice that support their continued learning. Reflective teaching practice can be the catalyst for teachers to apply inquiry-based approaches to adjust, monitor, and refine their teaching (Hall & Simeral, 2015). This study provided teachers with a voice to share their experiences and can be shared among colleagues in support of their teaching effectiveness. Furthermore, teachers can benefit from professional development that demonstrates how to reflect on, and refine, their teaching based on their classroom experiences. Therefore, the research questions in this qualitative study were asked in an effort to explore teachers' experiences of engaging in reflective teaching practice and to describe how they use that practice to inform their work. To this end, a phenomenological method (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Seidman, 2013) was used to explore, understand, and describe the lived experiences of 21 elementary-charter-school teachers who used reflective teaching practice in their work.

Research Design

A phenomenological method was used to interview the participants in this study: elementary-charter-school teachers who engaged in reflective teaching practice. Purposeful sampling is recommended in qualitative research when selecting participants familiar with the phenomenon, to provide information-rich data (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, teachers from two

elementary urban charter schools were selected as reflective practitioners based upon principal recommendation. Recommended teachers were contacted and informed about the research process and the purpose of the study. Data were gathered through 40-50 minute interview with each participant. The interviews were intended to provide in-depth responses and to extend conversations with prompts that stirred reflection on, and reporting of, teachers' lived experiences with reflective teaching practice.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this phenomenological study on reflective teaching practice stemmed from constructivism and transformative learning theories that describe adult learners. According to Schwandt (1994), "Constructivism means that human beings do not find or discover knowledge so much as construct or make it" (p. 125). Similarly, founding constructivist theorists, Piaget (1958) and Vygotsky (1978), believed that experience was formed as a result of one's active participation in response to external stimuli. According to York-Barr et al. (2006), "When adults enter any learning situation, they immediately begin to filter information based on their relevant repertoire of life experiences. They identify commonalities and discrepancies and employ cognitive processes to make sense of the situation" (p. 33). Therefore, a teacher's use of reflective teaching practice can enable him or her to build upon prior knowledge, seek appropriate resources, and develop new strategies to improve on his or her work. The constructivist process of reflection influences what a teacher perceives, feels, sees, and learns (Costa, 2006).

This claim is bolstered by Dewey (1933, 1938) and Schon (1983, 1987), who expressed the belief that reflective practice is based on active and critical inquiry of one's experience with problem solving. Thus, reflective teaching practice can result in teachers re-examining their

teaching and using problem-solving techniques to improve upon their work. According to Mezirow (1991), “Not all adult education involves reflective learning; however, fostering reflective and transformative learning should be the cardinal goal of adult education” (p. 117). Similarly, York-Barr et al. (2006) maintained that, “significant learning for educators involves an active process of knowledge construction drawing from experience and other knowledge sources, making sense of new ways of thinking, and moving toward application in the context of practice” (p. 35). Therefore, the philosophical assumption is that through reflective teaching practice, teachers will derive meaning from their experiences, thereby improving on their work.

With reference to reflection in teaching, Dewey (1933, 1938), Schon (1983, 1987), and Mezirow (1991) described reflective practice as a deliberate response to discourse or dilemma. Mezirow (1991) contended that the pre-reflective stage starts with a problematic situation or perplexed feeling that questions perception, stimulates critical reflection, and facilitates change. This change can occur through internal dialogue or in consulting others’ perspectives as well. As a result, Schwandt (1994) asserted, “We continually test and modify these constructions in the light of new experiences” (p. 126). Therefore, teachers’ use of reflective teaching practice can enable them to process their own learning experiences and analyze teaching outcomes.

Through reflective teaching practice, teachers can become self-directed learners as they conduct research on teaching, apply diverse strategies, and record their experiences for future action (Sagor, 2011). Reflective teaching practice can enable teachers to put complex ideas into practice as they seek better results in their teaching. This practice can lead to an improvement in their teaching and improve student learning outcomes.

Assumptions

Despite the gap in the literature on how reflective teaching practice is defined and practiced among teachers, I undertook this research with the assumption that reflective practice is vital to teaching. I also assumed that through reflective teaching practice, teachers would be able to meet the demands of their classroom experiences by evaluating their teaching, engaging students in learning, and creating a positive learning environment. However, Edwards and Thomas (2010) contended, “All human practices involve reflection; and the concern should be less about whether it is happening, rather, within what particular context it is occurring and how it is occurring” (p. 404). Therefore, this study sought to explore and describe how 21 recommended K–5 teachers from two urban charter schools reflected on their teaching, and the forms of practice that supported their reflection.

Limitation

For this phenomenological research study semistructured interviews were conducted to gain the perspective of 21 teachers who engage in reflective teaching practice. Because the researcher used teacher interviews as the main form of data collection for the present study, the study may provide a limited view of teachers’ experiences using reflective teaching practice. For example using interviews as a main source of data collection limits the researcher’s observation of a teacher’s interaction with students, peers, and/or administrators using reflective teaching practice.

Scope

The scope of this qualitative research was to contact 20–25 recommended elementary school teachers from an urban charter school in NYC. My hope was that these recommended teachers, identified by their principals as reflective practitioners, might be able to provide

information-rich data with respect to the purpose of this study. Marzano (2012) asserted, “Before reflecting on teaching, a teacher must have a general sense of what constitutes effective teaching” (p. 11). Therefore, for this study, principals were asked to recommend teachers who demonstrated behaviors that constituted effective teaching practices, including engaging students’ in learning, evaluating their own performance, participating in collaborative inquiry, and fostering positive learning to meet students’ learning needs.

Delimitation

This study was delimited to elementary school teachers who worked in an urban charter school system and who were recommended by their principals as reflective practitioners. I undertook the study with the intention of exploring the lived experiences of teachers; for that reason, the study was exploratory and interpretive in nature.

Definition of Terms

Adult Learning—also referred to as *andragogy*, has been defined “as an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their ability to function as self-directed learners” (Mezirow, 1991 p. 199).

Constructivism—For this study, *constructivism* is defined as how teachers making meaning from classroom experiences using reflective teaching practices (Riegler, 2012; Schwandt, 1994).

Professional Development—refers in this study to training designed to support and improve teacher effectiveness toward student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

Reflective Teaching Practice—refers here to an inquiry-based approach to teaching that involves critical thinking and a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement (York-Barr et al., 2006).

Transformative Learning—refers in this study to the extent to which teachers strive to use reflective learning to either confirm or transform their teaching practice (Mezirow, 1991).

Summary

The current economic and political atmosphere in education has resulted in an increased focus on teachers' professional development. Educational reforms have required professional development to include initiatives that support teacher effectiveness in supporting student learning. However, researchers in a study found that despite the billions of dollars spent on professional development, teachers did not exhibit adequate progress in their instructional performance (Jacob & McGovern, 2015). Darling-Hammond (2008) asserted that if professional development is to be effective, “teachers need to be able to analyze and reflect on their practice, to assess the effects of their teaching, and to refine and improve their instruction” (p. 93). Therefore, teachers can benefit from professional development that embeds reflective teaching practice. This can lead to change in teaching practice and promote better student learning outcomes.

Chapter 2 of this qualitative study provides a more detailed examination of the literature that describes reflective teaching practices. Chapter 3 describes the phenomenological research approach and details the specific research methods and protocols of this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings and results of the study. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings, potential for further research, and conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Few would argue that teaching is not complex work. Teachers have the responsibility of providing a comprehensive teaching and learning environment that promotes students' learning. According to Hall and Simeral (2015), "Teachers face immense pressure (both within the education system and in the greater public) to demonstrate accountability for their performance" (p. 21). For this reason, traditional forms of professional development are implemented to support teachers in their work. However, researchers (York-Barr et al., 2006) suggested that reflective practice be embedded in teachers' professional development to support their continuous learning. This form of practice can lead to teachers' self-assessment of their classroom experiences and promote collaborative inquiry to foster students' learning.

Although reflective teaching practice is often touted as a benefit to learners, a clear definition is lacking. As Cornish and Jenkins (2012) pointed out, there is a gap in the literature concerning a consensus on "reflective practice" or even describing reflection among teachers. On the other hand, Edwards and Thomas (2010) argued that reflective practice in teaching should not be limited to a set of attributes, skills, and competencies to be attained, given that human practice by definition involves reflection. Rather, the focus should be on finding out within which particular practice reflection is occurring and on how it is occurring (p. 404). Therefore, for this study, *reflective teaching practice* will refer to an inquiry-based approach to teaching that involves critical thinking and a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement (York-Barr et al., 2006). For this reason, a phenomenological study was undertaken to describe 21 elementary charter-school teachers' experiences with engaging in reflective teaching practice. Reports could provide insight into how these teachers reflect on

their teaching and into the forms of practice that support their reflection and promote student learning.

This review of literature provides a conceptual framework that is based on constructivism and transformative theory in adult learners. Seminal works on reflection were drawn upon to provide approaches to reflective teaching. In addition, various forms of reflection that serve as models and framework for reflective teaching practice were explored. These studies provide insight into forms of reflection that promote self-assessment collaborative inquiry and influence positive change in teaching practice.

Conceptual Framework

Constructivism and reflective practice. Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1958) described constructivism in terms of children's cognitive development and as a way of learning through interacting with one's physical or social world. According to Riegler (2012), "Constructivism expresses the idea that mental structures and operations are actively constructed by one's mind rather than passively acquired" (p. 235). Likewise, Piaget (1958) did not believe that the assimilation of knowledge was passive; rather, learning comprised successive stages of adaptation in which the learner actively constructed knowledge by creating and testing his or her own understandings. Constructivism is also useful for understanding how adults connect new experiences to prior knowledge. Applied to this study, through reflective practice, constructivism allowed teachers to examine their teaching and to form new ideas by testing theories to gain new perspectives on their classroom experiences.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's constructivist theory, based on social learning, aligns with the notion of collaborative inquiry on practice. Vygotsky (1978) believed that community is vital to "meaning making" in learning environments and that higher-order thinking is constructed

through interaction with a mentor or coach. As teachers navigate through the complexities of teaching, reflective practice with an experienced colleague, mentor, or coach can equip them with strategies that address their learning needs. Researchers who study reflective practice suggest that teachers' learning involves self-reflection, as well as group interactions, to test assumptions, problem solve, and create meaning from experiences (Dewey; 1933; York-Barr et al., 2006; Ghaye, 2011; Cornish & Jenkins, 2012).

Reflection and transformation in adult learners. Andragogy, the professional perspective on adult education, has been cited as a measure for promoting the efforts of adults to function as self-directed learners (Mezirow, 1991). Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2014) provided framing concepts and principles that guide adult learning and can promote an understanding of how teachers learn. The andragogical model is based on six assumptions regarding adult learners:

Adults need to know why they should learn; adults need to take responsibility for their own learning; adults bring experience to learning; adults are ready to learn when the need arises; adults are task-centered or problem-centered; adults' motivation to learn is mostly intrinsic and includes job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life (p. 50)

Therefore, through reflective teaching practice, teachers can become self-directed learners as they examine their teaching, problem solve, and adjust their instructional techniques in response to their students' needs. At the same time, Mezirow (1991) noted that a "learner may also have to be helped to transform his or her frame of reference to fully understand the experience" (p. 10). Consequently, learning acquisition through reflection in collaboration can enable teachers to gain new perspectives in addressing specific challenges they encounter in their teaching experiences.

Mezirow (1991) further contended that transformative learning in adults stems from disequilibrium that stimulates reflection. The pre-reflective stage starts with a problematic situation or perplexed feeling that urges the practitioner to question perceptions, stimulates critical reflection, and facilitates change. Therefore, it is moments of dissonance that can promote reflection and cause teachers to explore new ideas that can contribute to a positive effect on students' learning. According to Knowles et al. (2014), "the richest resources for learning reside in adult learners themselves. Adult learners thrive in experiential learning environments that foster group discussions, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case methods, and laboratory methods, instead of transmittal techniques" (p. 45). Therefore, reflective teaching practice can afford teachers the opportunity to take ownership of their learning by assessing and refining their practice.

Review of Research Literature

Approaches to reflective practice. Although the current literature lacks a consensus for defining *reflective practice*, the concept of reflection dates back centuries, and is mentioned in professional fields such as nursing, education, and law (Schon 1983, 1987; Marzano, 2012; Schon, 1983, 1987). Historically, philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle viewed reflection as contemplative rather than passive thoughts toward action (Tannenbaum, Hall, & Deaton, 2013). Dewey's definition of *reflection*, based on scientific evidence, is what transformation theorists refer to as *validity* testing (Mezirow, 1991) and serves as a basis for problem solving that leads to change. However, Schon (1983, 1987) defined reflective practice as an intuitive process of *knowing in action* enacted by skilled professionals. His notion of reflective practice criticizes any technical form of developing reflective professionals. Instead, he recommended that reflective practitioners frame and reframe a problem, experiment, and

participate in continuous work with skilled professionals (reflection on action) to increase tacit knowledge and thus become more skilled. The seminal works of Dewey (1933, 1938) and Schon (1983, 1987) on reflective practice have been acknowledged in educational research.

Dewey (1933) defined reflective practice by explaining that the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought” (p. 9). This type of reflection is analytical and “affords teachers conscious deliberate insight to bring about learning, and encourages them to become students of their own teaching” (Danielson, 2008, p. 130). Therefore, through reflective practice, teachers will be able to focus on examining how their content knowledge and skills affect student engagement and may adapt processes to improve their teaching practice.

In Dewey’s (1933) republished version of *How We Think*, he elaborated on the experiences of a reflective practitioner, which include five stages:

1. perplexity, confusion, and doubt;
2. conjectural anticipation or tentative interpretation;
3. careful survey of all attainable considerations;
4. consequent elaboration on the tentative hypothesis to make it more precise and consistent;
5. taking a stand upon the projected hypothesis as a plan of action, which is applied, to the existing problem (p. 3).

This scientific approach can provide teachers with a systematic way of thinking about how to modify, adjust, and refine their teaching to improve students’ learning.

Another key point in defining reflection was Schon's (1983, 1987) perspective on reflective practice. Schon coined phrases such as "reflection in action" and "knowing in action" to describe how experiences, framing or reframing a problem, allow people to respond to the demands of their profession. Schon believed in the intuition of skilled practitioners that develops from experience in the field and from interaction with experts such as mentors or coaches. Schon (1987) argued that most practices might not be easily explained, noting, "We reveal it by our spontaneous, skillful application of performance; and we are characteristically unable to make it verbally explicit" (p. 25). However, Schon's theory can be refuted if hindsight, bias, and overconfidence affect the outcomes of intuitive decision-making. As Myers (2007) stated, "Hindsight bias and overconfidence often lead us to overestimate our intuition and scientific inquiry fed by curious skepticism, and by humility, can help sift reality from illusions" (p. 22). Therefore, teachers' use of "knowing in action" may prove to be misleading if assumptions are not validated or do not produce expected outcomes. In that case, Schon's (1987) reflection theory, reflecting on action, would be feasible as teachers reflect after the fact with an expert in the field, such as a mentor, an instructional coach, or an administrator.

Some researchers (e.g., Bradley, 2015; Shortland, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2006) expanded on Schon's definition of reflective practice in teaching to include models for collegial interactions that go beyond an expert or coach. These models include peer observations, action research, and professional learning communities (PLCs). Collegial interactions with peers can promote reflective dialogue that stimulates critical thinking toward improving teaching practices. Nehring, Laboy, and Catarius (2010) asserted that reflective dialogue signals reflection with others through language and is therefore at the center of learning. Therefore, reflective dialogue about teaching practices can lead to teachers' gaining multiple perspectives from their peers and

can positively affect their instructional decision making. According to Bradley (2015), for professional learning to be meaningful, it must be engaging, intellectually stimulating, and collaborative (p. 109). As a result, collegial interactions can stimulate reflection as teachers exchange ideas to advance their teaching and student learning.

