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# Teacher Transformation: Self-reflection and praxis

Barbara Rousseau

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**TEACHER TRANSFORMATION: SELF-REFLECTION AND PRAXIS**

**BY**

**BARBARA ROUSSEAU**

B.A., Communication Studies, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1976  
M.Ed., University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1989

DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

**Doctor of Education  
Educational Leadership**

The University of New Mexico  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**May, 2010**

## **DEDICATION**

To my late brother, Michael, for whom education should have been the wind beneath his wings. May all teachers and students be attentive to those who see, feel, and know things differently.

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**ABSTRACT**

Teachers who practice self-reflection, particularly through narrative journals, report that they experience new ways to make meaning through perceptual transformation in how they view themselves, their work, and their relationships. The meaning making process for this personal and professional transformation is connected to how situations are perceived from a locus of control. A study of the research reported that teacher turnover rates are increasing primarily because of job dissatisfaction. A further investigation revealed this dissatisfaction was due to lack of administrative support, student behavioral problems, lack of school policy input, and low salaries. Funding for innovative instructional initiatives and professional development showed mixed results. To investigate how teachers access their personal resiliency in order to sustain motivation, quality teaching and professional commitment, this qualitative, exploratory study elicited from teachers how they made meaning of incidents through a structured journal deconstructive process. A sample of seven teachers in the Southwestern United States wrote nine journals on school-related incidents of

their choice and an exit interview. Findings revealed, through this grounded theory approach and qualitative triple-coding, respondents framed their incident interpretation through the lens of inner or outer locus of control—they either framed incidents as occurring *to* them and or *from* their stance of efficacy and congruence. One of the main findings was that most respondents consistently framed situations from an inner locus of control. Another finding was that this perspective transformation was reported despite a majority of stress-related journal topics. In the exit interviews, teachers expressed “gratitude” and “value” in the study process and indicated they would continue the practice. Three theoretical propositions emerging from this research were: The greater the inner locus of control, the stronger the level of congruence; they are mutually occurring. The mindful practice of high levels of congruent thinking has the potential to build teacher resiliency and retention. When self-reflective practice, perspective transformation, and congruent practices are implemented as the foundation for school “climate”, sustainable, systemic education reform is possible.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Positioning the Problem: Teacher Attrition and the Impact on Communities**

Over the years, working in various educational settings here and abroad, I have observed an increase in teachers leaving the profession not due to retirement (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003) but primarily due to job dissatisfaction (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005) or to pursue another job (Ingersoll, 2003). Reports, studies, and literature as well as my own tacit knowledge indicate that the demands of teaching have become increasingly stressful. Teachers must meet accountability mandates (NCLB, 2001) while teaching an increasing number of students with bipolar disorders (Moreno, Laje, Blanco, Jiang, Schmidt, Olfson, 2007). Logically, if we are to graduate well-prepared, educated youth we need educators who embody the caliber of educational excellence, discipline, and basic integrity we wish to see in young people.

Helping teachers build resiliency, confidence, and empowerment through efficacy (Hoy, 2008; Oberg, 2008; Seligman, 2006), may provide the essential personal skills in preparing our 21<sup>st</sup> century global workforce. Because of their role in the classroom, the level of teachers' discipline, respect, and work-ethic is modeled to students daily. Investing in teachers, has long-term sustainability implications for communities, the nation, and the world.

The impact of teacher turnover is costly educationally and economically. A robust economy is directly connected to the strength of its education system (Beader, 2005). The

AEE (2005) Issue Brief on Teacher Attrition: A costly loss to the nation and to the states addressed this economic impact.

A conservative national estimate of the cost of replacing public school teachers who have dropped out of the profession is \$2.2 billion a year (Department of Labor statistics source). If the cost of replacing public school teachers who transfer schools is added, the total reaches \$4.9 billion every year. For individual states, cost estimates range from \$8.5 million in North Dakota to a whopping half a billion dollars for a large state like Texas (p. 1).

For example, a language arts teacher who shared with me that his careful planning to engage at-risk teens, inclusion strategies for special needs students, and willingness to work 60 plus hour weeks went unrecognized and, more importantly, in his opinion, unsupported. Finally, in fatigue and frustration he took another job at a school where faculty had a *voice* in the building's strategic planning. When he gave his notice, the school quickly replaced him as automatically as an appliance that has reached the end of its life cycle. He described his personal experience with feeling as if he were in a *revolving door* and bemoaned feeling *dispensable*.

As I studied the trends and the research addressing primary reasons teachers leave their profession, it became clear to me that perhaps if given an opportunity to discover deeper levels of resiliency and commitment *within themselves* rather than in exclusively external supports, such as professional development, a stronger level of *buy in* may result.

To get to the core of teacher turnover, burn-out, and lack of ethics in public school faculty behavior, I wanted to get to the core of what's going on in the hearts and minds of teachers directly to find out how they were managing teaching in such a daily challenging



climate. Providing a guided, open-ended journal structure for teachers to confidentially self-reflect and analyze personal perspectives could elicit insights to help other teachers for personal and professional commitment. The intent of this study was to discover how teachers were making meaning of their experiences. What factors motivate them to do their work with full engagement? Would there be a potentially transformational influence on teachers through self-reflective journaling as a personal and professional intervention? This grounded theory study sought to see what trends might emerge from teachers' journals as they made meaning of their self-reflection, personal transformation, and how they saw themselves putting potential perspective changes into practice (Christie, 2007; Dirkx, 1997, English, Fenwick, & Parsons, 2003; Grimmet, 1994; Kreber, 2004; Lovat, & Clement, 2008; Mezirow, 1991; Singh, 2007; Taylor, 2007; and Tisdell, 2003)

I conducted exploratory research with a specifically sequential instrument to discover what perceptions teachers might discover or rediscover for themselves. I was interested to see what would emerge for teachers in their first-hand accounts of how they found resiliency, greater efficacy, and a more expanded perspective of themselves, those with whom they work, and the students they teach. Would they find that if they changed, their environment changed as well? Would a seemingly small step of *critical self-reflection* be enough of a catalyst to improve how they saw themselves and how they related to their profession?

### *Teacher Attrition*

Our radically changing world is evident in advancements of information, communication, and transportation accessibility. Medical discoveries and innovations have increased availability as never before for populations in need. Conversely, communities are experiencing job losses, home foreclosures, *war zone* neighborhoods, escalating crime, and a

rising number of youth suffering from clinical depression. Teaching is not what it used to be and neither are the students.

In addition to student profile complexities, schools struggle with a decreased pool of teachers from which to hire. Licensure complications, additional coursework requirements, and other state-specific endorsements put hurdles in the path of new teachers who are already wondering if they have chosen the right career (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000). The decreasing pool of teachers includes retirees as well as teacher *turnover* as stated by Ingersoll (2001). “In brief, the results of the analysis show that teacher turnover is a significant phenomenon and a dominant factor behind the demand for new teachers and the difficulties schools encounter adequately staffing classrooms with qualified teachers.” (p.5)

Age does not appear to be a factor in teacher attrition. It is not only young, “generation X” teachers, who often struggle with job fulfillment versus loyalty to their employment, but veteran teachers as well (Boverie & Kroth, 2001). As one thirteen-year veteran of teaching stated,

There are so many barriers—schools that are too large, lack of funding for adequate materials, lack of opportunities for professional development that are fully paid and time off for the event is given without having to take a personal or sick leave day, lack of substantial time for collaboration with other professionals, lower salaries, lack of parental involvement, poor image of education and educators that is perpetuated in the media, a superintendent that has not yet visited some of the schools in his district. All of these lead to low morale for those who choose to remain in teaching...A sense of duty kept these teachers dedicated to their jobs, but they were very unhappy

overall...The teachers...loved their work—the actual teaching, but lost passion because they were not cared for (p. 83).

From his studies of empirical research, Ingersoll noted that teacher characteristics—subject field, age, etc.—accounted for some of the turnover, not all. Previous research overlooked other significant effects of *school* characteristics and *organizational* conditions. Here are several of the characteristics he discovered which contribute to high teacher turnover: inadequate support from the school administration, student discipline problems, limited faculty input into school decision-making, and low pay.

The pattern of teacher attrition cited in an Issue Brief for The Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE, 2005) finds that teachers struggle with overwhelming workloads, problematic student behavior, and lack of influence over school policy. The situation has become a silent, continuously growing problem. Alarming, just under half, often the best and brightest, who enter the field are often the first to leave it within a mere five years (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000).

Harvard's Project on the New Generation of Teachers (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005) claims there is a relatively high teacher turnover in American schools, higher than in the prior decades. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics for 2000-2001 (Table 1) shows that out of a population of nearly three million teachers, 7.7% moved from their school, with an additional 7.4% who left teaching. This is a total percentage of 15.1% of American teachers who have left their schools (Luekens, Lyeter, Fox, and Chandler, 2004).

### *Economic Implications*

Teacher retention and commitment to the profession is vital for the sustainability of healthy communities (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2005). As a stakeholder

**Table 1. Public School Stayers, Movers, and Leavers by Selected School and Teacher Characteristics, 1999-2000 to 2000-2001.**

School or Teacher Characteristic	Total Number	Percentage of Stayers	Percentage of Movers	Percentage of Leavers
<b>Total</b>	2,994,600	84.9	7.7	7.4
<b>Age</b>				
Under 30	494,400	74.7	15.7	9.6
30-39	708,300	84.9	8.6	6.5
40-49	913,600	88.7	6.7	4.6
50 or more	880,400	86.8	3.6	9.8
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	731,300	86.7	6.0	7.4
Female	2,263,300	84.3	8.3	7.4
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>				
White, non-Hispanic	2,540,400	85.0	7.6	7.5
American Indian/Alaskan Native	22,700	87.9	4.7	7.5
Hispanic	160,900	85.4	7.1	7.5

Source: Luekens, Lyter, Fox and Chandler (2004). *Teacher attrition and mobility from the teacher follow-up survey*. 2000-01. Washington, D.C.: National Center for Education Statistics.

member representing Montezuma County in the Colorado Healthy Community Initiative in the early 1990s, we gathered information on local county indicators of health and wellness,

economic vitality, educational quality and access, and employment. The strength and interdependency of these components determined the vitality of the community profile (Conner & Easterling, 2002). “Education improves health status. Knowledge and skills gained through education provides access to information one may need to make healthy choices and access to job opportunities.” (Beader, 2005. p. 27)

Therefore, the support and retention of teachers is important for not only the health of local communities but also for the future of our citizenry and our educated participation in the global workforce. If we are to secure and support teachers, reviewing attrition trends and retention interventions are important. If current retention efforts are not stemming the tide of increasing teacher turnover (Henke, Chen, & Geis, 2000; Ingersoll, 2001; Luekens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004), what are we missing?

The education and discipline of our future workforce determine our social structure economically and the overall quality of life for our communities. How can we stem the rising tide of teacher attrition? Boverie and Kroth (2001) emphasize the importance of supporting and even nurturing human resources, whether in organizations or education.

People who are passionate about their work can also burn out if the organization does not feed their flame with recognition, rewards, new learning, and support for risk-taking and challenges.... How many people burned brightly for a while, only to see “organizational firefighters” douse the flame? Reigniting that flame is more difficult for some than for others, but the source of fire always resides in each of us, ready for the match to strike (p.9).

### *Student Need*

The impact of teachers leaving, or even moving within the system, carries a cost in terms of human resource management including the learning curve and typical mistakes which naturally come with bringing a new hire *up to speed*. Beyond this, the cost to the students in losing experienced teachers, takes a toll in terms of continuity and educational rigor and discipline. It sends a clear message to students about commitment.

There is a growing consensus among researchers that the single most important factor in determining student performance is the quality of his or her teachers. Therefore, if the national goal of providing an equitable education to children across the nation is to be met, it is critical that efforts be concentrated on developing and retaining high-quality teachers in every community and at every grade level (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2005, p.1).

### **Retention**

Research on teacher turnover draws our attention to the proactive stance of building teacher retention through a deeper understanding of the school and classroom dynamics prompting decisions to stay or leave. Huberman's (1993) open-ended, in-depth research interviews with 160 teachers in Switzerland resulted in his proposed theory of teachers' *career life cycles* and a model for teacher development research in Western countries. One of his insights was that during the first few years, teachers are often overwhelmed with work responsibilities and teaching uncertainties; students sense this uncertainty and take advantage of it through disruption. Ultimately, he found the criteria for fulfillment are dependent on *teachers' sense of their classroom efficacy*. This begs the question, "What would building teacher efficacy look like?"

Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) listed components of a new teacher induction *package* that indicate improved retention. They refer to the *basic induction* dual package of *quality mentoring* and *supportive administrator communication* with a turnover probability of 39 percent. However, the findings showed that when these five additional components were brought into the induction package, for a total of seven support elements the predicted probability of turnover dropped to 18 percent, "...collaboration/common planning time, seminars, teacher networks, an aide, and reduced course load." (p. 89)

Asking just what it is that teachers need to stay in the profession, Huberman (1993) describes the slow, draining 'burn-out' which plagues teachers as the years progress. Professional development, new roles, and career ladders are interventions often accessed for renewal. However, other research has shown that professional development may not be the be-all-end-all prescription it was thought to be (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Little, 1993). Research (Shields et al., 2003) which concurs stated that "...only about one-quarter of California teachers reported...that their professional development was sustained over time with ample participant follow-up and teacher support. Thirty-nine percent reported that their professional development was a series of single events with little or no follow up." p.90

In another study, Mevarech (1995) described how veteran teachers in Israel faced new instructional strategies in professional development. His observations revealed that when shown how to implement a new method, they "forgot their rich pedagogical knowledge base." (p. 92) Maravech continued to describe how when new ways of teaching are introduced, some teachers resist moving from their comfort zones of what has been *tried and true*.

This is not to say that solid professional development, well facilitated with supportive follow-up, not only improves teacher *efficacy*, but it may concurrently improve *retention*. In a longitudinal study over a ten year period examining the collaborative work of three teachers, Sawyer (2001) found that teachers who received structural support for their personal renewal deepened their sense of efficacy and resourcefulness.

### **Finding Deeper Levels for Retention**

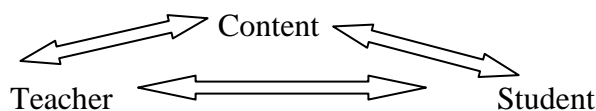
Retention is most often associated with instructional strategies, classroom methodologies, and professional development interventions. However, Ball and Forzani (2007) emphasized the importance of the more subtle influence of class environment, communication exchanges and instructional content interpretation between students and teachers they refer to as the *instructional dynamic*.

Education is the deliberate activity of helping learners to develop understanding and skills. Although it occurs in many settings and through a wide range of mechanisms, it is typically associated with schools, where it consists of interactions among teachers, students, and content, in the various environments of schools. By *interactions*, we mean active processes of interpretation that constitute teaching and learning. Teachers interpret and represent subject matter to students, who interpret their teachers, the content, and their classmates and then respond and act... We consider these multiple interactions, which we call the *instructional dynamic*, to be the defining feature of education. (p. 530)

Pedagogical approaches typically focus on student engagement, curriculum design, assessments and measures, and methodology. Ball & Forzani, (2007) emphasize the importance of understanding the *arrows* that connect content, teacher and student.



“...Whether or not teachers understand and attend to the arrows—the instructional dynamic—which connects the three (see Figure 1) may give us some insight into variances in academic rigor, teacher dispositions, and classroom effectiveness.” (p. 529)



**Figure 1. Instructional triangle adapted from Cohen, Raudenbush & Ball, 2003 (p.124).**

In the midst of our preoccupation with the triad of teacher, student, content (material), how are we addressing the ‘arrows’ between these three components—the actual dynamics of teaching? What is that unique interaction that brings excitement and inspiration to teaching? What is it in the *transmission* among between these three—the instructional dynamic?

Knowing about and understanding teachers, learners, content, or environments—or even knowing and understanding all of these entities—is not a substitute for knowing about and understanding the dynamic relationships among them that constitute the core of the educational process. Research that focuses on this dynamic is research that probes not only the corners of the instructional triangle but also the arrows.

These arrows represent the dynamic process of interpretation and mutual adjustment that shapes student learning, instructional practice, or policy implementation (Ball & Forzani, 2007, p. 531).

The difficulty in addressing the ‘arrows’ is that few teachers understand the instructional dynamic linking instructors, instruction, and students. Palmer (1998) contends that the degree to which teachers reflect deeply on who they are, their beliefs, their values,

their interpersonal relationships will set the tone for the classroom climate and thereby authentic communication and effective teaching. Teachers who courageously confront their limitations and work to replace them transform themselves and students. What about teachers who do not understand or know how to go about this? When teachers reflect deeply on their perspectives, beliefs, values, and the potential for doing things differently, do their perceptions change about themselves and their practice?

The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2007) has emphasized the importance of *teacher dispositions* as a component of professional development defining dispositions as “...as professional attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors as educators inter-act with students, families, colleagues, and communities. These positive behaviors support student learning and development.”(p. 2)

Is it possible that in our push for accountability, results, and achievement we have neglected to maintain a balance in the very critical work of supporting our teachers—their dispositions— and thereby effectively educating our children? Have we overemphasized content delivery without attending to ‘the inner world’ of the teacher? How can we support our students, if the teachers are not supported? To understand how we can better support teachers, it is worth noting Palmer’s (1998) explanation of the instructional dynamic—the relationship between the inner world of teachers and the effect on students and the classroom.

There is a complex relationship between what goes on in the inner world of teachers and the outer world of their practice. Teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one’s inwardness, for better or worse. As I teach, I project the condition of my soul onto my students, my subject, and our way of being together.

The entanglements I experience in the classroom are often no more or less than the convolutions of my inner life. Viewed from this angle, teaching holds a mirror to the soul. If I am willing to look in that mirror and not run from what I see, I have a good chance to gain self-knowledge—and knowing myself is as crucial to good teaching as knowing my students and my subject (p. 2).

Nonverbal expectations and attitudes are modeled by the teacher. Palmer (1998) observed that teaching and relating to one's *inwardness* are reflected behaviorally and academically in the classroom. How do *classroom entanglements* relate to the *convolutions* of the observer's inner life? If there is some connection, how can teachers emulate Palmer's level of *congruence*—his interrelatedness with students? Is this a natural disposition or can it be developed or learned? If it is an innate resource, how do we go about recognizing and developing this *self-knowledge*, which Palmer claims is crucial to good teaching?

Palmer (1998) commented on the need for guidance and support for teachers. He explained that

...we demoralize, even paralyze the very teachers who could help us in our rush to reform education we have forgotten a simple truth: reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean, dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends...none of that will transform education if we fail to cherish—and challenge—the human heart which is the source of good teaching. (p.3)

Palmer's point is that in the exclusive focus of improving instruction, education reform has neglected to invest in building teacher efficacy. Reflective practice has been referenced in pedagogical, methodological, and classroom management analyses (King,

2004; Kreber, 2004; Shön, 1983). However, educators as change agents across time (Boverie & Kroth, 2001; Dewey, 1939; Freire, 1978; hooks, 2003; Mezirow, 2000, Rousseau, 1750) suggest the inclusion of strategies in education and training which elicit the latent transformative potential within the individual. The very act of critical self-reflection surfaces personal assumptions which include values, ethics, and even spirituality, in terms of knowing oneself—one's mind sets, beliefs, and patterns of behavior (Dirkx, 1997; English, 2001, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Glazer, 1999; Groen & Jacob, 2006; Lovat & Clement, 2008; Sanger, 2008; Palmer, 1998; Tisdell, 2003).

In the interest of building teacher resiliency, a number of writers and researchers have implemented and made specific recommendations regarding questionnaire and journal usage to encourage and develop deeply reflective practice for educators (Armstrong, 2007; Escamez, Lopez & Jover, 2008; Joseph & Efron, 1993; King, 2004; Kreber, 2004; Kyriakides & Charalambos, 2005; Singh, 2007; Yates, 2007). In what ways has *reflective practice* changed over time from its focus on methodology, curriculum, and instruction to a more expanded definition including *self-reflection*? How can it enhance teacher efficacy? And, how can teachers work with so much of our population now termed “disenfranchised” when, as Wilson (1990) states, “(teachers) themselves are disenfranchised?” (p.7)

### **Purpose of the Study**

Working within a constructivist-grounded theory framework (Creswell, 1998, pp. 85-86), I learned from study participants how their affective and cognitive perspectives altered when they self-reflectively wrote journals. In this personal transformation, which has the potential to be unsettling, how did teachers process their self-discovery? In what ways did these processes emerge for them? Did perspective changes occur simultaneously with a

renewed awareness of relational dynamics and ultimately their relationships in the classroom and the workplace? Finally, were their perspective changes permanent—integrated into their schema—their self-awareness and world-view?

