University of Alberta

Reflective Practice and the Principalship

by

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DEDICATION

To my family...

Abstract

Reflective practice is receiving great attention and increased support in recent public, kindergarten to grade 12, educational discourse. However, relatively few studies seek the informative voice of principals regarding their experiences and understandings of reflective practice in relation to their roles as defined by legislation and policy. This case study reports on an investigation of Alberta principals' perspectives of reflective practice during and after participation in the year-long *Reflections on Practice: Institute for School Leaders* program that was designed to enhance principals' leadership practice through reflection. This study describes principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice and elucidates conditions that principals perceive support or constrain reflection within professional learning. I conclude by suggesting that reflective practice is critical to enhancing the moral, professional, and political autonomy of principals as they endeavour to improve the quality of educational opportunities for all students.

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Chapter One – The Nature of the Study

Introduction to the Study

Powerful social changes have impacted the nature and purpose of schooling and have created intense pressure for reform (Levin & Hopkins, 2000). In 2007, Fullan noted that current educational literature widely documents the failure, and in very few cases modest gains, of recent reforms to achieve policy directives aimed at sustainable change and improved student learning (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Levin, 2005).

In this turbulent political environment, the principal is deemed to be a critical lynch-pin in school improvement efforts (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Lambert, 2002; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). Because of the profound influence individual principals may directly and indirectly have on professionalizing teaching, enhancing student learning, and potentially improving schools, Barth (1986a) asserted that the professional development and preparation of school principals deserves great attention.

Within Alberta, recent government attention has demonstrated an unprecedented interest in professional development and reflective practice as means for developing principals charged with improving schools (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003; Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, 2007; Alberta Education 2006, 2007a). Numerous scholars have described this growing interest in arguing that school principals need to engage in ongoing learning and reflective practice to (a) develop the skills and acquire knowledge to adapt to current reform; (b) re-energize and motivate principals who work within demanding and complex roles; (c) serve as a powerful model of lifelong learning for students, teachers, and the school community; and (d) to impact teacher performance and student learning (Barth, 2001; Levine, 2005; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Differing views exist in regard to the role of a school principal within Alberta.

The Alberta School Act (Province of Alberta, 2002) clearly emphasizes the school principal's primary role as an instructional leader. Other provincial (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003) and local (Edmonton Public Schools, 2007) jurisdictional policies describe the principal as an instructional leader who attends to school culture and other organizational variables believed to influence teaching and learning. The professional practice of school principals is not reflected within Alberta's Teaching Quality Practice Standard (Alberta Education, 1997). However, principals are required by legislation to develop an annual professional growth plan (Alberta Education, 1997). In 2004, the role of the school principal was highlighted and explored with the development of the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA) Leadership Quality Standard (2004a) and the Model Policy for Principals Professional Growth,

Supervision, and Evaluation (2004b) documents. Most recently, seven leadership dimensions that further define the role of the principal have been included in the working draft of the Principal Quality Practice document (Alberta Education, 2006). Within the current reform context, the key competencies required by principals are increasing as their roles and responsibilities evolve and change.

Whereas there have been numerous calls for reform requiring principals to become instructional leaders, there is a relative paucity of empirical research and discussion that entails in-depth examination of reflection within the principalship and the conditions that support or inhibit professional learning and reflective practice specific to the role of school principals (Day, 1999a; Wanzare & da Costa, 2005; Wright, da Costa, & Peters, 2007). Although arguments in the educational literature claim that reflective practice is crucial in school improvement and underscore the importance of integrating reflective practice within principals' professional development, there is ambiguity surrounding the relationship between reflective practice and the changing role of the school principal. Moreover, Senge (1990) and Barth (1986a) further argue that traditional models of professional development are unsuccessful in meeting the professional needs of principals charged with leading organizational learning for school improvement. If the principal's instructional leadership is deemed crucial to sustainable school improvement, additional research is necessary to conceptualize how the reflective practices of the principal, given certain conditions, may foster individual and collective change. This investigation explored the understandings and perspectives of a group of principals that participated in a year-long professional development program emphasizing reflection as a professional development approach to enhance instructional leadership for school improvement.

During the 2006-2007 school year, as a strategy to enhance instructional leadership for school improvement, the ATA in collaboration with the University of Alberta and one Alberta school jurisdiction piloted a new professional development program for school principals. This intensive learning experience focused on principals' growth as instructional leaders in relation to Alberta's draft Principal Quality Practice (PQP) document by incorporating reflective practice, collective inquiry and action research (Wright, da Costa, & Peters, 2007). Participating in the *Reflections on Practice – An Institute for School Leaders* (*ROP Institute*) was a cohort of school principals and central office personnel who engaged in face-to-face workshops, online discussions, and action research throughout the school year. The program emphasized personal, collaborative and professional reflection on practice by critically examining theory and questioning assumptions and practices.

Modeled on the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario's pilot program (for teachers) entitled *Reflections on Practice: A Woman's Leadership Institute,* the *ROP Institute* moved from traditional, stand-alone workshops to "a more concentrated, comprehensive adult learning activity that incorporates the best practices of professional learning" (Rodrigue, 2005, p.1). Within the *ROP Institute*, there were three major foci (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006a): (a) the introduction of the concepts of reflective practice in the development of the repertoire of reflection strategies and skills; (b) the creation of a professional learning community supported by face-to-face interaction and sustained by ongoing, online learning; and (c) the development of personal action research projects to enhance leadership practice. Professional development topics covered within the *ROP Institute* workshops and online meetings are outlined in Appendix A.

Purpose and Research Questions

Reflective practice is receiving great attention and increased support in recent public, kindergarten to grade 12, educational discourse. This shift toward an interest in reflection as a strategy for professinal learning has come about as a reaction to an overly technical and structured view of school improvement that dominated the 1980s and 1990s. However, relatively few studies seek the informative voices of principals regarding their experiences and understandings of reflective practice in relation to their role as defined by legislation and policy. This case study reports on an investigation of Alberta principals' perspectives of reflective practice during and after participation in the year-long *Reflections on Practice: Institute for School Leaders* (*ROP Institute*) program that was designed to enhance principals' leadership practice through reflection. This study specifically describes Alberta school principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice and elucidates conditions that principals perceive as supporting or constraining reflection as a form of professional learning for school improvement.

The questions guiding my study evolved from my lived experiences as a school principal, my personal reflection, and professional reading:

- *What are principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice as a professional development approach?*
- *What conditions do principals perceive support reflection as a form of professional learning?*
- *What conditions do principals perceive limit or constrain reflection as a form of professional learning?*

Through this research, I have aimed to collect in-depth, longitudinal descriptions of reflection as a form of professional development that was supported or inhibited under certain conditions. The data analysis and resulting synthesis provide what I offer as pragmatic and scholarly insight into reflective practices that support the ongoing learning of school principals. In addition to exploring my own questions about reflection within the principalship, this study intends to inform the understandings and practice of school principals, central office administrators, policy makers, and scholars.

Significance of the Study

School reform has been a dominant topic of debate in policy arenas over the past two decades. Trans-national studies identify similarities in reform, including "the devolution of financial and managerial control to more local levels, promotion of parental choice, increasing diversity of provision, and a change in the role of governments" (Taylor, 2001, p. 8). Despite the design and implementation of a vast array of education reform efforts to address societal criticism of public education, few have succeeded. In his review of the reform literature and his analysis of reform efforts over the last two decades, Fullan (2007) claims:

> What is "bad" ... the failure to get the balance right between assessment and capacity building; the inability to get inside the classroom; superficial professional learning communities; and the failure in many countries to reduce the gap between lower- and higher-achieving students and schools, Indeed, widening of the income and education gap is occurring in some of the richest countries – a sure danger sign that society is worsening. (p. xii)

Interestingly enough, it would appear that decades of calls for reform and school improvement have not resulted in significant changes to long-standing educational structures and practices.

As of late, and in light of Fullan's claim, the creation of norms of reflection within schools has become increasingly popular as a response to the failure of school improvement reforms (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Although thought about reflection has evolved over decades (Dewey, 1938; Schön, 1983, 1987; van Manen, 2002; Zeichner, 1993), there is a resurgence of interest in reflective practice within the educational field.

This study has been designed to contribute to an area that is largely ignored in the current scholarship about the school principalship. Within complex organizational, social and cultural contexts, many factors affect the efficacy of change initiatives led by school principals. There is a remarkable absence of discussion relating to *how* school principals meet the challenges associated with changing leadership roles as demanded by external interventions and ideologically-driven reform.

My review of the literature suggests that traditional forms of professional development often provide access to new information and mechanistic approaches to change. These approaches are often fragmented and impede systemic and sustainable change. Seldom are externally-designed solutions helpful in addressing the problems that principals face in relation to their practice and the specific needs of their school. Subsequently, current education reform has created "a pressing need both for different conceptualizations of staff-development programs for principals and for a wider variety of interventive models for promoting principals' professional growth" (Barth, 1986a, p. 485).

Reflective practice is a newer conceptualization of professional development or learning. Underlying this approach is the assumption that thought influences our actions (Schön, 1987). Although the organizational context yields great influence over the work of principals, reflective practice is premised on the notion that human intentions and decisions have the potential to shape or change organizations for different purposes (Greenfield, 1991). Good intentions alone will not suffice. Tyack and Cuban (1995) argue that "better schooling will result in the future – as it has in the past and does now – chiefly from the steady, reflective efforts of the practitioners who work in schools" (p. 135).

Alberta is an ideal setting to examine the professional learning of school principals because the role of the school principal has undergone significant changes as a result of the multitude of reforms (e.g., schools of choice and standardized testing) that have been introduced over the last two decades (Levin, 2005; Taylor, 2001). The School Act (Province of Alberta, 2002, Part 2, Section 20) and other provincial (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003) and local (Edmonton Public Schools, 2007) jurisdictional policies describe expectations to engage principals as instructional leaders, directly and indirectly, to influence teaching and learning. As Alberta actively works towards the development of a principal certification process[1], the associated rhetoric in the draft PQP document describes the principal as an instructional leader who requires "in-depth knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy" to ensure that "all students have access to quality teaching and have the opportunity to meet the provincial goals of education" (Alberta Education, 2006, p. 5). There is an expectation for "strong and capable leadership from principals" that occurs when "school administrators continuously seek and share learning and then act on what they learn" (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003, p. 66).

[1] Although the move toward principal certification is fraught with dissenting views and associated rhetoric, the purpose of this study is not to enter into the debate. Rather, it acknowledges that principal certification will exist likely legally within the province of Alberta. Instead, the intention of this study is to formulate general and specific understandings about reflective practice as a form of learning and the principalship.

Paradoxically, reform policies that define "what is" are also statements of "what is not." Principals delicately balance the preservation of the status quo versus continuous improvement. As such, the principalship is fraught with dissenting criteria, conflicting viewpoints, and competing values. Moreover, different conceptual theories of leadership intersect, and at times, compete with each other. This "proliferation of competing theories" is problematic for school principals striving to enhance their leadership skills and engage in school improvement (Wallace, Foster, & da Costa, 2007, p. 185). Regrettably, conflicting demands and expectations of accountability, in addition to time spent attending to the minutia of operating a school, have significant bearing on the professional learning of school principals. Yet these very same demands, policies, and expectations require principals to reflect on their roles and think differently about their leadership practice.

My review of the literature has connected principal leadership indirectly, and at times directly, with improved student learning, effective school operations, and positive school culture (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000; Sergiovanni, 1992). Despite arguments in the educational literature claiming that leadership is a crucial catalyst for school improvement, relatively few studies seek the informative voice of principals regarding how they experience and understand reflective practice as a form of professional learning. Presently, the theoretical and conceptual basis for understanding reflective practice as an approach to professional learning primarily exists within the educational literature related to "teacher professional development", "clinical supervision" and "teacher reflection and reflective practice." As a principal, I am very aware of the differences in the practices of *learning to teach* and *learning to lead*. Therefore, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of learning and reflecting specifically within the context of the principalship.

Principals' experiences and constructions of reflective practice have the potential to elucidate conditions that support or constrain the reflection that may potentially challenge unexamined norms and break down barriers that impede school improvement. Since the empowerment and ownership of principals has an impact on the success or failure of school reform (Barth, 1986a; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004), it is important to consider principals' experiences and understandings of how reflective practice supports or constrains their mandated roles as school principals. During my literature review, I noted few longitudinal studies that explored principals' constructions and perceptions to examine how reflective practice may potentially leverage individual and organizational learning.

Lastly, because the leadership role of the principal influences school improvement, the need for a more nuanced understanding of the principal's reflective practices has never been

greater. Fullan (2007) also suggested: "What standards were to the 1990s, leadership is to the 2000s" (p. 293). This assertion about the crucial importance of school leadership, particularly that of the principal, has been echoed by other policy makers and scholars (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003; Elmore, 2006; Murphy, 2006). This study will contribute to the current research and will offer a foundation for future studies, particularly as Alberta and other Canadian provinces actively work towards the development of legal certification standards for principals (Wallace, et al., 2007). Also, considering the imminent principal leadership shortage (Levine, 2005) in most provinces, this study is timely and significant for informing policy and practice in Canada and beyond.

Definitions

The following definitions apply within the context of this study:

Instructional Leadership

Educational literature is fraught with ambiguous and conflicting notions of instructional leadership. Instructional leadership initially emerged as a construct that described the work of the principal or other formally-designated leaders who attended to school culture and other organizational variables believed to influence "the behaviours of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students" (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 47). However, more recent scholarship challenges role-bound theories of leadership and claims that great benefit is derived from teachers assuming numerous roles and functions as instructional leaders (Blasé & Blasé, 2002; Hallinger, 2003).

Within the province of Alberta, Section 20 of the School Act (Province of Alberta, 2002) stipulates that the principal is the legally-recognized leader of the school and is responsible for directly supporting teaching and learning, defining mission, and managing curriculum and instruction. Although my experiences, as well as current scholarship (Lambert, 2002; Sheppard, 1996; Starratt, 2004) point to the benefits of formally and informally engaging teachers as instructional leaders, this study conceives of instructional leadership as the primary responsibility of the school principal as defined in Alberta's educational policies.

Principal

Within the context of this study, I have defined the principal as the formally-designated educational leader at the school level. This decision aligns with Section 20 of the School Act (Province of Alberta, 2002) and Alberta Education's Three-Year Business Plan (Alberta

Education, 2007c). Assistant principals or other formally-designated school leaders are not recognized with legal authority in the School Act.

Specifically, this study considers the role and responsibilities of the principal as outlined in key Alberta policy documents. First and foremost, the principal's role is defined within the legal framework of the School Act indicating:

> The principal of a school must:
> (a) provide instructional leadership in the school;
> (b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this Act;
> (c) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;
> (d) ensure that students in the school have the opportunity to meet the standards of education set by the Minister;
> (e) direct the management of the school;
> (f) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and during activities sponsored or approved by the board;
> (g) promote co-operation between the school and the community that it serves;
> (h) supervise the evaluation and advancement of students;
> (i) evaluate the teachers employed in the school;
> (j) subject to any applicable collective agreement and the principal's contract of employment, carry out those duties that are assigned to the principal by the board in accordance with the regulations and the requirements of the school council and the board.
> (Province of Alberta, 2002, Section 20)

Other provincial policies framed my definition of "principal." Of particular interest to me as an Alberta principal was the policy statement about the role of school administrators that was adopted by the ATA (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2004a). This policy speaks to the multi-faceted role of the principal – that is, principals must be educational leaders, instructional leaders, decision makers, school managers, advocates, and professional colleagues.

This study also conceived of the role of the principal within a school-based decision-making framework that is viewed as "establishing an integral relationship among teaching, learning and the decision-making process [that] should result in higher levels of student performance" (Alberta Education, 2007d, para. 2). Providing students with the best possible learning opportunities is also highlighted within Alberta's draft PQP document stating "the school principal is an accomplished teacher who provides quality leadership in the provision of optimum learning and opportunities for the development of all students in the school" (Alberta Education, 2006, p. 4).

Principal Quality Practice (PQP)

Other than the principal being certified as a teacher within the province of Alberta, Alberta legislation does not specify other employment qualifications for school principals. However, in May 2006, Alberta Education began to develop the *Principal Quality Practice Standard* as a response to Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) recommendation that the province develop a quality practice standard to prepare, recruit and assess the performance of school principals. This draft quality practice standard for school principals highlighted successful school principal leadership in the following dimensions: supporting effective relationships; providing visionary leadership; leading a learning community; providing instructional leadership; developing and facilitating leadership in others; managing effectively; and understanding and responding to the larger societal context. However, in February 2008, Alberta's Deputy Minister of Education re-titled the document as *Principal Quality Practice*.

Professional Development

Within the literature, most scholars concur that professional development includes a plan and accompanying strategies which provide ongoing opportunities, both formal and informal, to enhance knowledge, skills, and attitudes that may result in improved professional practice and ultimately enhanced student learning. For example, Oliva and Pawlas (2004) defined professional development as "program of organized activities for both groups and individuals planned and carried out to promote the personal and professional growth of staff members" (p. 337). Lieberman and Miller (2002) also conceived of professional development as being synonymous with building a learning community that "lends itself to longer-term solutions and imaginative organizational arrangements to transform the very meaning of adult development in the school itself" (p. 75).

This study conceptualizes professional development as activities aimed at the personal growth and ongoing professional development of an individual through reflective practice. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, professional development emphasizes those planned and spontaneous activities (including reflective practices) that improve knowledge, skills and appreciation of practice as school principals adjust to ongoing change and problematic situations. Here, professional development is conceived as continuous professional learning.

Reflection

This study uses Schön's (1987) conceptualization of the practitioner as practicing reflection "in" and "on" action, individually or collectively, to facilitate decision-making and learning. Subsequently, reflective practice occurs at the intersection of practice and theory. That is, the practitioner considers how and why, and in what ways improvement could be achieved, maximized, and sustained. Reflection becomes a form of thinking, problem-posing and solving and theory building that appreciates each problematic or unique situation through different perspectives. A reflective practitioner is considered to be a decision-maker who engages in thinking to foster a new and deeper understanding that may potentially translate into action and improved practice. Consequently, the practitioner's identity is viewed as fluid and evolving through "continual re-skilling" (Biggs, 1999) and "re-creation" (Senge, 1990). Underlying this conceptualization is my own belief that reflection involves uncertainty and risk taking; therefore, the establishment of trust is an essential condition for reflective practice to occur.

This study is also premised on the notion that individual change is an essential precursor to collective change (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Therefore, reflection involves the interruption of taken-for granted behavioural patterns and unexamined assumptions that perpetuate the status quo. When beliefs, assumptions and long-standing norms are interrupted, practitioners engage in second-order change that has potential for radical transformation or behavioral change.

For the purpose of my study, reflection is considered to be a broader thinking process than reflexivity. I have taken up the notion of reflection as a potential professional development approach that may be useful to principals who engage in individual or organizational learning, or both, within the context of current reform.

Reflexivity

Within educational research, instrumental forms of *reflection* are often differentiated from social reconstructionist forms of *reflexion* (Fendler, 2003). Individual and collective reflexivity disrupts habituated patterns of thinking and interrogates beliefs and practices particularly around internalized structures and preoccupations that are based on one's position of power and privilege (Bourdieu, 1974; Foster, 1986; Hodgkinson, 1978; Ryan, 2003). For the purpose of my study, I felt that Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) depiction of reflexivity – as a sub-set of reflection in which one considers, analyzes and evaluates one's own role, preoccupations, assumptions, tacit ideas, values, and beliefs – was most aligned with my own notion of reflexivity. That is, reflexivity involves being vulnerable to exposing, challenging and

disrupting one's own thinking and practice by openly questioning the extent by which one's decisions and actions are value-laden. When principals practice reflexivity, I argue here, they consciously take responsibility for their actions and the impact on others. However, it is important to note that the construct of *reflexivity* was not introduced formally into the *ROP Institute* programming.

School Improvement

Much of the research on school improvement converges on structural and cultural conditions that result in enhanced student learning. Within Alberta, many recent reform efforts, such as Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), have focused on school initiatives and innovation. Alberta schools readily apply for optional funding based on research-based project proposals that aim to provide "meaningful and sustainable improvement in student learning and performance" by encouraging "teachers, administrators, trustees, parents and the community to work together to introduce innovative and creative initiatives" (Alberta Education, 2007e, para. 1). As the Alberta Ministry approves and monitors the implementation and results of AISI projects, I conceptualize AISI as a form of top-down school improvement policy. Most of the principals in this study conceptualized school improvement in relation to AISI and other jurisdictional initiatives or policies focusing on instructional leadership. For the purposes of this investigation, I have defined school improvement beyond the scope of such policy initiatives. Therefore, school improvement is conceptualized as the enhancement of student learning through an emphasis on instructional practices and conditions that support teaching and learning (Hopkins, 2001).

The Researcher

My own reflective and reflexive thinking, dialogue, and writing has shaped this study and has been used as method for *making meaning*. Therefore, this qualitative research begins with and is grounded in my own stories, experiences, dilemmas, and questions. As a person, teacher, principal, graduate student, and researcher, I continue to *make sense* of my presence, my role, and my responsibilities through reflective practice. In this reflection, I continue in my attempt to model the reflective practices that I will later interpret and critique. Here, I elucidate my assumptions and the reasoning behind my premise that reflective practice is critical to being open to and able to actualize the possibilities of school improvement.

My Early Experiences with Reflective Thinking

Raised in a family of educators, our family always united to brainstorm, question, analyze, imagine, and problem solve whenever one of us embarked on a new project or was confronted by a dilemma. We would sit around the kitchen table – learning with each other and from each other. As I reflect on these family encounters, it occurs to me that they were foundational to my practice as a teacher first, and later as a new principal.

My Dilemma

I remember surveying my new office for the first time. As a first time principal, I recall standing there, as far away from "The Principal's" desk as I could. My eyes scanned the office – eagerly searching for signs of learning and teaching. One document had been specifically left on the center of my new desk. This daunting list of school opening requirements and deadlines was not what I envisioned as my role as a school principal – that is, as a leader of learning. I was accountable for and would ultimately be evaluated on my ability to meet these prescribed requirements and the responsibilities as outlined in legislation and policy. How would I balance these legal and managerial responsibilities with what I believed were the ethical and moral imperatives inherent in the principalship?

Reflections on "Becoming" a Principal

With my appointment to the principalship, I embraced the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals dedicated to seeking new and potentially better possibilities for schooling. However, I quickly realized that within the current culture of accountability it would be an elusive challenge to find time to think or collaborate. Being an effective and efficient manager became my priority.

I was preoccupied with time. With the greatest respect for the work of the classroom teacher, I "protected" teachers from managerial responsibilities that robbed their time from students. Meetings were sacred times for collaborative planning around emerging issues such as transitioning at-risk students and learning new instructional and assessment strategies. I carved out time to work with multi-disciplinary teams and parents to address specific learner needs. I pushed aside paperwork to participate in collaborative planning and professional development with teachers. Although others expected me to be an instructional expert in all matters of curriculum and pedagogy, I conceptualized my role as supporting the professional learning of teachers. Facing conflicting demands, formidable expectations, and extensive parental scrutiny, I welcomed and encouraged leadership that grew from other varied, multiple sources in our school.