Another perspective on reflective practice as advanced by Van Manen (1977) described reflective teaching practice in three hierarchical, dialectical levels: In Stage 1, technical reflection, considered the lowest level, is used to examine skills, strategies, and methods; in Stage 2, practical reflection is used to examine underlying assumptions of methods used; and Stage 3, critical reflection, considered the highest form, embodies both technical and practical reflection and focuses on the moral, ethical, and equity aspects of teaching. Furthermore, Van Manen noted that critical reflection, the “highest level of deliberative rationality,” was what every reflective practitioner should strive to achieve (p. 227). He suggested that the highest level of reflection demonstrated how educators think critically about their practice and included considering moral and ethical issues when making decisions. In like manner, Ziechner and Liston (2013) suggested that reflective teaching practice consists of moral and ethical responsibilities that challenge assumptions and include questions, such as what should be taught and why. Frequent use of reflective teaching practice can promote self-efficacy and self-regulation; collaborative inquiry sessions can provide ways for teachers to contemplate decision-making, gain new insight, and take alternative actions toward improvement (Hall & Simeral, 2015; York-Barr et al., 2006). The following questions were suggested by Ghaye (2011) for use in facilitating discussions and testing assumptions when engaging in reflective practice.

Values: How should I act?

Expectations: What ought I to do?

Context: What is actually possible here?

Decisions: Is my action justifiable?

Options: Could I have done anything better or differently?

Judgment: How far was this successful?

Strength: What is worth amplifying (getting more of, not less of) next time?

Learning: Who has learnt what?

Voice: Whose voice has been heard and whose has not?

Knowledge: Whose knowledge is worth knowing and why? (p. 3)

Through reflective teaching practice, teachers can enhance their awareness of how their actions affect student learning. The questions cited can facilitate reflection that encourages teachers to identify their strengths, reexamine their classroom theories, and construct new approaches to teaching.

Despite the lack of consensus in defining reflective teaching practice, researchers have viewed the practice's potential as having a positive impact on teachers' and students' learning (Marcos et al., 2011; Tannebaum et al., 2013). Furthermore, the current literature provides theories and practices that can promote self-reflection and collaborative inquiry and influence change in teaching practice. These forms of reflective practice are designed to facilitate teachers' learning as they experience uncertainty, reflect on practice, and discuss steps to improve on their teaching.

To this end, some researchers (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Marzano, 2012; York-Barr et al., 2006) referred to teaching frameworks, action research, peer observations, and cognitive coaching as forms of reflective practice that support teaching effectiveness. However, although research studies might provide an awareness of these practices, "there are still limited studies on

how to reflect in the classroom or how to develop reflective practitioners” (Tannebaum et al., 2013, p. 254). The forms of reflective practice discussed in the next section provide insight into how teachers learn using reflective teaching practice and ways in which such practice supports teaching effectiveness.

Forms of reflective teaching practice.

Teaching framework. Researchers Marzano (2007) and Danielson (2008) advocated for the use of teaching frameworks that promote self-assessment and collaborative inquiry and foster a common language concerning what constitutes good teaching practice. Their research-based teaching frameworks provided attributes for good teaching and a structure for analyzing teachers’ demonstration of knowledge of content and skills, engagement of students in learning, establishment of classroom routines and procedures, and willingness to take part in continuous professional learning. Both Marzano (2007) and Danielson (2008) suggested that teachers must examine their teaching practices, set growth goals, and use focused feedback to achieve those goals. For this reason, teaching frameworks that serve as tools for reflection can guide teachers in establishing teaching techniques toward improvement. Marzano (2012) observed, “All experts have complex models that delineate what to do in specific situations. In other words, they have models of effective performance” (p. 19). A recent report by Wiener (2013) shows how the framework for teaching, developed by Danielson (2012), was adapted to reflect Common Core State Standards’ (CSSS) expectations and used to observe teachers in Hillsborough County Public School (HCPS) in Tampa, Florida. The observation report revealed that most teachers struggled with using questioning and instruction techniques in Danielson’s (2012) framework for teaching. As a result, HCPS decided to integrate teaching techniques from the teaching framework with Common Core content. This situation revealed that teaching

frameworks can provide a process for reflection and can promote school-wide inquiry focused on a common language and teaching expectations. This can lead to the development of teachers' expertise needed to foster student learning.

Danielson (2012) created the *Danielson framework for teaching*, as a scale or rubric to assist professional teachers to self-evaluate their instructional efficacy. The Danielson framework for teaching (2012), "is a research-based set of components of instruction aligned to INTASC standards, and grounded in a constructivist view of learning" (Danielson Group, 2013). The twenty-two components are clustered into four domains and include descriptors of instructional practices toward effective teaching. The four domains include: planning and preparation, classroom culture and climate, instruction, and professional responsibilities. Danielson (2012) emphasized, "teachers' professional learning to include self-assessment, reflection on practice, and professional conversation" (p. 37). Therefore, using a teaching framework such as The Danielson framework for teaching (2012) can enable teachers to measure their own teaching performance against the framework and can facilitate discussion on effective instructional practices. Currently, teaching frameworks are used as an evaluative tool to measure teacher effectiveness. However, a teaching framework can be used as a guide for teachers' self-reflection as teachers examine components within the instructional framework to improve on their daily teaching practices. Marzano, Frontier, and Livingston (2011) discussed how an established model for good teaching serves as a way for teachers to use a wide range of approaches to teaching; teachers can generate and receive feedback without the involvement of a supervisor. Thus, a teaching framework can foster self-reflection, promote collaborative inquiry, and increase collegial dialogue to support teachers' improvement of their teaching. Furthermore, a comprehensive teaching framework can enable teachers to reflect on ways to direct their own

learning by evaluating teaching practices and sharing best teaching practices with their colleagues and the school community.

Reflective teaching model. Cruickshank's (1985) perspective on reflective teaching is similar to Dewey's (1933) and suggested using an analytical, cooperative, inquiry-based approach to reflective teaching practice. Cruickshank developed a reflective teaching model (RTM) at Ohio State University in response to recommendations for additional laboratory and clinical experiences for pre-service and in-service teachers. The premise of the model was to offer teachers practical experience with peers as they analyzed their own practices. The RTM allowed pre-service teachers to share their rationale for planning and implementing a particular instructional method as they took turns facilitating the same lesson. Through practice and feedback, the teachers were able to learn about their teaching behaviors and how they affected student learning outcomes. This affirms that dialectical thinking augmented by collegial interactions can have an effect on teacher reflection and can facilitate change in teaching practices (Bradley, 2015; Shortland, 2010; York-Barr et al., 2006). As teachers participate in a group discussion, multiple perspectives can enhance teachers' professional development. Therefore, instituting an RTM can create a professional learning environment that facilitates self-reflection and collaborative inquiry among teachers and encourages collective responsibility to improve student learning.

Cognitive coaching model. Cognitive coaching is rooted in the clinical supervision theory of Goldhammer (1969) and Cogan (1973) with a focus on enhancing the intellectual growth of teachers. Cognitive coaching, as described by Costa and Garmston (2002), is a nonjudgmental approach to reflective practice development, and it is informed by neuroscience research and constructivist theory. The model is designed to support strategies that facilitate

conversations between coaches and teachers about planning, reflecting, and problem solving. The mission of “cognitive coaching is to produce self-directed persons with the cognitive capacity for high performance, both independently and as members of a community” (p. 16). Cognitive coaching helps facilitate dialogue and inquiry before and after the observation of a lesson. Through reflective dialogue, teachers can develop an awareness and understanding that leads to their becoming self-directed learners. According to Dewey (1938), “What an individual has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with situations that follow” (p. 44). As a result, cognitive coaching can allow teachers to develop as reflective practitioners and to become more skilled in their teaching practice. As teachers reflect with a coach, assumptions and theories can be tested toward improvement of teaching practices. This practice can lead to teachers generating new ideas and incorporating teaching practices that best serve their students. Open-ended questions about teaching practices can elicit responses that enable teachers to critically reflect as they decide upon a course of action. Cognitive coaching enables teachers to self-monitor, self-evaluate, and self-assess their teaching practices.

Some empirical research has been conducted on cognitive coaching. For example, Bjerken (2013) conducted a case study on teachers’ perceptions of cognitive coaching on their professional practice; the teachers identified experiencing an improved ability to reflect, which convinced them to make this a habitual form of their teaching practice. The report indicates that the teachers perceived an increase in their reflection due to cognitive coaching. Their experience with cognitive coaching enabled them to think deeply about how to refine their instructional methods in efforts to meet the needs of their students. Therefore, systematic efforts to support

reflective teaching practice such as cognitive coaching can encourage the continuous growth of teachers in their professional development.

Peer observation model. Observations are often known to be evaluative, summative, and used to make staffing decisions. However, peer observations can serve as a nonjudgmental approach to teachers' continuous learning and improvement of classroom practices (Hammersely-Fletcher & Orsmond, 2005; Peel, 2005; Shortland, 2010). Furthermore, administrators who might observe teachers three times a year could miss opportunities to engage teachers in reflective dialogue that promotes continuous learning. On the other hand, peer observations can afford teachers the advantage of viewing each other's performance on a more regular basis, participating in reflective dialogue, and providing each other with actionable feedback to guide professional development.

Peer observation involves an observer and the observed; it is often conducted between colleagues. The purpose of peer observation is for the colleague to provide descriptive feedback to the observed to strengthen learning and teaching practices. Peer observations include four phases to keep the process focused and reflective: a pre-observation meeting, observation, post-observation, and reflection (Day, 2013; Carroll & O'Loughlin, 2014; Sandt, 2012). The value a teacher places on a practice can determine how frequently that practice is used (Knowles et al., 2014; Zeichner & Liston, 2013) which leads to change. Sullivan, Buckle, Nicky, and Atkinson (2012) explained that an important aspect of peer observation is the opportunity for teachers to reflect on their teaching in light of the feedback from the observation (p. 3). Peer observation among teachers can afford opportunities for frequent professional conversations that promote reflection and result in daily improvement of teaching practice. Peer observation feedback can offer both parties opportunities for self-reflection, new insight, and motivation to learn more

about their teaching practice. However, building trust, allotting sufficient time for reflective dialogue, and offering adequate training are viewed as being vital to the process (Carroll & O’Loughlin, 2014; Lu, 2010; Sandt, 2012).

Empirical studies on peer observations with colleagues have reported that the process was useful and played an integral part in the improvement of their teaching (Carroll & O’Loughlin, 2014; Sandt, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2012). Post-observations gave teachers constructive feedback based on evidence from the observation. Moreover, teachers reported that peer observations gave them a chance to reflect on their practice and modify their teachings. Therefore, peer observations can endorse a collegial atmosphere among teachers toward the advancement of their learning.

Even though Sandt’s (2012) study on peer observation reported that some teachers viewed the practice as valuable and a great way to collaborate with peers, others were found to view it as intrusive. These teachers thought professionals should not have to seek the advice of colleagues to know they were teaching well. Nonetheless, experts still suggest that peer observations have the ability to support teachers’ learning as teachers reflect on collegial classroom observations to gain insight (Roberts & Pruitt, 2009) into how they can improve their teaching practices.

Professional learning communities model (PLCs). Dufour (2004) and Bradley (2015) described professional learning communities as a systematic approach to having teachers work together in teams as they engage in series of analytical practices in efforts to improve their classroom practices and student learning. The purpose of this job-embedded process is to enable teachers to study student work, identify specific learning goals, and develop strategies to achieve those goals. Bradley asserted, “When teachers engage in job-embedded professional

development, they learn what practices increase student achievement” (p. 3). PLCs can enable teachers to reflect on assumptions as they discuss classroom theories and practice. This form of collaborative inquiry can stimulate teachers’ reflection as they leverage ideas to create change in practice.

Newman et al. (1996) described five essential characteristics of PLCs: shared value and norms must be developed; a clear and consistent focus on student learning must be maintained; reflective dialogue should be focused on curriculum, instruction, and student development; deprivatize practice; and focus on collaboration (as cited in Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008, p. 81). PLC protocols can be used to guide a process that checks self-efficacy in an effort to revise and improve upon teaching practices (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2013). As a result of this small-group reflection, teachers may feel more confident and take action intended to improve their practice.

Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) reviewed 11 empirical studies on PLCs published between 1990 and 2005. The research studies examined ways in which teachers’ instructional practices changed as a result of participating in PLCs. Many of the 11 studies did not identify changes in pedagogy; however, change in professional culture was a significant finding (Vescio et al., 2008). The findings demonstrated how PLCs contributed to a fundamental shift in habits of mind that teachers bring to their daily work in the classroom (Vescio et al. 2008, p. 84). Mezirow (1991) suggested that reflection helps to transform habitual action that may lead to mindfulness (p. 114). Adopting PLCs as a form of reflective teaching practice can promote mindfulness among teachers as they use protocols to engage in discussion about student work. Vescio et al. (2008) also pointed out that the studies found higher student achievement from schools with strong PLCs; and measurable improvement in student achievement occurred in

PLCs that focused on changing the instructional practices of teachers. Knowles et al. (2014) found adults are motivated to learn when they experience learning that is applicable to real-life situations. Therefore, having a collegial environment that supports teacher reflection on pedagogy can promote change in teachers' practice and may lead to student learning.

Action research model. *Action research* is an investigative and experiential way in which teachers reflect, learn, and improve upon their practice. Johnson (2008) defined action research as an inquiry process that engages teachers in “studying real school or class situations to understand and improve the quality of actions and instruction” (p. 28). Action research allows teachers to view themselves as researchers as they test theory, use scientific methods of inquiry, apply research-based practices, and analyze data in order to discern appropriate next steps that yield results. Through the research process, teachers become “educational practitioners who are knowledge generators, decision makers, and deliberative collaborators” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 157). Action research as a form of reflective teaching practice fosters analytical thinking, deliberate action, and self-improvement by strengthening teachers' skills and ethical responsibility toward their students' success.

As an illustration of action research, Vaughn, Parsons, Kologi, and Saul (2014) examined eight rural educators from a graduate program whose action research focus was on school-wide issues pertaining to introducing new curricula and implementing new instructional practices to meet the needs of their students or schools. Vaughn et al. explained how, using action research projects, teachers tested their theories, found out why their students were unmotivated by the new curriculum, and used supplementary means for engagement. The consensus in their findings demonstrated the teachers' understanding of incorporating research into their instructional practices as it enhanced their sense of responsibility in meeting the unique needs of

their students and the rural communities. As Sagor (2011) asserted, “All action research reports share one purpose: to help inform decisions on future action” (p. 182).

To further the claim of action research as a reflective teaching practice, Peterson (2012) noted that action research allows teachers to “draw upon knowledge and experience to determine a research focus, new teaching practices, and methods for assessing the efficacy of their practices” (p. 12). Therefore, as teachers use action research to reflect, individually or in collaboration, they will be able to identify a problem, collect and interpret data, act on the evidence found, evaluate results, and reflect on outcomes.

Review of Methodological Literature

Creswell (2013) identified five methodological designs associated with qualitative research: phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and case study. A phenomenological method was chosen for this study because the aim was to explore the lived experiences of the participants in the context of reflective teaching practice. Creswell described phenomenology as a method that explores the lived experience of a group of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon. This group can range from 3 to 4 individuals or from 10 to 15 individuals, and interviews are the primary source of data. The final data analysis will include the “voice of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or social change” (p. 44). Collection of data through in-depth interviews coupled with analysis of the resulting data were conducted with a focus on gaining an understanding of, and describing, participants’ experiences with reflective teaching practice.