Ontologically, I was interested in how self-reflective journaling might assist teachers in analyzing their assumptions and how their perspectives influenced their experiences—incidents, relationships, and concepts. Transformational Learning theory (Boverie & Kroth, 2001; Daloz, 1999; and Mezirow, 2000) has application in organizational learning and in educational coursework. Researchers who have incorporated Transformational Learning theory in their studies of teacher self-reflective practice include: Howard’s (2003) case study on teacher reflection, King’s (2004) mixed method research on teacher’s transformational experiences, Kreber’s (2004) comparative qualitative reflection studies, Christie’s (2007) study of teacher self-reflective practice, and Vieten, Amorok, and Schlitz’s (2006) structured interviews with 47 teachers and scholars regarding transformation toward congruence—perceptions of interconnectedness.

### **Development of the Research Question**

I began to formulate the sub-questions as a preliminary step to writing the research question (Creswell, 1998, p. 103). In the context of this study, my questions were concerned with why and how teachers, who frequently lack professional and personal support, were making meaning of their experiences (Vygotsky, 1978).

- Have we emphasized external productivity at the expense internal reflection by giving academic performance priority over students becoming good, honest people? Why the “disconnect”?
- Does teacher consciousness influence instruction and students?

- Would narrative journaling rather than focus groups or face-to-face interviews facilitate authentic responses?
- Does “inward” self-discovery relate to “outward” improved professional effectiveness?
- Have we neglected nurturing teachers to the detriment of the stakeholders (students, families, school, and community)?

These sub-questions incorporated four important considerations for this study to investigate how teachers make meaning of their experiences, relationships, and work. My research question summarized these: How do teachers make meaning of their self reflection, their personal transformation, and praxis?

My purpose in conducting this study was to discover what emerged from teachers’ participation in guided self-reflective journaling. Would they, indeed, understand what it is to reflect on one’s own habits of mind, values, and perspectives? What kinds of incidents would they select for reflection? Would they find themselves changed as a result of their reflections? Would teacher reflections and self-discoveries influence or change how they interacted with colleagues, parents, administrators, and students? The design for this qualitative study is further explained in Chapter Three.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RESEARCH

This literature review is aligned with each component of the research question beginning with *meaning making*. The second component, *self-reflection*—particularly in the context of personal assumptions, values, ethics, and beliefs—is the practice of transformational learning for self-discovery. I have presented selected theoretical writings and research studies of *transformational learning* and perspective transformation. Finally, *praxis* puts theory into practice in the outer world including implications for systems change.

#### **Meaning Making—Theoretical Contexts**

The complexity of teacher motivation has been the subject of study (Hoy, 2008) and the application of strategies to maximize engagement for retention and for teacher education. Her findings on teacher behaviors revealed unstable patterns because, it was discovered, teachers tended to adapt to environmental situations—different students, academic subjects, class sizes, times of the day or year, student moods, etc. Teachers are thrown about daily in various contexts and accommodating external realities. Hoy commented that, “...the realities of teaching can be disheartening, especially for those whose motivations are altruistic. These tensions—between serving and surviving, between caring and control, between deep investment and protective distance—are seldom addressed in teacher preparation.” (p. 497)

The importance of building teacher efficacy, Hoy stated, is related to academic *optimism* (Seligman & Peterson, 1984; Seligman, 1990, 2007) and *student achievement*. To understand meaning making, it is essential to understand learning theories.

Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development theory addressed how an individual modifies the stimulus situation as part of the process of responding to it (p.14). In the

context of education, learners (and we are including teachers in this study) encounter new concepts and experiences and then integrate new information with existing personal schema.

It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (p. 86).

Constructivism is directly related to the transformational process teachers encounter with self-reflective journaling—making meaning of experiences. Kasl and Elias (2000) state, “As practitioners, we have found two theories of individual learning particularly useful in understanding group learning. The concepts of transformative learning and of constructivist-developmentalism: each provides a lens for understanding evolution of consciousness.” (p.230)

Dewey’s (1916) *Democracy in Education*, was perhaps his most important work in the emerging field of constructive philosophy. He believed in a naturalistic approach to the theory of knowledge as an *adaptive* human response to the world with the individual’s volition to restructure these conditions.

Honoring the learner is at the core of constructivism. The learner makes meaning of instruction and experiences based on the process of integrating information with what is known. This acknowledgment of the innate knowledge already inherent in the learner, is the premise of Friere’s (1970) work. To draw wisdom from *within* is in contrast with pouring knowledge in from *without*. Freire criticized what he termed the educational *banking concept* in which teachers *make deposits* from which students regurgitate *withdrawals* on tests. This concept of respecting the learner, setting the stage for innate wisdom to be elicited, and



honoring *basic goodness* was controversially proposed centuries ago by Rousseau (1750) and supported by Dewey (1915) in *Schools of Tomorrow*. Referring to Rousseau's educational treatise *Emile*, Dewey commented,

His (Rousseau's) insistence that education be based upon the native capacities of those to be taught and upon the need of studying children in order to discover what these native powers are, sounded the keynote of all modern efforts for educational progress. It meant that education is not something to be forced upon children and youth from without, but is the growth of capacities with which human beings are endowed at birth (pp.1-2).

The application of this approach to this study was to honor the participants and trust the process to make meaning of their unique experiences. The temptation for many educators is to micromanage the learning process instead of practicing what teachers of excellence do: let the learner do the investigating, exploring, modifying, and reflecting, while the teacher poses questions, mirrors back what learners discover, and empowers their process.

Dewey (1915, 1916, and 1939) considered himself a 'revolutionary educator' and that the only true source of knowledge is direct, personal experience. He admired Rousseau, as did Freire, as much for his empowering approach to democratic education as his philosophical stance that all individuals—especially students—are naturally good and moral. Rousseau's philosophy was, "Man's goodness is identical to his natural freedom (of body and soul) and quality." (parenthesis in the original, Bloom, 1979, p.14) In this same vein, Dewey advocated constructivist philosophy within the context of morality and reflection.

Lovet and Clement (2008) referred to Dewey in their article on quality teaching and values education.

He (Dewey) said to depend overly on subject knowledge and methods would be fatal to the best interests of education. He spoke, rather, of the need for a way of knowing that was about the cultivation of a mindset on the part of teachers that was... self-reflective and directed at instilling reflectivity, inquiry, and a capacity for moral judiciousness on the part of students. (p. 8)

Vygotsky (1978) and Krashen (1985) concurred with Dewey as a result of their research with empowering learners through the facilitation of meaning making: Vygotsky for his cognitive and language development theory and Krashen for his work on language acquisition.

*Scaffolding* research demonstrated that sequential, logical, gradual skill development is instrumental in effective education (Vygotsky, 1978). This combination—scaffolding with theoretical application of the zone of proximal development—resulted in *piecing together* meaning making components. As teachers model this metacognitive process; that is, how to make meaning through self-correction, editing, and incorporating new information with prior knowledge, students observe that meaning making is a *process*.

### **Meaning Making—Research Contexts**

Krashen's (1985) research incorporated five major hypotheses in second language acquisition. Among those, his *in-put hypothesis* has application for this study. The input hypothesis is described in a formula:  $I+1$ . Learners receive comprehensible input (I) and then are stretched a little further (+1) to maximize engagement and motivation. The theory is based on the observation that students learn more effectively if given manageable

information (in this case, self-directed, self-selected journal topics) and were encouraged to expand to the *next level*, that of reframing perspectives. Respondents may need to *go beyond* (I+1) their comfort zone to alter long held assumptions and habits of mind.

Seligman & Peterson (1985) developed a Likert questionnaire for twelve studies he conducted on *learned helplessness*. Collecting self-assessments from respondents, he was able to evaluate their responses as being either externally or internally motivated. This, he discovered, was key to personality tendencies toward pessimism or optimism (Seligman, 1990, 2007).

For the purposes of this paper, constructivism proposes that teachers, who engage authentically in self-reflective practice, bring a new dimension of self-discovery to themselves and their practice. Too often, in the all-consuming focus of meeting federal, state, and district mandates, there is little room for reflective practice, let alone *self*-reflection.

### **Self-reflection—Theoretical Contexts**

The connection between constructivism and transformational learning becomes clearer when self-reflective practice is considered within the context of possible *perspective transformation*. There is a difference between *reflective practice*, which focuses on *reflecting on and reflecting in* (Schön, 1983) instructional strategy effectiveness, classroom methodology, or curriculum design and *self-reflection*, an analysis of critical thoughts, feelings, interpretations, and conclusions formulated during the deconstruction of an incident. Taubman (2007) theoretically addressed the importance of critical self reflection and reflective practice as integral to good teaching (pp. 3-4).

In this study, respondents who were receptive to perspective transformation were asked to reflect on their belief systems, assumptions, and how they made meaning

ontologically. They were given the option to reflect on their work, on their responses to their work, or both.

Kreber's (2004) qualitative research analyzed two models of reflection—transformational learning and self-regulated learning in tertiary settings. Included in this, was her realization of the difference between reflective practice and self-reflection.

Though their statements were likely very sincere, analyses of the accounts they gave indicated that what most of them really did while “reflecting” was to think within a set of taken-for-granted assumptions. In other words, they engaged in content reflection. *If* the reason we encourage reflection on teaching is to enhance teaching practice, *then* it is imperative that assumptions are not just taken for granted but are tested for their *validity*, as in process reflection, and enhancement of teaching...the actual questioning of assumptions is difficult.... (It) begins with identifying the assumptions and beliefs we take for granted, but it must not stop there. It needs to go further and involve engaging in particular learning processes (instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory) that will either lead to validation or rejection of our assumptions (pp. 43-4).

To get to the heart of transformation, reflecting on practice—curriculum or lesson plan content—will not necessarily move teachers toward transformative experiences. Note Kreber's (2004) observation on teachers' lack of *assumption analysis*, a key component of transformational reflection (Mezirow, 1991, 2000), during reflective practice.

Typical curriculum reflective practice provides a process for continuous instruction improvement. Music instructors, Bell and Robinson (2004) attest to the importance of reflecting on successive lessons for teaching improvement, “From the onset of your student

teaching, demonstrate a reflective practice. Identify factors that influenced the success of a lesson and devise alternatives for improving the lesson.”(p.42) Self-reflection, which may include reflective practice, expands to include personal perspectives and new ways of meaning making.

### **Self-reflection—Research Contexts**

The challenge for teachers to reflect more deeply on themselves—their assumptions and their beliefs—does not necessarily imply a schism between reflecting on *practice* versus reflection on *personal values*. Christie (2007) recounts her research on a writing course she designed and implemented. In her study, she relates the process of helping teachers release antiquated expectations, judgments, and control issues, i.e. “the power of the red pen” (p. 486). This *merging* of reflective practices is what Schön’s (1983) *double-loop learning* studies addressed—reflection-on-practice and reflection-in-practice. Christie (2007) cites Schön’s (1983) theory of reflecting-*on*-practice versus reflecting-*in*-practice as, “When a practitioner reflects in and on his practice, the possible objects of his reflection are as varied as the kinds of phenomena before him and the systems of knowing-in-practice which he brings to them” (p. 62).

In the process of combining metacognitive practice and writing, Christie (2007) applied Schön’s (1983) double-loop learning theory and recounted how the power of journaling emerged in faculty reflection study. “Keeping a journal began as a course requirement but quickly became a source of inquiry for the teachers. They used their journals to raise doubts, question teaching methods and examine their personal and professional thoughts. This dialogue served as a reflection of their teaching.” (p. 488)

As the process in Christie's (2007) study demonstrated, reflective practice on teaching methods provided a *spring board* for deeper self-reflection. There are elements of *disorienting dilemma* and *perspective transformation* in the following excerpt from Schön (1983).

The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation (p. 68).

Howard (2003) reported on a qualitative case study of teachers taking a three day workshop on a reflective-process they would teach students regarding identity issues: race, ethnicity, social class, and gender. His findings included that there was tremendous value for teachers to engage in culturally relevant pedagogy in a reflective approach. Facilitation of this process improved practice and effectiveness for working with diverse student populations.

Kane, Sandretto, and Heath (2004), examined "what teachers *say* about their teaching and what they *do* in their teaching practice" in relation to reflecting on teachers' identities. (p. 283) They created a five-component *teaching excellence wheel* with reflection at the center. Their theoretical model suggests application for teaching excellence for induction programs or for beginning teachers.

Joseph and Efron (1993) examined teachers' self-perceptions through interviews and questionnaires to determine decisions and behaviors as moral educators. The study also portrayed the vulnerability of teachers.

The core finding of this research (was) that teachers' individual moralities shape the choices they make and the conflicts that concern them as they function as moral educators; despite their reluctance to directly teach values, the teachers (felt) a commitment to share their personal ethos (p. 201).

Self-reflection is not just stating philosophical beliefs, but prompts revisiting assumptions that form the basis of those beliefs. Mezirow (2000) addresses how habits of mind are adopted as assumptions, many times unconsciously from those around us, from the media, and from cultural beliefs. The process may involve reconfirming values or revisiting them with a new paradigm calling for personal *restructuring*.

The process of self-reflection, often accompanied by personal transformation and a renewed sense of *congruence* with others, implies a level of growth and compassion which begs a deeper term than emotional restoration.

Teachers who embody expanded vision, empathy, and inspiration demonstrate compassion, and elicit incisive, thought-provoking discussions with students. From my own observations, such teachers make a lifelong impact on students rather than those who deliver information alone. This transformation of consciousness is a process continually unfolding—a flower of forbearance, a spirit of inclusion, and of wisdom—none of which can be found in textbooks or courses. As Bleyl (2000) concluded, these qualities can be inspired from *without*, but must be integrated from *within*.

### **Transformational Learning Theoretical Contexts**

Central to the theory of Transformational Learning is the work of Mezirow (2000). He refers to *epistemic cognition* as a process of problem solving through reflection on or awareness of knowledge.

Transformative learning refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action....Transformational Theory's focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others—to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear-thinking decision makers. (pp.7-8)

Mezirow divides *frames of reference* into two dimensions: habits of mind and resulting points of view. Examining assumptions we consciously or unconsciously adopt from others—that is, analyzing a habit of mind—is one of the critical steps of transformational learning. Such analysis or deconstruction will either validate what was previously held to be true, or partially reframe assumptions, or totally transform one's perspective. Mezirow's (2000) habits of mind are organized into six domains:

1. Sociolinguistic—(cultural canon, ideologies, social norms, customs, “language games”, secondary socialization)
2. Moral-ethical—(conscience, moral norms)
3. Epistemic—(learning styles, sensory preferences, focus on wholes or parts or the concrete or abstract)
4. Philosophical—(religious doctrine, philosophy, transcendental world view)
5. Psychological—(self-concept, personality traits or types, repressed parental prohibitions that continue to dictate ways of feeling and acting in adulthood,



emotional response patterns, images, fantasies, dreams, for a Freudian interpretation see Gould 1978, for a Jungian interpretation see Boyd 1991)

6. Aesthetic—(values, tastes, attitudes, standards, and judgments about beauty and the insight and authenticity of aesthetic expressions, such as the sublime, the ugly, the tragic, the humorous, the “drab”, and others) (pp. 17-18).

Mezirow (2000) provided the general guidelines for phases of meaning associated with transformational learning. Note that the process of transformation can be uncomfortable in his following ten self-reflection components.

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans
8. Provisional trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective (p. 22)

These ten characteristics provide a profile of the self-evaluative process of critical self-reflection. Higher education professors and classroom teachers, who have experienced self-reflection, know there is a level of sensitivity required due to the highly emotive work of self-discovery (Howard, 2003; McGonigal, 2005). Daloz (1999) also provided a synopsis of

the evolution of transformational learning. He referred to the key component of his theory as *perspective expansion*.

The work of transformational learning is systemic; therefore, professors and student teachers who practice analyzing assumptions empower all affiliated participants. McGonigal (2005) addressed the importance of instructors striking a careful balance between support and challenge with students. She referred to Mezirow (1991) regarding how he influenced her regard for transformational learning as

...the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrating perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p.167)

Teacher induction professors may be well-advised that questioning previously held assumptions can be unsettling for students. However, when professors and instructors reframe disorienting dilemmas as self-discovery experiences, the process can become one of encountering hidden treasures of expansion. In consideration of walking this fine line, McGonigal (2005) recommended,

(when) students reach a problem-solving impasse, they should recognize that new information or a new approach is needed...convince them that the impasse can be solved...present the missing piece in many ways; from a simple explanation to helping students derive an idea or approach themselves. (p.2)

Other perspective transformations include *epistemological changes* by which meaning making is reframed. In studies involving citizen action projects (Lange, 2004),

changing a worldview and habits of thinking goes beyond epistemological to an *ontological process* “where participants experience a change in their being including their forms of relatedness.” Lange contended that transformative learning is essentially ontological change. In this process, one becomes self-aware of deep, inner convictions (p. 137). Similarly, in a study on mission and life purpose, Boverie & Kroth (2000) state that “without the ongoing interplay between directed purpose and inquiry into that purpose, life mission may become rigid, or life itself directionless.” (p.145)

Epistemological change is typified by empathetic understanding of another’s perspective (Lange, 2004). A calcified habit of mind, not open to perspective transformation, will remain in a habitual pattern established over time. An example of a rigid state of mind could be this perspective, “If my students question me, I’ve lost control of the classroom; so I must exhibit a domineering stance at all times.” Powerful shifts in perception come from looking at previously unexamined personal assumptions. In this example, the individual has equated *control* with *compliance* whereby *questioning* is out of compliance and therefore *out of control*. A perspective change would be, “I need to find out why the student feels compelled to question me. Is the student struggling with personal validation issues, is there confusion about the lesson content, or is there another reason? Let’s explore possible solutions together, respectfully.”

Taylor (2007) referred to new understandings about perspective transformation from recent studies. He stated that transformational learning studies are improving in clarity of defining frames of reference and degrees of change.

A number of significant findings emerge from this review about the meaning of a ‘perspective transformation’ (e.g. a change in frame of reference) that help address its

historic lack of clarity, provide greater understanding of what constitutes a frame of reference and describe its inherent characteristics. In particular, these studies offer insight about the issue of irreversibility (permanent change), sustainability, meaning scheme change and epistemological change. (p.180)

Taylor's (2007) summative review examined studies on transformation through perspective shifts and adds that subsequent studies reiterate the need for acting "on change and its value to the individual" (p. 180). Mezirow (2000) listed one of the characteristics of authentic perspective transformation theory as individuals who have the capacity of

....expanding to embrace a larger world view while immediate beliefs or expectations may continue to change. Perspective transformation (is) a more dependable frame of reference which evolves from one that is more inclusive, differentiating, permeable (open to other viewpoints), critically reflective of assumptions, emotionally capable of change and integrative of experience. (p. 19)

Since the advent of Transformational Learning, research design and data gathering have steadily improved specifically in the realm of action research. Taylor (2007) reviewed 40 published peer-review journals, primarily qualitative studies, which he calls, "more sophisticated and creative, including longitudinal and mixed-method designs" (p. 173). Among the trends Taylor observed was how transformational learning developed in the midst of bringing about change as well as a research trend toward more mixed methods data gathering with scales, surveys, open-ended questionnaires, and interviews.

### **Transformational Learning Research Contexts**

Transformational Learning research will necessarily be multi-method or qualitative by design due to ontological-axiological philosophical frameworks. When issues of personal

values, beliefs, or reality are studied, awareness and consciousness are integral parts of the observations. Literature on TL has been theoretically based; however empirical studies are increasing.

Kreber's (2004) qualitative research used two models to evaluate the extent to which higher education faculty reflected on their practice. Her first study utilized Mezirow's transformational learning theory (1991); the second study applied the lens of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 1998). Kreber (2004) stated that one of the difficulties in her study was to explore faculty understanding of *reflection* as defined by individual particular behaviors. From her interview instrument, study participants *said* they reflected when actually about two-thirds of her respondents only engaged in process reflection within instructional and pedagogical knowledge.

King's (2004) mixed method research, using questionnaires which included open-ended responses, collected data from 58 teachers and their course professor. The findings reported that through self-reflective practices in the class, 36 of the 58 experienced perspective transformation. "They expressed developing a more open-minded attitude towards others and themselves; developing a stronger reflective orientation to their lives and work; and (better) understand the people (adult learners) they will, or currently, work with." (p. 162).