As I navigated technological, societal, economic and political change, I became increasingly cognizant of the need to think, ask questions, and engage in dialogue with my colleagues that aimed at developing a richer understanding of diverse perspectives. Being the principal of a school with three distinct programs, I felt engaged in an endless tug-of-war between multiple criteria and competing values. Paradox permeated my practice and reflection – school-wide mission versus three distinct program philosophies; integration of special-needs students versus placements into congregated sites; assessment narratives versus achievement test scores; and marketing alternative programs versus ensuring accessibility for all children. Paradox complicated decision making; yet paradox forced me to be reflective.

Working as a principal within a school with multiple program offerings, program discreteness was emphasized in school advertisements, the recruitment of teachers, and when organizing professional development. I found that distinctiveness resulted in divisiveness. Teachers rarely planned or met with teachers in the other programs. Students only played with the children from their own program. Increasingly aware of competition and inequities between programs, being reflective took on a new meaning for me – reflective practice was not something to do; rather, it was a state of mind and a way of *being* a principal.

This new understanding provoked a change in my leadership practice. I became the principal of *our school*, not the principal of three distinct programs. I challenged teachers to explore what enabled or restricted their capacity to provide a quality educational experience for *all* students in our school. Teachers resisted when I encouraged them to question long-standing traditions, structures, and routines. Even with time and space to engage in such conversations, most teachers were reluctant to critique or imagine new possibilities for our school.

When the staff resisted dialogue, I sought out principal colleagues with whom I could discuss problematic situations and concerns. Conflict no longer scared me – rather, my learning was enhanced through intellectual debate. I began to refine my beliefs, assumptions and practices when I considered new perspectives and counter arguments. While the paradox, dilemma, tension and conflict inherent in the role of the principal prompted me to reflect, I noted that many of my colleagues felt exhausted and disillusioned. Principal meetings that formerly fostered debate, reflection, and problem solving evolved into gatherings tainted by cynicism and a sense of futility.

Reflecting was how I constructed meaning. This highly personal and holistic practice was essentially how I learned. Still struggling to make sense of the principalship, I would seek the input of others about specific school issues. Often, colleagues and central office administrators would point to policy when I asked for support. They had little time to dialogue and left no space

for my questions. I felt unsettled. The unique context of our school and the needs of our students were not carefully considered within these predetermined, one-size-fits-all responses found within policy. Such organizational conditions thwarted my reflection and learning.

My role was defined by legislation and framed by policy. District rhetoric was fraught with ideologically- and politically-driven agendas emphasizing the role of the principal as an instructional leader. As principals, we attended training (e.g., supervising and evaluating teachers and meeting occupational health and safety requirements) and in-services (e.g., change management, transformational learning, and professional learning communities). Although initially prompting motivating ideas and brief discussions, the learning from these seminars was quickly forgotten and rarely translated into practice. It was not practical to engage in in-depth learning and reflection only on specific training days. These professional development offerings did not provide opportunities to grapple with and address the practical problems that I faced daily in our school. In a similar vein, I also rejected theoretical university-based programs that did not recognize my professional experience, nor consider my "real work" as a principal. Moreover, even when a session or graduate course piqued my interest, I felt guilty using my time or school funds.

As our district officially promoted system-wide improvement, principals were required to spend 50% of the instructional day in classrooms. The district's unofficial adoption of the works of Kotter (1996), Sparks (2005), Dufour and Eaker (1998) and Fullan (2001) – each boasting cure-all leadership approaches for school improvement – provided strategies that principals could utilize to achieve "superb results" as measured by student achievement outputs and high school completion rates. Cynicism grew as organizational performance and results appeared to be elevated over individual growth and learning.

Tension resulted from expectations that quantified my role – the focus on "50% of the time in the classroom" restricted my role and capacity to find effective ways to support our teachers and to ultimately improve student learning. I oscillated between being an instructional leader and an operational manager. Upon completion of my daily visits to 22 classrooms, I rushed back to my office to catch up on the mounting paperwork, parental inquiries, student discipline cases, and a multitude of emergent issues. This practice was not congruent with my beliefs about the instructional leadership of the principal. The discomfort that teachers had with this new "requirement" mirrored the tension I was feeling.

There were significant trade-offs for this time-intensive work. I struggled with making space and finding time for the people and problems within our school. Ironically, while engaging in my defined work as an instructional leader, I became increasingly disconnected from teaching and

learning. The notion of the principal as a "great woman" or heroic leader masqueraded as instructional leadership – however, I was cognizant and uncomfortable with the power that I wielded and the expectations others had about my instructional expertise. Efforts to foster collaboration and encourage more distributed forms of leadership were undermined. Furthermore, classroom observations took precedence over impromptu conversations with a child or a teacher.

In Alberta, the list of innovations designed to improved schooling – including learning, teaching, and leading – seemed endless (e.g., school-based decision-making, alternative programming, grade-level of achievement reporting, balanced literacy, and computer-adapted assessment). I was held accountable for efficient and effective implementation of each innovation or reform. As I questioned the emerging tensions inherent in my role and the current policy context, I was caught between "giving in," resisting, or wanting to fiercely reclaim what felt like a loss of my professionalism. These questions prompted my desire to enroll in graduate studies – to create a space to reflect on my work within the principalship.

Looking Back... Forging Ahead

Over the three years, my understanding of my role as a principal continually evolved. Constantly bombarded with this array of innovations designed to reform education and with release of the working draft of the *Principal Quality Practice* document (PQP), I continually found myself trying to conceptualize my role as principal within the confines of each policy framework. In addition to adapting to this proliferation of new reforms and leadership strategies, teachers and I struggled to meet the needs of a diverse student body. Frustrated by the restrictive nature of my role as defined by policy, I wrestled with paradox – inclusion versus influence; personal beliefs about the principalship versus my role as defined by policy; and reflection versus action.

Looking back on my principalship, my greatest challenge was not making efficient decisions; rather, it was engaging in the deliberate and messy interrogation of *what is* in order to imagine *what might be*. I wrestled with finding the physical, and perhaps more importantly, the metaphorical space to engage in reflection.

But despite my beliefs about the importance of collaborative and reflective practice, I was accountable for efficient decisions that met external expectations. Although I fondly recalled those days around the kitchen table with my family when we would brainstorm, question, analyze, imagine and problem solve, I was very isolated as a principal. I had few opportunities to engage in sustained reflection and conversation with others. "Reflective practice" quickly became a hollow concept within educational discourse and popular literature. Externally-imposed

processes and policies left little room for me, as principal, to leverage my imagination to seek what *might be*. Whereas many colleagues seemed willing to forgo the opportunity to seek change and consider new possibilities, these same structures and polices motivated me to learn, question, and reflect.

When I turned to the educational literature to seek insight about the principalship, I found that empirical research related to reflective practice for school principals was sorely lacking. Motivated by my desire to gain a more nuanced understanding of reflective practices that support the professional learning of the principal, I returned to academia to be with those who were willing to acknowledge ambiguity and to openly speak about the paradoxical nature of the principalship. Through my coursework, I engaged with many scholars and graduate students who accepted the notion of "not always knowing." I was exposed to a range of literature that acknowledged the uniqueness of my identity and fostered greater personal and professional reflection, in addition to a greater sense of reflexivity on my behalf. Schön's (1983, 1987) seminal work on reflective practice, in addition to the work of Stone (2002), Costa and Garmston (2002), Shields and Edwards (2005) and Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) have resonated with me.

It was during this time that Dr. José da Costa, Chair of the Department of Educational Policy Studies, asked me to work as a research assistant on a study exploring the potential merits and limitations of a professional development model designed to enhance the instructional leadership practice of Alberta school principals. Given my interest in the topic, I welcomed this opportunity. Intuitively, I moved my research outside of my school district and the structural and social conditions that felt familiar to me – so familiar that I no longer felt compelled to question them.

My involvement in the *Reflections on Practice – Institute for School Leaders* (*ROP Institute)* study occurred at many levels – firstly, as a *learner* who attended the workshops alongside of the other ROP participants. In addition, I participated in various activities as a *facilitator* and a *critical friend* who provided feedback on the participants' action research projects. As a *research assistant* on Drs. da Costa and Peter's study, I served as a member of the *ROP Institute's* Steering Committee, in addition to the responsibilities related to seeking ethics approval, engaging in data collection and analysis, and writing the final report. Lastly, I was the *researcher* of this study about reflective practice and the principalship.

Based on my professional experiences, I find myself in a unique place to critique the reflective practices and learning inherent in the principalship. My goal was to contribute to both practical and theoretical knowledge about reflective practice and the principalship within the current Alberta educational context by attending to the narratives and perceptions of those "like

me" – that is, practicing school principals. I began this study with this, my own narrative, as a means to identify my positionality and illuminate the personal and professional preoccupations that have influenced my thinking and therefore this study. The processes of data collection and analysis have fostered intense reflection and reflexivity on my behalf. Although initially wanting to enhance my own understanding, I have reflected upon my responsibility *as* a professional and my responsibility *to* the profession. This research study is my way of giving back to colleagues who still work diligently and steadfastly toward school improvement, and ultimately on behalf of the children who are owed the promise and possibilities of a quality education that we have yet to envision.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized and presented in seven chapters. Chapter One includes the introduction and background information about the researcher. Also, the purposes and research questions, in addition to the significance and definitions of the study are provided. Chapter Two presents a review of relevant literature organized around three key strands: school leadership and the principalship; reflective practice; and professional development and learning. Chapter Three provides a rationale for the methodology and theoretical basis of the study, along with information on site and participant selection, the role of the researcher, ethical considerations, constraints (limitations and delimitations) as well as the collection, analysis, and trustworthiness of the data. Chapters Four and Five present the findings and interpretations related to the three questions guiding my study including (a) principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice as a professional development approach, (b) conditions principals perceive as supporting or constraining reflection as a form of professional learning, and (c) conditions principals perceive as limiting or constraining reflection as a form of professional learning. Chapter Six includes a summary of the study and presents my refined conceptual framework. Based on my data analysis in relation to each research question, Chapter Six also offers implications for practice and the future study of educational leadership. Finally, my personal questions resulting from unanticipated findings and new learnings are presented, as well as my closing reflective and reflexive comments.

Chapter Two – Review of the Literature

Introduction and Conceptual Framework

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the three research questions that guided my study. The literature which provides the background and theory for this research falls into three major strands: "School Leadership and the Principalship," "Reflective Practice," and "Professional Development." Under each strand, I have reviewed the educational literature in an effort to create the context and rationale that form the theoretical basis of this research and to illuminate the significance of this study. My review of the literature, across each of the identified strands, helped me to develop a richer understanding of reflection as a form of professional learning for school principals (see Figure 1).

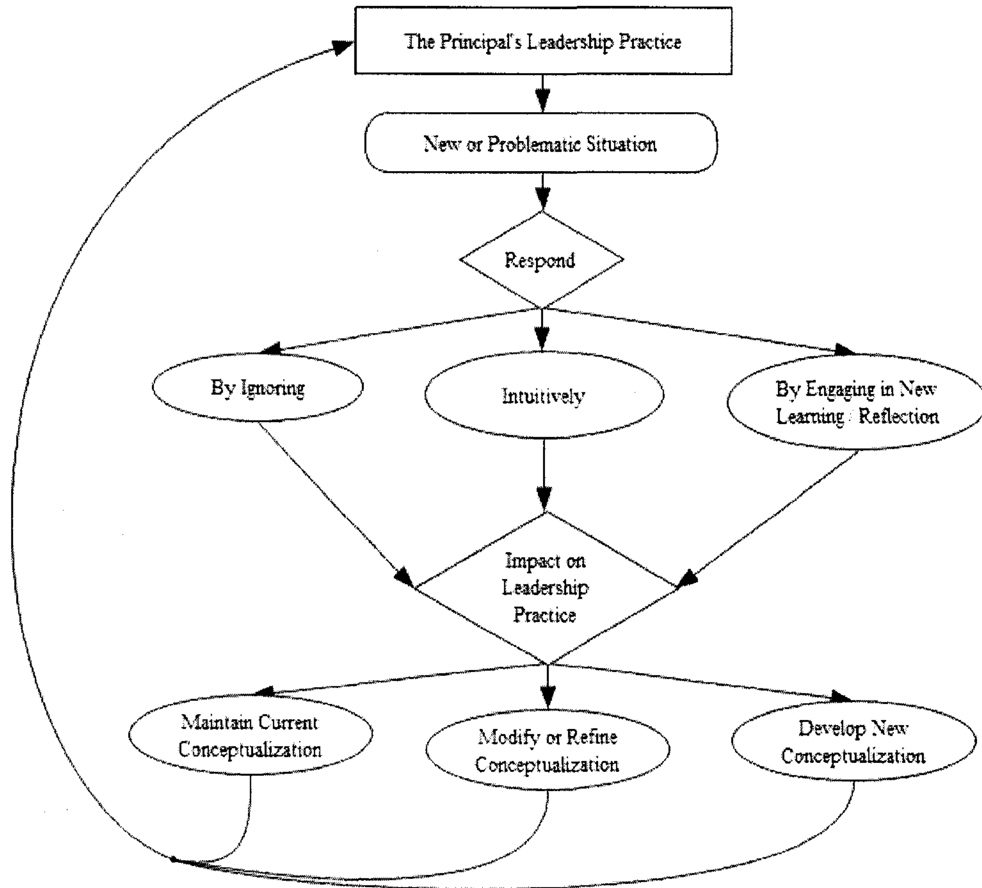

Figure 1 – Framework for the Professional Learning of School Principals

Initially, I began this literature review as a practicing principal – wanting to improve my own professional practice. Professional reading allowed me to gain insights from "others' analytical schemes" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 169). During graduate studies, this literature review was expanded through my coursework. I aimed for a more "*comprehensive understanding* of what is known about a topic" (Mertens, 2005, p. 90). In addition to my professional experiences, it was the critical analysis of the research within these three strands that helped me identify the significance and rationale of this study. The literature also influenced the development of my original research questions, and to some extent, impacted the design of this study. Although this literature review began before I engaged in fieldwork, it has continued through the processes of data collection and analysis. The literature review also continues to be augmented by additional coursework and through learnings gleaned from the scholarly presentations and conferences that I attend. Consequently, my understanding of these constructs is continually changing. Over time, my conceptual framework has become more differentiated and integrated. My revised and new understandings are depicted in Chapter Six.

School Leadership and the Principalship

Defining Leadership

Leadership has become a popularized conception fraught with numerous and conflicting assumptions around its definition and roles. Most contemporary educational literature, although attempting to define the concept of leadership, acknowledges the fact that there is no commonly agreed-upon definition for *leadership* (Bass, 1990; Bennis & Nanus, 1985). However, Yukl (2002) argued that most definitions emphasize leadership as a process whereby influence is exerted by one person (or group) over other people (or groups) in an effort to structure and facilitate activities and relationships within an organization. Definitions differ in regard to "who exerts influence, how influence is exerted, the purpose for the exercise of influence, and its outcomes" and whether leadership should be viewed as a specialized role or as a shared influence process (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 46).

Multiple perspectives of *leadership* for the purposes of practice, professional development, or research (that exist in the acceptance of definitional diversity) are problematic (Barth, 1986b; Leithwood & Duke, 1998). These enigmatical understandings of leadership result in "a proliferation of competing theories" (Wallace et al., 2007, p. 185) for school principals. One theory of leadership has not dominated the study or practice of school administration and leadership for any period of time (Bass, 1990).

Leithwood and Duke (1999) identified six major categories of leadership that dominate contemporary research about school leadership: instructional, transformational, moral, participatory, managerial/strategic, and contingency/style approaches. Each leadership approach is distinct with regard to foci, key assumptions, and nature or locus of leadership power. Regardless of the approach, Leithwood and Duke (1999) stated that it is *intentionality* that distinguishes leadership from other relationships or interactions. Despite being presented as separate approaches to leadership, the approaches are in no way mutually exclusive or pure.

Instructional Leadership. Instructional leadership attends to school culture and other organizational variables believed to influence "the behaviours of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students." Current scholarship also illuminates both formal and informal forms of instructional leadership that extend beyond the principalship and highlights the benefits of teachers serving as instructional leaders (Blasé & Blasé, 2002; Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 47; Sheppard, 1996; Starratt, 2004).

Transformational Leadership. By leveraging "the commitments and capacities of organizational members," transformational leaders achieve high levels of personal commitment towards the attainment of organizational goals (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 48). Burns (1978) elucidated the critical relationship between motives, resources, leaders, and followers, and subsequently "transforming leadership ultimately becomes moral in that it raises the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both leader and led, and has a transforming effect on both" (p. 20).

Moral Leadership. Leithwood and Duke (1999) stated that "the focus of moral leadership is on *the values and ethics of the leader*, so authority and influence are to be derived from defensible conceptions of what is right or good" (p. 50). Values are central to leadership and "intrusion of values into the decision-making process is not merely inevitable, it is the very substance of decision" (Hodgkinson, 1978, p. 59). School leaders view problem-solving as a process for improving the human condition (Dewey, 1938) and engage in reflection and reflexivity that is increasingly cognizant of "the nature of the relationships among those within the organization and the distribution of power between stakeholders both inside and outside the organization" (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 51).

Participatory Leadership. Participatory leadership emphasizes "the decision-making processes of the group" and maximizing authentic participation of others in an effort to positively impact organizational effectiveness (Leithwood & Duke, 1991, p. 51). Participatory leaders, through the actualization of democratic principles, ensure that schools reflect on the values and

needs of stakeholders and larger community. The expertise and experiences of others within the school or community is valued (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992; Yukl, 2002).

Managerial Leadership. In the managerial model, when "the functions, tasks, or behaviours of the leader" are carried out effectively and efficiently, the productivity of others within the organization is enhanced (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 53). Organizational members behave rationally and that authority and influence reside with those holding formal leadership positions. Management and leadership are seen both as competing and distinct conceptualizations, as well as complementary conceptualizations that are mutually supportive (Bolman & Deal, 1994). Managerial leadership aligns with transactional leadership theories emphasizing the realistic exchange relationship that occurs between leaders and followers (Burns, 1978).

Contingency Leadership. "How leaders respond to the unique organizational circumstances or problems that they face" characterizes contingent leadership/leadership style theories (Leithwood & Duke, 1999, p. 54). Each context or problem demands a different leadership response; therefore, there is virtually an unlimited repertoire of leadership practices that leaders may invent or enact when responding to a challenging situation. Studies conducted by Allison and Allison (1993), Leithwood and Hallinger (1993), and Sergiovanni (1989) stressed the principal masters a vast repertoire of leadership practices that are activated through problem solving, deep reflection, and critical thinking.

Competing Leadership Theories

Definitional diversity still exists within each of the educational leadership categories – making it difficult to assume the extent to which *leadership* means the same to those writing about it (Leithwood & Duke, 1999). It is apparent that these conceptual theories of leadership both intersect, and at times, compete with each other. In fact, principals may enact different approaches, or combinations of approaches, when confronting different leadership challenges. This has significant bearing for the training and education of school leaders.

Hallinger (2003) states that "over the past two decades, debate over the most suitable leadership role for principals has been dominated by two conceptual models: instructional leadership and transformational leadership" (p. 229). With the evolution of school-based decision-making over the past two decades, principals struggle with the tension of balancing instructional and managerial leadership roles (Hallinger, 2003). In the late 1980s, tension and conflict existed between hierarchical approaches of instructional leadership and the emerging democratic and participatory nature of schools. Principals continue to report growing concerns

about increased responsibilities and isolation and decreased authority and autonomy (Barth, 1990; Howley, Andrianaivo & Perry, 2005).

Furthermore, with the notable proliferation of school reform, the transformational leadership model has emerged as an alternative model to instructional leadership. Marks and Printy (2003) have suggested that one leadership approach should not supersede the other. Rather, they argue that "when transformational and shared instructional leadership coexisted in an integrated form of leadership, the influence of school performance, measured by the quality of its pedagogy and the achievement of its students, is substantial" (p. 370).

The Principal and School Improvement

A review of the literature on school leadership reveals a dearth of research emphasizing the importance of the principal's leadership related to different aspects of school improvement, including: (a) school culture and climate (Barth, 1986a; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Spillane, 2006); (b) teacher and parental attitudes (Barth, 1986a; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Lambert, 1998); (c) classroom practices of teachers (Barth, 1986a; Blasé &Blasé, 2002; Hallinger, 2003); (d) organization of curriculum and instruction (Blasé & Blasé, 2002; Hallinger, 2003); (e) improving opportunities for student learning (Barth, 1986a; Blasé &Blasé, 2002; Hallinger, 2003; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992); (f) participation of stakeholders in decision-making (Lambert, 1998); and (g) implementation of innovations and school reform (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Krug, 1993).

There is consensus among all levels of educational governance (policy makers, teachers' associations, school boards, and school personnel) that the role of the principal continues to evolve and impact school improvement efforts (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003; Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006a; Barth, 2001; Wallace, et al., 2007; Wright, et al., 2007). In addition to responsibilities for teaching and learning, the principal's role has continued to expand with the addition of complex administrative responsibilities and a multitude of school improvement reforms and innovations. In this broad social context, the key competencies required by principals have significantly increased with the evolving role of the principal. Yet, as principals navigate school improvement structures and policies, the approaches for professional learning remain largely the same.

Summary

Current educational leadership highlights the importance of the role of the principal in school improvement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2002). Subsequently, scholars such as Leithwood and Duke (1999) have identified perspectives of leadership for the

purposes of practice, professional development, and research. However, caution must be exercised when promoting a single leadership approach within school principals' professional development. Foster and St. Hilaire (2004) suggest that narrow conceptions of leadership may undermine efforts to understand successful school improvement. This was echoed by Hallinger (2003), who conceptualizes leadership as a "developmental process" (p. 347) and surmises that polarized concepts of leadership do not take into account the unique realities of schools and the changing times. When confronted with new insights, diverse perspectives, or challenging dilemmas, the principal naturally engages in analytical and interpretive practices. Thinking and reflection become another means to professional learning within the principalship.

Reflective Practice

Origins of Reflective Thinking

Numerous scholars, philosophers and practitioners have contributed to theories and research applications related to reflective practice. Drawing on the work of earlier philosophers and educators such as Socrates, Buddha, and Plato, John Dewey is recognized as the eminent 20th- century influence on reflective thinking within education (Fendler, 2003; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). In order to create a strong and democratic society, Dewey (1939) viewed the chief purpose of education as promoting and fostering the intellectual, social and moral growth of individuals. Considering how individuals think when confronted with real problems or relevant dilemmas, Dewey's (1939) theory conceptualized learning as a reflective process – that is, meaning was derived from the continuity of interactions between an individual and the surrounding context over time. As Dewey's work emerged during the Progressive Era, emphasis was placed on rational thinking and advances in scientific knowledge. Reflective thinking was conceived as a systematic and scientific process to (a) describe one's experience by posing questions arising from the experience, (b) to generate hypotheses, and (c) to take thoughtful, intelligent action to test hypotheses.

Nearly half a century later, the research of Donald Schön (1983, 1987) inspired a renewed interest in reflective practice within education. In contrast to Dewey's focus on scientific thinking, Schön's work emphasized experiential knowledge and context. Schön (1983) recognized that there was a significant gap between the actual competencies and professional knowledge required for practicing teachers. Furthermore, Schön argued that professional development relied exclusively on formal knowledge that was detached from the real concerns and experiences of practitioners. Later, Schön (1987) described reflection as the integration of theory and practice through "dialogue of thinking and doing to which I become more skillful" (p.

31). Reflection was viewed as a form of problem-solving and theory building that appreciated each unique situation through different perspectives.