Among the various research methods, case study could have been considered given that case studies also include in-depth interviews. However, according to Creswell (2013), “a case

study is a good approach when the inquirer has clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in depth understanding of the cases or a comparison of several cases” (p. 100). Rather than investigate a single case or event, a phenomenological study explores the perceptions of participants’ lived experiences concerning a phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as a form of research in which “perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge” (p. 52). Therefore, phenomenology appeared to be a more suitable approach for this study because it involves providing an in-depth report of the participants’ experiences from their point of view.

Another method, similar to phenomenology, is ethnography. Through in-depth interviews, both methods aim to examine how participants interpret and make meaning from their experiences. However, ethnography is the study of cultural or social groups, and data collection involves extended periods of time in the field conducting interviews, making observations, and collecting artifacts (Creswell, 2013). Researchers have to immerse themselves in interviews, transcripts, and field notes to describe themes that characterize the group’s culture. An analysis of an ethnographic study provides an understanding of how a culture group works, how it functions, and the group’s way of life (Creswell, 2012). A thick, rich description in narrative form allows readers to know what it is like to be of that culture or group. Conversely, in a phenomenological study the data collected are mainly from interviews. The purpose of the study is not to identify with a cultural group; rather, it is to get at the essence of what it is like to experience the phenomenon.

Even though phenomenology and narrative studies both generate stories from the participants’ experiences, the process of data collection and analysis differs in the two approaches. A narrative study collects biographical data in a chronological format and captures

detailed experiences of a person's past, present, and future (Creswell, 2013). Stories in a narrative can be analyzed according to what was said (thematically), the nature of the telling of the story (structural), [or] who the story is directed toward (dialogic/performance) (Riessman, 2008, as cited in Creswell, 2013 p. 71). Therefore, a phenomenological method was used since stories were not biographical and did not require a sequence of events. Creswell (2013) also noted, "Whereas a narrative study reports the stories of experiences of a single individual or several individuals, a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences" (p. 76). Thus, for this study, a phenomenological method was well suited to describe the multiple perspectives of participants' experiences with reflective teaching practice.

In contrast to a phenomenological method, grounded theory moves beyond description and generates or discovers theory based on the views of a large number of participants (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), "Participants in the study would have all experienced the process, and the development of the theory might help to explain practice or provide a framework for further research" (p. 83). This differs from a phenomenological data analysis that provides a description of the participants' experiences. Rather than formulate theory, a phenomenological method aims to provide an interpretation of the data and "essence" of the experience (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, a phenomenological method, here consisting of in-depth interviews conducted to provide information-rich description of participants' experiences, was used to explore the perceptions of participants.

Review of Methodological Issues

Due to the exploratory and interpretative nature of phenomenology, ethical issues such as trustworthiness and researcher bias can arise and must be addressed to ensure the validity of the

study. Creswell (2013) suggested considering these issues before conducting qualitative research in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena from the participants' perspectives. Therefore, methodological techniques such as bracketing, disclosing researcher bias, and reflexivity can ensure that the findings represent the actual account of the phenomenon being studied. However, Creswell claimed "bracketing personal experiences may be difficult for the researcher to implement because interpretations of the data always incorporate the assumptions that the researcher brings to the topic" (p. 83). Therefore, researchers must identify these assumptions and follow a process that provides an understanding of the phenomenon as experienced by participants in the study.

Consequently, given the interpretative nature of qualitative research, subjectivity might play a role in the data analysis and final report. According to Merriam (2009), the experience a person has includes the way in which the experience has been interpreted. There is no "objective" experience that stands outside its interpretation (p. 9). Therefore, a qualitative researcher must withhold assumptions and be sure to ask open-ended questions to gain multiple perspectives on participants' experiences. Furthermore, the researcher must listen attentively and seek clarification by probing, or restating questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) to obtain an in-depth understanding of how participants make meaning from their experiences. Likewise, Merriam (2009) contended that data in the form of quotations from documents, field notes, and participant interviews and excerpts from videotapes, electronic communication, or a combination thereof be included in support of the findings (p. 16). This process of data collection can ensure that descriptions from multiple sources reveal trends and patterns regarding what is being studied. Taking a flexible but systematic approach to qualitative inquiry can ensure trustworthiness in support of the findings.

Rather than testing theories, qualitative research uses inductive reasoning to build themes from written reports to provide theory on a topic being studied. Merriam (2009) mentioned that, unlike quantitative studies that provide a numerical report, a qualitative research report contains more writing that shows raw data being placed into abstract categories and concepts. Consequently, a qualitative report is much lengthier than a quantitative report. Furthermore, unlike quantitative research that is experimental and provides data from randomly sampled participants, qualitative research mostly uses purposefully sampled participants. Collection of data from purposefully sampled participants is meant to provide a rich description arising from those who can provide an understanding of what it is like to experience the phenomenon. In qualitative research, Merriam (2009) asserted, “The focus is on understanding the meaning of experience, the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and rich description characterizes the end product” (p. 19). Consequently, a researcher must be willing to spend a substantial amount of time in the field participating in qualitative inquiry. For this reason, prolonged interviews were conducted to provide an in-depth description of teachers’ experiences. The purpose of these prolonged interviews, as suggested by (Creswell, 2013), was to extend the conversations, and to avoid brief answers. This process also gave teachers time to express themselves without having to worry about answering all the questions in one sitting.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Researchers continuously advocate for reflective practice in teaching because it is important to the improvement of student learning. Marcos et al. (2011) described reflective teaching practice as including problem solving, self-awareness, and professional knowledge. They also revealed that to be a reflective teacher, one must be an expert in a specific area, think

critically, build on prior knowledge, and work in collaboration. This view is similar to that expressed by Vygotsky (1978) and Piaget (1958), who viewed thinking and learning as a process in experiential, and social learning. Dewey (1933) described reflective practice as an “act of search or investigation directed toward bringing to light facts that serve to corroborate or nullify the suggested belief” (p. 10). Therefore, reflective teaching practice can provide teachers with the opportunity to become self-directed learners as they test theories, problem-solve, and strive to learn from their experiences. In addition, teachers’ participation in social learning can promote the emergence of personal discovery and foster interdependency. This form of reflective practice can be promoted in pairs or in small groups. As teachers reflect and discuss teaching strategies, new perspectives can potentially generate new ideas for improving their practice. Teachers can reflect and discuss strengths and weaknesses of a lesson, analyze student work, interpret student data, and think of ways to build on prior knowledge or establish a plan for alternate action. Feedback teachers receive from peers, administrators, instructional coaches, or students can stimulate reflection and provide ideas about ways to improve on their teaching. As Bradley (2015) affirmed, “The objective in giving feedback is to provide guidance by supplying information in a useful manner either to support effective practices or to guide someone toward effectiveness” (p. 102). A teacher’s response to feedback can promote reflection in pursuit of effectiveness in the teacher’s instructional practice.

In further support of reflective practice, York-Barr et al. (2006) provided a spiral model for reflective teaching practice that begins with the individual and expands to the rest of the school community. According to York-Barr et al., “As we develop our individual reflection capacities, we can better influence the reflection that occurs with partners and in small groups or teams of which we are members” (p. 20). Reflective teaching practice in individual teachers can

promote self-assessment of personal performance so that next steps can lead to the desired outcome. However, reflection with a partner or in small groups can lead to greater insight from multiple perspectives as assumptions are tested and ideas are shared.

Researchers viewed the allocation of time to pause and reflect as critical to a teacher's thought process and decision-making. Larrivee (2000) noted that "time for reflection allows a person to face the turmoil, the conflict, and the uncertainty that allow personal discovery to emerge" (p. 306). Time designated for teacher reflection, in solitude or in collaboration, can afford teachers the opportunity to discover new ideas, build on prior knowledge, and become self-directed learners in their teaching practice. However, in advocating the use of teaching frameworks for teachers' continuous learning, Danielson (2008) suggested, "As teachers gain experience with self-assessment and reflection on practice, it is easier to do and requires less time" (p. 23). As a result, teachers can become more skilled and require less time to reference teaching strategies. This notion is similar to Schon (1983, 1987) *reflection in action*, which describes reflective practitioners as being self-aware, skilled to take action, and able to make adjustments in the moment in efforts to achieve desired results.

Critique of Previous Research

Hall and Simeral (2015) noted that one of the characteristics of reflective teachers is being aware of strategies that help to improve on their teaching practice. However, Mezirow (1991) asserted that reflection is more than simple awareness of our experience; it involves a critique and an evaluation of an experience. Van Manen (1977) also asserted that critical reflection, in addition to involving an evaluation of one's teaching, considered the moral and ethical responsibility of one's practice. For example, in a qualitative study on reflective practice, Boody (2008) studied a high school teacher who taught remedial English. Her challenge

stemmed from classroom management and her students' response to learning. She was aware of this challenge and decided to conduct a survey to find out why most of her students were resistant and not responding to her teaching. The students' surveys revealed their dissatisfaction with the teacher's behavior in response to their learning needs. The teacher responded to the survey data by reflecting on ways to mend her relationship with her students and adjust her teaching practice. She saw acting upon this feedback as a moral responsibility to help her students achieve success. This story shows that a reflective practice has the potential to make teachers aware of how their teaching affects student-learning outcomes and to lead them to take intentional action.

However, amid the daily demands of teaching, finding time for individual reflection or in collaboration appears to be a factor. Nonetheless, Dewey (1933) contended, "Time is required in order to digest impressions, and translate them into substantial ideas" (p. 34). Teachers need adequate time to contemplate teaching, analyze students' work, and set goals in efforts to improve their practice. Using a cross-sectional design, Rayford (2010) studied the perceptions of 122 elementary school teachers and 291 administrators from three states in the western United States regarding reflective teaching practice. Data analysis indicated that teachers believed in the importance of reflective practice. They acknowledged reflection in the midst of teaching, as well as reflection with peers, as a way to make adjustments to their teaching practice. Teachers felt that reflective practice helped to improve their teaching. However, teachers expressed the need for time to reflect and preferred to dialogue or collaborate with peers. York-Barr et al. (2006) suggests reflective teaching practice can lead to teachers' deepened understanding of content and skills. Additionally, the study revealed that administrators thought reflection was useful for improving teacher performance and for professional growth. Therefore, incorporating time for

reflective practice can contribute to teachers' use of critical thinking toward teaching effectiveness.

Summary

This phenomenological study explored 21 elementary-charter-school teachers' experiences with reflective teaching practice and described how they use it in their work. Research suggests that reflective teaching practice can be intuitive and systematic, and should encompass ethical responsibility toward student learning. Through reflective teaching practice, teachers can become self-directed learners and strive to improve their teaching effectiveness. Reflective teaching practice in collaboration can foster social learning and interdependency among teachers, which can lead to better student learning outcomes. Therefore, a phenomenological method was used to collect, analyze, and provide descriptive data based on teachers' experiences with reflective teaching practice. The findings from this phenomenological study revealed patterns and trends of teachers' experiences with reflective teaching practice in support of their continuous learning and professional development.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Researchers often refer to reflective practice as a process of critical thinking toward improvement (Dewey, 1938; Marzano, 2012; York-Barr et al., 2006). Reflective teaching practice is considered to be an inquiry-based approach to teaching that involves critical thinking and a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement (York-Barr et al., 2006). Therefore, a phenomenological method was used to explore, understand, and describe participants' lived experiences with reflective teaching practice (Creswell, 2013). This chapter provides a detailed description of the research design, the instrument, participant selection, ethical issues, and the procedure used for data collection and analysis. The data from this phenomenological study revealed themes that described teachers' experiences with using reflective teaching practice to improve on their work. The findings of this research study can enlighten the educational community about ways to embed reflective teaching practice into professional development initiatives. Moreover, this study provided a voice to those who engage in reflective teaching practice. Their insight can be shared among educators in support of teachers' professional development intended to improve student learning outcomes.

Research Questions and Interview Questions

The research questions and interview questions guided the process of revealing teachers' lived experiences and their use of reflective teaching practice to improve teaching performance. Rubin and Rubin (2011) suggested structuring interviews around three linked questions—main questions, probes, and follow-up questions—to evoke the in-depth and detailed responses required in a qualitative study. Open-ended questions, followed up with probes such as “tell me more” and “please explain,” were used to explore and build upon teachers' responses. Semistructured interviews were used to explore the contextual meaning of teachers' experiences

in response to the research questions. A limited number of questions were prepared in advance, along with plans to ask follow-up questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Research questions.

1. How do elementary school teachers define reflective teaching?
2. In what ways do teachers reflect on their teaching?
3. What value, if any, do elementary school teachers place on reflective teaching practice?
4. What forms of reflective teaching practice do teachers use? How do teachers report that it improves their teaching practice?

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of 21 elementary-charter-school teachers' use of reflective teaching practice. Although reflective teaching practice is considered to be vital to a teacher's profession, there is still a lack of consensus as to how reflection is defined and practiced among teachers (Marcos et al., 2011; Tannebaum et al., 2013; Williams & Grudnoff, 2011). Therefore, the significance of this study lies in its adding to the literature about teachers' lived experiences with reflective teaching practice and how they reported it is incorporated into their work. The intent behind this study was to provide an understanding of ways in which reflective teaching practice fosters teaching effectiveness that leads to better student learning outcomes. Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013) attested to the effectiveness of phenomenological methods for yielding contextualized findings of individuals' experiences through in-depth interviews. According to Moustakas (1994), "The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (p. 13). Therefore, a phenomenological method was

deemed appropriate to align with the purpose of this study, which was to obtain a firsthand account of teachers' lived experiences with reflective teaching practice. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological design can be used when describing experiences "such as the educational idea of 'professional growth'" (p. 78). Subsequently, this phenomenological study was conducted in an attempt to provide insight into how reflective teaching practice can contribute to teachers' professional development.

To gain further insight into teachers' lived experiences with reflective teaching practice, Moustakas's (1994) approach to analyzing phenomenological data was used in this study. The interview questions were constructed with the intent of providing an in-depth understanding of the research questions and research topic being studied. Forms of data collection included in-depth interviews and the researcher's field notes, which were analyzed to discern themes regarding teachers' reflective practice.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that for a phenomenological study, the researcher should interview 5–25 individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. Purposeful sampling is also recommended when selecting participants familiar with the phenomenon, because they can provide information-rich data (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, 21 teachers from two New York City (NYC) elementary urban charter schools were selected upon the recommendation of their principal. The participants studied included teachers with diverse ethnic backgrounds, varied levels of experience, and differing subjects/grade levels taught. Principals were the initial contact to grant permission to conduct the study with their teachers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015; Seidman, 2013). Principals from the selected schools were given a full description of the study, both in person and in writing. After disclosing the purpose of my study,

and upon agreement, I met with the recommended teachers in person and informed them of the research process and the purpose of the study. Furthermore, once teachers were contacted, and after they had agreed to participate in the study, I asked them to complete a written consent form and to return it via e-mail or in person. Teachers were given the option of choosing their preferred place and time to be interviewed (Merriam, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2011; Seidman, 2013) for their convenience.

Instruments

Creswell (2013) asserted that instrumentation such as interviews, observations, and artifacts can contribute to the understanding of individuals' lived experience with phenomena. For this study, in-depth interview questions were generated to address the research questions. These questions aligned with information gleaned from the review of literature.