As cited previously, Joseph & Effron (1993) administered questionnaires to small groups of teachers in a university program leading to an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction. The results of the qualitative study indicated that teachers were interested in bringing about

...changes in their students (and possibly in themselves as well) that make them better persons, not simply more knowledgeable or skillful...nearly all teachers surveyed responded positively to this statement, “I hope that I can have a lasting effect on the students whom I teach, not just by making them better students, but by making them better people” (pp. 203-204).

This feedback shows that with the intent to improve or change their practice, they are strongly interested in personal transformation and helping students to incorporate basic guiding principles of being *better people*.

In a study to better understand factors common to the transformative process, Vieten, Amorok, and Schlitz (2006) conducted structured interviews with a mix of teachers, scholars, psychologists, and sociologists—all but two over the age of 50 and 90 percent were college educated. Their 44 coded interviews were preceded by focus groups and extensive literature reviews. Included in their questions were, “What constitutes transformation?” and “What initiates transformative experiences?” “Compassion and altruism were almost universally identified as important outcomes of positive consciousness transformation.” (p. 915)

Advocates of transformational learning understand the value of critical analysis—that of facilitating positive change and empowering resiliency for teachers during times of high levels of uncertainty (Boverie & Kroth, 2001; Christie, 2007; Daloz, 1999; Gay & Kirkland, 2003, Grimmet, 1994; Mezirow, 1991, 2000). The cornerstone of Transformational Learning is self-reflection, which facilitates the *explorer* to go within, to refine the process of self-discovery, and to expand understanding personally and relationally.

### Praxis Theoretical Contexts

The transformation circle is completed with the final step of application, praxis—combining reflection with action. Dewey (1939) broke ground when he applied the sociological construct of *praxis* to education. Previously, sociological conceptual frameworks, notably Weber and Parsons, contended that *habits stimulate consciousness*; whereas, Dewey reversed the theory stating *consciousness impacts habits*. In forwarding this premise, Dewey linked reflection and action into an *internal* rather than external locus of control.

The *theory of praxis*, the evolutionary ‘next step’ of pragmatism, is frequently associated with Brazilian Friere (1970, 1997). Friere was influenced by critical Marxism and the liberation theology movement of Latin America and championed emancipatory adult education which aims to empower adults toward social change.

For Freire (1970), theory without action, including dialogue, rendered concepts barren. He cautioned against abandoning practice over theory and vice versa and advised unifying theory and practice through “epistemological curiosity” (pp. 18-19).

The philosophical frameworks of constructivist Vygotsky (1978) and critical western Marxist Friere (1997) form the foundation of praxis, an integral component to constructing self-knowledge, knowledge of the world, and empowerment through perspective transformation. Ontological aspects of this study presented the respondents with the opportunity for external reality changes, such as improved teaching, due to personal perspective transformation.

How teachers communicate with students indicates how they perceive students. This perceptual stance can be altered through critical reflection. Freirean (1970) *democratic*

classroom dialogue approach is not a *method* but a dialogical *process* of mutual learning and knowing. Praxis advocates authentic consciousness and corresponding dialogue between teachers and students. *Unity consciousness* is promoted through the dissolution of control issues and duality in a climate of respect. Freire (1970) firmly believed, as did Rousseau (1750) and Dewey (1915), in shifting the classroom power dynamics in which "...Education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students." (p. 72, italics in the original)

bell hooks (2003) emphasized the importance of democratic education and the dissolution of the *teacher-student contradiction* as an assurance for an improved classroom atmosphere that generates openness, happiness, confidence, and respect. She posited that learning flourishes in such an atmosphere.

Lovat and Clement (2008) wrote that Habermas (1990), whose stance aligned with Freire, spoke of the authenticity of *communicative knowledge* (the knowing and understanding that results from engagement and interrelationship with others (and)... "from critique of one's own self or, from knowing oneself." (p. 8) The link between knowing oneself and relational congruence including dialogue with students underscores the importance of communicative knowledge. How we relate to our world, as Palmer (1997), Hunt (2001) and others have emphasized, is aligned with our self-perception.

Qualitative studies often debate the problem of researcher influence or bias, the *interpretive crisis* (Denzien, 1994, p. 501). Ortlipp (2008) used reflective journals with college students to demonstrate the how novice researchers benefit from journaling as part of their scholarly work. Ortlipp shows how documenting reflections, epistemological changes,



and potential transformation as part of research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation puts into practice theories of self-reflection and transformation.

### **Praxis Research Contexts**

As noted previously, issues with attrition are due, in part, to teacher job dissatisfaction including lack of input on policy and decision making (Birkeland & Johnson, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Little, 1993). Oberg's (2008) quantitative study of five practices evaluated whether or not teacher input on school management was validated. His case study looked at five practices previously not evaluated in the literature in terms of *teacher voice*. Using personal interviews, surveys and observation analyses of five practices—self-reflection, identifying voice, professional learning communities, data driven decision making, and feedback loops—designed for school improvement, Oberg found that teachers felt they had input at the building level but not at the district level. This study provided application considerations for teacher engagement in management decisions at the building and district levels.

An qualitative action research study on metacognition with elementary school students Desautel (2009) proposed that students who are aware of their school work and think of themselves as learners will actually become better learners. Data was collected from observations of student interactions, their written records of self-generated goals, and their reflective journal writing. The investigator believes that awareness of meaning making (metacognition) and self-reflection helps young students consciously apply learning strategies, develop effective work habits and assess their own performance. The findings of this study have cross-application potential to improve teacher self-reflective practice and praxis.

Brown (1998) reported on a simple writing experiment he incorporated in his organizational behavior class at a business school using reflective statements to prompt epistemic writing. He observed, “my experience with this methodology has convinced me that personal learning through self-reflective epistemic writing is as powerful a learning tool as we may have in our repertoire as college teachers.” (p. 138)

Praxis brings theories and research into classrooms application in ways that improve teaching efficacy. It was with this approach, I intended to see if structured journal narrations would elicit transformation. (Rogers, 1961; Sawyer, 2001; Seligman, 1990, 2007)

## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH DESIGN

#### **Rationale**

Reflective practice has primarily been applied to pedagogical, methodological, and classroom management analyses (King, 2004; Kreber, 2004; Schön, 1983). Educators as change agents across time suggest the inclusion of strategies in education and training which elicit the latent transformative potential within the individual (Boverie & Kroth, 2001; Dewey, 1915, 1916, 1939; Freire, 1978; hooks, 2003; Mezirow, 2000; Rousseau, 1750). The very act of reflection surfaces personal values and beliefs which result in patterns of behavior (Dirkx, 1997; English, 2001, 2003; Fullan, 2001; Glazer, 1999; Groen & Jacob, 2006; Lovat & Clement, 2008; Sanger, 2008; Palmer, 1998; and Tisdell, 2003).

Research suggests *teachers* who reflect deeply—not only on their *practice*, but also on their beliefs, assumptions, and values—experience aspects of personal transformation which, in turn, has *classroom* implications (Christie, 2007; Groen & Jacob, 2006; Howard, 2003; Joseph & Efron, 1993; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2004; King, 2004). In this reflective process, perspective revisions often surface. As a result, the participant confirms, alters, or totally replaces former beliefs or assumptions. This perceptual “shift” brings about a transformation in reframing one’s self-perceptions, community relations, and world-view.

Research and theoretical literature cited above and in Chapter Two suggest that teachers, who reflect on meaning-making and perceptions often then transmit the efficacy gained through self-knowledge to their practice. They become more acutely aware of the quality and clarity of their communication and tend to become more “transparent” in their

relational congruence with students and peers. They become exemplars to colleagues and students of the continuous improvement that self-reflective practice instills.

The power of journaling as a tool for reflection, specifically self-reflection, is grounded in the participants' "inner journey" exploration (Palmer, 1998) as they analyze incidents, concepts, or disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000). King (2004) researched the practice of authentic, self reflection in a mixed-method study analyzing perspective shifts, personal beliefs, and values leading to personal transformation and found that adult learners who understand why and how learning activities are chosen and used gives them *ownership* in the process. King also discovered that higher education classrooms integrating transformative learning enhance the classroom climate of inquiry and reflection.

#### *Grounded Theory Tradition*

Creswell (1998) distinguished important characteristics between phenomenological and grounded theory studies. I intended to discover if there were any common emerging patterns of issues, ways of framing these issues, or unusual habits of mind in perceiving situations thereby classifying this research as a grounded study.

While a phenomenological study emphasizes meaning of an experience for a number of individuals, the intent of a grounded theory study is to generate or discover a theory, an abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon, that relates to a particular situation. This situation is one in which individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon....The centerpiece of grounded theory research is the development or generation of a theory closely related to the context of the phenomenon being studied. (pp. 55-56)

The sub-questions that gave rise to my research question were grouped into four underlying components: meaning making, self-reflection, transformation, and praxis. Through this study I was interested in discovering patterns of how teachers process self-reflection through their nine journal entries and, in that practice, did they transform their perspectives—beliefs, values, understandings? If so, did this potentially transfer into their personal and professional practice as evidenced in their implementation? The instrument for this study was designed to incorporate steps for journaling to guide the respondent to reflect affectively, cognitively, and transformationally on personally selected experiences.

#### *Philosophical Framework*

Critical theory addresses gaps between what *could be* and what *is* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Critical theory constructivism brings empowerment and voice to populations, in this case teachers (Oberg, 2008), who need support and skills (Dewey, 1929; Friere, 1970; Habermas, 1990; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 1983). This philosophical framework is aligned with the intent to elicit meaning making from the study respondents. Axiological constructivism, meaning making of one's values and beliefs, can lead to a deeper level of reflection—that of ontological meaning making—with respondents making meaning of their *being*.

My epistemic approach to this study included some concerns that respondents would avoid critical processing either out of anxiety as to what they may discover about themselves or their own naiveté about the process of self-reflection. Despite living in an urban setting, I felt there were potential parallels for contemporary Southwestern teachers to have to freely and confidentially write about their doubts, concerns, and epiphanies with the

study of the Appalachian women listening in disbelief to their recorded opinions for the first time (Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997).

In grounded study research, I allowed for patterns to emerge from respondents through the use of a guided self-reflective process. Emerging patterns from this study, including how teachers potentially access resiliency and efficacy (Hoy, 2008; Rogers, 1961; Sawyer, 2008; Seligman, 1990), have application for expanded studies and teacher support in professional development and induction programs

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

#### *Attrition and Time Constraints for Respondents*

Attrition presented the biggest challenge for effective and efficient data collection due to logistical delays spanning two semesters. Improved alignment between university induction programs and the consent form approval process would have prevented this. Several teacher education programs had incorporated the journal step in their curriculum; however, the consent form approval was unnecessarily delayed. The consent form was acceptable, the issue was the processing. Therefore, attrition issues spanned the academic year necessitating recruitment for a summer sample to meet study size recommendations. The study parameters had to change in order to move forward—originally the sample was student teachers and mentors. Because the academic year ended, summer recruitment made it possible to open the sample to any teacher who heard about the study by word-of-mouth, and who would like to participate. However, another unexpected delay for the summer portion of the study (for the same reason) cut short adequate time for respondents to write. A few respondents expressed frustration with this in Chapter Five.

Combined spring and summer groups provided the acceptable sample size for the study's reflective writing. While spring semester respondents were in the classroom and summer respondents were not, the summer respondents were all classroom teachers who remembered clearly the incidents about which they wrote. In recent follow-up telephone interviews, I asked respondents if summer reflection lessened their reflections in any way. Here were some of their statements: "I don't turn on and off my experiences from month to month; I live and reflect on my profession constantly", "I don't mentally compartmentalize by semester", "Things happen so quickly during the school year; I actually find it easier to reflect and gain greater insight during the summer". Escamez, Lopez, and Jover (2008) provide useful insights and study recommendations from their experiences with university educational research.

### *Causation*

One of the primary limitations for this study was the consideration of *causation*. Causation cannot be determined regarding the cause or effects of the steps within the reflection wheel journal. Because of the complexity of the mind and how perspectives are arrived at, critical self-reflection is non-linear in nature. Causation cannot necessarily be attributed to any of the five steps of deconstructing an incident using this study's primary instrument, the Reflection Wheel Journal graphic organizer. An event in the classroom may trigger a new awareness; this new awareness may prompt the observer to teach in a new way. Or, even in the midst of delivering a lesson, an exchange with a student may prompt an epiphany for a teacher who has become astute enough to pay attention to such opportunities.

Also, this study was *not* focused on measuring *growth*. The instrument was used as a prompt to guide in the reflective process. The reflective process may occur as an epiphany or

an incremental understanding which *gels* in the mind of the respondent after several realizations. The participant may experience *self-discovery* while in a university class, driving to school, watching television, or conversing with a friend. Realizations may occur the same day, a week later, or a month later and may prompt the respondent to write of the incident which brings up new understandings or perspectives (for example, summer participants writing of things that occurred during the school year). The reflection is dependent on the issues that surface; yet, personal transformation cannot happen unless there is the act of reflecting on an incident. All three operate synergistically and symbiotically. It is more likely to say there may be a relationship between these variables than to claim causation for any of them for the others.

### **Ontological/axiological Considerations**

A non-quantifiable aspect of this study was that the foundation of transformation is critical, ontological, and axiological self-discovery. Whenever ontological considerations become part of the discussion, the perceptions of the observer defy the limits of classification and causation. Causation is linear and relates to cause and effect. Dewey understood this with his philosophical framework that a teacher's inner locus of control impacts habits (1939). When the respondents' reality and the values-belief systems are components, the application of empirical measurements are inappropriate. The investigator must thereby attentively allow the resulting data to guide the process. This requires being comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty.

#### *Researcher's Role*

Because of the subjective and highly reflective nature of this research, my explanations or insights on the respondents' journal *content* could compromise response



authenticity. I made myself available to respond to the participants to clarify their questions on *procedure*. I provided four pages of support resources—two writing prompts and two Reflection Wheel Journal (RWJ) examples—from which procedure and examples could be drawn. During this study, no one asked for clarification. One exit interview comment stated that the resources were very helpful and provided everything the respondents needed.

### *Researcher's Positionality*

Creswell (1998) guidelines on grounded study characteristics included periodic epistemic *check-ins* by the investigator regarding research approach or emerging theoretical understanding changes. From the start of this study, my epistemological bias and tacit experience in the power of introspection is the result of years of journaling, processing, and self-discovery. I've observed within myself enhanced cognitive acuity, perspective transformation, and gains in efficacy as a result of self-reflective journaling. Nonetheless, I had concerns that the respondents' experiences could be dramatically different than mine. What if they did not have my background for this type of intensive personal reflection? Would they be able to understand how to follow the structured Reflection Wheel Journal steps? Would they be able to self-reflect, observe their own responses, and look at assumptions and beliefs? Would they be able to objectively analyze those assumptions and reframe their perspectives, if appropriate for them? What if they were too burned-out? I kept these concerns in check with my commitment to approaching the study without expectations.

For these reasons, I built in flexibility such as giving respondents the choice of what incident to choose for their journals and giving them the freedom to deconstruct either superficially or deeply, supported my commitment to *see what emerged*. I want to respect the

integrity of the participants and assure their psychological safety while challenging them to process as deeply as they were comfortable doing.

As I approached this study, I wanted to know how teachers were holding their *center*, maintaining their tenacity and resiliency if, indeed, they were. How were they finding strength to maintain in the challenging classrooms of today? I was hopeful their journals would reveal useful information applicable to teacher retention. Perhaps the topics on which they would choose to write would reveal more than deconstructing the incidents. I was not prepared for the high level of stress-related situations that surfaced; however, and I was equally surprised at the level of self-reflective processing expressed in the journals.

My single looming question, as the data collection began, was how I would determine *meaning making*. I was unsure what the measurement criteria for meaning making would be and even *if* meaning making could be measured. However, quite unexpectedly, I discovered emerging patterns in the journal writing that gave me a way to determine meaning making in the early steps of coding. I found I was able to categorize meaning making for the journal steps: self-reflection, transformation, and praxis. Ultimately, I hoped for indicators leading to a needed shift in the way we support teachers.

## **Sample**

### *Recruitment*

In this exploratory study, I initially intended to invite six to twelve participants from several different groups of teachers at varied career stages: student teachers, beginning teachers (those in their first and second year of teaching), and mentor teachers (multiple years in teaching while mentoring a student or beginning teacher). I originally planned to draw a sample of student teachers from three university programs—Elementary Education,

Secondary Education, and the Secondary Teacher Education in Math and Science (STEM) program. Two of the three professors had agreed to incorporate my Reflection Wheel Journal as part of their curriculum for the length of the academic year. Additionally, respondents included mentor teachers from the district-university partnership program. However, due to unanticipated study processing delays, university education program research participation was impaired resulting in attrition.

Originally, for the spring recruitment, there were nine respondents—none were men, although they had the opportunity to volunteer. Of the nine, three remained. From the summer recruitment, there were approximately twelve interested respondents—eight women and four men. Of these, four women remained for the summer sample. The total sample for the study was seven women—three respondents from spring and four from summer.

I edited the consent form to include *any teacher*—not just student teachers or mentors—who heard about this study through word-of-mouth and who was interested in participating. The advantage of flexible summer hours, electronic submission, and no constraints of aligning with university programs facilitated recruitment. The summer respondents expressed gratitude for the opportunity to journal about their school year experiences and expressed no memory issues in recalling incidents. The respondents successfully completed nine journal entries and the five question exit interviews. Respondents were informed their journals would be included in a publication to help other teachers who experience similar challenges and reflections.

### *Respondent Profiles*

Respondents' ages ranged from the early 20s to 50 years of age. They were of varied socioeconomic status—student teachers living on student loans, veteran teachers, some

single, and some married. Respondents were from three different states, New Mexico, Arizona, and Colorado, corresponding via email. The group was comprised of three Latinas and four Caucasians. One African-American woman dropped out of the spring population. For one respondent, teaching was a late life career change. The following briefly describes the participants using their pseudonyms:

*Dee*: Latina student teacher

*Helen*: Caucasian mentor teacher

*Angie*: Latina mentor teacher working

*Polly*: Caucasian second-career teacher

*Beth*: Caucasian veteran teacher nearing retirement

*Val*: Caucasian retired and returning substitute teacher

*Sonja*: Latina veteran teacher

The respondents provided timely, journal emails, were organized, and extremely forthright with their self-disclosure. The sample included a combination of participants from the spring and summer recruitment processes.

## **Research Methods**

### *Recruitment Procedure*

For the recruitment process, I explained the study verbally and through an electronic packet containing a summary of the study purpose, procedure, time line, and my support role in this confidential, voluntary study. The packet also included the two study instruments—the Reflection Wheel Journal and the Exit Interview—and four writing prompt support materials. I told respondents that the reflective journaling may yield some personally rewarding revelations about their own perspectives and how they interact with others. The

completed study would be submitted for publication. They, therefore, would have the opportunity to enhance teacher transformation and efficacy and contribute to the body of education knowledge.

### *Study Guidelines*

Each of the seven respondents submitted nine journals electronically for a total of 63 journals. Journal writing was to be a minimum of one to one and a half pages with no maximum in length. Journal topic selections and depth of reflection were at the discretion of the respondents. They were to use the instrument, the Reflection Wheel Journal, in a five-step deconstruction narration process.

After completing the journal submissions, respondents wrote and submitted their responses to the five question written exit interview. I did not use electronic recording devices—audio or video recording—for the interviews as I have found, in previous work, it potentially inhibits the respondents. For those who would like an alternative method of feedback, I was also available for phone or face-to-face exit interviews.