Building upon Dewey's work that described reflective practice as a critical inquiry beginning with a problematic situation, Schön (1983, 1987) argued that when facing a complex problem that extends beyond the technical knowledge and rules of the organization, the problem must be analyzed and interpreted. He emphasized reflective thinking that was practitioner-generated and based on intuitive knowledge derived from experience. Schön (1983) described how "competent practitioners usually know more than they can describe. They exhibit a kind of knowing-in-practice, most of which is tacit" (p. vii). Schön (1983, 1987) conceptualized the role of the practitioner as practicing *reflection-in-action* (within the present moment, one observes thinking and action in order to construct a new theory) and *reflection-on-action* (looking back on and learning from an experience or action by interrogating personal theories that underpin the basis of one's actions and in a concerted effort to change future actions). Schön's (1987) reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action typology was later expanded by Killion and Todnem's (1991) conceptualization of *reflection-for-action.*

Other scholars have explored the notion of reflection and have argued the essential role of critical reflection in education as a means to examining how educational practices may contribute to social equity and the establishment of a more just and humane society (Zeichner & Liston, 1987; Zeichner, 1993). Several scholars have created different classifications or typologies of reflective thought. For example, Smyth (1989) suggested four forms of action that guide reflection on practice: (a) *describing* (e.g., What did I do?); (b) *informing* (e.g., What does this mean?); (c) *confronting* (e.g., Why/how did I come to act/think this way?); and (d) *reconstructing* (e.g., How might I do things differently?). Later, van Manen (2002) identified three levels of reflectivity to describe the various aims of reflection, including: (a) *technical reflection* (examining skills, strategies and methods used to reach predetermined goals); (b) *practical reflection* (considering underlying assumptions of methods used to achieve goals, and results or outcomes for students); and (c) *critical reflection* (focusing on inquiry around moral and ethical aspects of practice). Most recently, Valli (1997) has based her typology for reflection on teacher preparation based on a comprehensive review of the literature on teacher preparation. Three dimensions of reflection are presented: (a) *technical reflection* (focus on one's teaching and instruction based on the research and one's own unique situation); (b) *deliberative reflection* (intentionally considering an array of assumptions, perspectives and research findings when considering teaching-related practices and problems); and (c) *critical reflection* (focusing on social, moral, and political aspects of education and using ethical criteria for decision making).

Much research related to reflection in education focuses on the reflective practices of teachers or pre-service educators; there is a relative paucity of research related to the reflective practices of school principals.

To create fundamental change and sustainable learning, Argyris and Schön (1974) argued that there must be a change in underlying theories-in-use or what they have coined as *double-loop learning*. Argyris and Schön (1974) distinguished second-order change from traditional problem-solving or single-loop (analytical) learning. Double-loop learning is a change in action that is accompanied by change in underlying beliefs or assumptions. As such, double-loop learning is more reflective in nature as practitioners go beyond generating an immediate solution. Rather, by analyzing what is being currently done and why, reflective practitioners assume a more objective stance on their own or their organization's behaviors and how these behaviors may attribute to the problem or issue at hand. At best, single-loop learning provides symptomatic relief as assumptions and beliefs are left unexamined and unchanged – resulting in transitory or first-order change. Through the development of new theories-in-use, individuals engage in second-order change that has potential for radical transformation or change.

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) have most recently explored the relationship between reflection and professional learning. Their conceptualization of reflective practice "emphasizes thought and action as integral processes but extends beyond to consider how context and culture shapes both thought and action...respects the autonomy of the learner but recognized the value of incorporating lessons drawn from theory, research and practice" (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004, p. xi).

Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) have also extensively contrasted traditional and reflective practice models of professional development. Whereas traditional professional development focuses on the transmission and acquisition of knowledge to the learner who is viewed as a passive consumer; newer models of professional development emphasize reflective practice. In these reflective models, the practitioner is viewed as an active learner and action researcher who engages in experiential learning to construct meaning. Reflective models of professional development seek understanding by identifying problematic situations, observing and analyzing the situation, and engaging in abstract reconceptualization of the situation. Active experimentation and data collection and analysis become keystones of reflective practice.

Possibilities and Benefits of Reflective Practice

Despite ambiguity and confusion around the concept of *reflection*, reflective practice is supported by conservative, critical, feminist, and Deweyian scholars (Fendler, 2003). Reflecting

in, *on*, and *for* action (Schön, 1987) challenges the socially-conditioned structures that preserved social privilege through unconscious systems and institutionalized practices (Burns, 1978; Foster, 1986). Although appearing to be the work of "heroic" leaders and reflective practitioners, many scholars argue that a practical and incremental approach to school improvement begins with *theories for practice* that reflective principals use to: (a) acknowledge diversity as "the starting point for a deeply democratic, academically excellent, and socially just education" (Shields, 2004, p. 127); (b) engage in "asset" thinking and refrain from deficit identification or dyconsciousness (McInerny, 2003, p. 69; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004); (c) overcome denials and pathologies of silence that "are misguided attempts to act justly, to display empathy, and to create democratic and optimistic educational communities" (McIntosh, 1988; Shields, 2004, p. 117); (d) examine and challenge the status quo through an "ethic of critique" (Starratt, 1991); (e) create inclusive and democratic processes (McInerny, 2003); (f) monitor market influences (McInerny, 2003); (g) promote an "ethic of care" emphasizing relationships and collaboration (McInerney, 2003; Starratt, 1991); (h) critique personal *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1974; Sefa Dei, 2002; Starratt, 1991); and (i) engage in collaborative professional development, reflection and problem solving (Day, 1999 a & b; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). By considering such a "broad range of theoretical perspectives and their connection to practice so that they [principals] are able to knowledgeably consider the complex nuances of contestable values in an increasingly diverse society" (Wallace, 2005, p.19), the principal develops a critical theory of practice.

But how do theories translate into practice? Praxis exemplifying reflection may include: (a) using "critical friends" to critique and provide feedback on practice (Day, 1999a; Short, 1997); (b) planning school-wide action research projects (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006b); (c) forging strategic relationships with other schools, universities, and community agencies (Barth, 2001; Wright et al., 2007); (d) modeling democracy through communicative discourse and critical participation of students, staff and parents in school decision-making (Foster & St. Hilaire, 2004; Spillane, 2006; Wright, 2007); and (e) analyzing current or problematic events from diverse perspectives (Shields, 2007).

Foster (1986) claims that "leadership must be socially critical, it does not reside *in* an individual but in the relationship between individuals, and it is oriented toward social vision and change, not simply, or only, organizational goals" (p. 46). Rather than structural-functionalist perspectives of efficient organizational delivery systems, professional learning communities may also exemplify reflection by highlighting new information and different perspectives to test prevailing understandings and to prevent structures from reinforcing "parochial attitudes and practices" (Leonard & Leonard, 2001; McInerney, 2003; Smylie & Hart, 1999, p. 431). When

learning communities assume collective responsibility for decision-making and relationships, conflict is valued as a means to challenging the status quo. Grant and Zeichner (1984) argue that Dewey's three attitudes are prerequisites for reflective action and are essential to meeting and responding to problems within the educational, social, political contexts in which their work is embedded. These attitudes (Grant & Zeichner, 1984) include: (a) *open-mindedness* – "an active desire to listen to more sides than one, to give full attention to alternate possibilities, and to recognize the possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us" (p. 57); (b) *responsibility* – "careful consideration of the consequences to which an action leads" (p. 57); and (c) *wholeheartedness* – "openmindedness and responsibility must be central components in the life of a reflective teacher and implies that prospective teachers who are reflective must take active control over their education as teachers" (p. 57).

Within the literature, many professional development strategies are described as fostering the reflective and imaginative thinking needed to potentially address the perennial problems of education. Reflection occurs through the examination of moral, ethical, and political issues that may emanate from constructivist conversations, collaborative planning and problem solving (Shields, 2004). These strategies include: (a) problem-based learning (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004); (b) professional code of ethic, meta-narratives, or educational platform development (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Foster, 1986); and (c) analysis of competing theories (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Problematizing Reflection – How May Reflective Practice Undermine Intended Purposes?

Within the educational discourse, Fendler (2003) describes reflective practice as:

> A demonstration of self-consciousness, a scientific approach to planning for the future, a tacit and intuitive understanding of practice, a discipline to become more professional, a way to tap into one's authentic inner voice, a means to become a more effective teacher, and a strategy to redress injustices in society. (p. 20)

Definitional diversity embodies "mixed messages and confusing agendas" for competing programs of educational reform (Fendler, 2003, p. 20). Despite a plethora of research, educators must see beyond popularized notions of reflection and assume a skeptical and critical attitude to elucidate how reflective practice may limit and undermine its intended purposes. Drawing upon literature related to "teacher reflection," I have noted that few studies problematize the notion of reflection, and even fewer studies distinguish between reflective and reflexive practices.

Fendler (2003) used Foucaultian genealogy to investigate how reflection plays out in complex and contradictory ways. Cautioning readers, Fendler (2003) critiqued "the effects of

power that reverberate through current reflective practices" and illuminated "unintended and undesirable political effects" (p. 23) including the development of taxonomies of reflective thought for disciplinary or socializing, rather than generative and innovative, purposes (e.g., by analyzing journal writing from professional development sessions). Established professional development practices such as journaling may be ineffective as these practices are "molded and disciplined by the very social practices, and relations that the reflective process is supposed to critique" (Fendler, 2003, p.21). Within the context of professional development, school principals often develop administrative platforms or autobiographical narratives that affirm identity by reinforcing existing stereotypes. In these ways, reflection is used for politically-engaged meaning making or activism to support dominant values or the status quo. As such, reflection becomes normalizing thinking that may comply with existing power hierarchies. In fact, Fendler (2003) cautions that it is ironic "that the rhetoric about reflective practitioners focuses on empowering teachers, but the requirements of learning to be reflective are based on the assumption that teachers are incapable of reflection without direction from expert authorities" (p. 23).

Popularized treatments of reflection, or "silver bullet" solutions, inadequately address complex problems such as racism – particularly within the structural and ideological milieus within which reflection is usually encouraged (Fendler, 2003; , & Liston 1996). Language within professional development programming often limits that which is invisible or obscured (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Hatcher, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1991). Absences are rarely noted or interrogated. Therefore, principals must be cautious about being blindsided by system rhetoric or theoretical expectations that are presented within professional development programs. By extending reflection into more reflexive practices, principals may avoid "utopian dissociations" and move beyond "considering an enforced idea independently of the actual place in which it has its effects" to listen and examine those objectified by undesirable practices (Jardine, 2005, p. 34). In this way, analysis of micro-level practices provides an "explicit and complete description of the mechanisms which coordinate specific acts of power and knowledge and acknowledge them to work synergistically at the 'macro' level" (Jardine, 2005, p. 35).

Principals, by virtue of legal authority and designated position, must be reflective and reflexive to recognize how power, control and inequity continually shape their own and other's experiences. Recognizing that principals participate and lead "as *unequal* subjects" makes "explicit the political nature of education and how power operates to privilege, silence, and marginalize individuals" (Ng, 2003, p. 214). Burns (1978) surmised that one's position and relationships may be used either positively or negatively. This was echoed by Sergiovanni (1991, p. 137) who proposed that "successful leaders know the difference between power *over* and

power *to*". In contrast, Jardine (2005) argued "we need to examine our educational values, beliefs and practices by examining our own role in each of the acts of power/knowledge," as even the "power *to*" pervasively and silently operates to monitor, classify, and control (p. 55). Ethical issues must be reflected upon in any change or "social engineering" process – the "position of the observer" and micro-politics should be subject to reflexive thinking and critical analysis (Anderson, 1990; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1991, p. 41).

Collaborative Reflection and Reflexivity

Although change is enhanced through an individual's *deliberate* intentions to confront existing (invisible and unobtrusive) structures that perpetuate largely taken-for-granted and unexamined assumptions about the social world (Greenfield, 1993), learning communities (Leonard & Leonard, 2001) and collaborative reflection (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) need to be problematized in light of human and social capital theory that highlights how social relations enable or restrain productivity, thinking, and learning. Smylie and Hart (1999) recommend a balance between openness and closure of social structures and between internal and external ties, as closed structures "limit access or receptiveness to new and potentially challenging information from outside the social structure. This condition can reinforce problematic knowledge and assumptions and lead to inferential errors, poor decisions, and unproductive behaviors" (p. 425). Yet, it cannot be assumed that strong social relations and collegiality improves schools. Social relations may "spawn and sustain parochial beliefs and unproductive practices" if an "open exchange and critique of ideas and assumptions, multiple referents and sources of information, and equitable distribution of authority" is lacking (Smylie & Hart, 1999, p. 437). Despite potential learning within research-based professional development strategies, effects of social isolation on thinking processes must be acknowledged. For example, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1991) criticize journaling as a "diary disease" that fails to subject "the *position* of the observer to the same critical analysis as the constructed object" (p. 41). Such strategies may inadvertently promote dominant power relationships.

Reflective activities are often integrated into professional development activities for teachers (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004) – however, my review of the current literature illuminated that little or no emphasis is placed on the notion of reflection beyond the confines of a specific professional development event or process. Little attention is given to the concept of reflexivity as a means to improving or creating more socially-just schools.

Personal and Professional Identity

Identity "is an unstable, shifting, and volatile construct, a contradictory and unfinalized social relation" (Britzman, as cited in Sumara and Davis, 1999, p. 191). Learning and change is holistic – furthermore, bifurcation of personal identity from one's professional role is impossible (Barth, 2001). When principals are asked to engage in reflexivity that is intended to examine the "construction of [our] inner eyes" (Anderson, 1990) or to change theories-in-use, principals may resist due to entrenched understandings of identity and fearfulness of showing vulnerability (Leonard & Leonard, 2001). At times, beliefs, assumptions, or "ignorance starves the imagination" (Harris, 2002, p. 351). Tensions arise for principals when (a) critique is perceived as negativity or unwillingness to be a "district player" (McInerny, 2003); (b) time for collaborative, critical reflection must be justified within a time-pressured and accountability-political climate (Sergiovanni, 1991); and (c) strong opposition and resistance from the school community is faced (Bolman & Deal, 1994).

Summary

Current literature appears to integrate both Dewey (1939) and Schön's (1983, 1987) perspectives – validating both research-based and experiential, context-based knowledge as important aspects of reflective thinking. However, Fendler (2003) asserts, "reflective practice is riddled with tensions between Schön's notion of practitioner-based intuition, on the one hand, and Dewey's notion of rational and scientific thinking on the other hand" (p. 19). Despite this claim, I have noted that the collective literature on reflective thinking converges around the notion that reflection requires active engagement in thought processes to enhance understanding and subsequently to improve action. Many scholars describe how personal and contextual variables influence reflective thought and will yield in different results. As of late, some educational research explores how reflection that considers social, ethical and moral implications may have the potential to impact individual and collective action, learning, and values (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Shields, 2007; van Manen, 2002).

Organizational learning theories do not specifically address reflective or reflexive practices for school principals (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997). However, reflective practice is prevalent in literature related to teaching, including: teacher as inquirer (Day, 1999a); teacher as researcher (Stenhouse, 1983); and teacher as reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983). Subsequently, studies related to the use of reflection as a tool to enhance principals' learning within professional development programs are few and limited (Short, 1997).

It is most recently the work of Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) and Short (1997) that illuminates how reflective practice can be conceptualized as an important professional development strategy for school principals. In addition to enhancing problem-solving, reflective practitioners openly share observations, assumptions, and interpretations within collegial and collaborative settings. Short (1997) intimates that the link between reflection and practice is of critical importance – administrators who engage in continual reflection and discourse around problems of practice have opportunities and potential to improve individual and organizational learning. In fact, Short (1997) suggests:

> The preparation of school administrators requires strategies that develop the capacity of school leaders to make sense of unclear and unique situations and problems and to understand the complexities of schooling. Reflection appears to be an important tool for developing expertise and the capacity to change behavior. (p. 86)

Consistent with Schön (1987), current research suggests that reflective practice (a) challenges tacit and explicit assumptions, processes and structures to deliberately build feedback loops that maximize individual or organizational learning; (b) shows promise in supporting principals' professional needs; and (c) allows for meaningful, sustainable change within the context of educational reform.

As educational reforms take place within a socio-political and economic milieu, principals have a moral imperative to intentionally reflect and engage in learning (Foster, 1986; Sergiovanni, 1992). However, there is a relative paucity of empirical research and discussion that entails in-depth examinations of practices and procedures for reflective practice as a form of professional development specific to school principals (Wanzare & da Costa, 2005; Wright, et al., 2007). It is this gap that this study sought to address.

Professional Development

Defining Professional Development

Within the literature, numerous definitions of the term *professional development* exist. For example, professional development is defined as "those activities that are aimed at the personal growth and development of an individual to enable him/her to understand the nature of a post and to meet the demands of that post" (Erasmus & van der Westhuizen, 1994, p. 2). Oliva and Pawlas (2004) define professional development as a "program of organized activities for both groups and individuals planned and carried out to promote the personal and professional growth of staff members" (p. 337). Extending the notion of the professional development of individuals,

Lieberman and Miller (2002) conceived professional development as the development of learning communities that allow for "longer-term solutions and imaginative organizational arrangements to transform the very meaning of adult development in the school itself" (p. 75).

Specialists in the field of clinical supervision differentiate between *professional development* and *in-service education*. Throughout the current educational literature, in-service education is often described as implying a deficiency to be overcome, whereas professional development focuses on growth and renewal that assists an individual towards improving competency within a professional role (Barth, 2001; Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon, 1998; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 2002).

The importance of professional learning is extensively documented in the teacher professional development literature. For example, Wanzare and da Costa (2005, citing Mugiri, 1980) state:

> Teacher education must be seen as a gradual sequence of experiences in professional growth that begins at the initial stage at the college and is followed by further in-service training cycles. There are must be continuity and reinforcement of training and growth throughout the teacher's career. (p. 51)

There is now increased awareness of the need to prepare school principals for complex and changing roles. The role of the principal is enhanced through continuous professional development experiences that enable learning and enhanced performance (Barth, 2001; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Purposes of Professional Development

The purposes of professional development for school principals continue to be described in contemporary educational research. In particular, the increased diversity within the student population has resulted in a call for principals to become more socially-aware leaders (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; Griffiths & Reynolds, 2002; Sefa Dei, 2002; Shields, 2004) and actualizing moral and ethical leadership to elevate citizenry and democratic principles within schools (Starratt, 2004). Professional development is often perceived as providing support to principals as they implement new policies (Dempster & Beere, 1996) and adapt to numerous school improvement reforms and recent trends of decentralization (including school- based decision-making, accountability through high-stakes testing, and increased parental choice) (Levin, 2005; McInerny, 2003). Professional development and learning is described as allowing principals to acquire and practice a range of practical administrative skills and specialized knowledge as they navigate continuous change within the current educational context (Levine,

2005; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992; Wallace et al., 2007). By increasing awareness of leadership practice through collective inquiry and the analysis of consequences of leadership on teaching and learning (Glickman et al., 1998), principals enhance teacher competence through their supervisory role (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Wanzare & da Costa, 2005). By creating and sustaining professional learning communities (Barth, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 2002), principals also build the internal leadership capacity of teachers through distributed or instructional leadership models (Blasé & Blasé, 2002; Lambert, 1998; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992). Professional development is often described as critical to building positive school culture (Barth, 2001; Deal & Peterson, 1999). Moreover, principals enhance theoretical understanding of leadership through the use of reflective practices (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997). Recently, professional development has been seen as critical to responding to parental demands for high quality education that is largely dependent upon effective leadership (Levin, 2005; Taylor, 2001).

Contrasting Traditional and Reflective Models of Professional Development

Within the literature, professional development approaches are often depicted as contrasting models. For example, Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) described current reflective models as emphasizing understanding and competence. In contrast, knowledge acquisition is indicative of more traditional approaches to professional development (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997; Day, 1999a, 1999b). Traditional models of professional development tend to focus learning on operational aspects of school leadership, including budgeting, managing, evaluating, and reporting. Learning is viewed as a cognitive process whereby the learner is a passive consumer that gains formal knowledge from the instructor's expert transmission of knowledge. More humanistic orientations of professional development emphasize a multifaceted, interpersonal process that focus on improvement through reflection and collective inquiry to enhance decision making and to solve complex problems. Osterman and Kottkamp (2004) describe how reflective models of professional development view the practitioner as a researcher who constructs personal understanding through experiential learning and formal knowledge acquisition.

Recognizing the crucial role of the principal in the creation and maintenance of effective schools, Barth (1986b) criticized traditional approaches to professional development that aim to identify the "desirable traits" of a principal in a high-performing school and attempted to replicate those same "desirable traits" through the widespread training of other principals. Barth (1986b) argued that this approach is ineffective because it (a) equates leadership with high test scores, (b)

assumes that the "desirable traits" are transferable to different contexts, and (c) results in tendencies for principals to resist what is perceived as remediation. This one-size-fits-all approach to principals' education often relies on:

> Propositional knowledge that leads to the somewhat naïve belief that there is "one best way" for school leaders to do their work....Programs often define leadership in strictly instrumental ways with little, if any, attention paid to the moral imperatives of complex and even conflicting educational goals in a democratic society. (Wallace et al., 2007, p. 19)

Furthermore, principal professional development is complicated by a lack of time, increased workloads, negative perceptions from past training experiences, lack of confidence, fear of being viewed as flawed or ineffective by others and a belief that it is "unethical to use public funds for their own learning" (Barth, 1986a, p. 157).

Adult Learning

John Dewey's (1939) theory about the nature of human experience suggests that experience arises from interaction of the principles of continuity and interaction. *Continuity* is the notion that each experience an individual has will ultimately impact future behavior. *Interaction* refers to situational influence on experience. Subsequently, any present experience is a function of interaction between past experiences and the present situation. Therefore, the value of an experience is judged by each individual and poses significant implications for the design of professional development programs.

Experiential learning, as noted through the writing of Lewin and Knowles, has contributed to changing conceptualizations of professional development. Lewin (1948) advocated for the establishment of learning environments in which participants have a sense of belonging, security, and freedom to make choices; whereas, Knowles' (1980) contributions centered on "andragogy," a learning theory recognizing specific pedagogies that distinguish adult learners from juvenile learners. Knowles (1980) identified four critical concepts within adult learning: (a) *changes in self-concept* – creation and of an environment conducive to self-directedness and learner choice; (b) *the role of experience* – past experiences provide a rich knowledge base that commingles with new experiences; (c) *readiness to learn* – the provision of choice enables learners to focus on what is deemed important at a particular point in their development; and (d) *orientation to learning* – seeking information and skills that can be readily applied, adult learners engage in problem-solving to address gaps in their knowledge or to increase their level of competence. Knowles (1980) focused on these elements within professional development programs: (a) creating an environment conducive to adult learning; (b) involving adult learners in

mutual planning to attend to specific learners' needs and interests; (c) involving adult learners in defining program goals and objectives, as well as designing the professional development program; (d) engaging adult learners in program implementation; and (e) including adult learners within program evaluation. When consideration is given to adult learning preferences and how adults make sense of experiences, professional development has potential to become more transformative and substantial (Glickman, et al., 1998; Knowles, 1980).

Valli and Hawley (2002) also explained how the research on cognitive development has provided insight into why and how adults learn by: (a) constructing new knowledge by integrating prior learning; (b) reflecting on thought and action to enable strategic processing; (c) preceding to complex stages of development, influenced by inherited and experiential factors; (d) enacting personal goal setting to enhance intrinsic motivation; and (e) engaging in individual and collaborative contexts.