Data Collection and Analysis

As the researcher, I was the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to guide and authenticate the research process. Interviews were audio-recorded, and a transcriber was hired to ensure efficiency in providing all 21 teachers with their transcripts for verification. Seidman (2013) suggested that an interviewer should actively listen to participants' responses, audio-record interviews, and take field notes. For this study, actively listening to teachers' responses, replaying the audio recordings, and transcribing the interviews helped me to detect key phrases before making notes in the margin. Field notes that captured the contextual setting and nonverbal cues from participants were also included in the data analysis. Transcribed information and audio recordings were e-mailed to each participant for verification, and the participants' input was used in the final analysis.

To ensure the privacy of participants, I assigned each of them a pseudonym, which I used their audio files and their transcribed interviews. Moreover, I read each of the transcripts twice, holistically, in an effort to understand the lived experiences of teachers engaging in reflective teaching practice. In addition, I used bracketing to ensure that the focus was on the study; the responses of each participant were viewed as having equal value; and all relevant statements were gradually reduced into a statement that captured the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The following steps, recommended by Moustakas (1994), were used for this phenomenological data analysis: I developed a list of significant statements about how teachers experienced reflective teaching practice (horizontalization); treated each statement as having equal value and worked to develop a list of nonrepetitive, nonoverlapping statements; grouped significant statements into larger units of information called *meaning units* or *themes*; and wrote a textual description of “what” the participants experienced using verbatim examples and included a structural description of “how” they experienced reflective teaching practice. Finally, I derived the essence of the phenomenon of reflective teaching practice by synthesizing the textual and structural descriptions. According to Creswell (2013), the “essence” of the experience represents the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study. I took these steps to provide a rich, thick description of the phenomenon being studied for transferability.

Limitations of the Research Design

One limitation of this study was that all the participants were recommended K–5 teachers from two NYC elementary urban charter school systems. This population represented only a selected demographic and geographic region. Another limitation arose from the difficulty of scheduling time with teachers at the beginning of the school year. Teachers were engaged in preparation for the new school year, such as conducting assessments, setting up their classrooms,

attending staff meetings, and so forth. Therefore, flexibility in scheduling had to be factored into this research study because I needed to adhere to dates and times determined by the participants.

Validity

Creswell (2013) suggested that two methods be used to ensure validity of the data findings: rich, thick description, which allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability, and member checking, which allows participants to verify their responses. For this study, both methods were used; teachers were e-mailed their transcripts for verification. The final analysis consisted of a rich, thick description of teachers' experiences with reflective teaching practice. Their textural and structural descriptions created a composite that can be transferred to other settings when referencing reflective teaching practice due to possible shared characteristics.

Credibility

The role of the researcher is to establish credibility by reporting findings from those who have experience with the research topic. To establish the credibility of the study, Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated, "you have to interview people who are knowledgeable on your topic, and you must restrict your questioning to what they know firsthand" (p. 64). As the researcher, I conducted in-depth interviews with 21 recommended NYC elementary school teachers in an urban charter school system that engaged in reflective teaching practice. They provided insight into how they reflected on their teaching and gave a report on forms of reflective teaching practice that supported them in their work. Furthermore, to ensure that the data collected were accurate, teachers participated in member checking to verify their responses. Member checking served as a debriefing method for establishing validity (Creswell, 2013) regarding information obtained from each of the participants.

Dependability

Creswell (2013) alluded to phenomenological study results' being subject to change; however, dependability is confirmed through auditing of the research process. For this study, a phenomenological method was used to ensure the dependability of the study's process. The literature review of Moustakas's (1994) approach was referenced to confirm the accuracy of the method design. This approach helped to support the dependability of this phenomenological study and can influence future studies about exploring teachers' experiences using reflective teaching practice.

Expected Findings

In view of the participants' identification as reflective practitioners, it was expected that they would share their approach to reflective teaching and forms of reflective teaching practice that supported them in their work. According to York-Barr et al. (2006), a reflective practitioner uses an inquiry-based approach to teaching that involves critical thinking and a personal commitment to continuous learning and improvement. Interview responses provided insight into how teachers approached reflection in teaching and forms of reflective practice that supported them in their work.

Ethical Issues

According to Creswell (2013), "Ethical issues in qualitative research can be described as occurring prior to conducting the study, at the beginning of the study, during the data collection, during data analysis and in reporting the data" (p. 57). Therefore, the following ethical considerations were used to ensure trustworthiness in the process and in publishing the data.

1. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study and were given a description of the process and of their role. (see Appendix B)

2. Any information provided was coded so it could not be linked to teachers or their schools.
3. Any name or identifying information was kept securely via electronic passcode or locked inside a file cabinet in my office.
4. The study used a passcode-protected computer and recoding software.
5. Audio-recorded interviews were labeled with pseudonyms. The hired transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement before transcribing interviews. (see Appendix C)
6. As soon as transcripts were validated as correct, the recording was deleted so it could not be used to identify the participants.
7. Reviewed and analyzed data did not contain teachers' names or identifying information.
8. Participants were not identified in any publication or report.
9. Participants' information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 5 years after the study was concluded.

Conflict of Interest

My personal experience with reflective teaching practice required that I put any assumptions aside to gain an understanding from the perspective of my participants. My prior knowledge or experiences on the research topic was acknowledged at the outset to avoid conflict of interest. Machi and McEvoy (2012) asserted, "By rationally identifying and confronting these views, the researcher can control personal bias and opinion, committing to being open-minded, skeptical, and considerate of research data" (p. 19). Hence, the interview questions served as a guide in keeping the route to discovery focused on my participants' point of view. As teachers were engaged in in-depth interviews, I listened attentively, asked clarifying questions, and

“bracketed” myself to avoid researcher bias. Bracketing myself helped me to suspend judgment or personal thoughts, thereby heightening my sense of consciousness and reflectivity on what was being examined (Merriam, 2009). In addition, member checking gave teachers the opportunity to review the transcripts and make any adjustments before the data were published.

Researcher’s Position

As a qualitative researcher, it was important for me to reflect on my position as I undertook this study. According to Merriam (2009), “Investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken” (p. 219). Therefore, I examined my biases, disclosed an overview of my experience, and explained the purpose for conducting the study to my participants. In an effort to forge researcher/participant relationships, I shared my experience in education and my interest in my research topic. During the interview process, I also created space that allowed the participants to share their experiences without judgment.

My career in education has spanned more than 15 years. My experience in the field of education has included providing professional development to elementary school teachers to promote their teaching effectiveness. As a staff developer, I continuously find myself contemplating whether my interventions offer teachers ample opportunity to reflect on their experiences. My method of support usually consists of making classroom observations, modeling, and offering teachers feedback on their performance. In addition, teachers and I engage in bi-weekly conversations about their classroom experiences and the subsequent outcomes. What I usually anticipate from our interactions is that teachers will reflect on strategies presented and refine their teaching practice. However, what is not known is the extent to which teachers reflect on the strategies, develop new understandings, and apply them to obtain

better student learning outcomes. My interest in this study stemmed from my desire to understand teachers' experiences with engaging in reflective teaching practice so that I can promote similar processes in future professional development work.

Ethical Issues in the Study

Phenomenological interviewing does not come without risks, given that participants are sharing experiences in teaching. Seidman (2013) advised that, depending on the potential sensitivity of the topic, researchers should indicate that the process of interviews could cause discomfort at times. For this study, participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and were given a description of the process and of their role. My role as the researcher was to ensure that participants found the process trustworthy by protecting their privacy and reporting on their experiences accurately. Therefore, as the researcher, I met with recommended participants to provide information about the study and to answer any questions they might have had concerning its purpose and their role. Subsequently, potential participants were e-mailed consent forms that contained details of the research process, potential risks or discomfort, participants' rights, potential benefits, steps in confidentiality, a description of how results would be disseminated, and ways in which they could contact me if they had any questions about their rights or about the research project. Furthermore, participants were notified of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Formal interviews were scheduled upon receipt of their written consent.

Summary

This chapter provided discussions on the qualitative research study and phenomenology method; the procedures for selecting participants; the procedures for collecting, analyzing, and verifying the data; ethical considerations; and ways in which I validated the findings. To accomplish this endeavor, this phenomenological study explored 21 elementary charter school

teachers' experiences with reflective teaching practice and provided an in-depth description of how they use it to improve upon their work. The findings in this study may provide the educational community with ways to promote reflective teaching practices in support of teachers' professional development. Additionally, the findings may influence further study in support of teachers' professional development.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

This chapter presents a description of the sample, the research methodology and analysis, the data and results, and a summary of the findings. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the role of reflective teaching practice from the perspective of 21 teachers from two elementary urban charter schools. A data analysis of this study shows how participants engaged in reflective practice that leads to effective teaching and promotes students' learning. The following research questions guided this investigation on the role of reflective practice on teaching effectiveness.

1. How do elementary school teachers define reflective teaching practice?
2. In what ways do teachers reflect on their teaching?
3. What value, if any, do elementary school teachers place on reflective teaching practice?
4. What forms of reflective teaching practice do teachers use? How do teachers report that it improves their teaching practice?

As the researcher, my role was to investigate the experiences of 21 teachers who engaged in reflective teaching practice. My experience in the field of education has included providing staff development to promote teaching effectiveness. My work with teachers consists of making classroom observations, participating in post-observation discussions, and modeling instructional practices to improve their performance. However, what was not known was the extent to which my work with teachers afforded them the opportunity to reflect on their learning and make connections to improve their teaching practice. My interest in this study stemmed from my desire to explore teachers' experiences of engaging in reflective teaching practice to promote similar processes in future professional development. Therefore, a phenomenological method

seemed plausible for exploring and describing the experiences of teachers who engage in reflective teaching practice.

The data-collection process consisted of conducting 21 audio-transcribed interviews, taking field notes, and assigning each participant with a pseudonym name. After participants and I verified the accuracy of the transcripts, I reviewed and highlighted each transcript, taking notes as I did so. Key themes were identified in the margin of each transcript based on the research questions. Then, during the review of the notes, commonalities among participants generated six key themes and 18 subthemes. The data analysis and results that emerged from the coded key themes and subthemes provided a textural description (what they experienced) and structural description (how they experienced) of the data. To that end, data analysis and results provided the essence of participants' experience engaging in reflective teaching practice toward teaching effectiveness.

Description of the Sample

This research study was conducted in two urban charter school districts. Each school had both general-education and inclusion classes. The 21 teachers interviewed worked either in inclusion classes with two teachers in a room or in general education classes in which one teacher worked alone. However, on occasion, teaching assistants were used or were split between classes to offer additional support. Teachers who participated in the study varied in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, level of experience based on number of years taught, and grade level/current grade taught. In one of the schools, teachers in grades K–3 taught all subjects. However, grades 4 and 5 teachers taught single subjects, such as English Language Arts (ELA), math, and science. In the other school, teachers who worked in grades K–5 taught all subjects.

Research Methodology and Analysis

This phenomenological study sought to understand ways in which teachers reflect, learn, and improve on their instruction using reflective teaching practice. Therefore, Moustakas's (1994) approach to data collection and analysis was applied to explore teachers' perception using reflective teaching practice toward teaching effectiveness. This method consisted of the collection and analysis of twenty-one in-depth interviews. After participants' verified their individual transcripts, 21 transcribed interviews were collected, analyzed, and coded. The initial coded categories, listed as six key themes, were derived from the research questions. These six key themes provided information on ways participants: described a reflective teacher and defined reflective teaching practice; reflected before, during, and after delivering a lesson; shared challenges and benefits to reflective teaching practice; and described forms of reflective teaching practice that supported their teaching effectiveness.

In addition to the six key themes, 18 subthemes were generated from reviewing the transcripts and identifying commonalities in words and phrases from participants' responses to the research and interview questions. Significant statements that reinforced more than one participant's views were then extracted from the transcript and placed under each coded key theme and subtheme. The extracted statements in this study were significant in understanding the central phenomenon in this study: reflective teaching practice. The summary of the findings provided a textural (what they experienced) and structural (how they experienced it) description of participants' experience engaging in reflective teaching practice. In the end, the essence of reflective teaching practice, as a way to make meaning and improve on instruction, was revealed.

Data Analysis and Results

Data collection and analysis procedures were conducted using a phenomenological design. The data analysis and results revealed participants' perspectives on the following: how they define and describe reflective teaching practice; when it occurs in their teaching; the benefits and challenges of reflective teaching practice; and the forms of reflective teaching practice that support their continuous learning. The narratives presented by participants provided an understanding of how reflective practice promoted the assessment and monitoring of instructional practices; facilitated critical thinking based on students' performance; fostered the ability to problem solve; and supported continuous learning. The following key themes, subthemes, and extracted statements provide an analysis of participants' experiences using reflective teaching practice.

How do elementary school teachers define reflective teaching practice?

Key theme: Describing a reflective teacher and defining reflective teaching practice.

Subtheme: Reflective teachers self-monitor and self-assess their practice. Participants in this study defined reflective teaching practice as a way to self-monitor and self-assess their teaching practice. Furthermore, participants described how reflective teachers self-monitor and self-assess their teaching practice to determine how their actions affect students' learning. Participants defined *self-monitoring* as frequently checking the progress of teaching behaviors to promote students' learning. For example, Wendy referred to a reflective teacher as someone who self-monitors to improve her or his teaching practice. Wendy explained, "They're always going over what they did, and if it could have been done better. And the answer is, yes. There's always room for improvement." Marilyn also referred to reflective teachers as those who self-monitor their teaching by planning ahead of time while assessing what has been taught and

figuring out ways to improve instruction. Jennifer's point of view was that reflective teachers use student data to self-monitor their teaching practice. She noted that reflective teachers "sort of teach in between the desks. So they're constantly moving around, trying to identify what they were just exposed to and checking for understanding via students' papers." Glenn considered a reflective teacher to be one who used awareness of her or his actions to self-monitor or self-assess their teaching toward students' learning. He stated, "A reflective teacher is someone who is aware of their actions within the classroom and of how it affects them and their students. They think of how they can have a more positive effect on their classroom culture."

Another significant element of reflective teaching practice pointed out by participants was conducting a self-assessment regarding teaching effectiveness. Participants in this study described how reflective teachers have the ability to frequently assess their teaching in efforts to improve. Pam explained that reflective teachers conduct a self-assessment every so often, if not every lesson. They are assessing what they are teaching, how they are teaching it, and if their students comprehend what they are teaching. Perry also described reflective teachers as self-assessing their teaching practice in response to their students' feedback. According to Perry, a reflective teacher can confidently critique her or his teaching performance by reflecting after delivering a lesson, or in the moment while teaching, to determine a course of action that will enhance students' learning. Similarly, Diane articulated her perception of a reflective teacher by saying that reflection is a way for teachers to self-assess by looking back on their teaching in order to become more effective. In the same vein, Steven referred to a reflective teacher as having the ability to self-assess his or her teaching toward improvement. In his opinion, a reflective teacher processes teaching experiences by examining areas in need of improvement; he or she maintains a positive outlook; and is a lifelong learner. Stewart reported that he reflected

throughout the day by assessing his teaching performance and that he made adjustments based on the feedback he received from his students.

Subtheme: Reflective teaching practice involves critical thinking toward improving teaching practice. In this study, participants also defined and described reflective teaching practice to mean critically thinking about their students' performance. Participants used critical thinking to assess students' learning outcomes, using observations and written work, to determine next steps in instruction. For instance, Cathy, a 1st-grade teacher, spoke of using student observations to think critically about ways to improve her practice. Cathy said, "For me, observation is key. So if I see my scholars are not getting the lesson, then I'll think of ways to make some adjustments to meet their needs." In addition, Colleen described reflective teaching practice as thinking critically about students' responses to the delivery of a lesson. She stated that she used students' responses to think about what she or they might have missed and about how she would make improvements in future instruction. Kelly offered similar sentiments about reflective teaching practice, saying, "My co-teacher and I take about two minutes in between classes to think and talk about what we saw was successful, the weak areas, and how we can adjust for the next lesson."