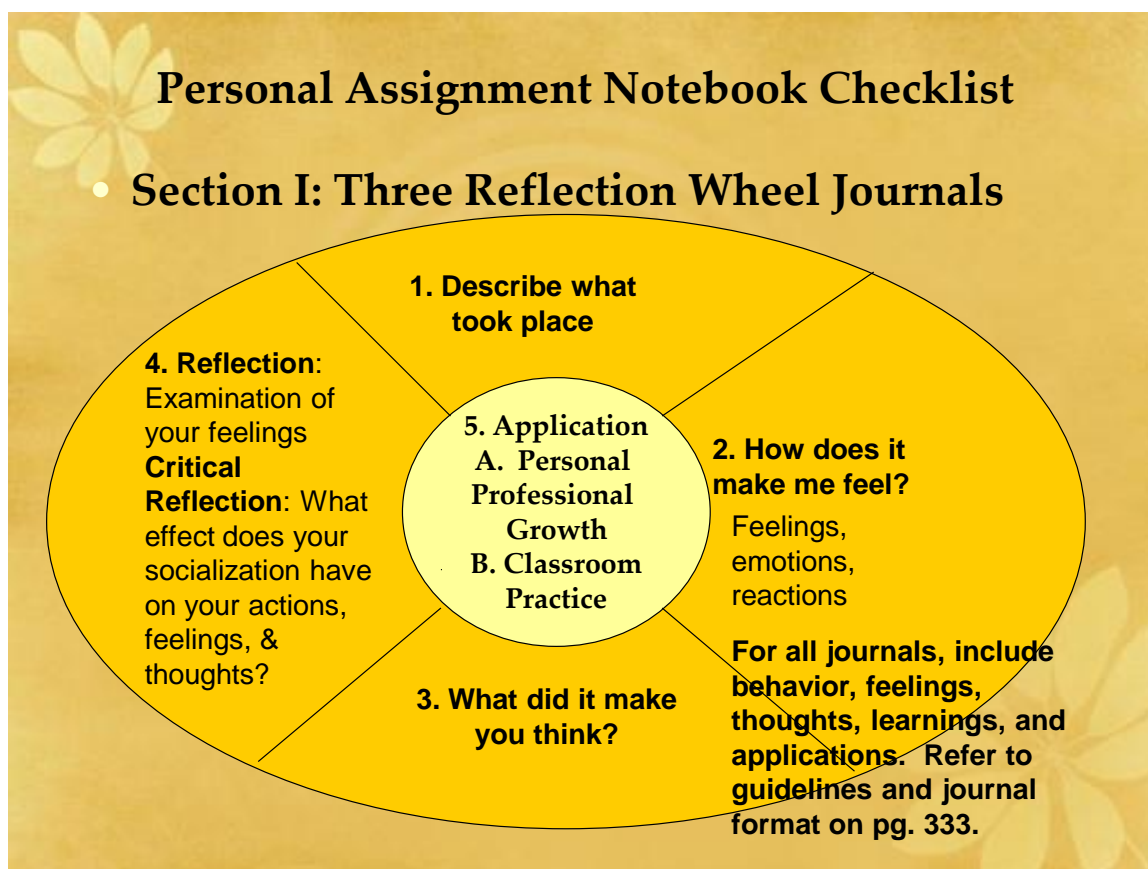
### *Instruments*

I used two instruments in this study to gather data: the five-step Reflection Wheel Journal (RWJ) and a five-question exit interview document (Appendix A). I also included an original four document support packet of writing prompts and examples of RWJs that I designed as writing prompt resources (Appendix B).

#### *Reflection Wheel Journal*

The original Reflection Wheel Journal (see Figure 2) originated at Kansas State University (CIMA, 2003) and was incorporated in a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) course offered through Eastern New Mexico University in Portales,

New Mexico. Central Consolidated School District's language arts teachers were required, as part of the course, to periodically submit a five-step reflection journal centered on selected transformational experiences.



**Figure 2. Original Reflection Wheel Journal from Kansas State University (CIMA, 2003) for Eastern New Mexico University's endorsement course, Teaching English for Speakers of Other Languages.**

As a participant in that course, I can attest to the power of critically reflecting on my perspectives and how my own transformation had classroom application. I can attest to both affective and cognitive benefits when I used the RWJ for my own self-reflective practice as a high school language arts teacher. Our alternative high school was designated as a school in *Corrective Action*, a federal designation for schools to academically achieve measurable

improvement. Upon application of the insights I gained about myself and strategies for respectfully working with my students, I saw a tremendous, positive academic and behavioral shift. My students' engagement levels increased, absenteeism dropped, and my eleventh grade class was the catalyst for our school making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in accordance with the mandated academic achievement goals of the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB, 2001).

Each step of the Reflection Wheel Journal is a self-reflective deconstruction step designed to help the participant to analyze a situation affectively, cognitively, and transformationally. The fourth step asks the respondent to revisit assumptions, beliefs, values, and the origin from which they came. It asks the participant to reflect on how they came to have a perspective and to consider alternative ways to view, understand, and interact. This is the transformational step of the journal.

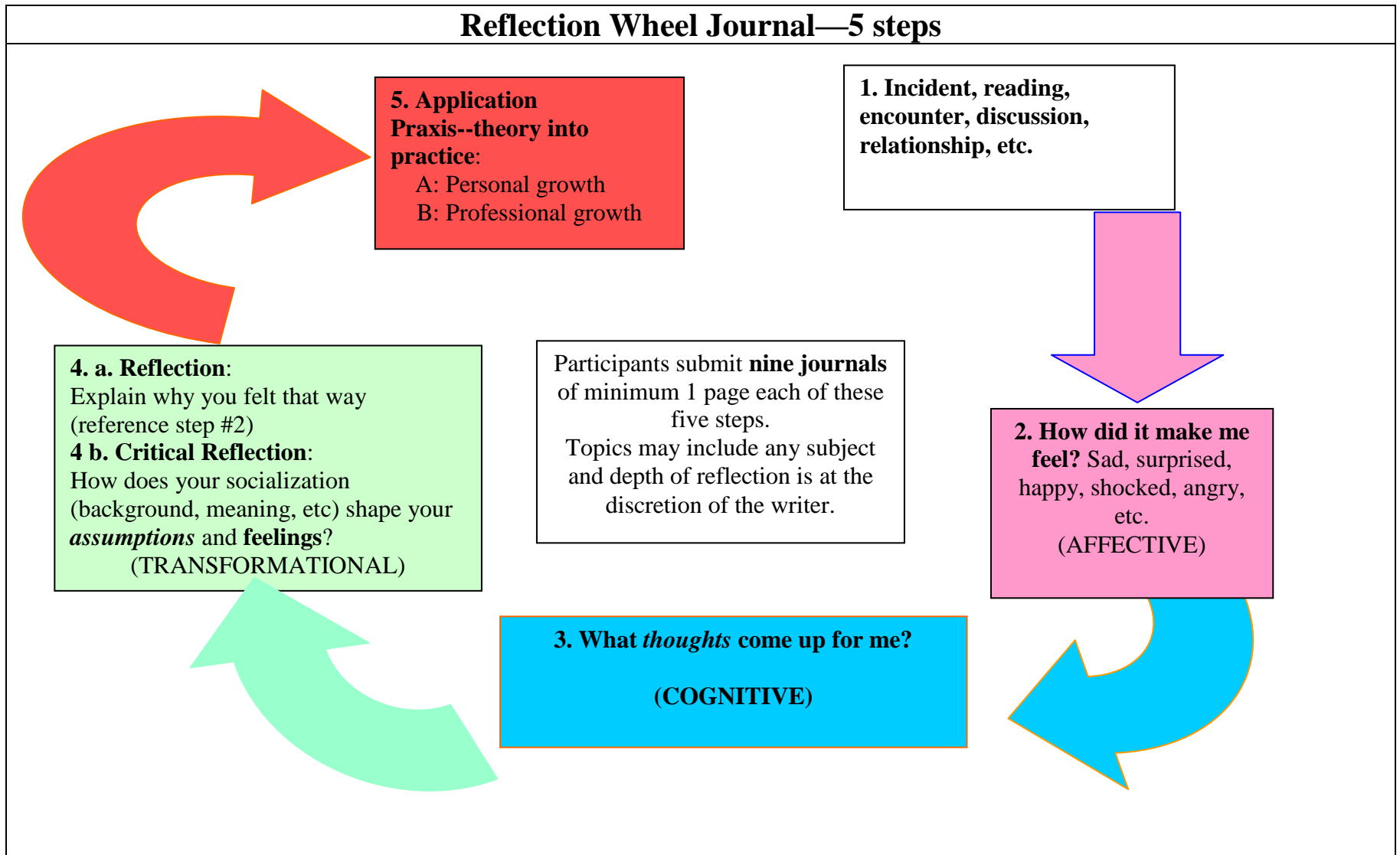
I graphically redesigned the Reflection Wheel Journal (see Figure 3) after consulting with my former professor at Eastern New Mexico University about using the RWJ with approved modifications for this study. Altering the earlier RWJ, I removed the reference to the text page and graphically redesigned the steps with more space and arrows so participants could use it as a flow-chart map in their journaling. The purpose and the steps are essentially the same. I also color coded the steps as I began to see an alignment emerging between the steps and the components of my research question: self-reflection (steps 2 & 3), transformation (step 4), and praxis (step 5). I re-worded my previous research question sequence to align with my new design for the Reflection Wheel Journal.

1. Describe an article, an event, a response, a reaction, or a question. (This is simply citing an incident or topic.)

2. How did this make me feel? No analyses or elaborations were to be recorded for this section—simply one word emotions associated with the incident.
3. Thoughts: What did the event make you think? What cognitive processes surfaced; what thoughts came to mind?
4. Two steps were involved in this section: Review responses from *step two* in more depth. What assumptions or potential biases are operating? Are they valid? What influence does my prior socialization have on my feelings, thoughts, and actions in this situation? What does this situation show me about my assumptions?
5. Application:
  - A. Personal/ Professional Growth—In what ways have I grown personally/professionally?
  - B. Professional Practice (Action)—What professional, classroom-based applications will I make?

The Reflection Wheel Journal is research-based and user friendly (CIMA, 2003). After the first few submissions, respondents found the process automatic and continuous as a personal and professional practice. The RWJ demonstrates how journaling, critical reflection, transformational analysis, and application in the classroom are powerful strategies for instructional and personal transformation.





**Figure 3. Reflection Wheel Journal adapted from Eastern New Mexico University with permission.**

### *Exit interview*

The second instrument was the five question exit interview designed for respondents' feedback and suggestions for future study improvement. For this instrument, I designed the first three questions based on the *Plus/Delta* evaluation model (Helminski & Koberna, 1995) frequently used in professional development, business workshops, and in classroom assessments. The *plus* step asked respondents what went well for them; the *delta* step asked what needed to be changed. In my professional work, I included a third step, *prescription*, for recommendations to things that needed to be changed.

The last two exit interview questions were personal summary assessments on their *most memorable transformational experience* and what made it so. The questions for the exit interview were:

1. How did the reflection wheel journal work for you in terms of dealing with meaning making of your teaching experience? (+ Plus)
2. What did not work for you? ( Δ Delta)
3. What suggestions/recommendations do you have for future studies? (Rx Prescription)
4. What was the one most transformational experience for you?
5. What made it so influential?

### *Additional Support Resources*

I designed four additional resources as optional writing support materials for respondents who needed writing prompts. Two were examples of Reflection Wheel Journals, so respondents would understand how to follow the five steps. The remaining two resources were writing prompt resources to be used when respondents experienced *writer's block* and

couldn't come up with a journal topic. I modified Mezirow's (2000) six-domain "Habits of Mind" to be educationally relevant and included a list of "21 quotes" from philosophical and educationally influential thinkers (Appendix B).

### *Standards of Quality and Verification*

Creswell (1998) proposed using alternative research terms for *reliability* and *validity*: *standards of quality* and *verification* respectively, justifying that this proposed lexicon was more apt and fitting for qualitative studies. He makes the distinction that a study's standards of quality (reliability) are the criteria upon which the research is measured and that verification (validity) is the process which is ongoing through a study.

#### *Standards of quality (reliability)*

Creswell's (1998) preferred qualitative term for study reliability is 'standards of quality'. In his qualitative inquiry textbook, he used the interpretive framework of Lincoln (1995) to define 'standards of quality' in qualitative research. Lincoln's criteria is based on three qualitative commitments: emergent relations with respondents, a set of stances, and a vision promoting justices. Her list of standards, specific to qualitative research include:

- The standard of positionality guides interpretive or qualitative research. Drawing on those concerned about standpoint epistemology, this means that the 'text' should display honesty or authenticity about its own stance and about the position of the author.
- Interpretive or qualitative research must give voice to participants so that their voice is not silenced, disengaged, or marginalized. Moreover, alternative or multiple voices need to be heard in a text.

- *Critical subjectivity* as a standard means that the researcher needs to have heightened self-awareness in the research process and create personal and social transformation. This ‘high-quality awareness’ enables the researcher to understand his or her psychological and emotional states before, during, and after the research experience (p. 284).

I measured my study’s reliability against the qualitative criteria as defined by Lincoln (1995). I addressed and recorded my views, expectations, and personal reflections as I began the study and how they were changed throughout the study. I established the research parameters to assure the participants’ comfort level, not only through confidentiality, but also through the open ended design of selecting their own incidents on which to write and determining their own depth of analysis. I provided my originally designed four-document support package as writing prompts. I did not disclose my teaching biases or values to study participants. Yet, understanding the likelihood of intense workloads of my respondents, I maintained an ‘open door’ for questions, clarification, or discussion through face-to-face, telephone, or email.

I entered the 63 journal narratives in a grid with the five journal steps as the five columns. I entered the nine journal entries for the seven respondents in 63 rows with each journal step entered in the five columns. There were 45 pages in this *master grid*.

Further, the respondents were given ‘voice’ in their assessment through the exit interviews which allowed for their input on the study itself as well as their personal experience with the study. My interpretation of the quality of journaled data was an indicator to me of the respondents’ receptivity and comfort level.

*Verification (validity)*

Creswell (1998) also recommended the use of the term *verification* rather than *validity* proposing qualitative researchers establish a confluence of evidence, a resonance of recognition in constructs. Creswell (1998) refers to Wolcott's (1990) re-conceptualizing that "validity neither guides nor informs his work" (p.146). Creswell clarifies, "He (Wolcott) does not dismiss validity but rather places it in a broader perspective...tries to understand rather than convince and voices that *validity* distracts from his work of understanding what is really going on. Wolcott claims that the term *validity* does not capture the essence of what he seeks....But for now, he says, the term understanding seems to encapsulate the idea as well as any other." (p. 200)

Creswell (1998) lists verification procedures recommending that researchers engage in several from the list in any given study (pp. 201-203), I have noted my adherence to five of the points:

- my first-hand account witnessing of the phenomena in the field,
- the review of literature to support my research,
- the study findings,
- the writing of thick descriptive data, and
- clarifying researcher bias at the outset of the study so the reader understands the investigator's position.

To assure internal verification, the instrument steps were aligned with the research question components, meaning making, self-reflection, personal transformation, and praxis. All steps in every journal were evaluated in accordance with the traditional, qualitative triple-

coding process. These Reflection Wheel Journal steps were my *units of analysis* as illustrated for clarity in my Research Method Design (see Figure 4).

The verification of the instrument took participants through the self-reflection process cognitively, affectively, and transformationally with the final step of putting possible perspective changes into practice. The instrument then, was appropriate and relevant to the study. The process of this alignment is continuous throughout the study. The specificity of the five steps of the RWJ presented the opportunity for respondents for perspective transformation. The journaling process was personal and private. The topic under evaluation was freely chosen by the respondent.

The Research Method Design (Figure 4) color codes the multi-component research question with the steps of the RWJ. In this manner, the respondents' five journal steps corresponded precisely with each component of the research question. This simplified organizing the coding process as the instrument, by its very design, aligned with the investigative units of analysis I would be coding. An explanation of units of analysis is described more fully below.

#### *Data Collection and Organization*

Respondents electronically submitted nine journals and their exit interviews to me through email. Data were held in a locking file cabinet.

As I received the journals, I transcribed them into grids. Collecting and recording the data in grids, streamlined the analysis process. There were seven respondents with nine journals for 63 rows, each row having five columns for the journal steps. Each row varied in depth—from a few inches to most of a page depending on the detail of an individual's

Reflection Wheel Journal—5 steps	Qualitative Coding	Alignment of RWJ and Research Question <i>Units of Analysis</i>
<p><b>5. Application Praxis--theory into practice:</b> A: Personal growth B: Professional growth</p> <p><b>1. Incident, reading, encounter, discussion, relationship, etc.</b></p> <p><b>2. How did it make me feel? Sad, surprised, happy, shocked, angry, etc. (AFFECTIVE)</b></p> <p><b>3. What thoughts come up for me? (COGNITIVE)</b></p> <p><b>4. a. Reflection:</b> Explain why you felt that way (reference step #2) <b>4 b. Critical Reflection:</b> How does your socialization (background, meaning, etc) shape your <i>assumptions</i> and <i>feelings</i>? (TRANSFORMATIONAL)</p>	<p><b>Research question components</b> are aligned with <b>RWJ steps.</b></p> <p><b><u>Response Coding:</u></b></p> <p>1. <b>open</b> coding <i>initial categories</i> of responses on units of analysis</p> <p>2. <b>axial</b> coding <i>reassemble responses in new ways</i> that may indicate relationships and/or a central phenomena</p> <p>3. <b>selective</b> coding <i>emerging theory development</i></p>	<p>How do teachers make meaning of their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• self reflection (2 &amp; 3)</li> <li>• personal transformation (4a., 4b), and</li> <li>• praxis (5)?</li> </ul> <p>~~~~~</p> <p><b>Exit interview feedback</b> on 5 questions recommendations for future studies</p>

**Figure 4. Teacher Transformation Research Method Design—including Reflection Wheel Journal, coding steps, research question alignment.**

writing in each step. The five-steps of each of the 63 journals were entered into the five columns for each respondent totaling 315 units of analysis (see Figure 4). *One cell represented one respondent's response to one RWJ step in one incident out of nine for that individual. This represented ONE unit of analysis* (Foss & Waters, 2007, pp. 185-215).

Applying a qualitative, grounded-study, triple-coding process—open, axial, selective coding—on these 315 pieces of data yield a total of 945 code steps for all the units. *Unit of analysis* is explained by Foss & Waters (2007), “You don’t have to invent your unit of analysis because it comes from your research question...Knowing your unit of analysis, then, is the first step to unpacking the wealth of data before you” (p. 187).

Similarly, respondents’ five exit interview responses were transcribed into a grid. There were five steps in the instrument and seven respondents, 35 pieces of information. Each cell contained one respondent’s response to a step in the exit interview. The cells varied in size depending on the responses. For this part of the study, I grouped responses into the five-steps of the exit interview because the steps themselves were an a priori coding.

#### *Data Analysis Procedure*

My Research Method Design (Figure 4) explains visually how I aligned the research question components, the units of analysis—self-reflection, personal transformation, and praxis—with the Reflection Wheel Journal (RWJ) steps. Step one in the RWJ was to provide an incident descriptor. The remaining RWJ respondent answers correlated to the research components. For example, in the final RWJ step (#5) application of perspective transformation for personal/professional growth and classroom practice addressed ‘praxis.’

I anticipated that respondents’ answers might not “stay within the lines”, sometimes possibly blending cognitive and affective realizations into one step or jumping to praxis in



step four, or revisiting their assumptions in step 5, praxis. I also anticipated possible ambiguity, despite the fact that respondents had clear definitions for each journal step from my introductory presentation and from my resource packet.

As the journals were submitted, I coded all responses in three successive stages (Creswell, 1998) open, axial, and selective coding. As defined by Creswell,

The process of data analysis in grounded theory research is systematic and follows a standard format:

- In **open coding**, the researcher forms initial categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting information. Within each category, the investigator finds several properties, or subcategories, and looks for data to dimensionalize, or show the extreme possibilities on a continuum of, the property.
- In **axial coding**, the investigator assembles the data in new ways after open coding. This is presented using a coding paradigm or logic diagram in which the researcher identifies a central phenomenon (i.e., a central category about the phenomenon), explores causal conditions (i.e., categories of conditions that influence the phenomenon), specifies strategies (i.e., the actions or interactions that result from the central phenomenon), identifies the context and intervening conditions (i.e., the narrow and broad conditions that influence the strategies, and delineates the consequences (i.e., the outcome of the strategies) for this phenomenon.
- In **selective coding**, the researcher identifies a “story line” and writes a story that integrates the categories in the axial coding model. In this phase conditional propositions (or hypotheses) are typically presented.

Before I began the coding process I made a second copy of each page of my grid and set it aside as instructed by Foss & Waters (2007, p. 186). I studied the three coding steps—open, axial, and selective-- and labeled large pages of flip-chart paper with each of the five journal steps with the three coding processes. I then cut the extra grid copy into 315 individual units of analysis (squares from the rows of journals and the five columns of journal steps), while setting aside the original grid.