Professional Development Needs Identified by School Leaders

Whereas there have been numerous calls for reform requiring principals to become effective schools leaders, there is a remarkable absence of discussion relating to how school principals are prepared to meet the challenges associated with changing leadership roles (Barth, 2001). Within the context of current reform, professional development is deemed vital for school principals who continuously face and navigate technological, societal, economic, and political changes to achieve school improvement.

Wanzare and da Costa (2005) suggested that the majority of studies about principal professional development have exclusively used survey questionnaires, giving little attention to qualitative approaches to yield rich descriptions of principals' needs, experiences and perceptions. Wanzare and da Costa (2005), in the *Survey of School Administrator Professional Development in Alberta*, indicated that the major professional development preferences of Alberta school principals focus on areas of instructional leadership, staff development, and developing school climate. In addition, school principals also perceived curriculum instruction, management of staff, and general administrative or leadership issues as other foci that should be addressed within professional development.

To effectively determine the foci, strategies, and duration of principal training and professional development programs, the needs of school principals as adult learners, must be clearly identified and should form the basis of professional development planning (Wanzare & da Costa, 2005). Often, school principals are neglected in efforts to evaluate professional development as they are not perceived to directly influence student learning. However, Guskey

and Sparks (1996) suggested that the knowledge and practices of principals indirectly influences student learning through interactions with teachers (through the creation of climate, culture, or interactions that support experimentation and continuous improvement) and through the leadership role undertaken when defining policy (policies addressing organization, curriculum, assessment, discipline, and resources directly impact *how* and *what* students learn).

Features of Effective Professional Development

After my review of the educational literature pertaining to teacher and principal professional development, clinical supervision, and adult education, commonly-identified features that facilitate the professional learning of educators are compiled in Table 1. The features listed in Table 1 are indicative of the convergence of practitioners, academics, and policy makers' understandings and visions of the features of effective professional development. Similar features are included the *Educate America Act: Principles of High Quality Professional Development* (U.S. Department of Education Professional Development Team, 1994); *National Staff Development Council: Standards for Staff Development* (National Staff Development Council, 2001); and the *Alberta Teachers' Association: Enhancing Teaching Practice for Student Learning – A Framework for Professional Development in Alberta* (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006b). Such commonality, although helpful, does not necessarily result in the creation of policies or structures that ensure equitable access to high-quality professional development (Sparks & Hirsh, 1999). Such congruence, although reassuring, has neglected the need to investigate alternate forms and conditions that support the professional learning of principals. Furthermore, there is an assumption that the learning needs of those who teach are the same as those who lead.

In 2005, Levine argued that both practitioner and university-based professional development should be evaluated for effectiveness in meeting the unique needs of school leaders. In *Educating School Leaders*, Levine (2005) examines university-based leadership programs and their capacity to educate principals with the knowledge and skills that they require to engage in the leadership required by current educational reform. Levine's study presents a range of criteria for determining the effectiveness of programs designed for school leaders including: (a) having an explicit purpose and goals; (b) curricular coherence whereby the curriculum is aligned with the program purposes, goals, and learner needs; (c) curricular balance between the theory and practice; (d) practical and academic expertise within faculty; (e) adequate resources; and (f) ongoing assessment of the program to enhance program delivery and future offerings.

Features of Professional Development	**Comparing Features of Professional Development Across the Educational Literature**			
	Teacher Professional Development	***Principal Professional Development***	***Clinical Supervision of Teachers***	***Adult Education***
Clear goals and purpose	Guskey, 1998 & 2002; Lambert, 1988	Barth, 1986a, 1986b & 2001; Levine, 2005	Oliva & Pawlas, 2004; Valli & Hawley, 2002	Knowles, 1989
Choice in professional development offerings	Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995	Day, 2000; Wanzare & da Costa, 2005	Glickman, et al., 1998	
Learner-centered approaches	Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000; Lieberman & Miller, 2002	Short, 1997; Wanzare & da Costa, 2005	Joyce & Showers, 1982, 1988; Oliva & Pawlas, 2004; Pajak, 1993	Knowles, 1980 & 1989; Lewin, 1948
Flexibility	Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2001	Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Costa & Garmston, 2002; Day, 2000; Wanzare & da Costa, 2005; Wallace et al., 2007	Costa & Garmston, 2002; Glickman, et al., 1998; Oliva & Pawlas, 2004	Knowles, 1980 & 1989
Collaboration	Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Dufour, & Eaker, 1998; Day, 1999a; Guskey, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 2002; Schön, 1983 & 1987; Smylie & Hart, 1999	Barth, 1986a & 2001; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Short, 1997; Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000	Joyce & Showers, 1988	Knowles, 1980 & 1989
Relevancy	Darling-Hammond, 1995; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Lieberman & Miller, 2002; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Schön, 1983 & 1987	Barth, 1986a & 2001; Levine, 2005; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004	Joyce & Showers, 1982 & 1988; Glickman et al., 1998	Knowles, 1980 & 1989; Lewin, 1948
Supportive	Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; National Staff Development Council, 2001	Barth, 1986a, 1986b & 2001; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004	Joyce & Showers, 1982, 1988; Glickman et al., 1998; Pajak, 1993	Knowles, 1980 & 1989
Problem-centered	Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Schön, 1983 & 1987	Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997	Pajak, 1993; Valli & Hawley, 2002	Knowles, 1980 & 1989; Lewin, 1948

Features of Professional Development	Comparing Features of Professional Development Across the Educational Literature			
	Teacher Professional Development	***Principal Professional Development***	***Clinical Supervision of Teachers***	***Adult Education***
Reflective	Argyris & Schön, 1974; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Day, 1995 & 1999b; Schön, 1983 & 1987	Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Costa & Garmston, 2002; Foster, 1986; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Shields, 2004; Short, 1997	Joyce & Showers, 1982, 1988	Knowles, 1980 & 1989
Capacity-building	Barth, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Dufour, & Eaker, 1998; Lambert, 1988; Smylie & Hart, 1999; Spillane, 2006	Barth, 2001; Levine, 2005	Joyce & Showers, 1982, 1988; Glickman et al., 1998	Knowles, 1980 & 1989
Proactive	Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 2002; National Staff Development Council, 2001			
Comprised of partnerships	Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Day, 1999a & 1999b; Lieberman & Miller, 2002	Barth, 2001; Browne-Ferrigno, 2003; Day, 1999a; Levine, 2005; Wanzare & da Costa, 2005; Wallace, et al., 2007	Oliva & Pawlas, 2004	
Long-term and sustainable	Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006b; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004	Levine, 2005; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Wallace, et al., 2007	Oliva & Pawlas, 2004	

Table 1. Comparing Features of Professional Development Across the Educational Literature

Approaches to School Principal Professional Development

My review of the literature indicates that professional development should encompass a diverse range of learning approaches that principals may engage in, individually or collectively, to allow for continuous learning and reflection. Once again, drawing upon the research on teacher professional development, Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (1995) explain:

> A climate rich in sustained and relevant opportunities for teachers' learning resembles a web, in which networks, seminars, meetings, and focus groups intersect to provide an array of opportunities for teachers. Occasions and opportunities for the intellectual renewal of teachers must be multiplied in diverse rather than generic and discrete if they are to be responsive to specific content-based or learner-based concerns. (para. 37)

It is assumed that aspiring and practicing principals continue to benefit from formalized professional development, including: (a) specific skill and development programs (Glickman et al., 1998), (b) formal university courses and graduate-level studies (Oliva & Pawlas, 2004; Wallace et al., 2007), (c) locally-developed/sponsored professional development in-services (Oliva & Pawlas, 2004), and (d) workshops or institutes (Oliva & Pawlas, 2004). However, the literature related to the use and effectiveness of these approaches with school principals is sparse. The following summary suggests the approaches most commonly used to support the professional learning of school principals:

Problem-Based Learning. Within cognitive psychology, research on problem-solving indicates that *expert* problem solvers develop and draw upon an expansive and inter-connected knowledge base (Allison & Allison, 1993). When principals encounter ill-structured problems, or new experiences, they draw upon an extensive and accessible knowledge base by accessing schemata that frame past experiences (Glaser, 1989). Short and Rinehart (1993) conclude "that the mental networks of meaning (schemata) of experts included more categories, greater detail, and greater interconnectedness than did the mental networks of novices" (p. 88). These findings suggest ramifications for the development of principal professional development and preparation programming.

The complexity of leadership and contextual variables create implications for the design of school leaders' professional development. In an effort to overcome complexity within varying environments, the "use of problem-based cases as a means of developing knowledge that a student would be likely to apply" shows promise as a mode of reflective professional development (Hallinger & McCary, 1990, p. 103). Problem-based learning also appears to be "more effective at promoting spontaneous access outside the classroom than does factually based learning" (Bransford, as quoted in Hallinger & McCary, 1990, p. 104).

Initially used to support the learning of medical students, problem-based learning appears to be potential strategy to support the professional development of school principals (Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Linda, 1992; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992). Linda (1992) describes how learners are presented with a hypothetical situation or problem and work together to devise a solution to the given dilemma. Within the literature on educational administration and leadership, Bolman and Deal (1994) intimate that leaders need to reflect on and explicate the core beliefs that guide their practice. By interrogating beliefs and values through the examination of real-life moral dilemmas and by critiquing the basis for choosing certain solutions, individuals gain a deeper understanding of the ethics that influence their own decision-making. The analysis of moral dilemmas within a group setting shed further light on the extent to which school principals approach and solve problems in different ways depending on their personal values, experiences, race, ethnicity, and gender (Hodgkinson, 1978). Although there is a lack of empirical evidence within the field of principal preparation and professional development that supports problem-based modes of learning, research from other fields supports "the efficacy of embedding learning in problem-based contexts" (Hallinger & McCary, 1990, p. 103).

Reflective and Reflexive Practice. Theoretical lenses that define understanding one's leadership are shaped through the metaphorical analysis of complementary and competing insights offered by different leadership approaches and paradigms (Foster, 1986; Morgan, 1998). Leadership development focuses on the strengths and constraints of different epistemological lenses, and shifting back and forth between different epistemologies creates "bifocal vision and that quality of depth perception necessary for efficacious school change efforts" (Amatea, Behar-Hornstein, & Sherrard, 1996, p.12). The social and collaborative reconstruction of theory and practice potentially produces second-order change (Schön, 1987). Distinctions between espoused theories and theories-in-use may also be illuminated through content analysis of school documents or statements made in meetings, formal presentations, and daily conversations.

Drawing upon the work from Argyris and Schön's (1974) *Theory in Practice*, the writing or development of an administrative platform or educational philosophy has been used as an effective professional development model that allows educators to examine the tension between intention and action or between espoused theories and theories-in-use. Developing an administrative platform is useful for determining epistemology, examining fundamental beliefs that contribute to vision, and analyzing the rules by which individuals operate and make sense of their world – thereby impacting how one sees him or herself as a leader. Because educational platforms are inherently biased, reflective and reflexive practice is required to understand issues and to scrutinize conceptualizations through differing viewpoints.

The use of reflection as a new approach to professional learning that centers on understanding over knowledge acquisition is becoming increasingly prominent. Numerous strategies are used to foster reflection within professional development, including: group reflection (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997), case studies or stories (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997), reflective journals (Costa and Garmston, 2002; Short, 1997; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), reflective writing within the classroom context (Short, 1997), self-reflection (Costa & Kallick, 2000; Short, 1997; Zeichner & Liston, 1996), and portfolios (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004). Within a safe and trusting environment, each of these strategies has been used to analyze real, critical incidents and engage in hypothesis testing through group interaction. Exposure to alternative perspectives, diverse backgrounds, and new frames of thought, is seen as positively impacting critical analysis and problem solving (Bolman & Deal, 1994; Short, 1997).

Action Research. Drawing on the works of Lewin (1948) and Kemmis and McTaggart (2000), action research fosters self-directed and reflective inquiry into one's practice, setting, or system. Key to action research is a desire to expand one's knowledge base, foster critical awareness, and provoke improvement or change (Schoen, 2007). Glickman et al. (1998) place great importance on educators taking responsibility for generating solutions to real problems existing within their schools. As a professional development strategy action research is a process of systematic inquiry into a self-selected problem geared towards greater understanding and ultimately the problem's improvement. Action research allows professionals to challenge espoused theory and tacit knowledge and has the potential to bridge theory and practice (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Practitioners assume ownership for problem identification and investigation.

Professional Learning Communities. Formalized, job-embedded, and impromptu professional development approaches are often found within the context of a professional learning community whereby principals may address common issues, engage in continuous learning, and reduce professional isolation (Barth, 2001; Day, 1999a; Lieberman & Miller, 2002). The notion of professional learning communities is based on the assumption that collaborative learning best enables the sharing of professional concerns and identifying solutions. Professional learning communities may take many forms whereby leaders from different schools or jurisdictions share concerns, expertise, ideas, feelings, and needs within a supportive and collegial environment. Networking often occurs on an ongoing basis within the context of local or national centres, such as the Harvard Principals' Center (Barth, 1986a, Glickman et al., 1998; Lieberman & Miller, 2002). Within mutually-supportive learning relationships, mentoring and coaching may also provide a meaningful and useful strategy for learning about leadership *in* and *on* action.

As of late, new technologies represent a radical shift from current teacher professional development models and have been incorporated into various professional learning community models. Relatively new technologies are being used to address challenges imposed by geography, life stages, underfunding, and recent educational reforms (Schlager & Fusco, 2003). Proponents of new technologies cite the benefits of web-based conferencing, any-time/any-place dialogue, and expedited information dissemination and sharing. Knowing that isolated workshops are not likely to result in significant long-term change and practice, online communities are described by scholars and policy makers alike as providing educators with multiple opportunities to interact about practice and utilizing media that may appeal to different learning styles and individual needs (Rodrigue, 2005). Despite opportunities for greater frequency and longer duration of interaction between professional development participants, online communities of practice still need to be studied in-depth to ascertain technological, social, organizational, political, and cultural factors that may influence the development of individual and collective leadership capacity (Schlager & Fusco, 2003). Although many of the professional development approaches for teachers are readily used with principals, these approaches are rarely interrogated to determine the actual impact on the professional learning of school principals.

Evaluating the Effectiveness of Professional Development

When speaking with different educators, it is readily apparent that the quality of professional development experienced by individuals and groups of educators varies considerably. In addition, policy makers and the general public are skeptical about the merits of professional development and the extent to which teaching, learning, and leadership is actually improved (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003). Skepticism is often addressed by delineating the impact of professional development in terms of intended and anticipated outcomes (National Staff Development Council, 2001). The use of multiple evaluation tools better ensures that different types of evidence and findings are collected to serve the needs of a diverse audience (Guskey, 1998).

Historically, the evaluation of professional development was seen as diverting important attention from the process of professional development planning. In addition to being costly and time-consuming, traditional evaluation was often conducted by outside experts who evaluated the professional development process upon its completion. Seldom were these results deemed helpful to staff developers or meaningful for participants. Guskey (1998) suggested:

> Good evaluations are the products of thoughtful planning, the ability to ask good questions in a basic understanding about how to find valid answers...They are simply the refinement of everyday thinking. Good evaluations provide information that is sound,

meaningful, and sufficiently reliable to use in making thoughtful and responsible decisions about professional development process and effects. (para. 7)

Guskey (1998) outlined three major types of evaluation, including: (a) *planning for evaluation* – occurs before a program or activity begins and assists professional development providers in knowing if the program is likely to produce desired results; (b) *formative evaluation* – occurs during the operation of the program and provides ongoing information as to whether expected process is being made and to determine if modifications are necessary; and (c) *summative evaluation* – occurs at the completion of the program and is intended to judge the overall merit or worth of the program in regards to positive and negative consequences and intended and unintended results that were achieved. Formal and systematic evaluation determines the value and the degree that a given professional development program met intended results, was more effective than past training or competing activities, and if worthy of incurred costs.

Known for his conceptualization of the five critical levels of evaluation, Guskey (1998) arranged evaluation levels on a simple to complex hierarchy. Success at one level is an essential precursor to success at the other levels. Guskey's (1998) critical levels of professional development evaluation considered: (a) participants' reactions, (b) participants' learning, (c) organizational support and change, (d) participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and lastly, (e) student learning outcomes.

In 1996, Guskey and Sparks proposed a model for staff development (not specifically the learning of the school principal) that was based on the premise that many factors immediately and directly influence professional development, including: (a) *content characteristics* – the "what" of professional development, including knowledge, skills, and understandings to be developed; (b) *process variables* – the "how" of professional development, addressing planning, organization, implementation, and follow-up of training activities; and (c) *context characteristics* – the "who, when, where, and why" of professional development that addresses the organizational and system context. This model is foundational to the professional development frameworks of many organizations including the Alberta Teachers' Association (2006b).

Although the majority of studies that report on the evaluation of professional development programming focus on "teacher professional development," aspects of such findings are often assumed to have a degree of applicability to the evaluation of professional development for school principals. Levine's (2005) study is one of a limited number of studies that specifically focuses on the comprehensive evaluation of professional development and university-based programming designed for school principals. Describing the loss of confidence in the public school system and the expanding scope and magnitude of government reforms that school principals need to address, Levine (2005) argued that leadership is critical to providing a quality educational experience for an increasingly diverse student body. Levine also asserted that many

university-based educational administration programs suffered from curricular disarray, low admissions and graduation standards, weak faculty, inadequate clinical instruction, and poor research. In his recommendations, Levine (2005) stated:

> While it is tempting to demand reform solely on the education schools in their leadership programs, there can be no meaningful improvement in the preparation of educational administrators unless states, school districts, and parent universities change as well. Improvement in the conditions of the nation's school leadership programs will require joint action by education schools and their leadership programs, the universities that house them, school districts and states. (p. 5)

Levine (2005) recommends that educational leadership programs must redesigned to include relevant and changing curricula that specifically prepare school leaders and meet their professional needs.

Summary

The theoretical basis for this study was derived from literature in the fields of "School Leadership and the Principalship," "Reflective Practice," and "Professional Development." A review of the literature underscores the importance of providing continuous professional development opportunities to school principals, especially in the area of leadership (Barth, 2001; Levine, 2005). Yet despite an emphasis on creating a new sense of community that demands invention, collaboration, innovation, and reflection, few longitudinal studies have been undertaken to explore principals' perceptions of professional development and the use of reflective practice as a form of professional development. Most programs appear to be based on empirical research related to teacher professional development and adult learning.

As of late, there has been a convergence of practitioners, academics, and policy makers' understanding of the importance of reflective, learner-centered, and collaborative features of professional development. Principals' learning is enhanced with the integration of conceptual understandings with practical knowledge and skills necessary for optimal leadership in diverse and changing situations (Barth, 2001; Holdaway & Ratsoy, 1991; Wallace, et al., 2007). Thinking about what to do within an "intellectually-demanding process" is critical to enhanced practice, decision-making, and leadership (Glickman et al., 1998, p. 370). Professional development that is integrated into the life of the school is viewed as integral to school improvement (Lieberman & Miller, 2002).

As structural-functionalist theories continue to dominate current understanding about educational administration and leadership – emphasizing rational objectives over more humanistic concerns – professional development programming and evaluation often fails to fully consider how principals lead and work within complex, contextually varying environments. Leadership training for school principals should foster problem solving through the consideration

of the conditions under which varying leadership strategies might be applied (Hallinger & McCary, 1999). Furthermore, when principals engage in isolated and independent practice, the emergence of a sense of community is challenging. Numerous scholars (Barth, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Joyce & Showers, 1982; Lieberman & Miller, 2002) assert that collectively sharing expertise and engaging in reflective practice has the greatest potential to transform education.

Through this study, I intend to specifically add to the practical and theoretical understanding of reflective practice and the conditions that support or inhibit reflection as a form of professional learning within the principalship. The following chapter outlines the research design and methodology of this study which explores reflective practice and the principalship.

Chapter Three – Methodology

Introduction

This chapter begins by outlining the research paradigm employed in this study, in addition to exploring my role as the researcher. Next, the methodology is presented, including descriptions of the research design, site, participants, data sources, and data collection and analysis processes. After outlining the delimitations and limitations of the study, trustworthiness and ethical considerations are included at the end of this chapter.

Paradigm

This research aimed to document the experiences and perceptions of school principals involved in the *ROP Institute*; therefore, a constructivist approach was deemed most appropriate to raise conscious understanding of the world view of school principals as they engaged in reflective practice as a form of professional learning (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Rather than a rationalistic or positivistic orientation that would potentially promote a quasi-experimental approach to identifying a single model or "best practice" for reflective practice within professional development, this qualitative research was premised on seeking an understanding of meaning – created by both participants and the researcher – to explore the conditions that principals perceive to support reflection as a form of professional learning. Moreover, the strength of a constructivist orientation, Heck and Hallinger (1999) argue, is "in illuminating that which is little known or hidden from view" (p. 147) by seeking the informative voice of principals regarding their experiences and understandings of reflection and the conditions that support or constrain reflective practice and professional learning.

The methodological direction of this study has been influenced by a relativist ontology (multiple realities and truths may exist simultaneously) and a subjectivist epistemology (understandings are socially constructed between participants and researcher) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Mertens, 2005). Also, by selecting a constructivist framework, the focus was on developing a body of knowledge in its natural context (naturalistic methodology) and from the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon (Mertens, 2005).

Role of the Researcher

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) depict the qualitative, constructivist researcher as a *bricoleur* that assumes numerous roles, along with a variety of tools and practices, to delineate understandings and to construct interpretations. Just like a quilter or film-maker creates textured

montages, the qualitative researcher systematically conducts research and creates a *bricolage* or the reported findings. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe how the *bricoleur* works with contending paradigms and recognizes that research is an interactive process influenced by a variety of factors. As *bricoleur*, I chose to employ multiple methods to seek a range of perspectives and to facilitate (rather than lead) the interviews in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between reflective practice and the professional learning of school principals.

Within qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument – taking an inductive stance and being responsive and sensitive to the context (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 1998). Within this study, it is recognized that I, the researcher and author, served as an instrument for data collection, analysis, and synthesis. As a researcher, I worked to foster relationships indicative of genuine respect for the participants – ensuring minimal risk exposure and upholding ethical procedures. I was highly cognizant that as researcher I inherently assumed a position of authority within an asymmetric relationship; therefore, I had an ethical responsibility to protect participants from harm.

Within constructivism, the researcher is immersed into, and thereby influences, the context being studied – the data belongs to the researcher, the researcher acknowledges personal values and assumptions, and assumes a reflective and reflexive stance. Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that the constructivist researcher is a "passionate participant" (p. 115) that orchestrates the inquiry process and ensures multi-voice reconstruction of meaning. Conscious responsibility must be exercised at all times for interpretations made during the course of the study and when sharing findings. Therefore, great importance has been placed on journaling and regular peer debriefing to reflect on the impact of my own values, assumptions, beliefs, and biases when engaging in data collection and analysis.

Throughout the research process, I envisioned my role similar to Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) description of a researcher who attempts to create a deeper understanding and knowledge of seemingly everyday, yet very complex experiences. Peshkin (1993) surmises that at the very best, the researcher will advance a problem down an "infinite path" for which there is no "one truth," "one reality," or "final solution" (p. 28). This research design reflects my quest to consider school principals' diverse perspectives about reflective practice and the conditions that support or constrain reflection as a form of professional learning.