To summarize this theme, although participants' descriptions of a reflective teacher and reflective teaching practice varied, teachers defined these practices as critically thinking about students' performance and assessing or monitoring their teaching effectiveness. Through reflective teaching practice, teachers were able to assess and monitor their teaching in efforts to determine an instructional approach or resources needed to address students' learning needs. In this way, reflective practice can serve as a way to examine the delivery of a lesson based on feedback from students, peers, instructional coaches, and/or administrators. Having reflected,

teachers can consider the strengths and weaknesses in a lesson's delivery and modify or adjust future instruction accordingly. This process can help a teacher grow in terms of enhancing students' learning.

In what ways do teachers reflect on their teaching?

Key theme: Opportunities for reflection. During the interviews, teachers paused to think about ways in which they reflected on their teaching. Teachers described ways in which they reflected either before a lesson, "in the moment" or as they taught, after a lesson's delivery, and at the end of the school day. They considered reflective teaching to be part of their daily practice in efforts to enhance their professional growth and students' learning.

Subtheme: Reflecting before a lesson. Participants described reflecting before a lesson as a way to consider students' learning needs and readiness. This technique helped them to anticipate questions or misconceptions students might have in learning new material. Perry described his reflective process:

Before a new lesson, I like to be prepared with at least two-three different ways that I can teach it to my students. So I start off with whatever the general way of teaching the lesson should be. If I notice that it's just not really working, then I already have a setup waiting—either a video, or I'll have some sort of an audio ready. The visual or audio can help students have a better understanding of the lesson.

Ciara also mentioned the importance of preparation-as-reflection, saying, "Before a lesson, I am always considering my students' responses. I'm considering what they might struggle with and try to fit my lessons to address their individual learning needs." Sandra's comments were in alignment with those of Perry and Ciara; she explained that reflection helped her to be aware of

what students needed to know before a lesson and changed her practice based on their learning need.

Subtheme: Reflecting in the moment. While reflecting before a lesson was perceived as a an approach to addressing students' learning needs and readiness, participants also described how "in-the-moment" reflection, such as that engaged in during the course of teaching, provides an immediate response to students' learning needs. Wendy observed, "Some of my best teaching has been on-the-spot reflection and then changing the lesson around based upon the needs of the students at that time. I'm always reflecting. I'm always in reflection mode." Steven also expressed similar sentiments about the importance of reflecting in the moment, necessary because "you have to be able to judge a situation in a split second and decide whether this is going to be a path to instruct this particular student." In like manner, Pam spoke of a time in which she seized an opportunity to reflect in the moment based on her students' responses to her teaching. Reflecting in the moment enabled her to observe her students' level of engagement and to self-assess her methods of instruction.

Subtheme: Reflecting after a lesson. In this study, participants also described reflecting after delivering a lesson, or at the end of the day. Doing this provided them with the opportunity to assess both their students' work and the outcomes of their teaching. Reflecting after delivering a lesson enabled them to think of ways to approach future instruction. In fact, Diane described how she usually reflected after a lesson in math, saying, "I always give them exit tickets to see if they understood the lesson of the day. I can see if they did well, and what else needs to be done to teach them." Exit tickets were used to assess students' understanding of skills presented that day. Selena's take on the subject was very similar to Diane's; she also used assessment data from students' exit tickets or written informal assessments to reflect on how she

should adjust the delivery of her lesson. Kelly changed it up a bit and described how reflecting with her co-teacher after a lesson helped her with her teaching. She said, “He’s the best person to reflect with; he’d often give me a little more insight into how to reach some of my students who have different needs. Last year it helped me with my struggling students.”

Whereas some participants reported reflecting immediately after each lesson, others discussed reflecting at the end of the day due to classroom challenges or lack of time. Fiona admitted, “I honestly don’t have time after each lesson because it’s transition and kids are moving around. I do jot a few little notes saying, next time do this, or that, but at the end of the day, that’s when I fully reflect.” Stewart also described why, and how, he reflected on his teaching, noting that it was hard to reflect during the school day because of an overabundance of meetings, meaning he did most of his reflecting at home.

To summarize this theme, participants spoke of times in which they seized opportunities to reflect on their teaching and used students’ data to inform next steps in instruction. Participants who reflected before a lesson reportedly took into consideration students’ prior knowledge before teaching a new lesson or skill. Participants who reflected “in the moment” or during the course of teaching perceived this to be vital in addressing students’ immediate learning needs. Participants who reflected after delivering a lesson reflected on students’ work to determine next steps in instruction. On the other hand, participants who struggled with reflecting during or after a lesson’s delivery reported reflecting on their teaching at the end of the day.

Key theme: Cause for reflective teaching practice. To further describe ways in which teachers reflect, participants were asked what caused them to reflect and the actions they took as a result of reflection. Teachers described ways in which they reflected using intrinsic motivation,

problem solving, and feedback from students. This reflection included a focus on pursuing professional growth, addressing classroom challenges, and examining students' assessments to determine next steps in instruction. It was clear that teachers perceived a connection between their improved performance and their students' learning.

Subtheme: Intrinsic motivation causes reflective teaching practice. For the purposes of this study, *intrinsic motivation* refers to the internal satisfaction teachers obtain from reflective teaching practice. As teachers are driven by internal satisfaction, their teaching practice results in their focus turning to becoming better teachers. Stewart viewed intrinsic motivation as a cause for his reflecting on his teaching, adding, "Part of it too, is that I want to get better. So if I'm thinking about my growth, that's one of the things that would cause me to reflect." Likewise, Wendell pointed out how wanting to improve for the benefit of his students caused him to reflect on his teaching practice. He recalled his first year teaching and how he had to think of classroom management strategies. Wendell stated, "So the reason why I reflect is obviously to improve for my students. The things that make me change are when I see things I think I could do better." Diane also mentioned how wanting to become a better teacher caused her to reflect on her teaching. She stated, "I want to be a better teacher, and it takes work. So I reflect all the time. I have to understand what the kids know, where they are, and how they're grasping what I'm trying to teach them." In the same vein, Barry noted that reflection was essential for improving as a teacher.

Subtheme: Problem-solving causes reflective teaching practice. Teachers also viewed problem solving as a cause for them to reflect on their teaching. Ciara said that once her students were struggling with a short-answer response on descriptive text, and, upon reflection, she realized she had not taught a particular skill in any of her previous lessons. She recounted, "I

realized while walking around that had not been something I focused on. So I had to think of ways to implement descriptive text structure in everything they did since it was something that I missed.” Steven also offered his experience with problem solving through reflective teaching.

He recalled,

I have a student; now getting him started to write was a challenge. So I needed to adjust all of his student response packets to include a couple of sentence starters. The thought was, what am I assessing him on? Am I assessing him on his ideas or am I assessing him on his ability to start writing? I think that’s when reflection, flexibility, and creativity kind of came together.

Kelly described how she and her colleague were able to problem solve using reflective teaching, saying,

We do a lot of reflecting on who will be candidates for small groups. We often look during a class, when we’re doing guided practice, to see who is struggling. We’ll pull *x* children aside to target what exactly they need for that lesson while the rest of the class moves on and does independent practice on their own.

Subtheme: Feedback from students causes reflective teaching practice. Feedback from students, whether through verbal or written responses, enabled teachers to reflect on their teaching. Felicia said, “Obviously, the students’ work causes reflective teaching because you want to change things that aren’t working. So I think it’s mostly based on how students are performing.” Similarly, Steven said, “Because your students are giving you information and giving you feedback, you have to adapt and use it in your practice.” Wendell echoed these sentiments. Colleen related a vivid experience when feedback from students’ informal assessments via exit tickets caused her to reflect on her teaching. She explained that exit tickets

were given out at the end of a lesson to check for students' understanding. She then took them home for review, where she identified commonalities to determine next steps in her instruction. Fiona also described how feedback from her students caused her to reflect on the goals she set for her students. She mentioned that daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly goals were always set and described how she monitored students' achievement:

If I'm reflecting on a math lesson, I know by the end of 2 weeks, for the test, the students need to add one-ten digits fluently; depending on how well they are doing, I would reflect and see maybe we need more time to do this lesson, or maybe I need to teach it in a different way.

To summarize this theme, teachers explained that intrinsic motivation, problem solving, and feedback from students caused them to reflect on their teaching. Subsequently, teachers were able to determine a course of action to improve their teaching practice. Teachers appeared flexible in their approach as they used critical thinking to revise their teaching practice. They supported the notion that reflective teaching practice leads to both teacher growth and student learning.

What value, if any, do elementary school teachers place on reflective teaching practice?

Key theme: Challenges in reflective teaching practice. Although participants appeared to value reflective teaching practice, they did acknowledge its challenges. Participants explained that having insufficient time to reflect on classroom challenges affected their ability to address students' immediate learning needs. Time constraints also affected their ability to make course corrections or improvements in instruction. A teacher's resistance to change was also mentioned as impeding reflective teaching practice. Participants explained how change-resistant teacher

mindsets affected the way they thought about their instructional practices and their determinations of the next steps in instruction.

Subtheme: Time constraints. Given that teachers are faced with daily demands, finding time for reflection seemed to pose a challenge when participants attempted to improve their teaching. For instance, Felicia reported,

You don't have time to reflect because of the overload of stuff to do. There's not enough time being provided for any kind of reflection because you are doing one lesson and before you know it, it's on to the next. You really don't have time to think if a lesson went well or not.

Sandra agreed:

I'd say time is a challenge. When I get done with a lesson, I don't have time to sit there and say *how did that go?* I'm on to the next lesson, which could also go poorly because I'm jumping from ELA to math and my mindset is then not wholeheartedly on math. So I would say time is the biggest thing. I can go home and reflect but it is not as beneficial as reflecting right after the lesson in order to improve.

These sentiments were echoed in similar words from Fiona, Wendy, Colleen, and Stewart, each of whom mentioned time for reflection as a challenge due to overwhelming responsibilities in teaching.

Subtheme: Teachers' mindset. Participants in this study discussed how a teacher's mindset, being resistant to change, could hinder reflection and growth in teaching practice. The words *fixed* and *growth mindsets* were mentioned to describe how a teacher's mindset can influence his or her reflection and approach to teaching. Ciara said, "I guess having a fixed mindset of, this is the way I've done it for this amount of time, and it's been working, makes you

not want to question yourself at times.” Kelly also saw a fixed mindset as being a hindrance, noting, “I have to keep reminding myself that there are other ways that work to benefit my students and it’s always good to still consider new ideas.” Barry agreed, elaborating:

I try my best to have a growth mindset, but obviously, I’m not perfect and there are times I’d say I’m not good at *x*, *y*, and *z*. And I always think of that as being the hindrance to me improving as an educator when I’m telling myself I’m not good at something.

Pam also described how being closed-minded and “not being able to say this isn’t working” could affect reflective teaching. She added that one of the hardest things for her was to adjust her students’ achievement goals so that they could eventually meet the standards. Marilyn concluded, “Not being open-minded can affect reflective teaching. Everything in life is evolutionary, and being open-minded can help to improve your teaching.”

To summarize this theme, the teachers said that their biggest hurdles were having insufficient scheduled time for reflection and possessing a mindset that resisted growth if it involved change. The teachers seemed to understand that although these challenges to reflection were present, reflective teaching practice was vital to their professional development.

Key theme: Benefits of reflective teaching. Although participants candidly shared challenges in reflective teaching practice, they also shared its benefits. Participants described how reflective practice promotes self-monitoring and self-assessment of teaching practice, fosters growth in teaching practice, and affects students’ learning. The teachers reported that reflective teaching practice helped them focus on students’ instructional goals, check students’ understanding, and find ways to adjust their own teaching practice based on students’ responses in learning. Participants in this study perceived reflective practice as a guide for monitoring their

teaching, assessing their students' learning, and thinking critically about approaches to improving instruction.

Subtheme: Reflective teaching facilitates self-monitoring and self-assessment. As teachers discussed reflecting on their teaching, it became clear that they viewed self-monitoring and self-assessment as key benefits. They perceived reflective teaching practice as a guide to their professional development and to students' learning. For example, Fiona acknowledged that if students didn't understand a lesson, it was her obligation to reflect and figure out where the problem lay. Cathy also described reflective teaching as a benefit to self-assessing her practice, explaining, "Reflective teaching helps me question if I am doing it right; am I zeroing in on what the students need? . . . I evaluate my students to see if my teaching made a difference, or if I have to reteach a lesson." The importance of reflection in teaching was reinforced by Lisa, who also described a benefit of reflective teaching as having the ability to stay on target to meet the needs of her students, to determine whether in fact she had done so, and to reach the greatest number of students. Sarah also noted that reflective teaching practice helped her to self-assess and to progress-monitor her instructional planning and lesson implementation. Kelly, another advocate for reflective teaching practice, said she preferred to reflect with a colleague to figure out "what worked well and didn't work well" and to get "solid advice" from someone in a similar situation. When Perry discussed benefits of reflective teaching, he listed reasons for self-monitoring his teaching that included the desire to understand what his students needed. He added, "I know being a frustrated learner is one of the worst feelings in the world, so I don't want them to have to feel that way."

Subtheme: Reflective teaching practice fosters teacher growth. Participants in this study viewed reflective teaching practice as a way to become better as teachers. For example, Diane

stated that the benefit of reflecting on her practice was “getting better at it,” adding, “You have to be reflective to grow as a teacher.” Marilyn agreed, noting that the benefit of reflection was the opportunity it afforded teachers to grow in their professional practices and adding, “For me, reflection is growth and discovering every single thing in phases.” Expressing similar sentiments, Wendy noted that reflection kept her focused on her responsibility to her students and on the need to improve as a teacher. She stated,

When you reflect on something you kind of say, “Oh, I should have done it this way.

Why didn’t I do that?” But in teaching, each day is a new day to make it better than the day before. So, this gives me the permission to up the ante and do a better job.

Subtheme: Reflective teaching practice promotes students’ learning. Similarly to teachers’ considering reflective teaching practice to be a benefit to their growth, they described how it could lead to students’ learning. Stewart observed that student growth was a substantial benefit of reflective teaching practice because reflection allows the teacher to help students learn. Felicia also offered her perspective on the benefits of reflective practice and described it as promoting students’ learning. She stated that through reflective practice she is able to determine whether she might need to incorporate alternate strategies or resources to ensure that her students comprehend specific skills being taught. She explained that it was helpful

if I am able to reflect on whether to incorporate more hands-on activities or maybe I have to provide more visuals. Or if a student is an English language learner, maybe I have to put a picture next to the word if they have a little bit trouble reading.

Adding her voice in support of reflective teaching, Ciara noted,

The truth of the matter is if you push yourself, and you're constantly making yourself better, and you're constantly thinking about what you're doing, and perfecting your craft, it just makes the achievement in your class so much better.

Steven, too, said that the most important element of reflection was its effect on student learning.

To summarize this theme, participants viewed the benefits of reflecting on their teaching as promoting teacher and student growth. Reflection was perceived as a way for participants to make changes based on the needs of their students. Teachers reported that reflection helped them to stay focused on targeted goals set for themselves and their students.

What forms of reflective teaching practice do teachers use? How do teachers report that it improves their teaching practice?

Key theme: Forms of reflective teaching practice that support teaching performance.

Participants described the different forms of reflective teaching practice that supported their teaching in a way that improved students' learning. These forms of reflective teaching practice included using teaching frameworks, reflecting through coaching methods, conducting peer observations, participating in a professional learning community (PLC), and using research methods to problem solve and improve teaching.