### *Open Coding*

As I was cutting the units of analysis, I began to group the units in a general way. For example, one pile seemed to address problems with administrators, another problems with difficult students, and yet another, feelings of *burn out*. In this coding phase, very superficial coding creates the categories. Foss & Waters (2007) advise, “As you code, code with naïveté. What we mean by this is that you should code trying to forget what you know about your subject....staying on the surface level of the text as you code prevents you from coding for what you want to find or for what you think you will find.” (p. 189)

In the initial *open* coding step, I formed initial categories of information. Then within those categories, I looked for properties or subcategories of similarity. Foss & Waters (2007) recommended, “As your piles start to take shape....use sticky notes (post-it notes) to label your piles (groups) with terms that express succinctly what all the codes in that one pile have in common...don’t worry if you have lots of small piles. That’s better than a few large piles.” (p.193)

### *Axial Coding*

After recording the open coding categories, Foss & Walters (2007) explain how to proceed with the next step, axial coding.

Remove your sticky note headings from the piles of labels and set them aside. Then mix your labels up. In other words, dismantle all your piles of labels and whatever layout you had of how they relate to one another. Shuffle them all around. Sort them again, making yourself sort differently from how you did before. The goal is to find completely different piles for the labels and entirely new relationships among the labels from what you found the first time. You might have a couple of labels (categories) that stay in the same relationship as they were in your earlier sort, but the general rule guiding you here should be to force yourself to think of new relationships among the labels and new ways in which they connect to one another. Make yourself come up with categories that aren't so literal, for example. Look for patterns other than traditional ones (p. 199).

After recording the open coding results, I re-assembled responses in new ways that would indicate a central phenomenon and commonality of participant responses. I then removed the labels, mixed the 'units of analysis' and regrouped looking for thematic patterns. I recorded these categories for the second coding step, noting a pattern emerging regarding how teachers were making meaning. See the results from these steps in Chapter Four.

### *Selective Coding*

Finally, the last step for analyzing responses was *selective* coding. I was interested in seeing if emerging patterns surfaced as a result of the axial coding. Foss & Waters (2007) list criteria to look for in the final coding of what they call the *explanatory schema*.

One is that it must *encompass all the major categories of your data....*The second criterion for an explanatory schema is that it should be marked by an *organic and*

*coherent relationship among the labels.* All of the labels should function together, without undue strain, to answer your research question. The schema should clearly show connections among labels and contributing relations among the piles (categories)....A third criterion is *reasonable inference*—the same criterion you used for coding your data, you want to be able to explain how the explanatory schema you are proposing fits your labels (categories). There has to be a clear and plausible fit between your schema and your coded data (represented by the labels) that is evident to others....Another criterion you should be trying for as you develop your schema is *insightfulness*.... you want to produce new insights and new understandings as a result of your analysis of the data (pp. 206-207).

#### *Emergence of Theoretical Propositions*

Theoretical propositions emerged regarding teacher transformation based on the response categories. The data generates the categories and the theory that results from the responses. Categories or variables from this exploratory study would, at least, provide a “starting point” on which a continued further research could expand. Creswell (1998) states, The results of this process of data collection and analysis is a theory, a substantive-level theory, written by the researcher close to a specific problem or population of people. This theory is subjected to further empirical testing because now we know the variables or categories from field-based data, although the study may end at this point because the generation of a theory is a legitimate outcome of the study (p. 58).

#### *Exit Interviews*

As with the journals, the intent for the individual exit interviews was to reveal patterns of success, areas for improvement, and suggestions for future studies. The final two

questions encouraged participants to narrow their focus on specific transformational experiences and what they perceived was the key component for that transformation. This closing step provided additional self-reflection opportunity for respondents.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS

During the course of the coding, one of my biggest findings—and this is appropriate for grounded study research—surfaced while progressing from coding step one to two. It occurred to me that I was grouping the units of analysis at a much too superficial level—a simple division of positive or negative experiences. By the time I began the triple coding process for step two, the respondents were indicating *how* they were interpreting and either reacting or responding to incidents. *Meaning making* had actually emerged from the data.

As I read the journals, I discovered that regardless of whether or not incidents were positive or negative, respondents were framing the experiences based on their personal *locus of control* (Rotter, 1960). In psychological studies, this locus of control can be categorized as either internal or external depending on how events and situations are framed in accordance to the level of one's personal control (Figure 5). An external locus of control defers power in relationships to others believing that events are happening *to them* and believing control is outside in the hands of others or due to fate-chance. An internal locus of control indicates a belief that outcomes are self-determined.

With this new lens for categorizing responses, determining meaning making was becoming clearer; however, it still seemed simplistic. While internal-external locus of control took the research to a needed critical level, I wanted to be certain to include the nuances of perspective transformation, that is, a *readiness* to self-reflect and to examine assumptions (Mezirow, 1991). Therefore, a mid-level was needed for transitional responses.



To determine *meaning making* of self-reflection, transformation, and praxis, I developed a *constructivist* coherence rubric (Table 2) with which to measure levels of internal and external locus of control. The premise for generating this rubric was for me to have a scale in determining coherence levels. High levels of coherence in writing exhibited unity, alignment, and participant responsiveness, as opposed to limited levels of coherence as demonstrated in writing expressing separateness, reactivity, and oppositional stances. I realized the locus of control was embedded within the level of congruence of the participants' analyses. I saw journal writing that framed a strong locus of control—inner determinism—also showed high level of congruence. That is, those respondents were recognizing multiple perspectives with greater alignment to their own viewpoints and an *attitude of flexibility* while in the midst of challenging circumstances. Conversely, writing that demonstrated an outer locus of control exhibited less congruence, less openness for adaptation and more inconsistencies and relational separation.

### **Seligman's Research**

To address the very difficult work of categorizing narrative responses while avoiding subjective assessment, I examined the work of Seligman (1984, 1990, and 2007) and his narrative interpretations from verbatim respondent feedback. His work in educational psychology, specifically in understanding the role of *optimism* in the dynamics of learning, contributed to expanded understandings and applications of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) and teacher efficacy (Hoy, 2008).

Seligman (1984) generated guidelines for interpreting a Likert scale rating of what he referred to as *spontaneous explanations* from verbatim narratives. This CAVE (Content Analysis of Verbatim Explanations) technique gathered responses along a seven point Likert



scale with respondents self-rating their presumed responses to situations from either an inner or outer locus of control. The self-assessed questionnaire provided Seligman with responses indicating an external locus of control which contributed to feelings of *helplessness*.

While the selection of variable scores along Likert scales vary from respondent to respondent, the investigator will ultimately interpret self-assessed responses from which, in this case, categories of either inner or outer locus of control are determined. Similarly, in my study—using a structured graphic organizer, the Reflection Wheel Journal—respondents are free to write of self-selected incidents and how they responded to them. Specifically, in step four—*Transformation*—respondents are invited to revisit the experience to look more closely at assumptions and beliefs which led them to interpret the situation as they did. They are also asked to consider alternative perspectives of reframing the situation. As Seligman did, I analyzed verbatim narratives through the lens of inner and outer locus of control. The difference in our studies, was that I incorporated the input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985) to ask teachers to expand their perceptions toward an inner locus of control and thereby expand efficacy levels toward greater congruence.

Because of the inductive nature of qualitative research, opinions, views, and perceptions can be gathered to formulate a trend or indication. Conversely, in quantitative research fact gathering results in a conclusion or several conclusions. The qualitative data gathered for this study, through verbatim, confidential responses to current education issues provides insights for general trends in building teacher personal and professional efficacy.

### **Topic Selections: RWJ Step One**

The first step in the Reflection Wheel Journal was for respondents to give a brief summary of the topic for analysis. I was interested to see what incidents respondents

selected. Topic selection was at their discretion. Quite a few selected incidents or issues which prompted reflection on sacrifices and rewards of teaching, weighing pros and cons of staying with their profession.

For the open coding process, I grouped responses according to key words and issues, such as teacher *burn-out*, *non-traditional students*, *administrative*, and *family issues*. There were a total of 18 categories covering a wide range of issues. For axial coding, I regrouped piles into four new piles: student, teacher, colleague/administration, and family.

From these, I noticed a ‘tone’ evident in the topic descriptions: 55 out of 63 responses of the self-selected journal topics were stress-related, school-setting issues—including communication problems, philosophical and policy *disconnects* between teachers and administrators, lack of professional support, disrespect from students, coworker and staff issues, *special needs* student program support, and employment concerns. I created the categories based on key words in the journals. The remaining seven responses topic selections dealt with family issues, not necessarily stress-related. Throughout these few responses, domestic issues were a consistent issue—aging parents, analyzing generational variances of *generational work ethic*, broken water heaters, children struggling with careers, schooling, parenting, and economics and similarities between home-life and classroom challenges.

In coding for journal step two, the affective responses, I noticed the units of analysis for step three, the cognitive analysis, incorporated step two in the self-reflective process. When the respondents carried the emotional responses into the cognitive step, “What thoughts came up for me”, the meaning making of self-reflection surfaced in their writing. This was evidenced as responses framed habits of mind in inner vs. outer locus of control

with corresponding congruence levels. Writing about the emotionality of the incident was an effective preliminary step for deconstructing the incident cognitively. I then realized the strategic sequencing of the instrument steps—to first prompt emotionality, followed by cognitive analysis, then transformation, and finally personal and professional praxis.

I combined my triple-coding analysis of steps two and three to address the beginning process of self-reflection. My total steps for triple coding then became three: self-reflection (a combination of responses to journal steps two and three), personal transformation (step four), and praxis (step 5). The Research Method Design (Figure 4) provides a visual for the merged coding of these journal steps and the internal verification (Creswell, 1998) with the research question components.

I began my data analysis with the qualitative triple coding process—open, axial, and selective. Selective coding indicated emerging patterns of meaning making for each of the RWJ steps and concurrently with the research question components. After each selective coding process, each unit of analysis was analyzed for levels of coherence—high, mid, and limited levels. I grouped these levels with accompanying direct excerpts from the respondents to cite and support the premise by which they were categorized.

### **Self-Reflection: RWJ Steps Two and Three**

I observed that RWJ steps two and three— affective and cognitive analyses—provided the units of analysis for the respondents' self-reflective processes. This would provide data to answer the first component of the research question: How were the respondents making meaning through self-reflection of their nine incidents? Respondents were able to observe their experiences from two lenses: their emotional responses and their logical analyses. Initially analyzing the emotion associated with the experience resulted in two observations:

first, the emotional step appeared to facilitate a more vivid recall of the incident; and, secondly, it acted as a prompt to contextually and objectively reflect on personal thoughts—judgments, biases, attitudes, beliefs, and perspectives.

The *self-reflection* unit of analysis then became an amalgam of these two steps: the affective and cognitive processes of meaning making. In the final selective coding, I merged the *emotional selective coding* with the *thought axial coding*.

It was from this blended coding, that the *inner* versus *outer* locus of control (Rotter, 1966, Seligman, 1984, 1990, 2007) framework for meaning making emerged. More subtle layers of metacognitive processing surfaced in the narratives. At the same time, I wanted to avoid becoming fixated on these categories to see if the pattern would *hold*. It became clear, as well, how cutting the journal steps into pieces, shuffling, grouping and regrouping responses would allow emerging patterns to surface. I saw the fluid nature of the process and continued to watch for trends in how teachers made meaning of their self-reflection, personal transformation, and praxis.

### **Emotions: RWJ Step Two**

*Self-Reflection* coding emerged from combining steps two (affective analysis) and step three (cognitive analysis). This provided the meaning making lens with which to analyze responses.

Step two in the Reflection Wheel Journal asks respondents to reflect, ‘How does it (the incident, relationship, or concept) make me feel?’ Respondents were to answer in just key *emotion words*, not sentences. In this manner, mental sentence structuring is put aside to elicit responses more comfortably, lowering the *affective filter* an effective strategy for adult and nontraditional learners (Krashen, 1985).

### *Open Coding*

In this step of categorizing, out of the total 63 units of analysis, there were 15 groups of similar patterns of emotions. There were 32 responses reporting anger, fear, frustration, anxiety, disappointment, and helplessness. The second category, 12 responses, reported lesser intensity of negative emotion: disrespect, disbelief/shock, confusion, regret, guilt, and humility. The third category, 19 responses, reported positive emotions such as pride/validation, calm/support, joy, appreciation, and commitment.

### *Axial Coding*

Following the next step of re-mixing the categories and re-grouping, I found 25 *anger-fear* based responses of the total 63 units of analysis. The *confused-sad* group had 20 responses, and there were 15 *calm-supported* responses. Only in this particular coding step, there were a few *miscellaneous units of analysis* which did not fit in any category and so were set aside (Foss & Waters, 2007).

### *Selective Coding*

I merged the two negative-emotion groups of step two units of analysis resulting in 45 responses expressing combined anger and frustration. This finding is a little less than the 55 responses focused on primarily stress-related topics in step one.

### **Thoughts: RWJ Step Three**

Participants responded to the third step in the Reflection Wheel Journal, ‘What thoughts came up for me?’ In this step, respondents replied in greater depth about what thoughts surfaced after recalling the emotions associated with their topic selection.

### *Open Coding*

There were a total of 15 categories created from the 63 units of analysis for RWJ step three. Among the negatively inclined responses were: challenging students, difficult work/unappreciated, administrative issues, and examples of bad teaching. Other categories discussed the rewards of helping students, positive feedback from students, experiencing good teaching and personal peace.

### *Axial Coding*

During this coding step I realized, while studying the journals carefully, that positive/negative grouping was *not* revealed by the meaning making. Rather, teachers were beginning to analytically deconstruct their experiences—both positive and negative—within their personal locus of control. One unit of analysis reflected on an adversarial staff conflict, “What is *my part* in all of this?” When I read this probing question, *this was my clue to rethink how to code the responses* and the key for *congruence*: at what level of awareness were participants able to frame and respond to an incident in a new way of meaning making that was less *me vs. them*? By asking, “What is my part...”, the response indicted an inner locus of control. I blended the *selective coding for emotions* with the *axial coding for thoughts* creating a blend of the two for *self-reflection—selective coding*.

### *Selective Coding: Self-reflection*

Following this newly reframed coding process based on internal/external locus of control, I developed a three tiered congruence rubric (see Table 2): *high level* (internal locus of control), *mid level* (approaching internal locus of control), and *limited level* (external locus of control). I chose the term *limited* rather than *low* because *limited* seemed less judgmental and allowed for the potential of reframing.

*Self-reflection: limited level*

The direct quotes cited in this chapter are examples of limited, mid, and high levels of congruence based on inner or outer locus of control as categorized in the rubric. Various intervening variables such as workplace pressure, fatigue, and even resistance to deeper levels of personal inquiry may play a role in how an incident is critically deconstructed.

Writing examples contained elements indicating *movement toward* high congruence, framed within an inner locus of control. In this case, the unit was categorized as *mid-level*. Units of analysis which were clear about inner locus of control were categorized as *high level* and were easy to determine through the category characteristics (see Table 2).

At the *limited level* of congruence for self-reflection units of analyses were characterized by venting, reporting, and relating perceptions of incidents beyond their control—external locus of control. These responses represented seven of the total 63 units of analysis on self reflection.

I put key trigger words in **bold** with my categorizing rationale in *italics*. As with Seligman's (1984) CAVE Likert scoring tool for verbatim explanations, I was looking for varied response framing. One main difference, however, was that responses were not to a generic question given to all respondents, but responses were to self-selected issues—a component of a grounded study.

No responses were deemed *right or wrong* and were selected as *representatives* of the congruence (inner vs. outer locus of control) categories. Responses coded as *limited* were often reporting or venting. Because self-reflective journaling can be therapeutic, confidential venting is often freeing and has a catalytic potential for perspective transformation. Selections are provided to show level of congruence coding for each journal step.

**Beth:** It was **disappointing** because although the **kid was troubled**, he was still keeping it together with lots of coaxing and prodding. During hall duty, I had time to encourage him. But, if you had seen him, you would understand my ‘**amused**’ feeling. I dearly **hoped** he would stay upright through the end of the class, twenty minutes.

*This was a level of reporting and assessing a student’s behavior and shifting emotions of observation at a surface level of processing.*

**Dee:** Student teaching is one of the hardest things I have ever experienced in my life: living off student loans, teaching two classes, and still a student myself.

**This system** was created to help us be successful; yet, it is just adding to the stress by giving us **frivolous time-consuming assignments**.

It feels like an initiation and I wonder if this is cause for **teacher burn-out**.

*This response was reporting and venting and categorized as an external locus of control.*

**Helen:** I was **embarrassed with myself**. I lost my cool with this kid. He “**creeped me out**” (with his non-responsiveness). Every question I asked him was met with a dull look; he seemed disconnected. I was **furious** that a new kid with a serious learning disability (was brought into my class) and **no one thinks to tell (me)**.

*This is an external locus of control. The respondent is expressing expectations of how things should be and attributing outside influences she feels she has no control over.*



*Self-reflection: mid level*

At the mid-level of congruence, 28 responses out of the 63 units of analysis indicated approaching internal locus of control through their ability to see cause/effect, and the problem/solution dilemma. Yet, there was still potential for assumption analysis (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) to determine how their assumptions, beliefs, and values were formed and if there were another way to make meaning of the situation. Distinguishing between the mid and high levels of congruence was extremely difficult to code because of nuances of subjective interpretation. The coherence rubric guided the coding.

**Beth:** I knew the enrollment **numbers on paper did not reflect** the actual need of our (minority population) students. I **rallied the faculty** to build a list immediately to **head off** the possibility of our efforts to offer this important support intervention **being thwarted**. My first thoughts were, when the directive came down from the Chief Financial Director, “How can he have so much **power?**”

*This excerpt indicates external locus of control; yet, proactive steps are taken to alleviate the situation.*

**Beth:** I felt like I **failed my students** regarding the (my) philosophy, “Teach like it’s the last day of school”. I needed permission from the nurse; I **couldn’t go myself!** I know I had a low-grade fever and could be contagious so I felt I could stay home without **guilt**. That is so **sad!**

*Here was evidence of external locus of control through feelings of guilt and dependence on 'permission'; however, there was also potential for further assumption transformation through awareness of perspective change: 'I could stay home without guilt'.*

**Dee:** I knew I **could not let this behavior slide**—the seriousness of their failing grades (how to address: individually or as a group?). It had to be **powerful enough to change their ways.**

*Moving toward inner locus of control through conviction of 'changing their ways'; however, incorporating students' realities into relational congruence could be explored.*

*Self-reflection: high level*

At the high level of congruence, also 28 responses reported perspective changes and ability to see alternative value perspectives and rationales for actions taken. Responses indicated an inner locus of control through deep, self-reflective questions about the motivations behind their actions. Reflection at this level indicates an openness to consider multiple realities and seek relational congruence.

**Val:** What is it to “surrender”, to not be in control?

*High level of congruence; openness to explore dissolving 'self-importance' (i.e. being 'in control') and allowing for alternate ways of relating..*

**Angie:** When I was a support person, **had I done *too much***? Why is this new support person being **selfish? OR is she just being smart...taking care of her own needs?**

*The writing analyzed previously held assumptions (i.e. 'had I done too much') while attempting to make meaning and reconciling alternative ways of doing things (i.e. selfish or smart). High level of congruence was evidenced in acknowledging multiple realities and possible necessity for suspending judgments.*

**Sonja:** Tried to use common sense to work with other faculty. I became aware that **my ego was way too involved. I think I'm the only one who knows how to "fix"** these situations with challenged students. It is a **dangerous place to be** because nothing I do is really coming from me, but **my spiritual teacher who is guiding me.** I need to **be alert**, but **not** the "savior" or "**specialist**". If I take that position, then I **set myself up for intolerable failure.**

*This writing demonstrated a willingness to reframe an incongruous way of relating to coworkers, even being 'alert (I'm) not the savior or specialist'. There was an assumption analysis (transformational learning theory) for ways to change behavior. There was also an awareness of the potential for unpleasant repercussions due to (the writer's admitted) arrogance (resulting from limited congruence). This reflection reflected a high level of congruence—a willingness for perspective reframing.*

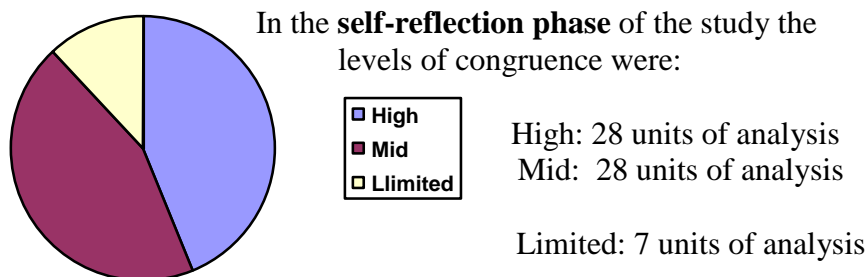
**Angie:** I was **surprised** this beginning teacher thought I would have **influenced the principal for her evaluation.** I **reassured her** that the principal has never invited my input but that the principal must have

believed she is becoming a good teacher and invest in her; otherwise, she would not have kept her on for the following year...I asked the beginning teacher to **reframe the advantages** of going on to the kindergarten level. She would have the support of an excellent “kinder” teacher with wonderful materials. She felt much better.