Research Design

Cognizant of the work of the *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), the research design for this study primarily utilized a qualitative approach to capture detailed and holistic accounts of the *ROP Institute* participants' experiences, expectations, perceptions and understandings about reflective practice in relation to their roles as defined by legislation and policy. To carry out this research, a collective case study approach (Merriam, 2001) using comparative thematic analysis (Stake, 2000) was used. Underpinning these approaches are constructivist assumptions reflecting beliefs that individual perceptions are instrumental in gaining a more nuanced understanding of the reflective practices of school principals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

This study, focusing on the reflective practice component of the *ROP Institute*, was conducted over ten months, from September 2006 – June 2007. When I initially engaged in my literature review, I discovered that the principalship (and school leadership), reflective practice, and professional development are often studied in-depth, but in isolation from each other. In a similar vein, few studies considered these phenomena within the current reform context. Subsequently, I intentionally designed this study to reflect a commitment to a holistic perspective that attends to whole-part relationships by examining the sophisticated interplay between policy and principal leadership, reflective practice, and professional development. To address what Heck and Hallinger (1999) have described as "blank spots" and "blind spots" (p. 141), a richer understanding of principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice as an approach to professional development was garnered through descriptive methodologies such as longitudinal observations and interviews. Meaning has been made by engaging in holistic interpretation, by oscillating between macro and micro, and by navigating and tolerating a degree of ambiguity (Ellis, 1998; Prasad, 2005; Smith, 1993). Moreover, I have "allowed the concepts of importance in the study to emerge as they had been constructed by the participants" (Mertens, 2005, p. 14). Risk-taking was inherent in such work as I had to tolerate a degree of uncertainty as I allowed for an emerging research design. Although this created greater complexity, such coalescence reflects and honors the intricacies of reflective practice in relation to the principalship and shared through the voices of the participants.

Context and Site Description

The Hillview Public School District (pseudo name used to provide confidentiality) was selected because of the jurisdiction's desire to be involved in the *ROP Institute* pilot study during the 2006 - 2007 school year, in collaboration with the ATA and University of Alberta. This urban jurisdiction having fewer than 20 schools in total, is comprised of secondary schools (grades 7-

12) and elementary (kindergarten - grade 6) schools. The district also offers an alternative school program benefiting from established partnerships with varying community organizations. During the 2006-2007 school year, fewer than 10,000 students were enrolled in this jurisdiction from Kindergarten to Grade 12. In addition, offering a variety of programs and settings to provide early intervention support for children from 2 ½ to 6 years of age, this jurisdiction provides programming to meet the special needs of children with speech-language and developmental disabilities. In addition, half- and full-day kindergarten programs are offered at each elementary school.

The *ROP Institute* program (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006a) was comprised of a cohort of thirteen principals, four assistant principals, and three central office personnel (senior administrators, including the superintendent) who spent four full days and three half days in face-to-face workshops and engaged in online discussions and action research throughout the school year. In an effort to enhance professional learning, participants were challenged to reflect on their leadership as school leaders, question their assumptions and practices, and engage in collaborative learning with colleagues. The *ROP* Institute pilot study was established by the ATA to garner greater understanding of professional development that enable principals' ongoing growth towards and refinement of professional practice in relation to the draft PQP document. Professional development topics covered within the workshops and online meetings of the *ROP Institute* are outlined in Appendix A.

Two steering committees guided the design of the *ROP Institute* professional development program. The provincial steering committee included representation from the ATA (four representatives and one provincial principal-at-large), University of Alberta (two professors and myself as research assistant), and Alberta Education (one representative). Secondly, the district's steering committee was comprised of two principals, the assistant superintendent and superintendent of the participating jurisdiction, in addition to one representative from the ATA and another from the University of Alberta.

Both the online and workshop facilitators for the *ROP Institute* were from the University of Alberta, the ATA, and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. In addition, five active school principals served as "critical friends" to groups of participants.

Site Entry

As previously mentioned, the Hillview jurisdiction and ATA invited representatives from the Department of Educational Policy Studies (University of Alberta) to participate on the provincial and district-level *ROP Institute* steering committees. In addition, university

representatives were asked to conduct a formal program evaluation and prepare a report related to the strengths and limitations of the *ROP Institute* (Wright, et al., 2007).

Based on my past professional experience as a principal, consultant, and staff developer, I was asked to assist with the program evaluation in the capacity of a research assistant. Noting that my personal research interests and emerging questions about reflective practice within the principalship related to the goals of the *ROP Institute*, I spoke to my supervisor and the chair of the Department of Educational Policy Studies, in addition to the Hillview superintendent and assistant superintendent, to indicate my desire to also conduct my thesis research within their jurisdiction. Hillview personnel were highly supportive of my research plan and expressed interest in how the findings could potentially shape policy and practice related to professional development and potential principal certification. The superintendent suggested that jurisdiction leaders (that is, central office administrators and principals), should they wish to participate in this study, would also have a rare opportunity to potentially "shape policy".

Once ethics approval was received, I contacted the superintendent of the Hillview school jurisdiction to fully explain the purpose of my study and the nature of the jurisdiction, principal, and central office personnel participation. I sought and obtained permission and written consent to conduct the study within the Hillview jurisdiction (Appendix B). Once written permission was received from the superintendent's office, an invitation to participate along with a consent form was mailed to each participating central office administrator, principal and assistant principal, as well as each online and workshop facilitator.

At a regularly-scheduled *ROP Institute* meeting, additional time was taken to explain the purpose and nature of this study. School principals and central office administrators were also invited and each received a copy of the *ROP Institute* questionnaire (Appendix C) for voluntary completion. Potential dates for focus groups and individual interviews were determined at this meeting in consultation with participants. Written permission was obtained from all participants prior to the completion of the questionnaire and the commencement of focus groups and individual interviews.

Sampling and Participants

The participants in the *ROP Institute* consisted of practicing elementary and secondary principals and central office personnel in one urban school jurisdiction within the province of Alberta, as well as members from the ATA and University of Alberta, active principals that served as "critical friends" and online facilitators, and myself.

All principals, assistant principals and central office administrators were invited to complete the questionnaire and participate in a focus group, individual interview, or both. Eight principals and one assistant principal attended the focus groups. Initially, I had intended to use the focus groups to identify a purposive sample (Wellington, 2000) for the semi-structured individual interviews in an effort to explore a wide range of cases based on varying ages, experiences, background, or qualifications. Because of a low response rate (eight principals and one assistant principal volunteered to participate within the focus groups; initially only one principal and two central office administrators volunteered to participate within the individual interviews), convenience sampling seemed more feasible and more likely to overcome problems of access and gaining entry. This dilemma reminded me of Wellington's (2000) assertion that sampling typically involves "choice and compromise for the researcher" (p. 58).

The sampling process was allowed to evolve through the duration of the study (Mertens, 2005). Ensuring confidentiality and the anonymity of the principals, I have decided to refrain from using pseudonyms due to the sensitivity of many of the participants' comments. Because the *ROP Institute* was an ATA pilot project, the ATA facilitators often discuss and present the project in a variety of public venues (e.g., at the ATA's Provincial Executive meetings). I believe, that in many cases, others were well-aware of the exact identity of the Hillview district and could therefore identify individual participants. Consequently, I felt compelled to further protect the identity of this relatively small group of principals who willingly volunteered to participate in my study. Had I made the decision to remove these sensitive and forthright contributions, I would have lost considerable insight into this work. Furthermore, the originality of my contribution to this study draws from and deconstructs these more sensitive, and largely-ignored, principals' perspectives. Under these conditions, Table 2 provides a general profile of the participants who participated in the focus groups or individual interviews (cognizant that this study draws primarily on the perspectives of principals).

In addition to the information provided above, each principal or assistant principal worked within an urban school setting. One principal held a Doctor of Philosophy degree. Eight principals or assistant principals held or were in the process of completing a Masters in Education degree. One principal and one assistant principal held a Bachelor of Education degree. Only one principal and assistant principal worked within a secondary school. The remaining participants worked at the elementary level.

A total of 8 principals, 1 assistant principal, and 2 central office personnel completed the questionnaire and consented to the use of the questionnaire within this study. Consent was provided for the use of the web site discussions by 6 principals, 1 assistant principal, 2 central

office personnel, and 5 facilitators. Consent was provided by 7 principals, 1 assistant principal, 2 central office personnel, and 3 facilitators to include information from ongoing *ROP Institute* sessions.

Profile of Participants		
Participants in the *ROP Institute*	**Focus Group Participants**	**Individual Interview Participants**
13 principals	8 principals participated in the focus groups: • 2 principals (male) had 10-20 years experience in education, with 6 months – 2 years experience in the principalship. • 6 principals (4 male, 2 female) had 25-35 years experience in education, with 7-14 years experience in the principalship.	4 principals participated in the individual interviews: • 3 principals (2 male, 1 female) had 20-30 years experience in education, with 8-15 years experience in the principalship. • 1 principal (male) had 10- 15 years experience in education, with 2 years experience in the principalship.
4 assistant principals	1 assistant principal participated in a focus group: • This assistant principal (male) had 15-20 years experience in education, with 3-7 years experience in the assistant principalship.	1 assistant principal participated in an individual interview: • This assistant principal (female) had 20-25 years experience in education, with 6-10 years experience in the assistant principalship.
3 central office administrators		2 central office administrators participated in individual interviews.
9 facilitators		3 facilitators participated in the individual interviews. • Included two representatives from the ATA (one was a former principal) and one practicing principal who served as an online facilitator (from an external school jurisdiction).

Table 2: Profile of participants

As it will be explained in the following chapters, trust issues often influenced the participation of school principals within the *ROP Institute* and subsequently this study. However, after conducting the focus groups, three additional principals and one assistant principal

volunteered to participate within the individual interviews. Reflecting upon the reason for this increased participation, I believe that the focus groups allowed the participants to establish greater rapport with me as a researcher through the creation of an environment characterized by openness and trust. Several participants commented that they believed that their perspectives were "heard and honored" in the focus groups; therefore, they were now more willing to participate in the individual interview process. Also, it was observed that in the absence of the *ROP Institute* facilitators and central office administrators, school principals spoke more freely about their experiences and understandings.

All online and workshop facilitators were invited to participate in a semi-structured individual interview. At the time of data collection, only three facilitators volunteered to participate and therefore each was interviewed. Since the writing of these findings, two other facilitators have volunteered to participate, but were not interviewed.

Data Sources and Collection

Data were collected primarily through individual, semi-structured interviews as described by Stake (2000) and focus group interviews as outlined by Mertens (2005). The interview guides were developed through continual review of the literature and discussions with other researchers and practicing principals from another jurisdiction. Other sources included field observations (onsite and online workshop observations, as well as informal conversations), a researcher's journal and questionnaires (Likert-type and open-ended short-answer format allowed participants to provide detailed information in a non-threatening manner). The questionnaire consisted of 54 questions that probed respondents' backgrounds and their experiences in the *ROP Institute*. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix C and a profile of the participants (who completed the survey) along with a descriptive summary of the Likert-type data are presented in Appendix D.

Although this study aims to explicate school principals' perceptions and understandings about reflective practice, I made the decision, on occasion, to integrate the principals' comments and narratives with those of central administrators and online/workshop facilitators. Ironically, each of the central administrators and facilitators had recently worked, or were still working within the principalship. Similarly, the experiences and understandings of the assistant principals were occasionally included as they currently worked in a formal leadership capacity alongside of their principals and were also participating in the *ROP Institute*. This methodological decision was based on my belief that each of these individuals had a very unique perspective about their experiences within the *ROP Institute* because of their respective roles, in addition to their formal

school leadership experience. To distinguish these individuals from participants who are currently practicing as principals within the context of this study, I have introduced specific quotations by referring to the differing roles of participants.

Despite establishing focus group and individual interview dates at one of the regularly-scheduled *ROP Institute* meetings, it quickly became apparent that emerging and unanticipated school and district needs demanded flexible scheduling. Typically communicating through e-mail, as well as over the telephone, focus group and interview times were scheduled over a two-week time period (last week of April and first week of May 2007). Interviews took place at a time that was convenient for participants. Due to the close proximity of the schools, participants recommended that the interviews take place at a central location. The Hillview central office was suggested due to the availability of conference rooms and offices (two facilitator interviews were held in a location of each participant's choice, and one online facilitator interview was conducted over the telephone due to geographic constraints). Participants were most appreciative about efforts taken to accommodate their personal and school schedules.

Practicing principals and central office personnel were invited to participate in focus groups, individual interviews, or both. Three focus groups were held with school principals – each lasting approximately 60 minutes (see Appendix E for guiding questions). Focus groups were conducted after questionnaires had been completed and before individual interviews commenced. Focus groups were viewed as a pertinent data collection method as the interactions between participants "allows the exhibition of a struggle for understanding how others interpret key terms and their agreements or disagreements with the issues raised" (Mertesn, 2005, p. 245).

In addition, 10 individual interviews (4 principals, 1 assistant principal, 2 central office personnel, and 3 workshop/online facilitators) were held. Individual interviews (lasting approximately 60 minutes) were semi-structured to allow for the inclusion of individual differences and were based on information or questions that developed from the focus groups. Guiding questions for the individual interviews are included in Appendix F. Interviews were deemed useful as a means to more fully understand participants' impressions, experiences, and understandings (Mertens, 2005) and to adapt to salient understandings and unexpected responses. As such, semi-structured interviews were used because of the degree of flexibility for the interviewer and participant to clarify and elaborate beyond the scope of the predetermined questions (Wellington, 2000). As the individual interviews were conducted as soon as possible after the initial focus groups, a climate of trust was established and possibly contributed to more insightful responses and dialogue that showed promise in increasing the trustworthiness of my interpretations. During each focus group or individual interview, the purpose and scope of the

study was described. I discussed ethical considerations, including voluntary participation, the right to opt out of the study at any time, and the provisions employed to ensure confidentiality and anonymity (Appendices B and C). After introductions, participants shared their perceptions and understandings related to the research questions provided to them beforehand. The focus groups utilized questions similar to the individual interviews in an effort to provide participants time to reflect more deeply about their personal responses.

Both focus groups and individual interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. I personally transcribed seven of the thirteen transcripts. An outside transcriber was also used to expedite the return of the interpretations to participants for member checking prior to the conclusion of the school year. Interpretations of the interview data, along with verbatim quotes, made on the basis of notes taken during and directly following the interviews, were returned to respondents for member checking approximately one week after the focus group or interview and before final analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Because language can transform the meaning (e.g., depth and clarity of participant's spoken word), member checking ensured that I remembered the participant correctly and avoided potential betrayal of the participant. In addition, my interview technique and ability to paraphrase participant responses improved as a result of transcribing and carefully listening to all audiotapes on repeated occasions.

During my five visits to the Hillview jurisdiction, I engaged in many conversations and both small and large group dialogue within the *ROP Institute* sessions and before and after the interviews. Elements of these observations and conversations were recorded in my researchers' journal and served as a valuable source of data. In addition to recording observations, my researchers' journal documents my own reflective and reflexive thinking related to this study, as well as my personal learning journey.

Data Analysis

The first stage of data analysis occurred while data were collected, and the second stage occurred when data collection was complete (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As such, analysis within this study tended to be recursive in nature as "findings are generated and systematically built as successive pieces of data are gathered" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Mertens, 2005, p. 420).

Initial analysis of data was done by a co-researcher and myself. During and immediately after the interviews, open coding was used to examine transcripts, field notes, and other documents to identify themes and relationships (Mertens, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Data were examined for symbolic language, interactions, and objects that elucidated principals' understandings of reflective practice and professional learning (Hatch, 2002). Through thematic

analysis (Stake, 2000), data were coded and categorized according to patterns and emergent themes related to the purpose of the program evaluation and study (Berg, 2004; Merriam, 1998). As outlined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), coding categories were developed as we reviewed the transcripts for emerging themes (e.g., setting and context, definition of situation and terms, perspectives held by subjects, processes, events, relationships and social structures). A variety of subcategories of broader topics emerged as we initially coded and sub-coded all data. In many cases, units of data had more than one coding category abbreviation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The categories were flexible and modified throughout the data analysis process (Merten, 2005). Supporting quotations were identified, colour-coded, and recorded under each theme listed on the chart paper. Finally, I prepared an electronic document that listed and categorized verbatim quotations illustrative of recurring themes for each of the study's sub-questions. As mentioned earlier, member checks were used to confirm emerging interpretations with participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

During the study, 21 semi-structured questionnaire surveys were distributed to elementary and secondary principals and assistant principals, in addition to central office personnel. Each questionnaire contained two types of items: (a) short answer and (b) forced choice (i.e., Likert-Type). Of the 21 questionnaire surveys distributed, 11 surveys were returned, a 55 % return rate. Of the participants who returned surveys, 8 (38 %) were principals; 1 (5 %) was an assistant principal, and 2 (10 %) were central office personnel. No surveys were returned incomplete. Questionnaire data are only presented descriptively (Appendix D).

After taking a one month break from the data to allow for "reflection" as described by Wellington (2000), I returned to the audiotapes and transcripts to again immerse myself in the voices of the participants and to engage in further content analysis related to the specific research questions for my own study. Using colored copies of each participant's transcript, I cut, sorted, and categorized data. The resulting synthesis was compared to the initial data analysis done with a co-researcher beforehand. This process strengthened my interpretations and allowed me to identify and consider insights afforded by the reading of the same data through different lenses (Morgan, 1998).

Following the recommendation of Guba and Lincoln (1985), analysis was discontinued upon data saturation; that is, additional data analysis appeared to no longer facilitate the emergence of new information. I examined the database "in light of a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories" (Mertens, 2005, p. 423; Miles & Huberman, 1994). At this point, relationships between categories were emphasized, and hypothesized relationships were validated or refined by available data (Mertens, 2005). Consideration was also

given to disconfirming evidence, counter-interpretations, and patterns emerging from an absence of data or lack of patterns (Berg, 2004).

As I prepared to organize and write my findings, I gave much consideration to my presence within this text. Working within a constructivist paradigm, I felt it was most appropriate to use "I" rather than the seemingly more objective use of pronouns or authoritarian wording such as the formal use of "researcher" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As I reviewed my researchers' journal, it was apparent that my role as researcher continuously evolved and changed and was guided by the environment (people and events unfolded in significant and unexpected ways during the *ROP Institute*) as well as through data collection and analysis. Boostrom (1994) explains that the researcher's role should be fluid and that different circumstances position the researcher in different stages, at different times, or in multiple stages at one time. Understanding the roles and stages as described by Boostrom (1994) enabled me to be more self-consciously interpretive and critical. Boostrom's (1994) stages provided a helpful framework to consider my evolution as a researcher during the course of this study, including: (a) *observer as video camera* (recording random and superficial data that does not necessarily depict significance); (b) *observer as playgoer* (being emotionally drawn into the events, lives, and narratives of participants, potentially impacting judgment and limiting interpretations); (c) *observer as evaluator* (developing hasty judgments that "close" the phenomena and do/may not address moral significance); (d) *observer as subjective inquirer* (wondering about significance, generating questions, striving to find meaning by revisiting the data through different questions or lenses); (e) *observer as insider* (realizing that what was observed was not what was initially perceived or understood, moving "outside to inside" to get beyond first impressions and to develop enhanced understanding); and (f) *observer as reflective interpreter* (seeing significance of the phenomena and new meaning). Although this study has evolved to a place where I engaged in more reflective and reflexive interpretation, I recognize that there is much that I still do not see, nor understand.

Trustworthiness

This study draws upon Lincoln and Guba's (1985) seminal work to establish trustworthiness. Constructivist research is evaluated for trustworthiness on the basis of establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1981; Merten, 2005).

Credibility, or the establishment of confidence in the truth of the findings, is contingent on how research is conducted and steps that are taken to ensure interpretations are grounded in data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Within this study, member checks were used to corroborate

researchers' interpretations with focus group and interview participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merten, 2005). Participants were asked to check focus group and interview interpretations (with supporting quotations) for accuracy, as well participants were invited to verify, correct, and elaborate on emerging themes. Feedback from participants was used to make changes to the interpretations. Credibility was further established by engaging in prolonged, sustained engagement (at workshops and on the *ROP Institute* website) that allowed me opportunities to capture salient issues and to note divergent information and themes (Guba, 1981). Engaging in the data analysis with a co-researcher, in addition to continued and regular peer debriefings with academic and professional colleagues allowed me to consider new perspectives and to challenge biases when engaging in data analysis (Guba, 1981). Lastly, data from multiple sources were triangulated to determine consistency (Merten, 2005) and breadth of evidence.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the particular findings of the study have applicability in other contexts or with other respondent groups. It is recognized that the data represent experiences of specific respondents and cannot be generalized broadly to other situations. However, rich illustrative examples, comprised of "extensive and careful description of the time, place, content and culture" are used throughout this report to allow readers to assess transferability of the findings (Merten, 2005, p. 256).

Within this study, *dependability*, or the determination of whether the findings of an inquiry would be repeated if replicated with similar participants within a similar context, has been achieved through overlapping methods that are used in tandem "to overcome invalidities in individual methods" (Guba, 1981, p. 86). To increase dependability and the legitimacy of the methodology and finding, I have created a database of documents, notes, and procedures that traces this study from the initial research questions through to data collection and analysis (Guba, 1981).

In the interests of *confirmability*, I have engaged in methodological triangulation (i.e., multi-method inquiry utilizing a variety of methods and drawing upon a variety of data sources) to enhance trustworthiness of the research. In addition, my individual predisposition was balanced within the context of my work with other researchers as I searched for differing perspectives. My biases, motivations, interests, and perspectives were tested during the peer debriefings already mentioned, in addition to ongoing meetings with my supervisor that were helpful in clarifying the research design and challenging my interpretations. Participation in various conferences afforded opportunities to share my emerging interpretations – this external critique challenged my current thinking and inspired me to consider new and different views of

"what is" and "what might be." As well, continued use of a researcher's journal supported the practices of reflection and reflexivity (Guba, 1981).

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted under stringent ethical codes that adhere to the University of Alberta's ethical standards, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPP Act), and the Alberta Teachers' Professional Code of Conduct. After requesting and receiving ethics approval from the University, jurisdictional approval was sought from the Superintendent of the Hillview district.

In this study, I sought the free and informed consent of participants. The nature of the research was thoroughly explained to participants at the onset of each focus group and interview, identifying: (a) the purpose of this study; (b) how/why the jurisdiction and participants were selected; (c) how research would be conducted; (d) anticipated time commitment for participants; (e) potential risks/benefits to participants, including how privacy, anonymity and confidentiality would be protected; and (e) how/where findings would be disseminated. This information was also provided in the form of a letter and accompanying consent form (Appendix B). Information pertaining to the participants' right to opt out of the study or to exercise of power of veto over any data with which they supplied was also explained in the letter and at each interview. Only data from those participants who supplied written consent was used within this study.

Lastly, participants were provided with my interpretations and accompanying verbatim quotations from each of the focus group and individual interviews. This provided participants with time to review the documents and then to exercise their veto rights if so desired. Minor changes or corrections were made to the documents as requested by a few participants.