Subtheme: Teaching frameworks support reflection and guide teaching practice.

Teachers described the ways in which teaching frameworks, for example, The Danielson framework for teaching (Danielson, 2012), were used for self-assessment and also served as guides for reflecting and for facilitating instructional conversations with administrators or instructional coaches after observations. Stewart spoke of the Danielson framework as "the backbone" for his school's evaluations. However, he also explained how it is used informally to assess his teaching practice. Asked to elaborate, Stewart described an informal meeting in which

he and his coach used the rubric to assess his teaching performance and to discuss how Stewart could get to the next level in his teaching. Barry affirmed that his school's teaching framework, similar to The Danielson framework for teaching (2012), was likewise used to facilitate instructional conversations with his dean to improve his teaching practice and noted that the framework provided a "common language." Sandra added that a teaching framework can be used as a guide for lesson planning during formal observations. Cathy also reported using Danielson framework for teaching to guide her teaching performance, noting, "I try my best to follow it because it keeps me guided. It gives me direction on what I need to work on in my teaching." Colleen explained that in addition to being used by individuals to improve their practice, the Danielson framework was used by her school as whole to set school-wide goals for student learning; she called it a "road map" and a "tracker" for their progress. Felicia added that the teaching framework helped to provide a visual for good teaching, saying, "We use the Danielson framework to guide us and the rubrics show us what effective teaching looks like and that's obviously what we all want to reflect on." Adding her voice to the chorus of teachers who used Danielson framework for teaching, Fiona said,

Something that I am reflecting on is communicating with parents. . . I now communicate with parents every single day, through e-mails and my class website. I know there are many different components to it (the Danielson framework), but that's just one that I currently use.

Although teachers seemed to see the benefits of using a teaching framework for reflection to improve teaching practice, they also reported encountering challenges in using it. When discussing her initial experience using Danielson framework for teaching, Wendy stated that she didn't fully understand the framework initially but that professional development had both made

it more accessible to her and allowed it to become part of her teaching philosophy. Selena also candidly shared her thoughts about using Danielson framework for teaching, acknowledging its richness and noting that she should be using it more often, but admitting, “On a day when things go wrong, that framework is gone.” On the other hand, she noted, “there are beautiful moments; like today was a little bit better than yesterday. I would say, elements within the framework did present itself in my teaching today.”

Subtheme: Cognitive coaching supports reflective teaching practice. After I provided a scope to define cognitive coaching, participants were asked to describe their experience. Teachers discussed their experience with reference to being coached and the value they placed on it. They found coaching sessions with instructional deans, coaches, or administrators were useful for their personal growth and their teaching practice. Steven, for instance, said of his coaching experience,

It was a mixture of what was observed and then the opportunity to reflect on that. Every week we’re asked to develop an action step, something that we want to implement in our practice. So far for me it has been cold calling. I wanted to pick up what I learned from this teacher I observed and try it in my own practice. My coach was all for it.

Barry too spoke positively about the coaching sessions:

I think it’s great to have someone else help you see your strengths in terms of planning and your teaching. It can be hard to realize: “Oh, this might be something I’m good at.” So, the coaching experience works as a check, because I can reflect all I want but having some other set of eyes, especially a set of eyes I can trust, is going to provide me with a check on what I need to improve on.

Kelly said that she believed coaching was helpful when the coach demonstrated respect for the teacher; that gave the teacher the confidence to experiment with acting on someone else's perception. Another participant in the study, Cathy, reported that she sought out coaching support to improve on her teaching practice. She said, "My math coach helped me by taking me step by step through a process where I could think of how to try different methods. So it definitely helps." Sandra described a time when she and her coach reflected together on what students needed to learn within an English Language Arts (ELA) module, which helped her to determine her approach to teaching. Marilyn also discussed how conversations with her coach helped her. She revealed,

My coach has helped me a lot with classroom management as well because she's a dean of behavior, so every little thing she catches right away when she observes, and she gives me feedback. Also, in developing my lesson she asks questions, like *how are you going to apply this?*

Subtheme: Peer observation helps reflection in teaching practice. Participants also valued peer observation; they said it served as a visual aid to their learning experience. Teachers expressed their ability to learn various instructional techniques from peers through observation sessions that were either formal or informal and were based on the direct need of the teacher. Teachers who took it upon themselves to seek advice from peers often visited the classroom of a colleague who was considered an expert in a particular instructional area.

Jennifer explained that she observed on a weekly basis, both to see new ways of teaching and to "watch for behavior. I want to see what the class looks like, and what it sounds like when the teacher is presenting certain information." She said of observation, "It gives me an opportunity to get fresh ideas and gives me a better view on how lessons are presented." Stewart

said that a teacher he had been paired with was a “master teacher” and that he observed her because “I wanted to have a little bit of that magic as well, and I wanted to see what she was doing that I could do in my classroom.” Barry described his observations as being more wide-ranging, “depending on what I’m working on.” He did focus on observing excellent teachers because it “lets me take the bits that I like the best or that I’m going to be comfortable doing.” Kelly also noted that informally observing peers helped her to improve her practice, although she added that time constraints prevented her from observing as much as she would like to. Wendy said of observation, “It benefits me in terms of validating what I’m doing is correct because I see it modeled in another classroom. I also pick up little cues that I can use that in my classroom.” Cathy described a formal peer observation in which getting feedback from peers supported her reflection and teaching practice; through feedback, she reported, she “was able to reflect and learn from my peers things that I was doing, and things I wasn't doing.” She added, “Seeing another teacher gives you ideas and things that you may want to take away from it.” Glenn too explained how engaging in peer observation with his co-teacher and visiting other classes supported his daily reflection in teaching. He said,

As a co-teacher, I’m actually getting a peer observation feedback almost every lesson.

But we do try to make a point during our preps to visit other classes. We get to see how other teachers teach the lesson and then talk to them about it afterwards.

Ciara shared insight into how peer observation serves as a prerequisite to teaching at her school.

She explained,

Before they put me in a classroom with my scholars, I observed for about two weeks.

They had me observing, obviously, the better teachers; I was just watching their practices,

watching their lines of questioning during the lessons, their transitions, and the way they reacted to behaviors. That just made me comfortable when I had my own classroom.

Subtheme: Action research supports reflection and problem solving. In this study, action research was described as investigating research-based methods to solve an instructional challenge. A teacher picks an instructional focus based on students' learning needs, applies research-based instructional techniques, and progress monitors its effectiveness. Participants in this study described how they engaged in action research to solve problems based on classroom situations and measured its effectiveness based on student learning outcomes. Glenn described how he used his action research proposal from graduate school to address a challenge in his teaching. He recounted,

Last year I saw a weakness in reading fluency. I did a lot of research and study on what's an effective way to teach fluency instruction that can benefit my students. So I based my guided reading instruction on a certain fluency reading intervention program that helped my struggling students.

When asked how he measured the effectiveness of his intervention method using this technique, Glenn explained how the use of a checklist that helped to determine students' progress in reading was used to track their improvements in decoding. He reported that studies have shown that improvements in fluency lead to reading comprehension; he said he hoped to see similar improvements with his current students, using this technique. Diane also mentioned using action research from her graduate course to incorporate ways to teach vocabulary. She explained how she incorporates methods for teaching vocabulary in every reading lesson. This methodology included previewing the meaning of words from a text before her students began reading. Diane explained that this technique helped her students read more fluently and comprehend the text

more effectively. In addition, Diane stated that she used an assessment at the end of the unit to see whether the technique supported students' learning. She checked for understanding by assessing the way students used the words in sentences or identified word meanings in context. Stewart also described how he used a research-based teaching model to check students' understanding in his science class. He noted, "It's basically like a cycle that deepens the students' understanding, and that's helpful for me because it deepens my understanding of how kids understand that topic." When asked how he measures the effectiveness of the model in his teaching, Stewart explained,

I think one of the things that can tell me if it's effective or not is if I'm using it consistently with fidelity. I think in order to see if something is working, you have to use it consistently and be open to feedback with regards to that implementation.

Fiona said she used action research to problem solve and found instructional resources online to address her students' learning needs. She said that she measured its effectiveness by the resulting level of student understanding in her classroom.

Subtheme: Professional Learning Communities (PLC) supports reflective teaching.

Although participants used different terms for PLC as it related to their school community, the process was similar. Teachers often met collaboratively as a team and/or with an administrator to analyze students' work and discuss best teaching practices. Wendell expressed his thoughts about PLC meetings by saying,

I think it's good for sharing best practices, especially when reflecting on student work. It's interesting to see why one classroom did something and the other one didn't and reflect on what teacher moves created that difference. So for us to be able to have those conversations makes it so that you're not working in a vacuum.

Sandra also described how engaging in PLC helped her to assess student data, inform instruction, and design a classroom structure conducive to students' learning. She reported,

It was interesting because we all noticed the same trends of where some students were doing well, and where others struggled. As a grade, we were able to discuss what the groups should be doing and how that could be beneficial within certain lessons.

Ciara explained that she and her grade level used PLC to either plan lessons or analyze student work and that it informs instruction. She said, "It happens once a week where we sit together and we either think of lesson plans or we analyze scholars' work or data. It could be something different every single week. But we all reflect on something together weekly." Barry also revealed his experience in analyzing student data with his grade-level team. According to Barry, these grade-level meetings supported reflective teaching and ensured consistency in teaching across the grade. Colleen also described how engaging in PLCs enabled her to with peers, discuss students' progress, and plan steps toward improvement, adding, "It's just nice to come together and really look at the work and then figure out how we can push the lower scholars or how we can partner them up by using strategic partnering in the classroom." Steven said that PLCs are embedded in his school's culture and that they help to set normative expectations in teaching and students' learning. He explained,

It's super important to norm on the expected outcomes and then drive your instruction from there. It's very powerful to have that opportunity to sit with peers, go through exemplars of the work, look for the trends, look for misconceptions, and think about ways to overcome them and modify your teaching.

Stewart noted that his meetings with peers included a network of schools teaching the same subject, facilitated by a director within the department. The focus was on discussing the implementation of best teaching practices and student data analysis. Stewart reported,

What we do is basically reflect on the best practices for teaching science. Part of the conversation would involve . . . what's the best way to let students struggle but still give them the support they need? We'll also have conversations about the best ways to write lesson plans. These meetings are helpful because we can also discuss student data and based on students' performance we can see those misconceptions surface in their student work, on their tests, or assessments. I can see what misconceptions are still lingering that I still need to address.

Lisa also shared her PLC experience with colleagues and an administrator; the focus was on how to implement guided reading in the classroom. Lisa stated that the viewing of an instructional video and discussion on best practices supported her reflection. She remarked, "It just helps to see it from a different perspective, tap new ideas, and have conversations about it." Describing her experience with PLCs, Wendy said,

PLCs are very useful and they do work only if it's a topic that you feel you are struggling with, or you feel you need help with; if not, it's a waste of time. But when you leave a PLC and can say, "Okay, I'm glad I was sitting in this PLC. I'm glad I was involved," then you feel more empowered and more strengthened because what you learned was of value to you.

To summarize this theme, participants perceived the above-cited forms of reflective practice as supporting their teaching and ongoing learning process. The participants reflected and learned through instructional conversations, peer observations, experimental learning, and

data analysis. These forms of reflective teaching practices provided learning opportunities that facilitated growth in teaching. The result was they became more aware of both their, and their students' areas of strength and areas for growth.

Summary of the Findings

In this phenomenological study Moustakas's (1994) data collection and analysis method was used to discover how teachers use reflective teaching practice to derive meaning from their classroom experiences and improve on instruction. After teachers' responses were analyzed, and coded, a summary of the findings provided a textural and structural description of their experience. The following textural description provides a report on what the teachers experienced using reflective teaching practice; the structural description provides an explanation of how reflective teaching practice was experienced. In the end, the essence of their experience using reflective teaching practice is revealed.

Textural description (i.e., what was experienced). Teachers in this study described what they experienced as they reflected on their instruction. Teachers reported that reflecting before a lesson enabled them to consider their students' readiness and learning needs. As a result, teachers were able to anticipate their students' struggles and planned accordingly with resources and/or modified instruction. Van Manen (1977) referred to this as critical reflection; in this stage teachers determined the relevance of a lesson based on students' interests, needs, and readiness. Teachers also described what they experienced as they reflected during a lesson. Through observation of students' engagement in learning, teachers in this study reportedly adjusted their teaching on the spot. Schon (1983/1987) referred to skilled reflective practitioners as being able to "reflect in action" that is "in the moment" based on intuitive knowledge and skills. Teachers in this study reflected in the moment by taking into account students' responses in order to

address their immediate learning needs. Furthermore, teachers reflected after teaching a lesson or at the end of a school day. Teachers took this time to analyze students' work to determine next steps in instruction. Dewey (1933) described this form of reflection as being analytical and based on evidence directed toward validity testing. In this study, teachers used an evidence-based approach by analyzing students' written work in the form of exit tickets to identify commonalities in responses, and they made adjustments to improve teaching and students' learning.

Teachers in this study perceived that they experienced growth as a result of reflective teaching practice. Teachers expressed the belief that reflective teaching practice allowed them to become better teachers, and that students would benefit from their growth in teaching. Teachers viewed a connection between their teaching effectiveness and student achievement. However, teachers mentioned challenges to reflective practice, one of which is the lack of time due to overwhelming responsibilities in teaching. Dewey (1933) contended, "Time for reflection is required in order to digest impressions, and translate them into substantial ideas" (p. 34). Teachers perceived personal time for reflection as important because it allowed them to assess and improve upon the delivery of their instruction. Another challenge mentioned was a teacher's resistance to change, which was perceived as impeding reflective teaching practice. Teachers acknowledged that having a closed or fixed mindset can inhibit reflection and can affect a person's ability to adapt to alternate views and teaching strategies that meet students' learning needs. Dweck (2014) wrote, "People with a 'growth mindset' enjoy challenges, strive to learn, and consistently see potential to develop new skills" (p. 28). Teachers in this study concurred that having a growth mindset is vital and supports continuous learning. Reflective teaching

practice was perceived as a professional responsibility that enabled teachers to focus on making instructional improvements that were likely to enhance student learning outcomes.

Structural description (i.e., how it was experienced). The teachers in this study explained how they used feedback to reflect on their instructional practices. They used verbal or written feedback from their students' performance to assess, monitor, and adjust their instruction. In addition, through feedback from a coach and/ or administrator, teachers were able to adopt new strategies in their teaching. Schon (1983/1987) referred to this as "reflection on action" and noted that it took place when a teacher reflected after a lesson with a mentor/coach or with someone else who was more skilled. After a classroom observation, teachers and their coach discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the delivery of a lesson. They also discussed next steps in instruction. Teachers also sought advice from expert peers to address instructional challenges that were connected to their classroom experiences. Through peer observations, teachers could either affirm their teaching practice or view a model that could help them improve.

In this study, teachers also described how engaging in a PLC with colleagues facilitated reflection. In a PLC, teachers were able to reflect on their current practices, view and consider alternate perspectives, and adjust their teaching practices. Through an analytical dialogue about students' work, teachers were able to identify common trends, discuss best practices, and create weekly lesson plans conducive to students' learning. PLC also helped to norm instructional practices that supported effectiveness and consistency in teaching.

Teachers explained how implementing an action research model and using a teaching framework supported reflective teaching practice. For example, teachers used an action research model to investigate instructional methods that solved a class issue. Teachers picked an area of focus, researched and implemented an instructional strategy, and progress-monitored students'

learning based on the applied instructional technique. Teachers also used a teaching framework to reflect on their instructional practices. The teachers described using Danielson framework for teaching (2012) to guide conversations with an instructional coach or dean regarding a common teaching philosophy; the framework was used to assess their teaching performance.