*This writing exemplified how despite being taken off-guard by the beginning teacher’s misjudgment, she did NOT take offense and even demonstrated compassion and sacrifice by helping the beginning teacher with her own perspective transformation—several characteristics of an inner locus of control and high level of congruence.*

To see how respondents were categorized at this step, I created a pie-chart from the response percentages. You can see (Figure 6) that participants were evenly divided between high and mid levels of congruence. Because they were being asked to critically reflect on their personal perspectives and how they came about them, the level of their responses was surprisingly positioned in an inner locus of control. The self-reflection step was assimilation, again, of steps two and three; they reflected affectively and cognitively on their chosen incident.

### Summary of Findings for Self-Reflection



**Figure 6. Self-reflection data for units of analysis**

### Transformation: RWJ Step Four

Step four of the Reflection Wheel Journal asked respondents to reflect more deeply on assumptions they'd adopted as their personal schema. Questions were posed at two levels: “*Explain the emotions* you described in step two. *Why* did you feel that way?” and Critical Reflection: “How does your socialization (background, meaning, etc.) shape your *assumptions and feelings*? Did you change your *perspective*?”

I noted that despite the earlier evidence in topic selection showed 55 responses focused on stress-related topics, the transformational units of analysis demonstrated a willingness to examine perspective assumptions in the light of how they *processed* their roles within these incidents. Moreover, they were open to explore improved ways to alter perceptions and corresponding responses.

#### *Open Coding*

For the transformational coding, I sorted responses into seven piles. This was a significant decrease from the original piles of 20 and 18 categories. The *transformational* categories (responses) that emerged in the open-coding step included: self-perception change,

student expectations, fixing *the system*, general global negativity/plight of the world, office politics, teacher modeling, and work ethic.

### *Axial Coding*

For axial coding, I reshuffled the groups and formed new categories to note that at the high level of congruence respondents cited *re-examining their personal assumptions, seeing alternative perspectives, reframing ways of viewing* relationships and situations. The mid level congruence responses did reflect on *reactions*, yet didn't fully consider alternative actions, responses, or perspectives. There were also *presumptions on expectations*, reports of being taken off-guard, surprised, *considering* future steps of how to change personal thinking, and processing beliefs. The *limited level of congruence* responses were primarily *reacting*, not reflecting, on their perspectives with no reflection on how their assumptions were formed or could be changed. They were also simply *reporting* observations.

### *Selective Coding*

I looked for emerging trends and comparing with the congruence levels of *self-reflection*. There were 34 responses for *high* levels of transformation congruence and nine *limited* level transformation congruence.

The following were excerpts from the RWJ step four, *transformation*. Selected responses were representative category responses, beginning with the limited level (bolded words were keys for categorizing).

#### *Transformation: limited level*

**Polly:** Only a few random events in my previous background as an engineer exposed me to seeing an **out of control meeting**... a **manager** getting away with (**misbehaving**). **Even within the**

**classrooms, expected orderly behavior was not evident.** Yet, it was explained that **all American schools are “like that”** and that, actually (**their school**) was fortunate and (**not as bad as most**).

*This excerpt is a report on an incident with no evaluation of perspective or evaluating expectation.*

**Beth:** By the end of the six-week probationary period for “Justin” I was truly **embarrassed** that I was going to **send him to the low level math class so he could graduate.** I was “educated” by him that over the summer, **he turned around.** I never did find out what happened. **I was just happy with the results.**

*This is a report on an unexpected pleasant outcome. There was potential to explore the embarrassment of underestimating the student.*

**Dee:** This is the **post-Columbine school procedure: teachers** have the responsibility to know how to act, how to keep students calm, and to **insure safety.** I’ve seen how our schools have transformed since the Columbine shootings. **Classrooms are no longer safe** environments; we are **changed forever by this violence.** This is a tragic yet real reaction that everyone who wants to work in the education system has to deal with.

*This response reported on how school violence has radically changed school protocol and procedures; all of these indicated external locus of control perspective. Internal locus of control would have explored potential ways to manage, adapt, and cope.*

**Helen:** The **boss is an old friend** I've known since college. Back in the day, we had a lot of fun and everyone was happy. Now, I still have a **fun relationship with he and his wife**; lots of jokes; he puts **Kailua in his morning coffee**. My **big mistake was to present a (risqué) birthday gift in front of others (as an employee)**. **I crossed a line**. He told me that if I ever have the thought to do something like this again, "Take a deep breath and THINK." **I was furious**. He wasn't offended, why should anyone else be? Who was it? **Which one of that sea of faces is a traitor to me. How can I be the wildly creative person I am without occasionally crossing 'the line'?**

*This response was positioned from an external locus of control. The response reported on an incident that happened 'to' the writer with reactions from others and defensiveness. There was the potential for moving to an internal locus of control through analysis of roles and an awareness of multiple perspectives.*

*Transformation: mid level*

These mid level of congruence "transformation" examples indicated which responses approached high levels of congruence:

**Angie:** Part of the job is, after 31 years, knowing there will be surprises! I know this principal is not tactful when informing teachers they may have to change. It can **feel like a demotion**. At this point, in my career, **I like change**. However, early in one's



teaching career, there is a need to stay at grade level.

*This response illustrated several examples of internal locus of control: the ability to see multiple perspectives, observing cause-effect, and reflective-reporting.*

*Further perspective analysis could include inquiry why the principal is perceived as not tactful and reconciling strategies for that type of behavior.*

**Angie: Shocked** because I'm always trying to help others. Was I placing **my own expectations on what a support person should do based on what I did?** The instructional coach (said) this new person felt it was not part of her job description.

*This unit of analysis approached inner locus of control through an attempt to reconcile a different way someone else worked in a position the writer formerly held. Had she answered her own question and discovered a way to reframe expectations, this response would move to the high level of congruence.*

*Transformation: high level*

High Level of congruence examples for transformation revealed critical reflection incorporating, in several instances, a consciousness of integrity, sacrifice, and compassion, assumption analysis, ability to reframe and shift perspectives (See congruence rubric Figure 2). Responses indicated that personal beliefs and values played a central personal transformation role.

**Val:** The Waldorf pedagogy primacy is that the **teacher's inner experience is the tone-setter**. The Waldorf protocol is for the teacher to reflect on each student with love at the beginning of the day. The **Buddhist**

practice is to “equalize” in the case of difficult students. **When I authentically did my own spiritual practice, the classroom generally had a calm center and when not, not.**

*This response is framed from an inner locus of control perspective; the environment is a reflection of the writer’s reality (high congruence).*

**Sonja:** I do believe **I have a divine gift to make connections where none seem possible.** I know I must **keep my ego out of my work** because it is **not I that can make these connections, but my spiritual convictions that allow me to show compassion where there was none.** This can show **tolerance** where there was little and provide hope. If I can accomplish all this with an **open heart and clear mind,** then I am in a position to provide hope, compassion, and love **for those who seek to change their lives.**

*This unit of analysis showed an inner locus of control through observation as the writer chose to respond in either incongruent, divisive ways or through a high level of congruence.*

**Dee: Reframing and redirecting stress...**nerve wracking experience. My past work as a dance and substitute teachers did not prepare me for this experience...**totally different**...having to explain a full lesson and concept. I discovered my **nerves can work in my favor** to help me present the best lesson possible!

*This response demonstrated resourcefulness and an ability to shift from looking at an outer challenge to a strong inner locus of control by accessing and transferring previous skills to manage a difficult situation..*

**Val: When I get clear on my inner life, the outer life gets simpler.**

You just **do what you can do from a good motivation** and keep moving forward. It is not valuable to spend time and energy on doubt and fear...I can **resolve to be mindful**...to keep my attention where it matters—on others, on work, on the divine within me.

*This unit of analysis demonstrated the inner locus of control volition to focus on the positive rather than on negative and on an environment reflected from an inner locus of control (high level of congruence).*

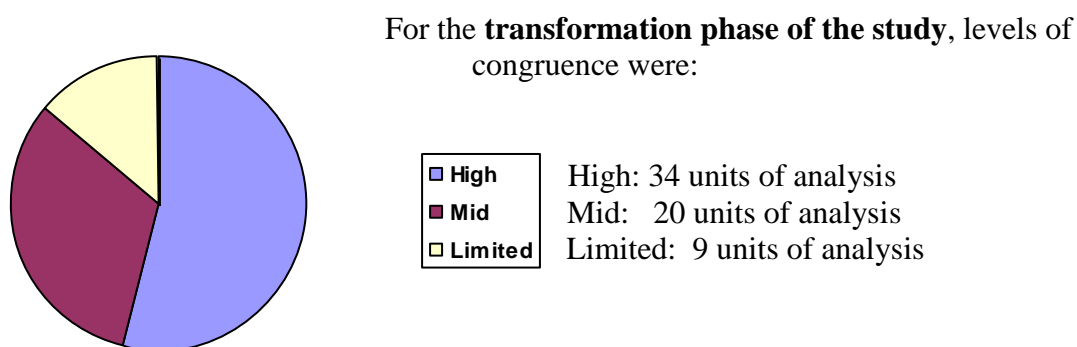
**Sonja: Initially, my explanations were met with resistance; yet, I was able to keep my words soft with just enough insistence** that the team began to **respond to my plea** to treat this girl with respect and caring instead of condemnation and revulsion. I felt satisfied I was heard and there would be changes for her. I felt that I could convey that I “do what I say” and **saw some softening of people’s perceptions** of her. I could feel my spiritual teacher’s guidance through this process helping me interact with others using all the principles he teaches and that I hold closest to my heart. **I saw a distinctive change, a shift in people who were suddenly not put off by what I expressed.**

*By operating from a position of relational congruence and holding*

*that inner locus of control, this writer showed how external situations can be changed.*

These entries, from the three states of Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico revealed journaled accounts that cross-verified one another in the management of stressful situations through high levels of relational congruence. It is my observation that this is a position of consciousness—neither in the affective or cognitive domain. There were repeated references to inner guidance, spiritual teachers and ethical convictions, citing reliance on the spiritual practice and clarity, with one specific reference to Buddhism. Figure 7 shows a visual depiction of how the respondents were grouped according to my congruence rubric measurement in the journal step number four: “Why did you feel (respond) that way? “How does your socialization (background, meaning making, etc) shape your assumptions and feelings”?

*Summary of Findings for Transformation*



**Figure 7. Transformation data for units of analysis**

### **Praxis: RWJ Step Five**

The last component of the journaling, the fifth step, addressed personal and professional application. Praxis is putting a theory or concept into practice.

#### *Open Coding*

Seven piles of open coded responses included these topics: positive expectations for students, personal efficacy, administrative interactions, student empowerment, self-forgiveness, problem-solution situations, and problematic situations.

#### *Axial Coding*

Of these seven open coding piles, there were 38 responses showing high levels of congruence out of the total 63 units of analysis for praxis. Phraseology from the responses included: “a teacher who radiates love, enthusiasm, and understanding creates that in the classroom”, “I have greater awareness of what and how I say things, by monitoring my ego and emotions I can respond in new ways”, and “I’m firm about not giving in to prejudice”. At the mid level of congruence, 13 responses cited: “learning is continuous” and, “we had to deal with a school lock-down for an escaped prisoner”. For the limited level, twelve responses addressed gossip, blame, celebrations, and control issues.

#### *Selective Coding*

The last step of the journaling seemed to indicate that participants were reflecting from a more internal locus of control. Causation cannot be determined.

#### *Praxis: limited level*

Praxis addresses taking concepts and putting them into action personally as well as for classroom instruction and management. Among the responses are these selected

examples of respondents addressing personal transformational processes application regarding their personal and professional lives.

**Dee:** In pre-student teaching (lesson planning), students discussed elements of archetypal hero. I remember the sense of pride and joy on hearing my students discuss this. I love my future career, **even if the “cons” outweigh the “pros”**. Teaching may be one of the **hardest careers out there . . . numerous hours of work, very little pay** off. Like any other initiation, it’s **designed to see who really wants to teach—growing pain(s)** to know what we really want in life. **Countless years paying off** my student loan debt, but see if have impacted a student’s life . . . worth it.

*This excerpt indicated an external locus of control—situation out of her hands. Expanding this to a stronger level of coherence could include a critical reflection on her choice to teach and why the cons outweigh pros in her mind.*

**Helen:** There is **not much I can do to change the way society views teachers**, but I can influence those I train . . . **hold them to a standard I hold myself to. I can refuse to graduate unprepared student (teachers) . . . make them understand “I am the boss. You will do as I say, if you want to graduate.** Somewhere down the line you’ll see that **what I’m teaching you works** and is based on a deeper understanding of learning

modalities. If you don't like it, then **when you have your own classroom, you can change things around. Until then, I am the boss**".

*This excerpt was primarily an observation/report. There was potential for appreciating multiple perspectives and suspending expectations.*

**Dee:** Other rewards as a teacher include when students share personal goals, give you a senior photo, or ask you to sign a yearbook. All the hard work makes it valuable. **Must remember our main reason to become a teacher: to see our students succeed.**

Seeing students graduate will give me a sense of pride—being an educator is the best profession for me.

*This response was another borderline limited-mid level of congruence.*

*While it was a report, the writer reflected on the purpose of becoming a teacher.*

*Praxis: mid level*

I found the following excerpts extremely difficult to distinguish between mid and high levels of congruence. The litmus test was to assess if these participants were able to perceive the basis of their perspectives and assumptions in accordance with the congruence rubric. Aside from *outside* referrals, compliances, and mandates, how have respondents found the *internal* capacity to alleviate dysfunctional situations?

**Angie:** This year, I am **finding out some of my biases**. I told this beginning teacher **we can find a way to meet our requirements** for the program. She said she realized what she had **signed up for** and will try to be **better**. I reminded her why she is being mentored.

*This excerpt showed a mix of internal and external locus of control. The evidence of an internal locus of control was “finding out some of my biases” demonstrating a perspective analysis.*

**Helen:** Have **we** really become a nation ready to embrace **our** differences? Where do **we** stand as a nation on sexuality? If “Lilly” has a problem with reading, **we** have an obligation to provide remedial services in reading. **We** are not equipped (to handle sexual orientation)... **we should** agree that it is not our business and, therefore, **we should** just butt out!

*The issues in this response were a report on the appropriateness or inappropriateness of what is included in teaching responsibilities. This was an external locus of control report.*

**Angie:**...family is of the utmost importance. **Some students don’t have the solidarity of family** that I have to help students. If they don’t have the support system at home, I know **we have to take a risk with giving our time and energy**. That continues my love of teaching and reaching. I believe this is why **we** do go into this profession.

*This was another borderline mid/high level of congruence due to several points of inner locus of control, i.e. flexibility of transferring*



*perspectives to other situations, sense of compassion and sacrifice to assist others.*

*Praxis: high level*

Of the 63 responses to the last journal step, praxis, I categorized 38 responses as high levels of congruence. This was based on the criteria for responding from an internal locus of control as described in the congruence rubric (Table 2). Below are selected excerpts illustrating this.

**Sonja:** This was an exercise in demonstrating **what is possible** for kids like this (institutionalized with little decision-making opportunities). Although it is **difficult to speak** about these “hot potato” incidents **without allowing my ego and emotions to enter into the equation**, I feel that **through my actions, my behavior, and my words I show the possibilities.**

*This narrative showed a high locus of control through the writer’s awareness of how careful communication can serve as an example to peers for proactive possibilities (for student advocacy). Perspective transformation was indicated by self-monitoring former tendencies for “ego and hot-potato emotional” reactions to a more congruent way of working with coworkers.*

**Val:** Over the fifteen years of classroom teaching, **I almost lost my heart.** There were many times when I entered a classroom...not wanting to be there. I considered this to be close to a sin because I **consider the classroom a sacred place.** (Really, I consider irritability

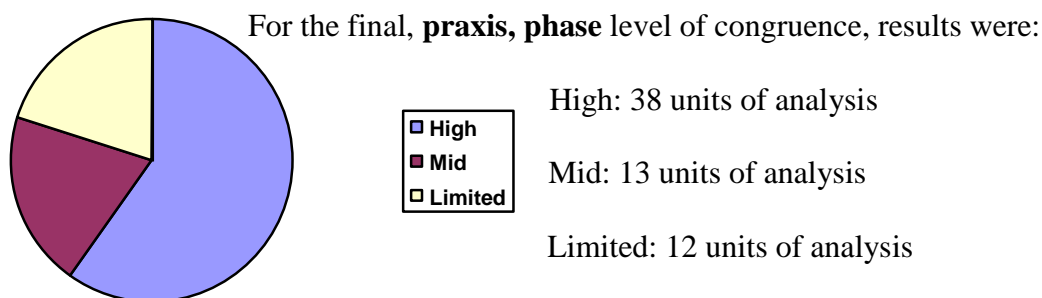
close to a sin wherever I am). **I want to enter every classroom with an open heart** and to greet every student every day with the small, steady flame of **love** burning reliably. **From that place, teaching is so much more intelligent because the mind is clear and fully supported by the heart.**

*This response showed the teacher's recognition of the importance of her own habit of mind impacting the environment. Her self-reflection acknowledged that her own resistance came from within herself, a high level of congruence. She acknowledged personal potential for perspective change.*

**Beth:** Our campus has been using the Baldrige Model with stakeholders and “student-centered” classrooms. **I’ve let go of the “sage on the stage” model and it is LIBERATING! By allowing students to play a role in their learning “collaboratively”** (thanks to TESOL—Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), there is an **atmosphere of mutual respect** in most of my classes. I continue to **grow with my students** in my personal and professional community to be a better teacher producing better people and learners.

*This response demonstrated high levels of congruence and an openness to transform previous teaching style of ‘sage on the stage’ to a democratic style of classroom management. This is a high level of perspective transformation.*

*Summary of Findings for Praxis*



**Figure 8. Praxis data for units of analysis**

### Exit Interview Report

Upon completion of the study, respondents evaluated the *study itself* and on *their experience* of the study process (the last two questions). The exit interviews provided information for future studies and a candid synopsis of the respondents' most transformational experience.

The first three of the five questions regarded what *worked* for them in the study, what *needed changing*, and *recommendations* for changes in the study. This assessment model is a modification of the plus-delta assessment (Helminski and Koberna, 1995).

+ *Plus: What worked*

- Helped with *analyzing* my own reflective process (2 comments)
- Allowed me to reflect
- I was able to articulate what I deal with intuitively
- I loved the open-ended style
- Helped me sift through the work I do

- Encouraged intentionality
- Brought things to the surface
- Am so thankful for this experience!
- Gives teachers a way to see out of emotional pain and helps new teachers take everything with a grain of salt
- Researcher gave us all the tools (explanations and writing prompt resources) we needed to make this “pain-free”!
- I don’t have problems writing; I’m a menopausal woman, I don’t sleep

*Δ Delta: What did not work—needed changing*

- I was confused by the whole process
- Needed more time
- Had to condense my emotions—but, I think that was the point
- Had trouble with the 5-step format
- Reverse the order of the (RWJ) steps

*Rx Prescription: Recommendations for future studies*

- Follow-up study to see if participants continue to use the RWJ
- For student teachers, three times a month is too much, twice monthly is better, once a month is not enough
- Not clear on how this information will be used (by the investigator)
- Meetings the end-of-month on a Friday afternoon rough for me (spring 2009 group)

Responses to the last two exit interview questions: “What was your most transformational experience? Why was it so?” as *thick descriptions* are cited here. The first replies are followed by the respondents’ rationale.

**Dee:**

Most Transformative: I learned that **student teachers have an actual impact on students!** I actually got an award to show that I DO have an impact. It was a tear-jerker for me. It put my self-perception into perspective...the notion that I am (only) a novice. I was very fortunate to have a Master Teacher for my cooperating teacher. I saw how serious she is about teaching and learned so much from her.