Delimitations

The following are delimitations of this study:

1. The research was delimited to the study of one urban school jurisdiction within Alberta, a finite number of school and central office leaders, as well as a finite number of workshop and online facilitators. In particular, this jurisdiction was chosen on the basis that school and central office principals were interested in learning about reflective practice and participating in professional development that supported the growth of school principals.
2. Focus groups and interviews were held in May 2007. At the time of data collection, many ROP participants noted that they had not completed their action research projects. Since many of the participants anticipated that their action research projects would extend into

the next school year, it was difficult to discern the specific learnings related to their individually-selected action research projects.

3. In addition to central office leaders and facilitators, the participants of the study were delimited to principals and other formally-designated school leaders (who participated in the *ROP Institute*).

Limitations

This study had the following limitations:

1. Because the subjects of this study were delimited to principals and other formally-designated school leaders, this sample is not necessarily reflective of other formally or informally-designated school leaders that have leadership duties or capacities within the schools of this jurisdiction.
2. This study relied on participant recollection and voluntary participation. Efforts to triangulate interview data with questionnaires may be limited due to the low return rate of questionnaires. Only 11 out of 21 questionnaires were completed and returned. Subsequently, paradigmatic and methodological choices in the research design may have inevitably produced limitations and invited misinterpretation.
3. Because the primary source of data was interviews (focus group and individual), the data may have been limited by the extent of the participants' willingness to share and dialogue openly about their perceptions and experiences. In some cases, the participants may have only offered socially- or politically-acceptable responses, lacked the knowledge or experiences to respond adequately to the questions posed, or may have derived a different meaning of the questions than intended by the researcher. Participants may have tried to present themselves in a "favourable" manner or may have contributed adversely due to hypothesis guessing.
4. As a recently-appointed principal, I am keenly interested in learning about school leadership and professional development. Within the context of the *ROP Institute*, I participated as a researcher. In addition, I actively participated as a learner, facilitator and "critical friend" within the action research proposal reviews. This inquiry, therefore, was limited to my interpretations of the participant's perceptions in response to the questions asked and observations of ongoing *ROP Institute* sessions. As such, I regularly examined my own taken-for-granted assumptions and biases, particularly since I was also a member of the case being studied. I have made every effort to illuminate my past professional and personal experiences that may have influenced findings through the reflections that I have

included at the beginning and end of this study. I have also engaged in ongoing dialogue with other researchers and my supervisor.

Summary

In this chapter, I outlined the research paradigm employed in this study, as well as my role as researcher. Next, I presented the research design and methodology (i.e., context and site description; site entry; sampling and participants; data sources; and data collection and analysis procedures). The measures taken to enhance the degree of trustworthiness within my interpretations, as well as ethical considerations were fully described. In addition, the delimitations and limitations of this study were presented. The next two chapters are dedicated to my interpretations of participants' responses to my specific research questions.

Chapter Four – Problematizing Reflective Practice and the Principalship

Although reflective practice is receiving great attention and increased support in recent public kindergarten to grade 12 educational discourse, relatively few studies seek the informative voices of principals regarding their experiences and understandings of reflective practice in relation to their roles as defined by legislation and policy. To address this gap in the current educational literature, this chapter addresses the research question, *What are principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice as a professional development approach?*

In this chapter, I explore themes emerging from my data analysis, including: (a) principals' experiences and constructions of reflective practice, (b) the role of the principal, and (c) tensions inherent in a reflective principalship. In addition, this chapter closes with my examination of the participants' perceptions of the overall value of the *ROP Institute* as a form of professional learning that emphasized reflective practice.

Interpretations and Discussion

Principals' Experiences and Constructions of Reflective Practice

Reflective practice appeared to be an umbrella term – definitional diversity was evident in participants' descriptions of reflective practice as related to their prescribed roles. Several participants indicated, "We've been engaged in that [reflective practice] without naming it." Reflective practice was considered to be an important skill, whereby "you reflect on how you've done things and try to make it better the next time you do it." One experienced principal indicated that meaningful reflection must be "proactive, not reactive" to ensure that reflection is "moving towards careful and deliberative actions – reflecting, questioning before moving forward. A culture of inquiry is key to developing a community of learners." Thinking about how the ability to be reflective and to professionally grow required having knowledge of one's self, this experienced principal suggested engaging in:

> Personal reflection on "Who am I? What skills do I have? What do I need to be able to do? How is this? What are the results of my actions?" This is a big piece of being able to grow [professionally].

Few principals described being reflective as an attitudinal feature required in the principalship. However, one experienced principal explained that being reflective is "to cherish creativity and imagination." He argued that imaginative thinking, leveraged through reflection, allows the principal to reconceptualize what schools "might be." Interestingly, this principal had

just completed his doctoral studies in educational leadership. He spoke emphatically about how his recent coursework illuminated the importance of creative, imaginative and critical thinking.

Throughout the majority of interviews, principals alluded to lack of physical and metaphorical space to question or change schools. It appeared that many principals felt that it was unrealistic to expect principals to be reflective practitioners. Off the record, several principals shared stories about their fears or political ramifications that occurred when they had questioned or critiqued educational policies within their district. Demonstrating the attitude or ability to imagine or envision what schools "might be" was not deemed by principals to be realistic or politically astute within the current accountability culture of the province and district. Principals told me that they were not professionally or personally willing to "take risks", "rock the boat," "push too much," or "stick out my neck."

ROP Institute goals emphasized that school leaders would engage in personal, collaborative and professional reflection to enhance leadership practice by critically examining theory and making effective use of multiple sources of data. Early in the program, principals were introduced to the concept of reflective practice in the development of the repertoire of reflection strategies and skills and through the creation of a professional learning community. These communities were supported by face-to-face interaction and sustained by ongoing, online learning. As well, each principal participated in the development of a personal action research project to enhance leadership practice. Strategies such as journaling, portfolios, and engaging in online discussion groups around leadership practice and issues were described by the principals as "contrived." Participants emphasized that you "can't mandate true reflection" at specific times or on predetermined topics or generic issues. Most principals felt that there was not a single, correct form or process to engage in reflection – rather, reflection was highly individualized and that participants should be able to self-select the approaches perceived to be most beneficial.

Questioning appeared to be the most common form of reflection used by this group of principals when confronted by a problematic situations. Questions commonly considered by principals included, "What did you try? What do you need to do next? Where's it going from here?" In addition to questioning, action research was described as a tool to enhance individual and collective reflection "as you are never going to be the same person at the end of this project as when you started, because you will find out some warts or some good things through it." Building upon Dewey's (1939) work that describes reflection as critical inquiry into a problematic situation, it was observed that conflicting viewpoints, pressing issues, or emergent problems prompted questioning and reflection. In these situations, principals self-initiated reflection with colleagues.

Although principals explained *how* to reflect, few described *what* they reflected on. The action research questions self-selected by principals provided some indication of *what* principals were purposefully reflecting on within the formal context of the *ROP Institute* (see Table 3):

Reflections on Practice Institute: **Sample of Participants' Action Research Questions**

1. How do the actions (monitoring and facilitating) that a principal takes influence the professional growth and development of teachers?
2. Can parental involvement in their child's education be improved?
3. What actions and behaviours by an administrator best facilitate teacher supervision and growth?
4. What determinates are necessary for individuals to choose to move into or leave the principalship?
5. How can a faith community and school work together?
6. Will a principal-conducted Walk-Through Program challenge teachers to become more reflective of their teaching practices?
7. How did participation in the *Reflection on Practice* project increase perceived effectiveness of administrators in instructional leadership?

Table 3. Sample of participants' action research questions (action research projects were conducted individually, or in small groups of typically 3 or 4 members)

When asked about *what* preoccupies their thinking, most principals emphasized "improving student achievement, particularly on the PATs [provincial achievement tests]" or "consistently implementing the teacher supervision and evaluation policy." Few principals referred to their self-selected action research projects. In fact, most principals provided generic responses such as "reflection would be looking at those things that you are presently doing, and deciding if those practices are beneficial to others, and beneficial to you in helping to increase student learning." Key issues raised in recent Alberta policies (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003; Alberta Education, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c; Alberta Initiative for School Improvement, 2007; Alberta Teachers' Association, 2004a, 2004b) were noticeably absent from participants' descriptions. Rather, most principals seemed preoccupied with technical issues related to district procedures and school practices (e.g. fundraising initiatives, implementing the new teacher supervision policy, recruiting more students). Subsequently, specific issues related to the current Alberta educational context, (e.g., diversity, Aboriginal education, English as a Second language learning, poverty, inclusion, schools of choice and assessment) were rarely contemplated. Even after probing for specific examples within the interviews, my understanding of *what* these principals reflected upon, within the context of the *ROP Institute* and daily practice, remained ambiguous and tentative.

Within the *ROP Institute*, structured opportunities to engage in reflective practice enabled some participants to uncover and address differences between *espoused theories* and *theories-in-use*. The use of educational literature related to professionalism and instructional leadership prompted thinking and dialogue related to moral responsibilities inherent in the principalship. When discussing the ethical tensions inherent in the principalship, one experienced principal stated, "Just because a practice works doesn't mean it's good... right...educational." Another experienced principal stated,

> Reflection and activism are related to professionalism. We need to speak out and critique what is not in the best interests of students. We need to articulate our practice to parents and make it transparent. "This is what we will do and why." We need to articulate our decisions.

Contesting traditional schooling practices, another participant urged examination of what is "socially worthwhile. Look at phonics, worksheets, streaming. Who benefits? Who loses? What are the equity issues?" Such responses indicated that within the context of the *ROP Institute*, some principals were examining and challenging the status quo through what Starratt (1991) identified as an "ethic of critique" (p. 188). Within the context of these dialectical and reflective conversations, some principals considered ethical and moral issues, confronted highly-structured boundaries, challenged pre-existing norms, and interrogated taken-for-granted assumptions. These conversations were skillfully prompted by the facilitators' questions after principals read various articles from the current educational literature. These articles included: (a) *Teachers' perceptions of principals' instructional leadership and implications* by Blase & and Blase (2002); (b) *A framework for shared leadership* by Lambert (2002); and (c) *Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership* by Hallinger (2003).

Reflection was used in conjunction with problem solving and decision making. However, one principal challenged the notion of reflection as mere problem solving. He argued, "You can't always talk about problems. We're doing lots of good things in our classrooms." This principal felt that reflection should also include celebrating successful and innovative AISI projects. Celebrations usually entailed descriptive accounts of a situation or problem. Considering the impact of school improvement reforms and initiatives on her school and leadership practice, another principal shared:

> We go from unit-to-unit and project-to-project and we spend so much time planning and implementing that we really don't reflect. We might celebrate, but we really don't take the time at the end to sit down. In my practice, I have to consistently build in those questions – What can we learn from this? Where can we go with it? We are on a rushed treadmill for time, and I don't think we do it [engage in reflective practice] enough...I really need to strategically focus on reflection more and collectively.

In this case, looking back to celebrate accomplishments was viewed as a beginning point for reflection.

Most principals provided ambiguous descriptions of how reflective practice potentially impacted teaching practice and student learning. Most comments reflected a commonly-held understanding that student learning should be a priority. For example, after engaging in an online reflective activity requiring principals to analyze the use of their time during the workday, one experienced principal wrote:

> I think the most frustrating thing is, what should be getting the most attention in time – is not. Having seen it in black and white [recording actual use of time in one's journal] should help to refocus on what is important and how to add a few minutes to each day to get the paperwork back in place.

As he examined his weekly schedule, this principal grappled with his own problem (the need for more time) while questioning his values and beliefs that were demonstrated with his current use of time. He began to critique his use of time – considering the perspectives of teachers, students, other school members, and central office administrators. Principals' constructions ranged from technical to more critical and ultimately ethical and moral forms of reflection.

Principals shared their experiences and understandings of reflection – both individually and collectively. Most principals espoused the benefits of collective inquiry. This was emphasized by one principal who shared:

> Reflection at its best is when you're reflecting with others. It's not … something that you do by yourself. By being introspective and thinking and just keeping things to myself I'm not gonna learn … I like to have some validation about what I'm thinking, I'm doing. I don't want to… go off on a tangent.

One newly-appointed principal highlighted the importance of drawing upon the expertise and experiences of colleagues while engaging in reflective practice. His leadership team met weekly to discuss unanticipated issues or problems:

> What happened? Have you had any experiences like this before? How have you dealt with it? What do you recommend? What are the pros and cons? The side effects? And so we do some reflection together before we get to the solution.

Reflection was enhanced through both an individual's or group's deliberate intentions to confront existing structures that perpetuated largely unexamined assumptions. To some extent, I was surprised at the great emphasis that principals placed on collective reflection. However, these comments are indicative of current research suggesting that effective leadership is related to the commitment and capacity of principals to engage other school members in reflective practice and

problem solving around school improvement issues (Barth, 2001; Day, 2000; Leithwood & Hallinger, 1993; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Schön, 1983).

Principals described how diverse viewpoints prompt reflection. *ROP Institute* participants reported that the self-selection of mentors, action research group members, and "critical friends" contributed to richer reflection and critique. One principal suggested, "We need one another's ideas for stimulation and we need one another's perspectives to enrich our own. We need others' wisdom and ideas to make new insights and wise decisions." A central administrator agreed and suggested:

> It would almost be nice to have someone come in and look with you and almost ask questions that you haven't asked.... There may be a gap that is pretty clear if you are looking from the outside, but because you are so internal, you haven't thought about it as you are so immersed in it.

These data point to the benefit of collaboration, dialectical engagement, and inquiry within the context of a learning community. When multiple and conflicting viewpoints existed, principals were forced to consciously construct the particular reality of their administrative and leadership practice through different lenses. Confrontation of thinking and examination of practice occurred through meaningful dialogue with others from inside or outside of the school or district. On the one hand, most principals felt that opposing perspectives were necessary if the outcome of reflection was learning and the possibility of change. Yet on the other hand, conflicting viewpoints posed ambiguity and discomfort for the principals that I interviewed because "it is exhausting to deal with everyone's ideas and needs. Getting consensus is painful." This notion of "consensus" did not appear to honour the espoused valuing of diverse viewpoints.

Collective reflection was challenging at times. One program facilitator, a former principal, suggested that principals need protocols for engaging in meaningful reflection "with a critical view. This is not criticizing. We need protocols so that individuals don't need to defend their practice." For example, a "critical friends" protocol was used within the *ROP Institute*. At times, "critical friends" provided input and critiqued each other's action research projects. The intent of this protocol was to challenge the insular context of the action research projects and to provide intellectual change and stimulation within a supportive environment. Although recognizing the potential benefits of using protocols to shape and guide professional dialogue, I sensed a tension, whereby such protocols fostered highly normative reflective "practices" that further weakened the notion of reflection within the current educational context. When critiquing each other's action research projects, principals typically provided feedback related to typographical errors, inconsistent formatting on the documents, and general questions about methodology. Most times, principals provided each other with positive feedback or compliments.

Rarely did I observe principals challenging each other in regard to the purpose of the study, ethical implications, or embedded values. While Day (1999b) purports that reflection is enhanced with "critical friends," my data suggested that "critical friends" protocols diluted problem solving, constrained reflection, and strained imaginative thinking. The predetermined confines of such protocols restricted the capacity of principals to speak openly and to reconstruct their professional understanding. Furthermore, like-minded colleagues that served as "critical friends" did not promote reflective or reflexive thinking. Rather, current practices and beliefs were perpetuated and validated.

Considering how all stakeholders may potentially enhance student learning, one principal declared that problems are better solved collectively because "the parents are part of the answer. The teachers are part of the answer. Everyone feels like they're contributing to the whole ... So it's a total team approach." One principal argued that school leadership was enhanced through the involvement and participation of others, "The key role of a principal is to work with students, parents and teachers. Also, the school community. We can only improve our school if everyone contributes is a way that is real for them." Moreover, a newly-appointed principal suggested, "My key role is to get teachers talking and collaborating around school-side issues. They know the issues better that I do...better than the parents or central office." With the exception of these few comments, principals rarely spoke about the inclusion of parents and students within collective reflection for school improvement. The extent that non-traditional perspectives of school leadership, related to influence and inclusion, were considered to achieve successful school improvement was unclear. In fact, data were indicative of social relations that exemplified "collaborative, but exclusionary professionalism" (Hatcher, 2005, p. 263) in the absence of opportunities for others to engage in reflection around school issues. Participants emphasized that negotiating complex social relations was only facet of their role as principals.

The Role of the Principal

Within Alberta, principals must hold a valid teaching certificate. Although *teaching* is not identified in local or provincial policy pertaining to the role of the principal, many principals still identified with *being a teacher* – teaching was considered integral to their work and role as principals. For example, one principal explained:

> Educational leadership requires that we continue to be teachers...I don't mean by that that administrators should teach full time in the classroom but it means that they have to see their role to be a teacher. When a discipline case comes to office, my job isn't to consequence and discipline, my job is to teach. When I have a teacher, with a challenge – whether it's a competency issue or some other personal issue – my role primarily is to teach. When parents come in with their issues, I'm going to teach. To me, the most

> effective teachers and leaders are those that see, as their first priority, developing relationships. So, as a leader, I need to be concerned with developing relationships with the children, with the staff, with the parents, with my colleagues. When I do that, then they'll permit me to teach.... If we don't make connections, then they won't permit us to teach or to lead.

As she prepared to assume a new role as a principal in the upcoming year, one of the assistant principals stated, "I am at the core a teacher so it's hard to wrap my head around what my new job could look like." A more experienced principal focused on this transition from teacher to principal:

> I've always been a teacher...learning has been my passion and reason why I go to work each day. All of a sudden you have this new role and not much relates to teaching and learning...I stumbled around to understand how to do my work... I have learned to keep the teaching...I teach daily...teaching gives me energy to do the paperwork in my office. It models that teaching is valued to my staff and parents. It requires finesse to move from teacher to leader, back to teacher all day, each day.

The capacity to lead was contingent upon, and often equated to, the principal's ability to build relationships and to teach others. For principals to understand classroom conditions and to demonstrate empathy for teachers, another principal lamented the need to teach while working in the principalship. For example, she argued:

> As a principal, would I have any empathy with my staff who's saying, "Come on, we've got way too much to do and don't add that to our plate?" No, not unless I'm in the classroom and I know how busy it is. It reminds you of why you were there in the first place. We didn't go into teaching to be administrators.

Although these principals' notions of their identity as principals were provisional, and at times contradictory, most consistently identified with *teaching* as one of the key facets of their role within the principalship. Principals constantly reinvented, renegotiated and reconstructed their roles. The composition of one's role as principal was constructed through individual reflection and in relation with others. However, my data did not specifically reveal how identity is redefined, named, and produced when a teacher was socialized into the principalship.

Personal disposition and readiness fostered reflection. When describing reflective practice, one participant shared:

> Reflective practice is there's something that's related to openness and commitment. It's personalized. The big difference to me – like I can think of one of my friends who navel gazes a lot – he never personalizes. Personally, he wants to talk about things that are just a little bit further out than in his personal space. He can talk about whatever in education, but he talks about it "out here" – away from him. It's de-personalized.

He further explained:

> Reflective practice is personalized. You have ownership of it...Part of that openness is the outcome. You want to know, "Am I doing it right or is there a better way to do it?" That's the reflective practice. You think, "Okay, I'm on the right track. This is affirming. I know what I'm doing. I never thought about that...That's a good point. Maybe I need to alter this or change this or think more deeply about what I am doing." That's how I would see it being different than navel gazing. [Reflection] becomes very much more personal.

Principals who discussed issues at "arms length" engaged in what appeared to be technical, descriptive, and at times superficial reflection.

As principals personalized their reflections, they became increasingly critical and at times more reflexive. For example, one participant expressed frustration navigating conflicting stakeholder (e.g., provincial Ministry, central office, teachers, parents, students' views). He reflected on the limited autonomy as a professional:

> One is, do I have the skill set to do what I'm being asked to do, and two, how do I really feel about what I'm being asked to do? I think the bigger challenge, for me to be honest with you, is to work and get some kind of common understanding of how we feel about what it is we're being asked to do with kids.

Several principals described facing similar ethical dilemmas when engaging in certain provincial or jurisdictional improvement initiatives. For instance, one principal contemplated the emphasis placed on accountability and "expecting my teachers to teach test-wiseness to students while I don't even support standardized testing. What is the purpose of this? Getting good results on the tests is highly valued by our parents. That's the nature of this area." In a similar vein, another principal was frustrated with "the time I spend marketing my school so that I can increase my enrolment ends up being a loss of time with my teachers and students." One principal further considered the marketization of schools and questioned, "Why do we do this? It is money thrown in the wind. I feel uncomfortable with wanting some kids and not others. Aren't we supposed to teach and nurture all kids?" At times, principals recognized alternate viewpoints, explored and clarified different values, and considered moral, ethical and socio-political issues. My data illuminated the inevitably value-laden nature of decision-making and leadership as described a Greenfield (1993) and Hodgkinson (1991).

Many of the principals argued that reflection must be authentically owned. "I was interested in doing it for my own edification. It was for my own professional growth – it wasn't something for somebody else," stated one experienced principal. A newly-appointed principal shared, "We wanted to find out who we are." Moreover, one facilitator, a former principal, spoke to the importance of understanding one's self as a precursor to engaging others in reflection:

> As a leader, people need to know where your flag is in the ground. I think you model that. I think you articulate that...I think you make people aware of your own and their

> conceptual framework. We have a lot of safe conversations and we talk about stuff. We either rattle that cage or we allow them to add to it.

This understanding of self and group identity was viewed as a critical to providing effective leadership and challenging the status quo.

Although participant responses demonstrated that school principals felt it was important to engage others in reflective practice – overall, less emphasis was placed on intentionally enhancing their *own* capacity to engage in reflective thinking. For example, when asked how engaging in the *ROP Institute* enhanced his own understanding, one central office participant commented that "I don't know that my notions of reflective practice have changed. I hope the administrators' notions of reflective practice have changed." This was echoed by one principal who suggested that "time is better spent on getting the teachers to reflect. Principals already do this." On another occasion, one principal stated how he perceived his participation in the *ROP Institute* was beneficial to his new teachers' role conceptualization:

> It actually moved to a more reflective practice approach with teachers. I usually will ask them questions and I think they know that when they come to the office ...Most of the time I'm going to ask a question and get them to think through it first ... Reflective practice is a real big part of my own practice. I use it a lot with beginning teachers. Some beginning teachers are quite frustrated when they don't get an answer from me right away. I quite often will say, "I have an answer but I'm not going to give it to you."

Risk-taking appeared to be inherent in reflective practice: "Being reflective takes a lot of confidence because you always walk that fine line between...you know, beating one's self up." Within the *ROP Institute*, the emphasis on reflection also periodically prompted enhanced reflexivity. The notion of reflexivity was evident in one participant's interpretation of action research: "We all have biases. Reflect on this. Methodology affects biases. Find out what they are. What is bad is when we don't know when our underlying beliefs are influencing our understanding and methodology." She stressed the importance of continuously "questioning your bias – recognizing it and questioning it. And also looking at the evidence and being able to interpret that evidence and bias that might be in the evidence." Analysis of data generated through action research also prompted another experienced principal to challenge her own long-standing beliefs and practices. She described her new insights as "thirty-three years out the window. It's like you have things that you've held onto...I believed that [referring to her deeply-entrenched understanding] so strongly. It takes a real paradigm shift to move forward." This principal exemplified the difficulty and importance of critiquing one's personal habitus (Bourdieu, 1974) and how reflection elucidates possibilities and limitations for learning and change. Arguing that individual learning is amplified through reflection, Bourdieu (1974) surmised that schools

reproduce societal structures and preserve social privilege through unconscious systems and institutionalized practices which he refers to as *habitus*. Throughout the year, I observed this principal engage in self-conscious reflection through her action research project. Action research allowed her to examine her personal *habitus* as she critiqued the taken-for-granted beliefs and values implicit in her practice. Data from the action research prompted interrogation of her long-standing understandings of how the home and school should work together. The data she collected disrupted her current thinking about her role and prompted consideration of the implications for her practice. I observed how reflection continuously impacted this principals's beliefs, values, and therefore her identity and role. She often described her identity and practice as "fluid," "in a state of flux," and "always changing and evolving." These descriptions were similar to research that suggest that the formation and reconceptualization of identity involves "continual re-skilling" (Biggs, 1999) and "re-creation" (Senge, 1990). When a principal wholeheartedly and openly embraced reflection, there appeared to be understanding and a degree of comfort with identity being as "an unstable, shifting, and volatile construct, a contradictory and unfinalized social relation" (Britzman as cited in Sumara and Davis, 1999, p. 191); however, tension still existed as principals tried to engage in reflection within the context of their mandated role.