The essence of reflective teaching practice. Reflective teaching practice enabled teachers to make meaning from their classroom experiences and to take necessary steps toward improvements. Through reflective teaching practice, teachers were able to examine their teaching and form new ideas by testing theories to gain new perspectives on their classroom experiences. Teachers used their student learning outcomes to investigate instructional techniques and resources that promoted teaching effectiveness. As a result of reflective teaching practice, teachers perceived a connection between their teaching effectiveness and better student learning outcomes.

Summary

Chapter 4 discussed the research findings regarding 21 elementary school teachers from two urban charter schools. Six themes and 18 subthemes emerged from this study of reflective teaching practice. Teachers' transcribed interviews created a thick, rich description of their experiences with reflective teaching practice. As a result, a textural and structural description of teachers' experiences revealed the essence of the phenomenon. Chapter 5 offers a summary of the results, a discussion of the results in relation to the literature, and implications of the results, and will provide recommendations for future research on reflective teaching practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of teachers who engaged in reflective teaching practice. Constructivism and transformational learning theories were used to code participants' responses about how reflective teaching practice was used to make meaning of their classroom experiences to improve on their instruction. Participants in this study shared how, through reflective practice, they were able to assess their teaching and students' performance toward effectiveness. This study was important because it provided participants a voice to describe how they reflected, learned, and improved on their teaching practice. The information shared by participants has the potential to promote teaching effectiveness and students' learning. This chapter presents a summary of the results; a discussion of the results in relation to the literature; limitations of the study; implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory; recommendations for further research; and a conclusion.

Summary of the Results

The results of this study revealed that participants used reflective teaching practice to assess their teaching in the context of students' learning. Teachers reflected before teaching a new skill, in the moment of teaching, and after teaching or at the end of the school day. Teachers in this study engaged in individual reflection and in reflection in collaboration with colleagues, administrators, and/or peers. Reflective practice enabled them to either confirm the efficacy of their current methods or make discoveries that would allow them to improve their instruction. Teachers used reflective teaching practice to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the delivery of their lessons in efforts to determine next steps in instruction. Teachers perceived reflective practice to be beneficial to their teaching practice in terms of enhancing students'

learning. The following research questions guided the investigation into how teachers engage in reflective practice to promote their teaching effectiveness and promote students' learning:

1. How do elementary school teachers define reflective teaching?
2. In what ways do teachers reflect on their teaching?
3. What value, if any, do elementary school teachers place on reflective teaching practice?
4. What forms of reflective teaching practice do teachers use? How do teachers report that it improves their teaching practice?

Discussion of the Results

The intent behind this study was to discover ways in which teachers reflect, learn, and improve their teaching performance using reflective teaching practices. Each of the participants in the study articulated ways in which he or she engaged in reflective teaching practice.

Participants discussed ways in which they used reflective practice to self-monitor and self-assess their teaching; observe and analyze students' performance; consider students' readiness to learn a new skill; use a teaching framework as a rubric to assess their teaching practice; and engage in coaching sessions, PLCs, and peer observations to view demonstrations of effective teaching practice, and to use an action research model to test and progress monitor instructional strategies to enhance better student-learning outcomes. The following sections provide an in-depth analysis of the results in response to the research questions.

How do elementary school teachers define reflective teaching practice? Participants in this study defined and described reflective teaching practice as self-monitoring and self-assessing their teaching and examining its effects on their students' learning. Researchers (Hall & Simeral, 2015; York-Barr et al., 2006) contended that reflective teaching practice promotes

self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-regulation as teachers attempt to address the complexities and demands of their teaching. Participants also defined and described reflective teaching practice to mean thinking critically about their students' performance and taking steps to modify or adjust their instruction. Reflecting often led them to think of ways to create a more positive learning environment and to incorporate diverse methods of instructional practices that met their students' learning needs.

In what ways do teachers reflect on their teaching? Participants reportedly reflected before teaching their students a new skill. Reflecting before teaching enabled them to consider their students' prior knowledge and readiness level before teaching new material. Van Manen (1977) referred to this process as *critical reflection*, in which teachers consider students' readiness level, interests, and learning needs when teaching a lesson. Teachers in this study used reflective practice to plan for anticipated questions or any misconceptions their students might have about their learning. Teachers also used supplementary resources such as audiovisual aids or hands-on activities to provide students with a better understanding of the lesson.

Participants also discussed reflecting in the moment of teaching, which they thought to be beneficial because it provided an immediate response to students' learning needs. Teachers considered it a way to adjust their teaching on the spot based on their students' level of engagement in learning. Schon (1983, 1987) referred to this as "reflection in action" which is in-the-moment thinking and is based on intuitive knowledge. As teachers reflected in the moment, they were able to assess their own teaching based on their students' responses and to decide on ways to adjust their teaching to elicit improved student learning outcomes.

Another time teachers reportedly reflected was immediately after a lesson or at the end of the school day. This reflection offered a way for teachers to look back on their teaching and on

their students' performance. Teachers reflected by analyzing students' written work and patterns in their responses. Teachers identified students' strengths and areas of struggle in order to determine next steps in instruction. This process is referenced by Dewey (1933, 1938), who believed reflective practice to be analytical, scientific, and based on validity testing.

In addition to describing ways in which participants reflected on their teaching, they also shared what caused them to reflect or informed their reflective practice. Participants were intrinsically motivated to reflect because they perceived that doing so helped them improve their teaching and promoted better student learning outcomes. Through reflective teaching practice teachers were able to implement problem solving strategies as they observed and listened to their students' responses. Participants in this study adjusted their learning goals, conducted small group instruction, used visual aids to reinforce teaching, and modified their instruction. An example is one of the participants mentioned how he addressed a reluctant writer in his class. Reflective teaching practice prompted him to give the student sentence starters to motivate him to write. Through reflection, he mentioned the ability to be flexible and creative in response to his student's learning need. Another participant shared how feedback from her students in the moment of teaching allowed her to identify students who were struggling, and, as a result, she implemented small group instruction that addressed her students' specific learning needs.

What value, if any, do elementary school teachers place on reflective teaching practice? The results indicated participants' perspectives on challenges that affect reflective practice. One factor mentioned was time constraints. Participants mentioned the lack of transition time between classes and the overwhelming responsibilities in teaching. Another factor was the teachers' mindset of being resistant to change. Participants candidly admitted that having a "fixed mindset" could hinder their ability to reflect due to the presence of preconceived

notions or assumptions about their teaching. However, Dewey (1933) suggested that reflective practice be deeply rooted in effective habits that discriminate against opinions, assumptions, or mere assertions that have been untested. Therefore, he recommended that teachers “develop an open-minded preference for conclusions that are properly grounded, and to ingrain into the individual’s working habits methods of inquiry and reasoning appropriate to the various problems that present themselves” (p. 24). Participants in this study perceived open-mindedness to be important for moving toward growth in teaching and improved student learning outcomes.

Despite participants’ reporting on challenges that impeded reflection, they also perceived the benefits of the practice. Participants viewed reflective practice as supporting professional growth in teaching, enabling them to assess and monitor their instruction, and promoting their students’ learning. From the participants’ viewpoints, engaging in reflective teaching practice enabled them to become better at teaching; they saw a connection between improving their practice and their students’ improved performance.

What forms of reflective teaching practice do teachers use? How do teachers report that it improves their teaching practice? Participants described the different forms of reflective teaching practice that supported their teaching effectiveness and promoted students’ learning. Participants discussed how reflection through coaching with deans or administrators, whose primary job is to observe and provide feedback, led to teaching effectiveness. Participants valued this practice because they were able to discuss areas in need of improvement as well as the strengths in the delivery of their lesson, and devised action plans toward improved instruction and students’ learning.

Another form of reflective teaching practice that supported teaching effectiveness was engaging in a PLC. Participants in this study mentioned that engaging in a PLC in collaboration

with colleagues allowed teachers to analyze student work, interpret student data, and identify patterns in students' responses that demonstrated students' strengths and weakness. Participants discussed how in collaboration with colleagues they normed expectations, discussed best instructional practices, and devised lesson plans to address students learning needs. They perceived this form of practice to be a collective responsibility toward shared goals regarding students' learning.

In addition to reflecting on and discussing student learning outcomes in a PLC, participants also sought expert peers to observe. Participants considered expert peers to be colleagues who demonstrated best instructional practices based on their specific instructional challenge. Participants took time during their preparation periods to observe expert peers and reflect on ways to incorporate similar practices in their classroom. Participants viewed peer observation as a way to reflect on their current teaching practices and develop new approaches to effective teaching that enhances student learning.

Participants also mentioned the Danielson framework for teaching (2012) as a form of reflective practice that supported their growth in teaching. The Danielson framework for teaching (2012) was used as a rubric to guide participants' instructional practices toward improved teaching. The Danielson framework for teaching consists of four domains and 22 elements that demonstrate teaching responsibilities toward good teaching practice. Participants used this framework during formal and informal observations to plan lessons and assess their teaching practice. Participants used this rubric to identify the characteristics of a highly effective teacher and make plans toward achieving that goal. For example, in this study, a participant mentioned that one of her focuses this year will be reflecting on ways to communicate with

parents, which is a performance indicator in the rubric; she mentioned that she presently communicated with parents through e-mails and her class website.

Lastly, participants shared how they used action research methods to reflect on and address instructional issues related to students' learning. In this study, reflective teaching practice prompted teachers to investigate research-based methods to implement in their instruction toward students' learning. Teachers discussed ways in which they used action research to identify a problem, apply researched-based strategies, and progress monitor its effectiveness based on students responses. One teacher mentioned that a key factor in determining the effectiveness of an instructional strategy obtained from action research methods is in its use. He explained that a research-based method had to be used with fidelity and consistency; a teacher has to be open to feedback with regard to implementation.

The results of this study provided insight into the ways in which teachers make instructional decisions as they reflect on their daily teaching practice. Participants described how feedback from their students, instructional coaches or administrators, and peers enabled them to identify interventions and strategies to improve their instruction. These strategies included incorporating small group instruction, modifying instruction, scaffolding, and using resources that promoted students' learning. Participants also used reflective practice to either confirm an instructional decision or seek alternative perspectives by visiting a colleague's classroom and observing best practices in teaching.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

The focus of this study was on investigating how teachers engage in reflective teaching practice and the related outcomes. Despite researchers' claims on the importance of reflective teaching practice, and potential benefits, there are still limited studies on how teachers use

reflective teaching practice to improve on their instruction (Marcos, Sanchez, & Tillema, 2011; Williams & Grudnoff, 2011). Therefore, this study contributes to educational research because the results revealed how participants used reflective practice toward effective teaching.

Participants shared how they reflected in their classroom by assessing and monitoring their instruction in response to their students' performance. Participants reflected as they planned their lessons by considering students' background knowledge and readiness to learn a new skill. Participants also reflected in the moment of teaching in an effort to address their students' immediate learning needs. Moreover, participants reflected after the delivery of a lesson or at the end of the school day. Reflective teaching practice enabled participants to assess their teaching and students' performance to determine next steps in instruction.

In addition to engaging in self-reflection, participants also reflected as part of communities of practice. Participants in this study explained how engaging in a PLC facilitated analysis of and discussion about student work and data. Dufour (2004) and Bradley (2015) described PLCs as a systematic approach to having teachers work together in teams as they engage in series of analytical practices in efforts to improve their classroom practices and student learning. Participants in this study discussed how they used student data to norm expectations, identify common trends, share best practices, and discuss next steps in instruction. In this study, a PLC provided participants with the opportunity to work together on shared goals in efforts to achieve better student learning outcomes.

Another significant aspect of reflective practice was participants' intrinsic motivation to become better at teaching. Knowles et al. (2014) described adult learners as problem solvers whose motivation to learn is largely intrinsic. With regard to reflective practice, participants perceived a connection between their teaching effectiveness and students' increased learning.

Through reflective practice, they were able to address problems that were directly related to their classroom experiences. Through classroom observations and the analysis of students' written work, participants were able to make evidence-based decisions to select methods of instruction that were conducive to learning. Participants also used an action research model for reflection by identifying a learning issue, seeking out instructional methods, testing their effectiveness, and monitoring student performance using the applied research. Johnson (2008) defined action research as an inquiry process that engages teachers in "studying real school or class situations to understand and improve the quality of actions and instruction" (p. 28). Teachers in this study viewed action research as a way to test instructional theories in efforts to enhance student learning.

Cognitive coaching also supported participants' reflective practice. In this study, a cognitive coaching model was used in support of teaching effectiveness to promote students' learning. Costa and Garmston (2002) described cognitive coaching as a nonjudgmental approach to reflective practice in which conversations between coaches and teachers support planning, reflecting, and problem solving. Participants described using a cognitive coaching approach with an instructional coach, dean, or administrator to identify strengths and weaknesses in the delivery of their lesson. Through cognitive coaching, participants were able to discuss the outcomes of their informal observations and devise a plan to improve. The Danielson framework for teaching (2012) was also used as a tool during coaching sessions to facilitate conversations around good teaching practices. During these coaching sessions, the teaching framework was used for reflection and to establish a common language around instructional practices that support teaching effectiveness.

Despite a lack of consensus regarding a definition for reflective teaching practice or how to discern whether it is happening among teachers (Tannen, Hall, & Deaton, 2013), participants in this study believed that reflective teaching practice involves thinking critically about students' performance, and assessing and monitoring their teaching effectiveness. Edwards and Thomas (2010) contended, "All human practices involve reflection; and the concern should be less about whether it is happening, rather, within what particular context it is occurring and how it is occurring" (p. 404). Participants in this study explained how they engaged in reflective practice and perceived it as enabling them to self-assess and self-monitor their instruction, problem-solve, foster growth in teaching, and promote student learning. Through reflective teaching, practice participants were able to refine, modify, and adjust their teaching to promote student learning. Participants used reflective teaching practice to test their assumptions in teaching by checking for students' understanding, appropriating instructional resources and tools, and incorporating feedback from instructional coaches, administrators, and peers into their teaching practice.

Limitations

Semistructured interviews conducted in this phenomenological study were based mainly on the responses of participants in view of their reflective teaching practice. This limited any observable insight into how teachers interacted with their students or adjusted their instruction toward teaching effectiveness and students' learning. Another limitation was that reports in this study mostly involved participants' view of reflective practice as it related to their pedagogical practices. This limited any additional insight about how teachers reflect on their classroom experience as it relates to creating an environment of respect and rapport, establishing a culture for learning, managing classroom procedures, managing student behavior, and organizing physical space (Danielson, 2008).

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Implications for practice. In this study, the participants perceived time constraints to impede reflective practice. Participants mentioned lack of sufficient transition time and overwhelming demands in teaching, such as staff meetings, as factors that challenged reflective practice. According to Francis (2009), “Much of the day is already scheduled. There is very limited leeway in altering a class schedule, so teachers must work very efficiently with the very limited time that is flexible” (p. 3). Therefore, a teacher’s schedule that includes time for reflection within and between classes can be beneficial in enabling teachers to make decisions that facilitate students’ learning. Francis (2009) also suggested that teachers reflect on what and how they are spending considerable time during an instructional period, for example, attending to disruptions, taking attendance, and repeating directions. Through reflective practice, teachers can self-monitor and self-assess the pacing of their lessons, and pay close attention to the amount of time spent on attending to classroom procedures or routines. As a result of reflective practice, teachers can identify the issue and then take steps to ensure that more time is spent on instruction and routines that enhance students’ learning.