Why: The interaction with the classroom students gave me the strong indication that I’m on the right path. I often wondered if **student teaching is an “initiation”**. It became clear to me that I had to have the right “mind set” to experience how fulfilling teaching can be.

**Angie:**

Most transformative: I realized that my expectations for the way things “should” be are for ME! I have to keep in mind that others will not necessarily adhere to *my* standards (not to confuse this with high academic standards for students).

Why: I came to realize that my professional approach by comparison with some of the other educators is less laid back. I can only request information, ask questions, or try to interact with other educators without expecting responses that I

would give. I have adjusted to be prepared for any response! I've learned through these reflective practices and reframing my own versus others' responses that, although I get initially shocked or surprised, I'm **able to pause and realize perhaps they are in a difficult place.** Despite the fact that I can be more aware, not all people feel they have to or will!

**Polly:**

Most transformative: I think I have a tendency to be a very controlling person. I am actually trained to control processes in engineering and think this trickles into my personal life...Or perhaps I am an engineer because I like to control things. ☺ My experiences as a teacher taught me to define boundaries (which I will) and mind my own business; and, outside of which I will intervene and speak up. These boundaries have to do more with other people and where the activities that I object to can hurt...not have to do with what I like or dislike or what my personal habits are.

Why: I think that the whole process of evaluating the situations that I was in and trying to understand how I will use the experience for growth were very valuable. I often do not usually write it down. It was very useful in that I was able to put the events in the past—reflectively—in a concrete way rather than letting them bug me for a long time.

**Sonja:**

Most transformative: For me, it was the moment I realized I'm not "special" or "unique". Anyone can use the same strategies w/ kids in distress. Sometimes just allowing the time to process the information and emotional content allows me to look at the next step in some tough situations.

Why: Important for me to learn that what I do for the kids is only a reflection of who I am. My spiritual teacher works through me and helps me sift out what things are within reach and how to use the principles of His teachings. All this can be done without a conscious thought pattern—more like a feeling of alignment. Spirituality is a practice that **does** belong in our schools. No one really understands what it is that motivates me to work with some of the most difficult kids in our school district!

**Val:**

Most transformative: The first and second RWJs were remarkably timed with the coincidence of my first grandchild entering school and my own reentry into teaching. This transition included a *renewal of faith*—faith in the positive human potential of education reform, faith in god, and faith in my own ability to act and serve.

Why: The fact that I was journaling at this critical time brought attention and mindfulness to the situation. It encouraged me to take my personal experience as a teacher more seriously. The reflective writing process supported and nourished me so that I was able to appreciate my teaching as authentic. I believe this made me more effective in the classroom because it gave me **greater confidence. The**

**increased confidence came from a better knowledge of myself**, of what was actually going on internally.

**Helen:**

Most transformational: I wrote about how I really embraced my work as “leading from below” as an intervening force through balanced discussion in crises. The mediation process has caused me to listen and reflect. I’ve learned to use my own power, but to use it wisely and gently.

Why: I believe there is a shift in education. We must **integrate values** into everything! Without it, schools can make or break a child OR a teacher! Teaching behind closed doors can become autocratic. We must continue to learn to cooperate. Stop reacting...putting out fires. Be proactive in building what we wish to see.

**Beth:**

Most transformational: I found that when I was writing some of these journals, I cried because to see these reflections and revelations in print, brought out so many emotions.

Why: I can’t help but reflect on the timing of this project (research)! I’m furiously debating the “should I, shouldn’t I retire” issue. I’m not positive what will ultimately result, but I know that this project will have played a part in my final decision.

**Data Summary**

Seven teacher participants submitted nine journals each on how they self-reflected and put into practice alternative ways of relating to incidents. Their journaling processes



guided them through five steps of deconstruction and meaning making which covered affective, cognitive, transformative, and application of potential perspective shifts.

Results from the 63 journal entries, five steps for each journal provided 315 pieces of information, units of analysis. Each of these 315 units of analysis were qualitatively coded through three levels—open, axial, and selective—and revealed ways of meaning making in self-reflection, transformation, and praxis. These constructivist interpretations were then categorized, at the selective coding step according to levels of congruence: high, mid, and limited based on inner vs. outer locus of control.

Because the sample was small and was administered with time constraints (see limitations and delimitations), the findings cannot generalize; however, this study can provide a model for more extensive future research regarding how teachers make meaning and manage the challenges of teaching in today's society.

### **Personal Epistemology**

From an axiological standpoint, my personal values regarding this study are grounded in the power and efficacy of self-reflection. This perspective has come about after years of my own reflection; therefore, I have taken a cautionary stance regarding the study participants for whom self-reflection may be a novel concept. For this purpose, I maintained an open and objective stance to the journal submissions, being mindful of my epistemological biases and how I interpreted their *processing*. I acknowledged my bias that the respondents would personally and professionally benefit from this study; however, I realized that I had years of journaling, processing, and self-reflection. More recently, I experienced the beneficial results of using the Reflection Wheel Journal instrument as incorporated in my TESOL (Teaching English to Students of Other Languages) certification

coursework. Therefore, I recognized the importance of patience with respondents as they learned this *incident deconstruction* process and the importance of my mindfulness of maintaining the stance of a neutral observer.

My research on teacher transformation has emphasized overwhelmingly the importance of personal self-reflection, transformation, and the importance of self-discovery. As teachers reflected on the underlying assumptions they held about themselves, their craft, and their relational issues, deep, authentic alterations were evident in the responses. Engaging our teachers in these practices provides the platform to model creative and critical thinking for students.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSION

#### **Review of Positioning the Problem, Study Purpose and Design**

This study was prompted, in part from my own tacit knowledge in observing schools where ethical breaches and lax discipline were the norm. In one situation, thirteen teachers left within eighteen months at one school with this type of culture. Reports from the field have included those from teachers who began their work with sound instructional strategies and high standards of academic expectations. Then, after teaching within a difficult school in which these values were not supported, out of exhaustion, they simply gave up and left. Others who have stayed, report utilizing intensive *self-talk* in order to teach. Attrition has been traced to job dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 2003; Johnson, 2006; Johnson, Berg & Donaldson, 2005; Hoy, 2008; Leukens, Lyter, Fox, & Chandler, 2004). The effectiveness of retention strategies' show mixed results (Birkeland & Johnson, 2002; Little, 1993; Sawyer, 2001).

The critical role of teacher retention—for community and cultural sustainability—cannot be overemphasized (Beader, 2005; Conner & Easterling, 2009). Simple observation shows that one teacher has the potential to impact thousands of children—often generations in the same family—in the span of a teaching career.

The Alliance for Excellent Education (2005) warned,

There is a growing consensus among researchers that the single most important factor determining student performance is the quality of his or her teachers. Therefore, if the national goal of providing an equitable education to children across the nation is to be

met, it is critical that efforts be concentrated on developing and retaining high-quality teachers in every community and at every grade level” (p. 1).

I wanted to see if there were alternative interventions to support teachers in confidentially *telling their story* of how they made meaning of their experiences. What were the major things they thought, how did they feel about these issues, how did they analyze and possibly reframe these experiences in order to transform their lives? Finally, could they implement these new ways of being and relating into their practice and their personal world? Were they able to discover inner resources of efficacy to sustain themselves and their relational work?

My research question was: How do teachers make meaning of their self-reflection, their personal transformation, and praxis? In keeping with the open-ended criteria of qualitative research, this study did not state a hypothesis regarding *whether* respondents did or did not make meaning; but *how they made meaning*. What emerged in the early stages of response coding was *inner-outer locus of control* as evidenced in the verbatim narratives. I categorized the responses using rubric criteria measuring relational congruence through narrative evidenced through inner and outer locus of control situational framing along a three-level continuum.

A sample of seven teachers—all at various points in their careers—self-selected for the study in two sections, through presentations and word-of-mouth from Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico. The study parameters stipulated writing nine single-page, to page-and-a-half minimum—writing more if they chose—self-reflective journals to be submitted via email. They were free to write on any topic related to their work as teachers and to reflect and write as deeply as comfortable. I used a tested, researched structured journal-writing

instrument with which I was familiar from a previous course I had taken. I realized the journal's structured steps were a *fit* for what I needed to discover through my research question. Respondents also submitted a five question exit interview as a summary of their experience with the study and their own transformation assessment.

### **Research Question Steps: Studies/Responses/Interpretation**

In this section, each of the research question steps—meaning making, self-reflection, personal transformation, and praxis—will be addressed citing research findings in the literature, data responses, and my interpretation. A synopsis of the exit interviews follows with my interpretation.

#### *Meaning Making*

##### *Theories and research*

Dewey's theory that knowledge is acquired as an *adaptive* human response to the environment—the theory of pragmatism—provides for the learner's volition to restructure conditions. This established the foundation for constructivism, which honors the learner. Dewey (1909, 1915, 1916, 1929, 1939). The learner makes meaning of instruction and experiences and integrates this with what is already known. Vygotsky (1978) expanded this with the theory of the zone of proximal development—that the learner benefits from proximity with others who have gained higher levels of knowledge.

Among Krashen's research hypotheses which have application for this study are the input hypothesis and the affective filter theory. The first states that learners do best when new information is built on existing information or (I) existing information (input) plus 1 (extending with added information)—written in a simple formula: I+1.

In order to determine how meaning is expressed and then decoded in a context providing clues to enhance efficacy, Seligman (1984) first developed the Content Analysis of Verbatim Explanations (CAVE) to interpret Likert scale feedback from respondents regarding their self-esteem, choices, and responses to situations. His later work (1990, 2007) focused on enhancing optimism through cognitive alteration and perspective transformation.

### *Responses*

During the coding, the primary lens of *meaning making* emerged as the way respondents were interpreting experiences—through variations of *inner and outer locus of control*. I noticed that depending on which end of the spectrum of their conceptual framework for meaning making was categorized (inner or outer locus of control) indicated, correspondingly, the *level of congruence* (unity or synergy) by which they interpreted their experiences.

Their framing of the experiences within each journal step—self-reflection, personal transformation, and praxis—were grounded either in relating to situations from a perspective of exclusively *reporter-victim* or from a *self-reflective, supportive, multi-view observer*. The first position was one of being subject to external forces; the second, having self-determinism. Most of the responses in this study used the lens of *inner locus of control* in how they made meaning of self-reflection, personally transforming situations, and how they put new understandings into practice.

### *Interpretation*

The responses demonstrated consistently a high level of congruence. That is, the responses were from a level of awareness which exhibited awareness of not only their potential for perspective shifts but also of multiple realities and points of view. Krashen's

*input hypothesis* was evidenced in how the Reflective Wheel Journal was structured—building on prior knowledge and asking respondents in step four to re-evaluate the experience with a new perspective, more expanded awareness, and to innovative ways to relate to the incident. I incorporated the *affective filter* by giving the respondents choice in selecting and depth of processing their incidents. The use of this instrument was aligned with the theories and research of Dewey, Vygotsky, and Seligman because of the way the journal steps elicited the respondent toward reflection and options of viewing experiences differently.

I created an atmosphere of safety and support through providing a four-part support packet of writing prompts and examples of what this type of journal exercise would look like. I saw by the responses, that there was a level of comfort and assured confidentiality as evidenced in narrative transparency.

### *Self-Reflection*

#### *Theories and research*

Researchers (Christie, 2007; Howard, 2003; Joseph & Efron, 1993; Kane, Sandretto & Heath, 2004; Kreber, 2004; interested in self-reflection often positioned their work in the context of Schon's *double loop learning*—reflection-on-practice and reflection-in-practice.

Christie (2007) designed a self reflective writing course for faculty and reported that it helped teachers release antiquated expectations, judgments, and control issues. Howard (2003), too, gathered data during a three-day faculty training on self-identity issues incorporating a reflective approach resulting in improved effectiveness working with students of diverse populations.

Joseph & Effron's (1993) questionnaire-based study asked teachers to reflect on their self-perceptions regarding their role as classroom exemplars for ethical behavior. Their findings revealed teachers' self-perceptions, decision-making criteria, and conflict management in the light of their consciences.

The theoretical developments by Kane, Sandretto & Heath (2004) assisted teachers in reflecting who they are dissolving the contradiction between what they say about their teaching and what they do in their practice. Their five-point teaching excellence wheel places reflection at the center as the variable that influences the other aspects of teaching.

Kreber (2004) discovered in her qualitative research that teachers who engaged in reflective practice were not self-reflecting. She clarified that questioning assumptions and beliefs we take for granted, will assist respondents toward a deeper evaluation.

### *Responses*

The self-reflection step merged affective and cognitive—emotions and thoughts about the incident. Excerpts representing the varied categories of responses are below.

Limited level: At this level the seven responses were observations and reports with reactions, 'disappointed, amused, hoped', 'I wonder if this is teacher *burn-out*', '....this kid....creeped me out', 'no one thinks to tell me'. These were categorized as external locus of control.

Responses were externally based observations with no self-reflection on the origin of beliefs or assumptions.

Mid level: The 28 units of analysis were approaching internal locus of control through evidence of seeing cause-effect and problem-solution interpretations. There was yet potential for analysis of perspectives and inconsistencies in perceiving other viewpoints—'I rallied the



faculty...to head off...’, ‘...support intervention (was) being thwarted’, ‘how does he have so much power?’, ‘stay home without guilt’, ‘powerful enough to change their ways’.

High level: This level was also 28 units of analysis. Responses indicated perspective transformation and assumption analysis: ‘What is it to surrender and not be in control?’, ‘had I done too much...was this support person selfish...or taking care of her own needs?’, ‘my ego was way too involved...dangerous place to be’, and ‘I asked the beginning teacher to reframe the advantages’. This last response demonstrated the support for a colleague in their perspective transformation, a level of sacrifice and compassion associated with high levels of congruence.

#### *Interpretation*

These verbatim excerpts are representative of the levels of congruence—from inner to outer locus of control. Theories on the importance of teachers to align what they say and what they do in practice (Kane, Sandretto, and Heath, 2004; Kreber, 2004) challenges authentic self-reflection, including confronting assumptions.

The level of response disclosures varied; some were quite *transparent* “...my ego was way too involved” to “why does he have so much power?” Kreber (2004) attested that “...actual questioning of assumptions is difficult.” (p. 44) Respondent comments included *confronting assumptions* about expectations and responses—“teacher burn-out”, “stay home without guilt”, and “What is it to surrender and not be in control?” The last statement is synchronous with Christie’s (2007) findings that *self-reflection can surface challenges regarding relinquishing control*.

## *Transformation*

### *Theories and research*

Kreber's (2004) qualitative research used two models to evaluate the extent to which higher education faculty reflected on their practice. Her first study utilized Mezirow's transformational learning theory (1991); the second study applied the lens of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 1998). From her interview instrument, study participants *said* they reflected when actually about two-thirds of her respondents only engaged in process reflection within instructional and pedagogical knowledge.

King's (2004) mixed method research, used questionnaires which included open-ended responses and collected data from 58 teachers and their course professor. The findings reported that through self-reflective practices in the class, 36 of the 58 experienced perspective transformation. "They expressed developing a more open-minded attitude towards others and themselves; developing a stronger reflective orientation to their lives and work; and (better) understand the people (adult learners) they will, or currently, work with." (p. 162).

Joseph & Efron (1993) administered questionnaires to small groups of teachers in a university program leading to an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction. Feedback on this qualitative study showed teachers' intent to improve or change their practice. They were especially interested in personal transformation and helping students to incorporate basic guiding principles of being *better people*.

In a study to better understand factors common to the transformative process, Vieten, Amorok, and Schlitz (2006) conducted structured interviews asking, "What constitutes transformation?" and "What initiates transformative experiences?" "Compassion and

altruism were almost universally identified as important outcomes of positive consciousness transformation.” (p. 915)

### *Responses*

This was step four in the instrument with the writing prompts: ‘Explain the emotions you described in step two. Why did you feel that way? How does your socialization (background, beliefs, etc) shape your assumptions and feelings? Did you change your perspective?’ This was the most critical and the most deeply-reflective step in the journaling process.

Limited level: Most of these journal excerpts were reports: ‘(this is an) out of control meeting’, ‘I was truly embarrassed to send him to the low level math class’, ‘I was just happy with the results’, ‘classrooms are no longer safe’, ‘Kailua in his morning coffee’, ‘I was furious’, ‘How can I be the wildly creative person I am without occasionally crossing the line’.

Mid level: At this level, there were 20 units of analysis from the total with responses approaching higher levels of congruence: ‘teachers may have to change...it can feel like a demotion’, ‘was I placing my own expectations on what a support person should do based on what I did’. There were perspective changes with still potential for how they came to have those perspectives.

High level: From the total of 63 units of analysis, there were 34 group of responses which were categorized as high level of congruence: ‘the teacher’s inner experience is the tone-setter’, ‘when I authentically did my own spiritual practice, the classroom generally had a calmer center and when not, not’, ‘allow me to show compassion where there was none’, ‘I discovered my nerves can work in my favor’. These responses indicate a strong inner locus

of control in self-determinism for managing the environment. I was impressed with the candor, clarity, and insight of these responses.

### *Interpretation*

This was the more critical step in the journal, where deeper reflecting would be evident in responses. Some of the responses were still simply reports, concerned reports, but reports, nevertheless as found by Kreber (2004) in respondents who missed the step of assumption analysis. King's (2004) self-reflection study found that respondents became more open-minded and had greater understanding of others as perspective transformations such as, 'was I placing my own expectations on what a support person should do based on what I did' and 'when I authentically did my own spiritual practice, the classroom generally had a calmer center and when not, not'. The Viteten, Amorok, and Schlitz (2006) findings on altruism and compassion aligned nearly exactly with the transformational response from this writer, 'allow me to show compassion where there was none'. These particular responses, I believe, will assist other teachers in how others in the field are able to make meaning from an inner locus of control and move toward personal transformation.

### *Praxis*

#### *Theories and research*

Friere (1970, 1997) promoted the theory of praxis, bringing theory into action, and his *democratic classroom* model. Oberg's (2008) quantitative study evaluated teacher *voice* in policy and decision making regarding five school-improvement practices. His findings indicated that while teachers felt they had input at the building level, they did not at the administrative level. Desautel (2009) applied theories of metacognition with his students becoming aware of their work as students and believed that awareness of meaning making

improves self-reflective practice and praxis. At a business school where he used reflective statements to prompt epistemic writing, Brown (1998) found it to be a powerful learning tool.

### *Responses*

Praxis addresses taking concepts and operationalizing them personally and professionally. This was the final step in the Reflection Wheel Journal.

Limited level: Some of these excerpts included: ‘teaching is one of the hardest careers out there’, ‘I can refuse to graduate unprepared student teachers...I am the boss’, ‘main reason to become a teacher: to see our students succeed’. These are philosophic perspectives with no indication where these assumptions originated.

Mid level: Here were some responses: ‘finding out some of my biases’, ‘have we really become a nation ready to embrace our differences?’, ‘some students don’t have the solidarity of the family...we have to take a risk with giving our time and energy’.

High level: Here are some of the excerpts: ‘difficult to speak...without allowing my ego and emotions to enter into the equation...through my actions, behavior, and words, I show the possibilities’, ‘I consider the classroom a sacred place’, ‘I want to enter every classroom with an open heart’, ‘allowing students to play a role in their learning...(creates) an atmosphere of mutual respect’, ‘I continue to grow with my students’. All of these demonstrate relational congruence and a willingness to critically reflect on ways to bring that into personal and professional practice.

### *Interpretation*

Oberg’s (2008) quantitative study evaluated teacher *voice* in policy and decision making regarding five school-improvement practices. His findings indicated that while teachers felt they had input at the building level, they did not at the administrative level. One

response addressed *filtering* her voice over demonstrating through behavior, ‘difficult to speak...without allowing my ego and emotions to enter into the equation...through my actions, behavior, and words, I show the possibilities’.

Desautel (2009) applied theories of metacognition with his students to enhance awareness of their work. He believed self-reflective practice and praxis through intentionally seeing themselves as students increases academic achievement. Friere (1970, 1997), who promoted the theory of praxis, was also known for his *democratic classroom* model. ‘I consider the classroom a sacred place’, ‘I want to enter every classroom with an open heart’, ‘allowing students to play a role in there learning.... (creates) an atmosphere of mutual respect’, ‘I continue to grow with my students’.

At a business school where he used reflective statements to prompt epistemic writing, Brown (1998) found it to be a powerful learning tool. The application at all student age levels appears to have consistent results.