Tensions Inherent in a Reflective Principalship

Many principals felt that reflection was essential to determining an effective leadership response to a given problem. Just as Ryan (2003) argues that the context is critical to understanding how organizational life is shaped, one participant maintained, "Each individual building has to be taken into consideration." Principals recognized a virtually unlimited repertoire of leadership practices that school principals may invent or enact when responding to a challenging situation. For example, one experienced principal explained how "you could approach school improvement as an instructional leader. If we want change, and I mean real change, we need to use transformational leadership practices." Other participants suggested that reflective practice enables a principal to assess a situation and determine the best leadership approach to enact. As he considered the emerging issues in his school, this newly-appointed principal explained how "I constantly have to think about things. I have split seconds to think about what happened and who is involved. I try to guess what's the best course of action before I make a decision." Another principal tried to "slow everything down" so that "everyone involved can have input. We need to reflect on all sides and perspectives so that you can figure out the next steps."

During the focus groups and interviews, principals questioned the predominant emphasis on instructional leadership within the *ROP Institute* workshops and materials. Several principals espoused the benefits of teachers serving as instructional leaders:

> We've got somebody on staff now that's really good. I'm giving her the opportunities to go to schools and see what's going on and bring it back to share. Maybe that's what the instructional leader means – it's not doing it all yourself.

These findings challenge traditional conceptualizations of instructional leadership that emphasize the principal's role in directly supporting teaching and learning, defining mission, and managing curriculum and instruction (Hallinger, 1992; Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a). After reading several articles on instructional leadership, principals reflected on what resonated with or challenged their beliefs about leadership. One principal expressed discomfort with the notion of instructional leadership and stated, "It puts me in a position where I'm supervising teachers. I'm not comfortable doing that because I'm a classroom teacher, as well as an administrator, and I would never put myself above another teacher professionally." Similarly, Smylie and Hart (1999) would argue that social trust is enhanced when principals relinquish control and share authority with teachers. One principal indicated that he had:

> An automatic bias because I see transformational leadership as being more powerful. It fits with my belief about our role and how we help people be the best that they can be and exceed their expectations and empower people. There's quite a difference in those approaches.

The emphasis on instructional leadership directly competed with this principal's philosophical beliefs about his role as a transformational leader.

With the evolution of school-based decision-making, principals described how they struggled with balancing management and leadership roles. Participants indicated that their work responsibilities increased at a time when provincial funding had decreased or remained constant. As a result, many principals assumed classroom teaching assignments "as much as 0.6 FTE, in addition to working as a full-time principal." For these principals, they struggled with "knowing I am responsible for my students and teaching while still being legally responsible and held accountable for all of the principal's responsibilities." One experienced principal stated, "It is out of my hands. I don't decided what to spend my time on. The problems and tasks make my day – what it is or is not – and how much time I can think or not think." Similarly, another principal shared that "I go to work with my day planned, and very soon something happens and my day is no longer my own." Offering his own following perspective about the tension between transactional and transformational responsibilities, another principal offered a third and differing perspective:

> Stephen Covey has some really interesting ideas on that. He differentiated between urgent and important. Sometimes they are one and the same and sometimes they are not. That is always stuck with me as I continued to struggle with the whole issue of leadership versus management.

All principals continuously coped with different constraints; however, few principals felt that they had the autonomy and control over their work priorities and the extent to which they pursued these priorities. During the interviews, I noted that principals often focused on responses and reactions to external change. Principals suggested that within the current policy context, they have little latitude to initiate change, to be creative, and to reflect. This contrasts the work of Sergiovanni (1991) and Zaleznik (1989) who maintained that leaders should be proactive and self-initiate change; as well as Burns (1978) who described leadership as causative when leaders and followers interact and produce a causal effect on political institutions and social relations. My observations led me to believe that these principals felt that the *system* (e.g., various stakeholders and bureaucratic practices and policies) shaped their work, role, and identity. Few principals expressed having the legal and moral autonomy to change or influence the system.

In some cases, principals identified the need to reflect on current schooling practices and the changing educational landscape. For instance, one principal stated, "Things are changing here with the number of ESL [English as a Second Language] learners. Many of our families are new to Canada and don't speak the language." Other principals spoke the uneasiness and uncertainly associated with "expecting a huge influx of Aboriginal students," "dealing with declining enrolment is a reality in this older neighbourhood," "struggling to keep up with the latest technologies," and ensuring "students come to school fed." Recognizing that principals need to draw upon new and different skill sets to reflect upon and respond to tensions that characterize Albertan education, many participants recommended the inclusion of content (into the *ROP Institute*) that was indicative of various conceptualizations of leadership. In particular, one principal shared that "even the concept of instructional leadership has to change for today's schools." Another principal argued that "we should have had additional content on transformational leadership if we really want enhanced leadership practice and school improvement." In contrast, other data suggest that less experienced principals still valued and expressed a need for content related to instructional and managerial leadership approaches because "without these basics on running a school, I will never get to thinking about the big issues." The majority of participants also indicated that the *ROP Institute* content related to instructional leadership did not challenge traditional role-bound theories of leadership and therefore did not consider how "we share leadership" and "we don't lead single-handedly

anymore. It is a team effort." I found it interesting that principals appeared to dispute role-bound theories of instructional leadership, yet they continually spoke about "needing more time so I attend to important instruction matters." It is unclear as to what instructional leadership meant to these principals.

Many principals indicated that participation in the *ROP Institute* resulted in the convergence of their understanding of being a reflective practitioner with more transformational notions of leadership. One principal intimated:

> Part of the problem is transformational leadership is an unbelievably high standard. It's not like I'm being a transformational leader every day I'm walking around the school. But, it [reflection] does create a vision of what the potential is....So, we need to go and look at "What are our leadership practices? How do we be more effective?" It needs to fit that transformational model. We also need to understand that transactional part. Yet there's a whole bunch of management things we need to do too.

However, during the course of the *ROP Institute*, principals struggled with messages that emphasized "improved leadership practice for continuous school improvement." Grappling with conflicting values, these principal were frustrated with the paradox inherent in more humanistic or transformational aspects of their roles. One principal questioned his role as principal:

> What is the moral purpose of school? With a social focus we try to widen our vision of schooling. What is **my** broad purpose? How is what **I** am doing contributing to the big picture? [bolded emphasis as per the intonation and volume of the participant's voice]

Although encouraged to be reflective practitioners, principals were expected to honor, protect and champion existing district and provincial mandates. While focusing on preserving and sustaining what was thriving within their schools, principals felt pressured to embrace change and continuously seek innovation. Despite being encouraged to be reflective practitioners, principals were preoccupied with identifying and applying predetermined responses or solutions to given problems "that inevitably come up unexpectedly and require immediate attention. Right away there is another situation or problem to deal with. It is never ending. When do you have the time to go back to the first problem and reflect?" Clearly, principals struggled to find time to reflect on their work when they faced numerous school-based decisions demanding immediate action and timely decision making.

As I explored principals' experiences and understandings of reflection, I noted a number of tensions inherent in a reflective principalship. Principals experienced role conflict as they were "always wearing a different hat" such as principal, instructional leader, community advocate, teacher, colleague, transformation leader, reflective practitioner, and critical friend. Within the current accountability context, principals struggled between meeting the diverse needs of students

and meeting high standards. Differing values complicated matters. In fact, many principals felt that they had to navigate reform agendas that were in conflict with their own personal beliefs. Moreover, as principals worked at implementing reform mandates, they expressed a diminishing sense of professional satisfaction and autonomy.

Overall Participant Perceptions of the Value of the ROP Institute

Participants' perceptions varied when asked, "How effective was this program as professional development that supported reflective practice and addressed principals' professional needs?" Interview data from participants seemed to cluster into three broad groups.

For the first group of participants, the "Non-Contesters," engaging in the *ROP Institute* was not perceived as "transformational learning." Rather, participation reaffirmed and validated existing practices. For example, one principal indicated "my view of leadership and my practice as a leader hasn't been significantly altered from this experience." Another principal shared how "my current practice has been confirmed as being appropriate." In these cases, the *ROP Institute* often reminded participants of important information about leadership practice. One principal explained, "I don't know if the effect has been powerful. I guess probably it's caused a lot more reflection for me and some practices have changed but it wasn't transformational." Reflective practice, for these principals, was seen as interesting, yet not significant enough to create change or prompt learning.

For a second group of participants, the "Resistors," they expressed indifference or a degree of negativity regarding this professional development experience. One principal reported, "I don't really know if it has changed me as a leader, like my philosophy in leadership. I don't think it has." Another claimed that he valued the collaboration, but the online component "was just a waste of time...I got more out of meeting with my group, like the networking and the interaction that way, meeting face-to-face rather than the computer thing, which just didn't work." For some of the participants, "the low-light of the program was the additional workload, particularly with the online meetings and the additional burden on those of us [principals] that come from smaller schools." For this group of principals, reflective practice was viewed as "contrived" or as "another thing to do."

The third group of participants, the "Converted," recognized the value of the *ROP Institute* as a model to support reflective practice and the professional learning of principals. One principal suggested that he was "more passionate...than I was before. I think the reflective practice thing really solidified that vision." For another, the action research project was:

> A perfect fit ...we didn't really pay attention until this happened. We didn't really evaluate what we had until we started doing this and then we started thinking about what we're actually doing. With *Reflections on Practice* we started reflecting on this practice and ... now it's become who we are.

As noted in my researcher's journal, one of the newly-appointed principals felt that the collaborative practice derived from his leadership team's (principal and assistant principals) participation in the ROP action research project was just what his team needed "to survive." The collaboration and "constant dialogue kept us alive and healthy. This has influenced the culture of the school and how we treat each other, how we determine what is best for kids, and how we include everyone in decision-making." Reflecting on the reason he continued to participate in his action research project, one principal suggested:

> If it had become nothing but an academic exercise, or if had really started to interfere with our capacity to carry out our responsibilities, we would have all stepped back one at a time, or as a group. And so, the fact that we're here is evidence that this has been worthwhile.

Interestingly, three weeks after the interviews (last week of May 2007) the insights shared during a large group session (with the majority *ROP Institute* participants present) regarding the extent that the *ROP Institute* fostered reflective practice and professional learning were significantly more positive from the group as a whole. I attributed this partly to the fact that during the interviews, most principals were still deeply engaged in their own data analysis related to their self-selected action research projects. At the large group session, one principal stated, "now that I'm finished my project, I feel a greater sense of accomplishment." Most of the principals nodded in agreement and also indicated they were eager to share their findings and results with colleagues.

Summary

This chapter outlined principals' experiences and constructions of reflective practice, the role of the principal, and the tensions inherent in a "reflective principalship." In order to ascertain the conditions that enable or inhibit reflection and professional learning, participants' overall perceptions of the value of the *ROP Institute* as a form of professional learning were also presented. Specific conditions will be presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five – Conditions That Support or Constrain Reflection and Professional Learning Within the Principalship

Moving from a more traditional, stand-alone inservice model, the *ROP Institute* design emphasized professional reflection to enhance principals' instructional leadership practice. Key understandings underpinning the *ROP Institute* included: (a) principals are members of the teaching profession and, as such, have a responsibility to on-going professional growth; (b) development of leadership practice is a personal journey, is situational (contextual), and a career-long process; (c) reflection is a critical factor in the development of leadership practice; and (d) effective professional development is collaborative, research-based and grounded in practice (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006a). Within the *ROP Institute*, there were three major foci: (a) the introduction of the concepts of reflective practice in the development of the repertoire of reflection strategies and skills; (b) the creation of a professional learning community supported by face-to-face interaction and sustained by ongoing, online learning; and (c) the development of personal action research projects to enhance leadership practice (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006a).

Within Chapter Five, I take into consideration the participants' overall perceptions of the value of the *ROP Institute* and other data from the interviews and focus groups to address the following sub-questions: *What conditions do principals perceive support reflection as a form of professional learning?* And, *what conditions do principals perceive limit or constrain reflection as a form of professional learning?* Participants' insights into the conditions that support reflection as a form of professional learning are reported on in the first section titled, "Converging Perceptions of the Conditions that Support Reflection as a Form of Professional Learning." The second section of this chapter discusses "Problematic Conditions That Constrain Reflection."

Converging Perceptions of the Conditions that Support Reflection as a Form of Professional Learning

In this section, I explore principals' perceptions of the conditions that support and enhance reflection as a form of professional learning. I have organized this section under the themes of "Time," "Trust" and "Relevancy."

Time

Principals spoke about the *ROP Institute* as "a welcomed change in how we use principals' time and how we go about our work." In the past, principals gathered at meetings that

were more "information sharing or more policy based. There is usually no component of professional development" or collective reflection. Subsequently, some principals felt that the scheduled and informal collaboration time that emerged out of participation in the *ROP Institute* provided space "to share information and to explore our own personal goals as administrators in a non-threatening way."

Participants felt that the time spent with colleagues was valuable. In fact, it was widely recognized that "We all had something that we had learned in the research. But keeping it to ourselves doesn't improve your practice." Describing how principals initially collaborated to address problems, one principal observed how the time provided through participation in the *ROP Institute* allowed "the principals' group came together in a more positive kind of way" to share ideas that would foster "better teaching and learning." One principal indicated that structured time enabled learning "even more about ourselves because it forced us to reflect and think and talk." Similarly, a newly-appointed principal considered the time commitment inherent in the *ROP Institute* and suggested, "We were kind of forced into collaborating. It led us to talk about what is it that we do, what's working, what's not working and why it is important."

Study participants spoke about scheduling and structuring time for professional development during the work day. Efforts were under way to reconceptualize the regularly-scheduled principal meetings to provide a "half day, once a month...which wouldn't be pulling us out of the school excessively. It would be on company time and would be inclusive of everyone." It was felt that an "additional Tuesday afternoon isn't going to be felt deeply by anybody within the [school] buildings, because there is an expectation or an understanding that Tuesday afternoons is a day when principals are busy out of the building." This move towards "common half days across the system for people to meet" resulted from "much of the discussion between schools that helped foster this understanding that the dialogue is important and having it at all levels of the organization is necessary to develop professionally." Valuing the structure and space provided within the context of the *ROP Institute*, this participant stated:

> We've operated cognitively at a different level. How do we create that space for other principals to learn through discussions of theory and practice? How do we create space for teachers? If we value this professional experience, how do we highly prioritize [our time and resources] and make this space available?

Scheduled and structured time appeared to reduce isolation and foster collaboration, as well as enhancing "good communication. It is on an annual calendar and people plan around it to make arrangements." In addition to communicating the importance of learning to stakeholders, most participants felt that scheduled time increased accountability "for me to come prepared for and to attend the sessions." Participation in the *ROP Institute* allowed for time to rethink existing

structures that limited the creation of collaborative communities of practice that "improved my leadership skills and practice as a principal." Time and time again, principals argued that the benefits accrued from collaborative planning, sharing ideas and practices, and engaging in dialogue were only realized by reconceptualising how available time was used, as well as through the provision of additional time.

As written in my researcher's journal, one newly-appointed principal mentioned, "As a new administrator you are always assessing yourself and what you have done. I walked away with new information every time we met. We can only succeed if we are constantly reflecting on how we are doing." The development of new norms that elevated collaboration, dialogue and professional learning to a scheduled priority was also seen as crucial to supporting a more reflective learning culture. However, as I left Hillview, I understood how and why the time provided through the *ROP Institute* was valued; yet I was puzzled. If collaboration and dialogue were deemed central to improving professional practice, why didn't principals find time beforehand? Did principals lack the autonomy, authority and will to find time for professional learning within their workdays?

The provision of organizational support, as demonstrated through the creation and allocation of structures and space, was viewed as an important impetus and condition for learning and reflection to occur. One facilitator shared how "demonstrating commitment" indicated that reflection and professional learning was valued:

> When we have jurisdiction buy-in, and to demonstrate that with resources, then it gets the attention of the participants. And they [the participants] say, "Okay, this is a priority and the district supports this. And they're giving us resources, whatever those resources are, so I know this isn't going to drop off the radar screen in January." Because people don't have time to start something that isn't going to be taken through to the finish, there has to be a demonstrating commitment.

A principal agreed with this comment, "You know it is important when money is ear-marked...it validates what is happening. It says 'We think that it is important to give you time to reflect and work together.'" Within Hillview, time was viewed as both a resource and investment in learning. Both the ATA and the jurisdiction provided funding for the project. This was recognized by a central administrator, who stated "if this system believes it is important enough, there has to be something visible that says 'Yes, we're going to try and remove some time if we can.'" Organizational support, as demonstrated through district-wide participation in the *ROP Institute*, signaled to principals that the professional learning of school principals was valued. Furthermore, demonstration of organizational support elucidated the norms, values, beliefs, and assumptions of the district and school personnel. It appeared that the provision of resources (particularly

monetary funding) was viewed the primary means to demonstrate support and to make explicit the organization's mission and goals. However, I question the extent to which the current reflection and collaboration between principals will be sustained in the absence of the additional funding received through the AISI and the *ROP Institute* pilot project. Would reflection and collaboration be valued in the absence of funding?

Trust

Collaboration within Professional Communities of Practice

Within social interactions characterized by trust, principals claimed that they engaged in "teambuilding" and "sharing both our success stories and what we learned from our mistakes." Principals often shared how trust was integral to their work with others:

> I have a trusting relationship with my teaching staff. They know I listen to their ideas and respond with support and encouragement. They also listen to my ideas and together we have been able to build a high level of cooperative planning.

Trust was deemed essential to having "open relationships."

A learner-centered climate characterized by trust, empathy and respect was viewed as an important condition for reflection. Participants indicated that they were more likely to take risks, be reflective, and ask questions in environments that "felt safe." For instance, one principal highlighted:

> Another factor is our comfort with our administrative groups…its been kind of a long-term relationship. So then, it's pretty easy to move into those reflective practice modes because I think there is a high level of trust in our teams.

Within a trusting and respectful environment, "participants have said that this is one of the most valuable couple of hours spent in the month because I'm in a safe place where I can ask questions that I may not feel comfortable asking in big principal meetings" because "there's a greater ease in asking those questions within that [smaller] group because you're not going to feel like that was a stupid question." Trust was viewed as being built more readily within smaller groups already comprised of established relationships. Regardless, principals indicated that there "is some level of anxiety because for all of us its like, 'Am I doing this right? I don't know if I am or not.'" Questions and uncertainty often prompted reflective thinking.

During the course of my year-long observations, principals often remarked that "we know each other. We can trust one another to pick us up when we are down and to applaud when we are successful." In a similar vein, an experienced principal stated that the "collaboration was excellent. We worked together and pushed each other" and over time "the conversation and

planning has become increasingly meaningful and personal." When asked on the questionnaire to indicate the degree to which "collaborative dialogue was beneficial and supported my learning," respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the collaborative dialogue within the *ROP Institute* was valuable (a descriptive summary of the questionnaire is included in Appendix D). In particular, the "Converted" principals felt that individual reflective practices were enhanced by working and planning together, debating openly, and celebrating success within a trusting community. Trust was a precursor to collaboration and reflection.

As claimed by this principal, the establishment of a community of learning was highly valued by Hillview personnel:

> The power of a group coming together to share, that could be a very powerful culture building activity. Because you would come open or as open as you could be and with the intent of sharing information and doing what needs to be done.

Principals clearly indicated a preference for face-to-face collaboration. For example, one participant shared, "to be connecting with other principals around practice has been phenomenal as it has raised our level of consciousness." In addition to reducing isolation and fragmentation, collaboration fostered an increased awareness of differing needs, contexts, and issues within the district as "our projects were so diverse that we all had something that we could learn from each other – it's the diversity that made it interesting." Implicit in principals' responses was the notion that trust prompted risk-taking. Risk-taking was apparent as principals began to trust each other enough to collaborate around common issues or needs. For example, one principal shared how distributed leadership occurred spontaneously from the activities of several principals who trusted each other and believed in working together to improve schooling:

> We kind of get excited about it [use of distributed leadership]...because we're proud of it. I think it's expanding to our teachers...to other schools. With the other principals of Cranbrook Heights, McCoy and...now we meet monthly and more so at [one of the high schools]. The principal and I meet monthly or every second month...and we're just sharing ideas and we feel like we're a team. So now when there are things that come up and I need advice from somebody who has that kind of experience, and you know that none of us in our school have that kind of experience, I can go to them [other high school principals].

This principal's understanding reflected a belief that practice is enhanced when learning and reflection occurs within and across schools. When trust existed, collective agency, reflection and learning naturally emerged in a "bottom-up" manner rather than being something "imposed" by others (Wright, 2007). However, I observed that principals generally selected like-minded colleagues and mentors to discuss leadership challenges and unanticipated problems.

As the participants shared their specific findings from their action research projects, the majority of principals surmised that collective reflective practices were essential to individual learning and organizational improvement. One participant commented that the time invested in trust-building and collaboration is "invaluable and really a good investment in practice, and that this informal off-shoot of this whole process is one of the things that really should be encouraged." Several school principals hoped to establish collaborative cultures within their own schools, and they were

> Trying to figure out, 'What do we do to collaborate and have this peer coaching? What do we need to do to get all the staff onto this? What do we do to get other departments in that so we can have a whole staff working together?"

In my journal, I noted a central office administrator who questioned how the district could extend the collegiality and inquiry established in the *ROP Institute* so that "we can build exceptional teams across the system." After each *ROP Institute* observations or interview, I came to see how these collaborative learning communities – characterized by trust between principals– potentially fostered greater understanding of diverse perspectives and allowed for collective thinking and action around common problems and administrative issues both at the school and district level.

Access to External Partnerships and Collaboration

All three groups of principals indicated that the collaborative network with the ATA and the University of Alberta promoted a degree of new learning and provided access to external expertise. One principal suggested,

> There is always a place for external people to come in, and for another set of eyes, and the perspective of those that are affected by your work. Those are really legitimate. We have to be listening and be informed by those people and hear those perspectives.

Another principal felt that dialogue with facilitators prompted meaningful reflection as "you [representative from the University of Alberta] kind of helped us think about some things that are important to us. We thought 'Okay, how can we do this? How can it help us?'" Participants also "valued and appreciated the supportive and constructive feedback from colleagues, the ATA and the University" as they reflected upon "impromptu issues and emergent problems." Participants valued having "another pair of eyes and ears to reflect on our practice." In addition, one participant elaborated, "We had authentic critical friends who helped us see reality and keep our feet on the ground. They helped us identify and work on best practices. We became teams characterized by warmth and empathy." As I look back on the year with Hillview, I observed that it took time for principals to trust external partners. These comments were made at the close of

the *ROP Institute*. As principals came to trust the members from the ATA and the University of Alberta, it appeared that the collective and coordinated endeavours of a variety of professional development providers could positively impact the professional learning of school principals.