Another significant aspect of reflective teaching practice, according to participants, suggested that a teacher’s mindset that is resistant to change can impede reflection. This could be due to a teacher having preconceived notions about his or her teaching practice. According to Knowles et al. (2014), because of their wide range of experiences, adult learners can be closed to new ideas or alternative perspectives. For this reason, it is recommended that, “adult educators try to discover ways to help adults examine their biases and open their minds to new approaches” (p. 45). An approach to uncovering personal biases can be to facilitate professional learning that engages teachers in reflection and the exploration of new approaches to teaching practices

through videos, peer observation, and research studies that support better student learning outcomes. According to Kelly, a participant in this study, she constantly reminds herself that there are other ways that work to benefit her students and it's always good to consider new ideas. Therefore, as teachers reflect on current practices, and are exposed to new ideas, the possibility exists that they can develop new perspectives that lead to improved student learning. To summarize this theme, another participant concluded, "Everything in life is evolutionary, and being open-minded can help to improve one's teaching practice."

Finally, incorporating reflective teaching practice in job-embedded professional development can support continuous learning. According to Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, and Powers (2010), "Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) refers to teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning" (p. 2). Participants in this study affirmed that engaging in JEPD, for example through PLCs, supported their reflective practice and led to their analyzing student work and discussing interventions, modifications, resources, and effective lesson planning among themselves. According to Bradley (2015), "When teachers engage in job-embedded professional development, they learn what practices increase student achievement" (p. 3). Therefore, incorporating reflective practice in teachers' job-embedded learning can enable them to assess their instruction, based on students' performance, and develop plans that lead to student achievement. In addition, reflective teaching practice can support personalized learning as teachers engage in JEPD. Job-embedded professional development can support teachers' reflection as they seek and receive feedback from an instructional coach, administrator, or expert peer. Offering teachers personalized job-embedded support through coaching can enable them to reflect on direct classroom challenges

that affect their instructional practice and students' learning. This approach can lead to teachers' setting achievable instructional goals and leveraging resources to increase teaching effectiveness.

Implications for policy. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) requires states to consider their accountability systems for all charter and public schools in response to students' academic achievement. Although states can choose both a long-term goal, and smaller, interim goals, these goals must address proficiency rates on tests, English-language proficiency rates, and graduation rates. In other words, schools will have to set an expectation that all groups that are furthest behind, close gaps in achievement, and graduation rates (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2016). Therefore, teachers will need to use reflective practice to understand what students need to know and be able to do in order to reach proficiency. Through reflective practice, teachers can address whole-school reform efforts by reflecting on their students' academic data and devise a plan to ensure students are meeting required state standards. Teachers can use reflective practice to progress monitor students' learning in order to apply instructional strategies and resources most effectively. As a result, teachers will be able address any disparities between content requirements and their instructional practices to meet intended goals.

The NYC Department of Education has instituted a new teacher-evaluation policy that will take effect in the 2017–2018 academic school year. In this new evaluation policy, teachers are expected to provide evidence of students' work to determine the effectiveness of their teaching practice (UFT, 2016). For this reason, it will be important for teachers to reflect on both their teaching and student performance. While collecting and documenting evidence of students' work, teachers can reflect on best instructional practices conducive to student learning. Reflective practice can be instrumental as teachers assess their students' performance and plan

interventions and resources that meet their students' learning needs. Furthermore, through reflective practice, teachers will be able to self-assess and self-monitor their own level of competency based on students' learning, to determine their next steps in teacher growth. Through reflective practice, teachers will be able to analyze their teaching and students' learning using formative and summative assessments. According to Hall and Simeral (2015), "Every planned task in the classroom is considered an assessment of students and provides the teacher with continuous information that will direct his or her next steps" (p. 130). Therefore, during the evaluation process, along with students' work, teachers can be asked to provide evidence of a professional growth plan that showcases their professional learning goals, based on student data, a timeline for implementation, and next steps to ensure teachers' continuous learning. Providing a professional growth plan can reinforce teachers' perception of their growth as it enhances to students' learning.

Implications for theory. This study shows that reflective practice facilitates problem solving in teaching. Researchers who study reflective practice suggest that through problem solving teachers are able to make meaning from their classroom experiences (Dewey; 1933; York-Barr et al., 2006; Ghaye, 2011; Cornish & Jenkins, 2012). Likewise, participants in this study reportedly problem-solved by examining their teaching, and assessing their students' learning. As a result, they implemented interventions, tested instructional strategies, and applied resources in response to their students' learning needs. Moreover, participants used reflective practice to problem-solve during coaching sessions or in a PLC with their colleagues. This strategy led to their leveraging ideas and resources; developing plans; and implementing instructional strategies intended to improve students' learning. These analytical procedures conducted through reflective practice show that teachers problem-solve by taking inventory of

their classroom situations and use diverse methods to improve teaching and better student learning outcomes.

Another theoretical implication is that reflective practice promotes self-directed learning that enhances teaching. According to Knowles et al. (2014), “When adults undertake to learn something on their own, they will invest considerable energy in probing into the benefits they will gain from learning it” (p. 43). With respect to reflective practice, participants in this study applied self-directed learning to address the outcomes of their students’ academic performance. Self-directed learning led them to explore diverse methods of instruction, based on their students’ learning needs. Through reflective teaching practice, participants checked their students’ understanding and assessed their own instructional practices. As a result, participants used self-directed learning to plan, implement, and modify instruction; conduct formative assessments; and appropriate resources to enhance students’ learning. Participants also used self-directed learning to seek new ideas from expert peers on ways to address their specific instructional challenges. In this regard, reflective teaching practice has the potential to promote self-directed learning as teachers seek opportunities to improve their instructional practice.

Furthermore, in terms of teacher growth, reflective teaching practice can foster a commitment toward continuous learning. In this study, participants were intrinsically motivated to reflect and improve on their instruction based on their students’ learning needs. According to Knowles et al. (2014), “Adults are motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them improve perform tasks or deal with problems they confront in their life situations” (p. 46). In this regard, a teacher’s focus on a class or school-wide issue can foster reflection and a commitment to continuous learning. As teachers reflect on a related issue, they can be motivated to learn about instructional practices, resources, and technologies that support

their students' learning needs. Such elements can include how to develop standards-based lesson plans and assessments, differentiate instruction, and ways to progress-monitor students' learning. The use of reflective practice in meaningful ways can facilitate continuous learning. Participants in this study used reflective practice as a support to continuous learning by monitoring and assessing their instructional practices, analyzing student data or written responses; considering students' readiness in learning new skills; adjusting their teaching based on student observations; appropriating instructional strategies and resources; seeking out feedback and ideas; progress monitoring, and developing action plans toward effective teaching. Participants mentioned teacher and student growth as benefits of reflective practice and considered it a professional responsibility of teachers who wanted to improve teaching effectiveness.

Recommendations for Further Research

For this study, semistructured interviews were conducted to gain the perspective of teachers engaging in reflective teaching practice. However, it is recommended that for further research, a pre-observation conference, a teaching observation, and a post-observation conference to be included in a future research study. Doing so can help to provide additional insight into how teachers reflect on instruction before teaching, during a lesson, and after they teach. Through a pre-observation interview, the researcher may discover how a participant incorporates reflective practice in planning and preparing for lessons. For instance, participants in this study explained that before teaching a new skill, they considered students' readiness level by anticipating students' struggles and implementing instructional strategies to scaffold concepts in learning. Therefore, a researcher may discover how teachers develop lesson plans that consider what students know, need to know, and ways in which they will assess what students learned. During the delivery of the lesson, the researcher can view the way in which a teacher

presents a lesson, establishes rapport with students, manages student behaviors, conducts formative assessments, manages classroom procedures, responds to student learning needs, and documents progress. A post-observation discussion can provide an opportunity to gain the perspective of teachers regarding the outcomes of the lesson. The researcher can ask probing questions that elicit responses on how successful the students were, and in what ways they met or did not meet learning expectations. Teachers can reflect on and discuss what went well, provide evidence of students' work, and share next steps in instruction.

Another recommendation would be to observe teachers' engagement in a PLC. Through interviews, participants in this study shared how reflective practice in a PLC enabled them to analyze students' work, norm expectations, and share best instructional practices to meet their students' learning needs. According to Knowles et al. (2014), "Adult learners thrive in experiential learning environments that foster group discussions, problem-solving activities, simulation exercises, case studies, and so forth" (p. 45). Therefore, through a PLC observation, a researcher may discern ways in which teachers work in collaboration and use reflective teaching practice to set norms, analyze students' work, interpret student data, and leverage resources. Moreover, a researcher may observe how teachers capitalize on each other's strengths and provide feedback that stimulates reflection on next steps in instruction. After the PLC observation, the researcher can conduct a focus group with participants to gain their perspectives on the session. The PLC session can be videotaped and presented so that teachers can reflect on their discussion and share what they learned about the effects of their teaching practice on students' performance. A videotaped session may also provide teachers with insight on the strengths of their discussion and ways to further enhance the PLC experience to ensure better student-learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The purpose of conducting this phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of participants who engage in reflective practice to promote teaching effectiveness and students' learning. Constructivist and transformative learning theories were used to explore how teachers reflect, learn, and improve on their teaching practice. Patterns in participants' responses reveal that participants reflect in response to their students' learning needs. Reflective practice prompted participants to problem-solve, elicit feedback, seek new ideas, and make decisions to facilitate student learning. Despite reported challenges, participants perceived that reflective practice fostered teacher growth and promoted student learning. Therefore, this research has shown reflective teaching practice has the potential to enable teachers to improve their skills while adapting to the ever-changing demands of the teaching profession.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Demographic Data/ Interview Protocol

Demographic Data for Interviews:

- Name of Participant
- Gender
- Race/Ethnicity
- Number of Years Teaching
- Grade Level/Subject Currently Teaching

Interview Protocol and Guiding Interview Questions:

Interview Protocol
Name of Interviewer: Name or Pseudonym of Interviewee: Time and Length of Interview: Date and Location of Interview:

Research Question 1: How do elementary school teachers define reflective teaching?

- As a teacher, how would you describe a reflective teacher? How you would you define reflective teaching?

Research Question 2: In what ways do teachers reflect on their teaching?

- What causes you to reflect on your teaching? When do you reflect on your teaching?
- Tell me about a time when you reflected during the course of your teaching. What teaching strategies did you use to ensure students' learning?
- Tell me about a time when you reflected after a lesson. How did you seek guidance from a coach or mentor to improve your teaching? What were some outcomes, e.g., what next steps did you take to modify, adjust, or refine your teaching?

Research Question 3: What value, if any, do elementary school teachers place on reflective teaching practice?

- What do you see as benefits of reflecting on your teaching?
- What are some challenges or what might impede your ability to reflect on your teaching?

Research Question 4: What forms of reflection do teachers use? How do teachers report that reflection informs their teaching? Now I am going to ask about the forms of reflective practice that inform your teaching.

- For example, teaching frameworks are used to measure teaching effectiveness or set goals to improve teaching effectiveness. Do you use teaching frameworks to evaluate your teaching? In what way do you use them to set goals to improve your teaching effectiveness (e.g. Danielson Framework for Teaching/Marzano)?
- Action research allows teachers to view themselves as researchers as they use research-based problem-solving techniques in their teaching practice. So, do you use action research to strengthen your teaching? In what ways do you apply this technique to improve on your teaching practice? How do you evaluate its effectiveness?
- Cognitive coaching is designed to facilitate conversations between coaches and teachers about planning, reflecting on their teaching, and problem solving. Do you participate in any cognitive coaching with an administrator or an instructional coach? If so, tell me the focus of your coaching experience and whether it supported your reflection in teaching.
- Have you participated in peer observations? Tell me your experience with observing a colleague's classroom. What prompted you to visit the teacher's classroom? What was the focus of your observation? How did this observation help you reflect on your teaching?
- A professional learning community (PLC) is described as a community of practice in which teachers reflect on, and analyze, student work. Teachers participate in collaborative inquiry and discuss teaching methods that support students' learning. Do you participate in a PLC? If so, tell me how you got involved in your PLC. What was the focus/topic? Does this method help to support your reflection in teaching? If so, what makes it work so well for you? If not, what do you see as challenges?
- Do you have any questions? Would you like to provide any additional insight regarding your experiences with reflective teaching practice?

APPENDIX B: Consent Form

Research Study Title: Reflective Teaching Practice
Principle Investigator: Abimbola Disu
Research Institution: Concordia University–Portland
Faculty Advisor: Barbara Weschke

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this research study is to discover K–5 teachers’ experiences using reflective teaching practices in their work. Teachers will be selected upon a principal’s recommendation and approval. Teachers will be offered reflective teaching practice techniques and strategies in support of their work. Enrollment will begin on September 8, 2016 and end on September 15, 2016. The study is scheduled to last from September 22, 2016- November 22, 2016.

To be in the study, you will be asked to:

- Read and sign a consent form for participation in the research study.
- Return the completed consent form in an attached stamped self-addressed envelope.
- Complete a demographic survey that discloses information such as their names, age, gender, years of teaching experience, and the subject and grade they currently teach.
- Participate in one introductory meeting of 15-20 minutes, two recorded interviews of approximately 50 minutes each, and one possible follow-up meeting of approximately 15-20 minutes.
- Be available for follow-up questions and “member checking” to review interpretations and conclusions about the research study.

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you or your school. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic passcode or locked inside a file cabinet in my office. The study will use a passcode protected computer and recoding software. Regarding the recording of an interview, the interview will be transcribed while striking any personal identifying information from the transcript. As soon as the transcript can be validated as correct, the recording will be deleted so this recording cannot be used to identify you. When the data is reviewed and analyzed, none of the data will contain your name or identifying information. You will not be identified in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

Benefits:

Information you provide could offer insight to the greater educational community on ways to embed reflective teaching practice in professional development training. It could also provide you a voice in sharing ways to use reflective teaching practices that may lead to improved student learning outcomes.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us about abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required and there is no penalty for not participating.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions you can talk to or write the principle investigator, Abimbola Disu at email bodisu33@yahoo.com. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch at email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390.

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

Participant Name

Date

Participant Signature

Date

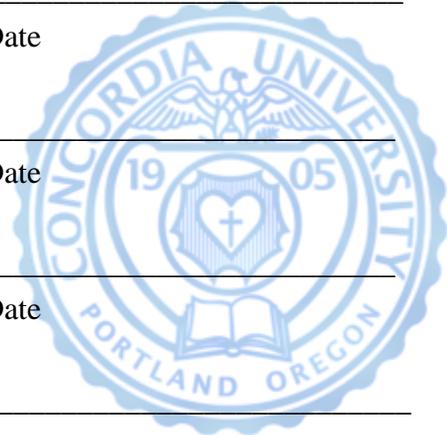
Investigator Name

Date

Investigator Signature

Date

Abimbola Disu, email bodisu33@yahoo.com
[Faculty Advisor: Dr. Barbara Weschke, email \[bweschke@cu-portland.edu\]\(mailto:bweschke@cu-portland.edu\)](#)
[Concordia University–Portland](#)
2811 NE Holman Street, Portland, OR 97211



APPENDIX C: Confidentiality Agreement

Transcriptionist

I, _____ transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regard to any and all audiotapes and documentations received from (researcher's name) related to his/her research study on the researcher study titled (name of research study). Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents.
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized titles of the transcribed interviews texts, unless specifically requested to do so by the researcher, (name of researcher).
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession.
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related materials to (researcher's name) in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any back-up devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally responsible for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

Researcher's name (printed) _____

Researcher's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX D: Statement of Original Work

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

abimbola disu

Digital Signature

Abimbola Disu

Name

3/23/17

Date