There are similarities in the responses and the research especially regarding democratic classrooms. This concept appeared throughout the responses where there was authentically critical self-reflection.

### *Exit Interviews*

#### *Responses*

The exit interview (see Appendix A) had five questions. The first three addressed the study itself; the last two asked about their most transformational experience. Among the things that worked: ‘helped analyze my own reflective practice’ (2 comments). ‘allowed me to reflect’, and ‘able to articulate what I deal with intuitively’. Others responses expressed appreciation for the experience and the support resources (Appendix B).

In the ‘needing changes’ responses included: ‘need more time’, ‘confused’, and ‘had trouble with the five steps’. Suggestions included; ‘follow up to see if respondents continue to use the RWJ’, ‘longer research time line’, and face-to-face meetings scheduling difficult.

The last two questions, ‘What was your most transformational experience and why was it so?’ provided additional opportunities for reflection. Some excerpts include: ‘I learned student teachers have an actual impact on students’, ‘I realized my expectations for the way things ‘should be’ are for ME’, ‘I’m able to pause and realize perhaps they are in a difficult place’, ‘I think the whole process of evaluation the situations...and how I will use the experiences for growth were very valuable’, ‘important for me to learn what I do for kids is only a reflection of who I am’, ‘I believe this made me more effective in the classroom because it gave me greater confidence...from a better knowledge of myself’, ‘I believe there is a shift in education...we must integrate values into everything.’, and ‘I’m debating should I/shouldn’t I retire...this project will have played a part in my final decision’.

### *Interpretation*

The self-reflective process was empowering and helped them become aware of alternate perspectives—of others, and their own. I interpret the expressed need for a future study to have more time and to have further explanation for the instrument to be that a more seamless process of facilitating required research document *turn-around* would allow for full academic year (plus) data gathering and analysis. Thus, an improved process would provide time for deeper, more reflective writing. This is valuable for future research so investigators can be aware of the importance of this necessary step in the process of implementing an effective study.

### *Study interpretation*

In this grounded study, I was interested to discover, through a research-based journaling instrument, how teachers affectively, cognitively, and transformationally deconstructed self-selected incidents. I wanted to see if their self-reflections would lead to any perspective transformation and if so, were they able to apply it to their professional and personal life. Several responses indicated they realized how they could change their perceptions—even while writing the journals. Others indicated this in the exit interview. I felt these journals would provide *voices* from the field and insights for program and professional development application.

### **Theoretical Propositions**

Based on data interpretations, I have created a list of theoretical propositions that function as hypotheses for this study (Foss & Waters, 2007, p. 225):

- **The greater the inner locus of control, the stronger the level of congruence—they are mutually occurring.**

As shown in the data, narratives which framed experiences from an inner locus of control correspondingly related to the incident in a congruent way. They exhibited greater synergy, compassion, understanding, and communicative coherence.

- **Teacher resiliency can be built through the mindful practice of high levels of congruence.**

Teachers commented that as they began to practice re-evaluating circumstances and their habitual manner of reacting, it became easier to see alternative ways of perceiving situations and others. They experienced greater empathy, understanding,



and even compassion as a result. Several reported they gained an inner strength and efficacy through this practice of thinking in a unified, congruent way.

- **When self-reflective practice, perspective transformation, and congruent practices are integrated in classrooms and in school-wide policy and procedure, sustainable systemic education reform is possible.**

One of the respondents commented that she had taught for years at a school in which journaling was a school-wide practice—administration, faculty, and students.

Accompanying dialogic process enriched the reflective process and a culture of trust and transparency resulted. A new group of teachers were hired one year and resisted the practice. Because of their persistent refusal to participate, the practice slowly eroded and so did the healthy school culture. Cynicism, mistrust, and negative communication became the norm. This teacher said she never let go of her practice of self-reflective journaling because the practice serves her so well wherever she works.

#### **Epistemic Assessment: Plus/Delta/Prescription**

My general interpretation of the study results is that by providing an opportunity for teachers to self-reflect, the potential for strengthening their inner locus of control is enhanced. While this is not an antidote for teacher attrition, this exploratory study can offer one example in which teachers can work toward greater professional and personal congruence.

*Plus:* I enjoyed working with the teachers and hearing their stories. I felt honored to be able to facilitate *their voices* being heard. I was impressed with the level of self-reflection

in the responses and even thought the *limited congruence level* stories were important. Too often, those who are not *in the trenches* find these stories hard to believe.

What I found valuable, too, was the research process. It was an *input hypothesis* (Krashen, 1998) in action—building on my prior knowledge and stretching to understand more rigorous aspects of scholarly research. It was extremely gratifying to discover the literature in the field which supported my premises.

I truly believe that teachers who self-reflect with the critical component of transformational perspective change will discover a higher level of congruence that will help them in their work. I found that because I was so immersed in the data, continuously looking for levels of congruence, I became increasingly aware—through the work—of my epistemic reality. A *soft effect* of this work brought a transformational shift for me in the way I perceived myself—as a scholar, as an investigator, as a teacher advocate, and as a proponent of educational excellence.

There were subtle shifts toward an inner locus of control in my academic work and I expressed concerns when I saw things in the process which I felt needed to be changed, not only for myself but for doctoral students to come. I noticed that as I read accounts from the respondents, *their* experiences and how they transformed their ways of being, I began to incorporate alternate approaches as well.

Keeping a log through the study was extremely valuable. I kept notes in two columns: one for what I was *doing*: data gathering, the coding processes, and the emerging patterns of congruence. In the second column I kept notes on I was *observing* about myself: my surprise with the journal topics and how respondents made meaning from them, my astonishment at their

candor, and my realizations of the inner vs. outer locus of control perspective-alterations during the course of the study. Working with the respondents was personally transformational.

*Delta:* University sample size can be improved for future studies with careful coordination. Due to unexpected delays in paperwork resulted in misalignment with the semester calendar, three potential student-teacher populations could have participated.

*Prescription:* I advise longitudinal studies with more respondents. I think the benefits of this will yield valuable information.

### **Implications**

As indicated in chapter one, healthy communities require from their schools students who are career/workplace educated and prepared. Classrooms emphasizing rigorous academics, relevance for student engagement, and congruent relationship-building are positioned to integrate ‘character’ at the center of learning. In order to do this, the support and efficacy of teachers is vital. Community health indices show a direct connection between economic vitality and the strength of the education system. Teachers of excellence are essential for the preparation of global citizens of tomorrow.

Teachers who receive structural support for their personal renewal deepen their sense of efficacy and resourcefulness. Teachers can self-reflect and move into stronger levels of congruence. To implement this practice as school-wide learning environments can bring value to the home, the school, the community, and the nation. The need for school systems, universities, and classrooms to integrate ‘classroom democracy’ based on mutual respect cannot be underestimated. Cultural sustainability begins in the schools, and in the one-on-one instructional dynamic with students, it begins with the teachers.

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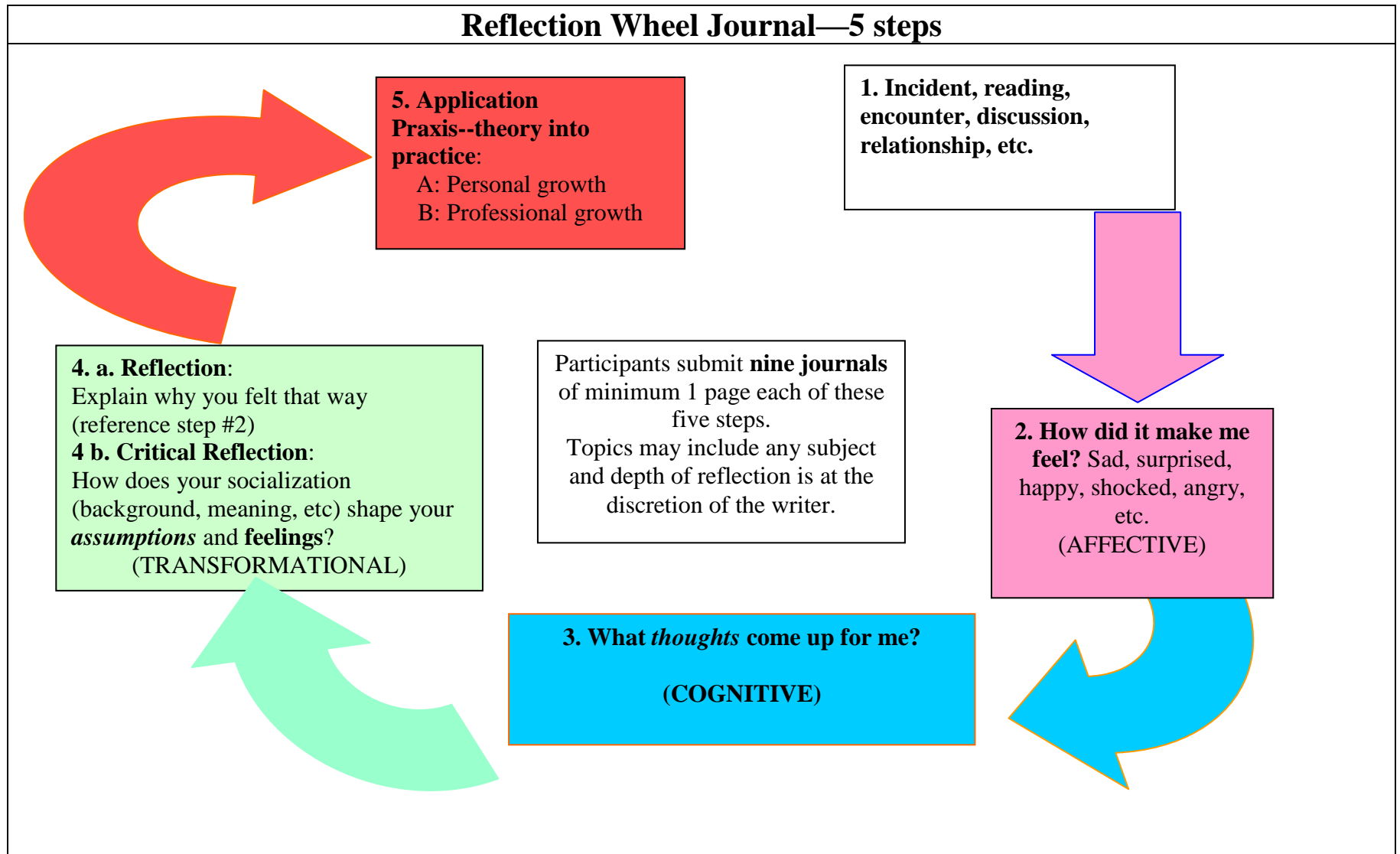
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APPENDIX A  
INSTRUMENTS

## Reflection Wheel Journal—5 steps



## **Exit Interview for Teacher Transformation**

1. How did the reflection wheel journal work for you in terms of dealing with meaning making of your teaching experience?
2. What did not work for you?
3. What suggestions/recommendations do you have for future studies?
4. What was the one most transformational experience for you?
5. What made it so influential?



APPENDIX B

SUPPORT RESOURCES: WRITING PROMPTS

### Habits of Mind\*

A set of assumptions that acts as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience

*With added questions regarding the teaching experience*

To be used as a resource for Teacher Transformation Reflection Wheel Journals

Habit of Mind	Sample questions to test your assumptions
<b>Sociolinguistic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you believe to be true about teaching?</li> <li>• What do you believe about other races?</li> <li>• What do you believe to be true about the opposite gender? Your own gender?</li> <li>• What “truths” do you believe about democracy, capitalism, socialism, feminism, and ageism?</li> <li>• When you speak of oppression, what are you assuming to be true?</li> <li>• What do you believe about sexuality &amp; marriage? Why?</li> <li>• What do you believe to be important work? Is there work that is “above you”? “Below you”? Why?</li> <li>• What thoughts do you have about the responsibility of teaching?</li> </ul>
<b>Moral-Ethical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What thoughts do you have about the responsibility of teaching?</li> <li>• Do you believe teaching is “moral work”? Why/why not?</li> <li>• What is morality to you? Why?</li> <li>• What is amorality to you? Why?</li> <li>• On what basis do you make ethical decisions? Why?</li> <li>• Does teaching values have a place in the classroom? Why?_Why not?</li> </ul>
<b>Epistemic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there a best learning style? Why do you think that?</li> <li>• Does your teaching emphasize the concrete or the abstract? Why?</li> </ul>
<b>Philosophical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is god a separate being, or a part of everything?</li> <li>• Do you believe in one god, several gods, or no god?</li> <li>• Does god have a gender? If so, what is it?</li> <li>• Do you believe humans are basically good? Bad?</li> <li>• Are you born with a god-given vocation?</li> </ul>
<b>Psychological</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you believe you are basically a good person? Bad person?</li> <li>• Do you believe you are talented? Why or why not?</li> <li>• What things did your parents tell you about yourself, family, heritage, or ethnicity that you still believe today?</li> <li>• Are you smart? Why do you think that?</li> </ul>
<b>Aesthetic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is beautiful? What is ugly? Why do you think that?</li> <li>• What are your criteria for beauty? Does anyone disagree with you? Why are they right/wrong?</li> <li>• What makes things funny or sad?</li> </ul>

\*Adapted from Mezirow (2000), Transformational Learning course, Dr. P Boverie (2008) UNM

***21 quotes: Use to reflect on the quote itself OR on an incident/experience to which it applies!***

1. "Great spirits have often encountered violent opposition from mediocre minds." Albert Einstein
2. "Leadership is a personal quest you undertake, based on mission that troubles your heart." Rubin.
3. "In the end we will have had enough of cynicism and skepticism and humbug and we shall want to live more musically." van Gogh
4. "Teach us to walk the soft Earth as relatives to all that live there." Sioux Indian saying
5. "As the world becomes more inter-connected organizations that will truly excel in the future will be (those)... who discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn." Senge
6. "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has." Mead
7. "The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing." Einstein
8. "Some schools develop 'toxic' cultures which actively discourage efforts to improve teaching or student achievement." Deal & Patterson
9. "Be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart and dreams, try to love the questions themselves." Rilke
10. "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding." Albert Einstein
11. "We can easily forgive a child whom is frightened of the dark; the real tragedy of life is when men are afraid of the light." Plato
12. "The heart and soul of school culture is what people believe, the assumptions they make about how school works." Sergiovanni
13. "It is what teachers think, what teachers do, and what teachers are at the level of the classroom that ultimately shapes the kind of learning that young people get." Hargreaves & Fullan
14. "Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius -- and a lot of courage -- to move in the opposite direction." Albert Einstein
15. "Some people think you are strong when you hold on. Others think it is when you let go." Robinson
16. "Things do not change; we change." Thoreau
17. "It doesn't happen all at once. You become. It takes a long time." Williams
18. "You must be the change you want to see in the world." Gandhi
19. "We are like eggs at present. And you cannot go on indefinitely being just an ordinary egg. We must hatch or go bad." C S Lewis
20. "Equations are more important to me, because politics is for the present, but an equation is something for eternity." Einstein
21. "Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher." Palmer

### RWJ #1 example

#### Reflection Wheel Journal #1 (alternative high school language arts class)

1. One day two weeks ago during fourth hour, Wilber House, the kid who is so totally disengaged had his head down on the desk for the first 20 minutes of class. At first, I just left him alone, but then I knew if he didn't get busy on the writing assignment, he would have a bad start on the unit and it would be all downhill for him. When the rest of the class got busy, I walked over to him, and gently tapped him on the shoulder. He bolted upright with his fist clenched, like he was ready to hit me. There was tremendous anger in his face and he said, "Don't ever touch me. EVER." I backed off and thought I would have to process this! How am I going to handle this kid?
2. frustrated, confused, embarrassed in front of the class, and a little shocked
3. My first thoughts were, "WOW, this kid has some anger issues. I don't know if I have the skills to deal with this. Was he asleep because he was up all night partying? Does he have a hang-over? What's up with him, anyway?"
4. I was taken off guard because I had a mind-set that kids *want to learn*; they want to learn what I have to teach them. If they just got involved in the lesson, they'd realize the value and the benefit of this work. They just don't appreciate *me* or *education*!

I realized that I was coming from my own assumptions based on how *I* was as a student—compliant, cooperative, and pleasant. So, no wonder I was shocked at his reaction. I was overlaying my reality on him! When I grew up, nobody in my classes ever reacted to a teacher like that! This might be why I reacted as I did.

I asked a few other teachers about Wilber's background. I was told his father was Hopi and his mother was Navajo—enemy tribes for many generations. I was also told that another student, a Navajo kid, was "bull dogging" him (eyeing him for a fight) over a girl. I felt sorry for him and tried to think of ways to engage him in our unit—at a personal, relevant level. I no longer felt frustrated when I realized he had tremendous self-esteem issues possibly holding him back. My brother used to act like this when my mom would try to approach him—explosive! I always thought she needed to back off a bit and give him space.

5. A. I realized I needed to put my own background aside and be more empathetic with Wilbur, yet without overdoing it! It had to be a casual, gradual engagement enough *relevance* to get him on board. But, I also had to come to terms with the fact that he may be so emotionally damaged, he just might *not* come around. I had to go where he's at! He's dealing with cultural ambiguity; and a certain amount of violence.

B. Our unit was a compare/contrast research and writing project on themes in “Gandhi”. Choices for study included: selecting how resource dominance can keep a population under control (i.e. the British control of salt production—an Indian resource), massacres as a mean of control, various religions living in the same country (similarities and differences), and nonviolence as a means of activism. After a great deal of front-loading regarding gang-violence, revenge, and domination, I talked to them about how people must feel when their country is under the domination of another country to the point of massacres and economic controls. I warned them about the violence in the scene and told them the Sikhs were being massacred for simply gathering to discuss what they could do to achieve a voice in their country. Of course, the scene was quite moving. Afterwards, they wrote their impressions—most were outraged.

I casually walked by Wilbur and asked, “Pretty intense, huh?” He said, “Yeah”. Later I was able to talk with him more at length and asked him if he knew about the “Hopi Prophecies”. He didn’t know. I told him to look it up on the web and let me know what he found. He was totally amazed and said he told his father who didn’t know the details he discovered. From that point, Wilbur was off and running. At the end of the unit he turned in a fascinating paper, comparing the plight of the Hopi being forced to live in austere conditions and enduring massacres as compared with the British atrocities and occupation of India. A careful, sensitive strategy paid off.

## RWJ #2 Example

- 1 A year and a half ago, some friends of my wife invited us over for dinner and to watch a DVD called “Freedom Writers”. It was a pretty cool video and I found myself feeling very burned out on my HR job at the corporate office. Teaching might be pretty fun, I thought. So, I checked in on how to get licensed. My BA was in English; I thought it would be a piece of cake. What was I thinking? It is so much work; lesson plans, preparing materials, copying, and grading! Today, in class, all I wanted to do was give the kids an assignment, tell them to keep quiet, and just sit at my desk. How could I be burned out so soon?
- 2 disillusioned, disappointed, then pleasantly surprised!
- 3 Did I make a mistake? Seems like there is so much to juggle; how can I keep up? I know we talked about classroom management in our university class, but OMG, I had no idea how on top of things I’d have to be! In my old job, things seem to just perk along smoothly. Why can’t things be like that now? I want teaching to be as easy as my old job! I don’t think the jobs are really that different. I’m working with numbers in both situations.
- 4 I guess I might have been looking at teaching through rose-colored glasses; or at least through Hollywood glasses! What exactly was it that attracted me to teaching? Was I being realistic? Maybe I was comparing apples and oranges! I guess I saw how the lead character was helping the kids become empowered. I think that was the main thing that attracted me to teaching, but I didn’t know it would be so much work.

I’ve been conditioned to getting into a “routine” with work. I guess I’ve assumed that most all jobs have that about them. I’m beginning to see that teaching is a *profession* not a job. There’s a big difference—lots more skill (and patience!) required. I’m also realizing I have some control issues because I’m not really giving the kids the benefit of the doubt.

- 5 A. I need to be asking the students more questions and recognizing they have answers-- like in the video. It was about respect. I think I might need to stop comparing my old work with teaching. I need to really shift gears because they are so different. Before, I was just making sure my numbers all computed right. I guess anybody can do that, really. But, I’m actually preparing kids for life! That’s a huge responsibility.
- B. The teacher across the hall has some great ideas about getting kids into “teams”. I’m going to see what tips she can help me with. I think this might just work out after all. In fact, getting to know these kids might be fun. We’ll see. But I do think I need an attitude shift before anything else.