Organizational Support and Trust

For the majority of principals, enhanced reflection and learning was derived from trusting relationships at the jurisdictional and school levels. Trusting relationships fostered learning as colleagues, protégés, and mentors came "together around the really tough issues that we don't seem to be able to talk about in meetings – and most of those focus around changing practice." Several principals indicated that they self-selected their mentors:

> I asked him and he volunteered. He could have said "No." He just said, "I want to work with you." He didn't classify it as a mentorship. He classified it as a partnership, which was interesting because he said that there was lot of good ideas that I also shared with him that he implemented into his building. So, rather than him just having all the answers, it was a time to dialogue, share things, bounce ideas off one another, come up with game plans.

This newly-appointed principal trusted and valued the support of his mentor. Another newly-appointed principal stated, "I chose him [his mentor] because I trusted him. I knew that I could be forthright without worrying. He wasn't there to judge me or rate how I performed." My findings suggest that reflection occurs in an atmosphere of trust, collaborative inquiry, and shared leadership whereby support was provided and received without the threat of evaluation. However, upon review of the focus group and individual interview data in its entirety, I noticed that few participants sought out mentors or group members who questioned or challenged their current thinking and practice. Many mentors were selected on the basis that they were already known and a trusting relationship already existed.

Within the interviews, it was typically the facilitators, not the principals or central office personnel, who spoke to meaningful learning and successful team work being derived from trusting relationships. One facilitator explained, "I think we've got cultures in schools that don't lend themselves to professional exchange and professional dialogue, and I think there are all sorts of trust building that we need to do." Another facilitator described how superintendents need to trust their principals to engage in professional learning as "it talks about respecting them as professionals – competent professionals." She goes on to explain how a superintendent needs to believe:

> We're in the right place. I am prepared to allow them the space to do this work. This means not overloading them with other things. And I will trust that they are going to do the work and that they are capable of doing it, so let them do it.

Central to reflection was organizational trust and recognition of the professional autonomy of principals as they assumed ownership of practice. As I looked over my data, I realized that implicit in the principals' responses was recognition that trust was critical to professional growth and satisfaction. However, when asked about the degree that this trust existed, most principals were reluctant to comment.

Relevancy

Focusing on the Specific Learning Needs of Principals

Having the readiness and willingness to engage in reflection and professional development was seen as important condition for individual learning. The notion that "people have to determine their own professional growth and where or when it is needed" was repeated throughout the focus groups and individual interviews. Principals recognized that "we continually pass through different personal and professional stages." Considering his organizational role and responsibilities, a newly-appointed principal suggested, "Understanding what needs to be reflected upon and how to reflect is essential to teaching and principal leadership."

Specialized supports and learning opportunities for less experienced and aspiring principals were deemed essential conditions for professional learning. A newly-appointed principal stated, "I value the 'how to' sessions on staffing and budgeting. I can't focus on the big picture if I don't know how to do the day-to-day tasks." Another newly-appointed principal suggested, "Having a formal mentorship program would help me with my specific questions and give me a chance to talk about those unexpected problems. Having a mentor is like having a teacher who facilitates and guides the learning of students." One of the more experienced principals equated learning with action and reflection:

> If my job is to help get Karen [assistant principal] ready to be a principal, she's got to learn to do [teacher] evaluations because that's a very crucial component and the only way you learn it is to do it and think about it.

This principal also felt that engaging the assistant principal in his action research project around teacher professional growth plans and evaluation was an integral learning experience that prepared her for her role within the principalship. In many ways, several principals conceptualized schools and districts as classrooms – classrooms that provided differentiated learning opportunities for individuals. When the school was seen as a classroom – a supportive learning environment whereby an assistant principal could learn and practice new skills – meaningful feedback allowed the assistant principal to reflect upon and enhance future actions.

One assistant principal agreed that her participation in the *ROP Institute* supported her professional learning needs. Recognizing how learning is holistic and highly personal, she said:

> There is so much more information that goes on there [at principals' meetings] than what ... the principals realize is happening... It will be little bits of information that if Tim [principal] came from a principal's meeting; he wouldn't even think it was important enough to tell me. It's also developing relationships listening to those people.

Another assistant principal stated, "Being in the ROP program allowed me to see what being a principal would look like and sound like... There is much to learn from my colleagues who have years of experience." Participation in the *ROP Institute* sessions and action research projects, alongside of more experienced principals, allowed assistant principals and those new to the principalship to gain craft knowledge and hands-on experience. In this way, the *ROP Institute* provided reflective activities that supported assistant principals' role conceptualization and considered the specific challenges and needs required for the transformation that occurs when a teacher becomes a school principal.

Within a learner-centered environment, realistic expectations and goals were deemed important to learning. Principals shared different strategies used to ensure that the learning was meaningful, yet manageable. For example, one principal explained:

> I had a real goal to try to keep this doable. If we had tackled something that was a bigger piece of that pie, it would have been overwhelming and very difficult to see through. So, I was looking for something that would be practical, helpful, and appropriate, and that would add to my skill level but that was still something that was very specific. So, it [action research project] was quite doable in terms of how ambitious we were, what time commitment we would make, and how we would be able do all parts of the project.

Another experienced principal stressed the importance of learning being manageable within the current context of his role and responsibilities. He stated:

> Our lives are filled with things that are urgent and important – deadlines, bells ring, meetings, and interviews at 8:00 a.m. We respond to that. We're run by the clock. The effective person is run by the compass, not the clock. They have a direction. They say, "These are my priorities and I'll decide how I'll spend my time." Within that, there is a whole quadrant of things that are urgent but not important because they are somebody else's priority...We have to keep asking, "If my plate is full and I want to add something to it, then what do I take off the plate so I don't over indulge?"

For this principal, as well as others, learning was often "relegated to the back burner" when emergent issues commanded immediate attention. As he scanned the draft PQP document, this principal reiterated:

> The KSA's, as I read them, seem to acknowledge the realities, many of the realities, of the work. What is not there is support to make that become a reality in a humane way. I'll use that word, "humane" way, because school principals, to be highly effective, need

> to have balance in their lives. Meaning that, they need to have a family life, and a community life, and a church life, and a private life, and a professional life. When school principals are working seventy-hour weeks, then they don't have balance in their lives.

Another principal in the *ROP Institute* acknowledged, "We are busy. Certainly. Yet we have the responsibility to model and engage in ongoing professional learning." Stating that "the challenge is to get the management work around the building done so that there is time for pd and time to have a home life," this principal expressed the tension that principals faced as they balanced school management and leadership, and personal and professional obligations.

Engagement and Participation

Within all three groups of principals, the "Non-Converted," "Resistors," and "Converted" groups, the principals agreed that motivation was fueled and energized by specific needs and real administrative issues. When speaking about his action research project, one of the "Resistors" explained how when it "meets the needs that you have expressed, then it becomes meaningful ... so there has to be that desire and want to do that." This was echoed by a "Non-Converted" principal, who suggested, "This can't be an add-on for anybody.... Making it contextual, and making it so that the people that are involved in the project and see value in their participation." Although principals appreciated having flexibility to identify an action research project that addressed their own professional needs, "some topics were chosen just because, 'I've got to get a topic'... as opposed to one that is more meaningful and directly related to your practice." In these cases, "real powerful ownership" or engagement was lacking. Motivation diminished when professional learning was not perceived as relevant or productive.

How principals came to participate in the *ROP Institute* influenced their level of engagement and motivation. For one principal, "the expectation that I had was that you will do this." For this principal, the *ROP Institute* was not meaningful:

> It was mandatory. The meaningfulness of it just was not there. To this point, I'm not sure how meaningful this whole activity has been for me. There's been some stuff in the back seat that's been really beneficial for me. But, the actual project itself hasn't been.

In a similar vein, the participants who felt indifferent about their experience in the *ROP Institute* expressed feeling as if "we were in a graduate studies program rather than what we had just described as 'roll up your sleeves and let's get to work.'" For others, particularly the "Converted," they told me that ownership "happened when we got together and we shifted our project idea. That's when we felt ownership and it was more meaningful for us." Similarly, one principal indicated that school principals naturally engaged in refection when faced with real

"topics that are very much related to administration and some of the problems or issues that we face and deal with head on." These findings also point to Dewey's (1939) description of how specialized thinking is naturally prompted by perplexity, uncertainty, or paradox.

Principals also expressed appreciation for the opportunity to select their own project and group:

> I liked being able to choose your own project...I liked that freedom to do that because then it also allowed you to work in a group. It was interesting because some people chose to work alone. Some people chose to work in groups. I thought, "It's nice to have that opportunity to do either..." We talked about the things that were important to us and our schools...

Program flexibility allowed participants to delve into topics or projects of great personal and professional importance. Suggesting that "we don't need to rely on books and the University when we have an abundance of expertise sitting around this table," one of the principals indicated that principals tend to draw upon their own and others' specific craft knowledge to a greater extent than academic or theoretical knowledge to solve practical administrative problems. Reflection was enhanced when learners had the freedom to choose the type and purpose of professional development opportunities that met their developmental needs and interests or aligned with the specific issues or problems within their local contexts.

Data from this study illustrated the importance of reflection and professional learning that recognizes and meets the unique learning needs (i.e., each principal's age, career stage, and learning style) and specific contexts (i.e., type of school and experience level of staff). However, one principal revealed, "You guys make it sound easy. I don't have a clue about what I am going to write [in his reflective journal]." Suggesting that individuals have differing capacities to engage in critical reflection, one participant stated, "There are people who tend to be more reflective in terms of a personality trait...Confidence comes over time and through experience and wisdom." While reflection seemed natural and effortless for some principals, it was challenging and frustrating for others. It appeared that the ability to reflect as a form of professional learning varied. This is similar to Allison and Allison's (1993) discussion about their examination of a principal's "ability to see both the broad context and the fine details of the presented problem is not, apparently, just a result of raw experience... expertise may be dependent on and limited by cognitive capacity" (p. 319).

When asked about what professional development was most relevant to the principalship, one principal stated,

> Individual pd [professional development] is a must. I choose that. But there is a place for centralized professional learning. As a district, we need some element of consistency and

> continuity or efficiency. It is not practical for us to reinvent the wheel for each school or each circumstance...It's not that we don't want to learn what was shared in the ROP sessions, its just that we see that there is a district need being missed. We needed to learn about teacher supervision and evaluation. We still aren't doing this consistently as administrators.

Although principals felt it was important to engage in meaningful learning that met their own individual needs, there was recognition that professional development that addressed jurisdictional goals was also needed and relevant to the work of the principal.

Participant motivation increased when they were actively engaged in identifying the process and outcomes of reflection and learning. Principals felt that their involvement was warranted because "we're an important cog ...we can give input from the perspective of what really matters because we're closest to the kids." Participants focused much attention on the lack of clarity around the program goals and the unmet needs related to the implementation of the district's supervision and evaluation policy. On numerous occasions, principals provided examples where a lack of ownership inhibited professional reflection and learning:

> We had to have quite a paradigm shift from where we thought we were going to when these people showed up especially from the ATA, and started talking about this project based on experience somewhere in Ontario. A lot of us were looking at each other thinking, "Am I at the wrong meeting?" That was the lunch discussion..."Were we supposed to be here? Did I sign up for this? Where is this taking me? Do I have time for another grad studies course right now?"

Participants stressed that learning would have been enhanced if they contributed to and better understood the goals of the professional development program. Principals who participated without a clear purpose in the action research projects were disinterested in *ROP Institute* activities. Rather than embracing action research as an opportunity to engage in meaningful reflection that supported professional growth, the "Resistors" complained about their action research projects and assigned tasks, as well as expressing the greatest degree of criticism during the interviews.

Noticeably absent from most participants' descriptions of the conditions that supported engagement and participation were notions that learning should be enjoyable and self-fulfilling. With what appeared to be a diminishing sense of efficacy, participants focused on the need for more technical forms of professional development and rarely mentioned the possibilities of reinventing education through professional learning and reflection. Even though one participant indicated that learning is "really powerful when educators take control of their professional growth, being researchers and inquiring into their own practice and their own situation;" reflection typically centered on reacting to emergent issues and problems. Here, Schön's (1983,

1987) description of the tacit knowledge that practitioners develop within the daily work context was highly applicable to the principalship. However, the emphasis on learning to address practical problems failed to leverage the power of imaginative and critical thinking that some scholars suggest are essential to improving schools (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; McInerny, 2003; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Sefa Dei, 2002).

Understanding the "Big Picture"

The principals felt that reflection was more relevant when and if specific contextual understandings were balanced within the "big picture." For example, one participant described how leadership practice and decision-making occupied a position at the intersection of a number of ways of knowing:

> Increasing one's understanding of external forces is critical...To the extent that we have the big picture and have an understanding, we can respond more appropriately at the school level...In terms of principal PD [professional development], it's a combination of continuing to gain an understanding of that big picture ... those sands shift all the time... As a principal, I need to understand the "what" and I need to understand the "how."

A recently-appointed principal also described how meaning and understanding is constructed by personal assumptions, experiences, and roles:

> When you're in the classroom you live in a box. You don't realize why certain decisions are made – you only know what things are going on if you know the culture of the school...You don't understand some of the issues that administrators have to deal with...I just found I was a much more helpful teacher to administrators after I went back [returned to the classroom after working for an extended period of time as an "acting" assistant principal].

These examples were illustrative of the ambiguity and uncertainty that defined principals' daily practice as they navigated oftentimes conflicting values and multiple realities within their schools and the district. Principals were constantly constructing and reconstructing their role and experiences in these contexts. The ability to reflect more deeply about one's experiences and actions was based on the ability to situate oneself within a more global context. When this occurred, one principal stated, "You become a principal of all kids – not just your own school. Your practice is more reflective and more ethical as you consider others." "Seeing the big picture" was dependent upon a principal's willingness to seek and consider alternate viewpoints and external perspectives. Principals who envisioned their roles beyond their specific school milieu often alluded to the moral and ethical dimensions of the principalship, in addition to their managerial and instructional responsibilities as defined in policy.

Pedagogies That Support School Principals' Learning

Participants placed great importance on providing flexible programming to ensure principals were "involved in whatever best suits their learning needs." Almost all of the principals interviewed "appreciate the range of activities...switching from lecture, to discussions, to group work...all of these kept us interested. There was something for everyone." Another principal remarked, "It was helpful to have time to work alone, but also as a large group or a small group that we picked...Working with colleagues, other than the ones on our action research projects too."

Whereas the "Resistors" explained that they "wanted more of an in-service;" the other two groups of principals recognized the value of the *ROP Institute* as a model that showed potential in supporting reflective practice. Participants identified numerous instructional approaches that they suggested enhanced their learning. For example, principals told me that they "liked when we tackled the case studies or real issues using our own expertise as well as what we learned in the literature." They "found it to be particularly helpful to engage in conversations with people I know as well as colleagues that I don't normally speak with." Moreover, it was "critical to have a real mentor to ask questions or to listen to me." Some principals expressed that they "appreciated having some current articles to discuss and access to the online database" and "discovered a powerful outcome and learned so much when I was a researcher." The majority of principals felt that learning was enhanced with "time to just think." As the participants engaged in regular dialogue, their awareness of contextually-specific needs was heightened. Traditional, one-size-fits-all professional learning approaches were being questioned by all three groups of principals because "there is such a broad range of needs out there." Participant responses were congruent with professional development approaches or pedagogies that are described within contemporary educational literature. Certain approaches, used within the *ROP Institute*, appeared to fostered individual and collective reflection particularly through: (a) problem-based learning (Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Linda, 1992; Murphy & Hallinger, 1992); (b) case stories or studies (Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997); (c) action research (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000; Costa & Garmston, 2002); (d) peer coaching and mentoring (Costa & Garmston, 2002; Glickman et al., 1998; Joyce & Showers, 1982); (e) educational networking and dialectic learning (Barth, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Day, 1999a Glickman et al., 1998; Lieberman & Miller, 2002); (f) reflection (Bourdieu, 1974; Burns, 1978; Costa & Kallick, 2000; Day, 2000; Foster, 1986; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004; Short, 1997); and (g) professional learning communities (Barth, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 2002; Osterman & Kottkamp, 2004).

Critical in the success of the *ROP Institute* was the authentic ownership, from the participants' perspectives, of the learning process whereby "we got to pick our own topics, our own groups, and our own methodology." One principal shared how "it was interesting to see how other principals responded to my action research topic. Likewise, when we went off on a tangent to talk about what happened at school, I couldn't believe how we all solved the same problem differently." Ownership appeared to be made possible through flexibility to identify action research projects deemed important to the individual, collaborate with trusted and respected colleagues, and identify appropriate resources, including expertise outside of the immediate group. The process of sharing insights and coming together to discuss leadership issues related to their action research specifically, and to principal leadership generally, served as a useful mechanism for thinking about leadership roles through a variety of lenses. Professional development tasks, based on choice of grouping, format, and learning content, allowed for a greater degree of relevancy as the specific needs, interests and level of readiness of individual learners were addressed.

However, the "Converted" principals often spoke about the value of assuming the role of a "researcher" who constructed knowledge "through the literature review, my daily experiences, and looking at the data I collected from the [action research] interviews." This process "challenged my long-standing beliefs and challenged my actions and my practice as a leader." Further, this principal explained that action research "provoked a desire to learn more because I had more questions...I need to change what I do now. What I say." As I listened to this principal speak about her refined understanding and her unanticipated learning, I was reminded of Schön's (1983) premise that reflection *in* and *on* action facilitates second-order behavioural change. When this principal saw value in the reflective component embedded in the action research, she was more inclined to consider and ultimately change her practice. Considering his action research project, a newly-appointed principal described the relevance of his learning, "Will all of this reflection change me? My practice? It has already. It has seeped into my collaborative work with staff. The reflection is contagious. I can't be the same person or leader now." Similarly, another principal stated that the reflective content and processes provided were:

> Really good cause it made me stop and think about some things in regards to what we are doing with staff and school. We actually used some of those same reflective practice exercises and some of the information from a half-day workshop with our teachers.

The approaches used within the *ROP Institute* also impacted the degree to which the participants were engaged in learning and reflection about their leadership practice. For instance, one online activity required principals to track, analyze and reflect on their use of time within

their weekly schedule. As I reviewed the ROP Institute website, I was interested in the principals' reflections about their time. One principal stated, "I noticed that each day I do a large number of different tasks. I don't think I spend more time on one activity more than another. The activity that takes the least time is recognition of students." In a similar vein, another principal commented, "I see more outside demands on my school time. I know that the important thing is to spend the time needed with staff and students and parents." As the online discussion continued, principals agreed that managerial responsibilities monopolized their time. This was not a surprise to most principals: "The data I collected was pretty well what I expected.
What frustrates me about the use of my time is having to respond to requests from Central Office or Alberta Education." After several postings, the discussion became more interpretive: "The implication for my instructional leadership is that I need to try to put aside the emergent needs to focus on instructional leadership." Another principal thought about the need to:

> Try to plan more classroom visits whereby I can become more aware of what teachers are doing in their classrooms. What would change – better planning of my day to include classroom visitations with teachers, not allowing emergent demands to take me away from these visits?

Online, principals comments shifted from being technical data to interpretive dialogue. However, I observed that more reflective, decisional and action-oriented discussions occurred within the context of face-to-face interactions.

In most cases, participants cited a preference for interactive activities and small group collaboration. Afternoon lectures were not effective, because having "people talk at you is sometimes difficult… stand and deliver is tough…It is better to debate and solve and talk about what is really happening in our schools." One principal commented, "It was beneficial when we did something with the articles. The different group processes you led us through…posting our ideas on charts and sharing them with the larger group really got to the heart of reflection. Do. Think. Discuss. Think some more." Such participant comments reflected recent findings suggesting that professional development should be interactive – as well as problem or performance-centered over subject-oriented (Barth, 2001; Osterman & Kottkamp; Schön, 1987). Constructivist learning approaches that allowed for co-construction of meaning recognized the personal, holistic and dialectical nature of learning. Reflection was relevant when principals engaged in knowledge creation and meaning making around specific problems of practice.

Engaging in Action Research

Although many participants expressed that action research was time-consuming, several indicated that the "benefits of the project and rigor may not be realized initially" and in fact, "some of them [benefits] you don't realize that they are useful until you're finished." One principal told me that he plans to use the collaborative reflection component of action research next year as "we really hit on something that we just honestly all believe in… and I think it's, it's going to be part of our culture." When considering if "the action research projects enabled thoughtful data analysis that assisted in determining progress towards my professional/school improvement goals," the majority of respondents agreed that action research advanced their professional leadership practice as well as supporting school improvement efforts. One principal suggested that "in order for things to be effective, we need to be doing it in an action-based model. I do believe that there are some legitimate aspects to that."

Many principals felt responsible to share their learnings with colleagues and others. Within the questionnaire, all but one respondent indicated that they agreed that the "action research projects provided an opportunity for other staff, students, and parents to be engaged in learning and school improvement efforts" (a descriptive summary of the questionnaire is included in Appendix D). For example, one principal stated that she was sharing the "results of the survey I did… part of it is to share it at Parent Council … at my staff meeting. People will be interested to hear the accolades … and how we need to shift our thinking" as a result of the new findings. She described her project as a "paradigm shift" that illuminated "the way people think" – an understanding that would not have been discovered if she had not engaged in her action research project.

Assuming the role of researcher, principals engaged in literature reviews that linked educational theory to self-selected problems of practice. One principal acknowledged that the literature review allowed her to expand knowledge of different resources and perspectives. The educational literature enabled her to better contextualize discussions and make authentic links to her practice and efforts to engage in school improvement. She explains that "I didn't know Joyce Epstein [researcher who studies parental involvement within school] before … so now I have another name that I can pull up now in my head if I need something for a parent meeting or I want some information." Another participant emphasized how theory may inform leadership practice by looking at:

> What the current body of research is saying … We have a starting point for conversation and where does that starting point come from? The starting point for conversation comes from one's understanding of the synthesis of the best information that's out there…sixty-two studies have said this.

Building on current research supporting the integration of theory into concrete practices of reflecting, teaching, and leading (Barth, 2001; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Joyce & Showers, 1982), this data also highlights how the integration of theoretical analysis with data collection and analysis may inform practice and serve as a powerful motivator that sustains momentum through school improvement efforts.

Recognizing the importance of modeling lifelong learning, one principal shared the value of assuming the role of researcher: "We don't sit on our laurels, that we're trying to do something different to learn something more about a topic we're interested in. We're willing to put the time and energy into doing it." The role of the principal as the leader within a learning community was also explored in the questionnaire. Respondents generally agreed that the "Institute had an appropriate emphasis on the principal as nurturing and sustaining a school culture that values and supports learning" (a descriptive summary of the questionnaire is included in Appendix D). Similarly, participants generally agreed that the "Institute served as an effective means for the principal to model a desire to engage in continuous improvement and lifelong learning."

Problematic Conditions That Constrain Reflection

Problematic conditions that constrain reflection as a form of professional learning also emerged from my analysis of the principals' perspectives in relation to their mandated role as instructional leaders. In this section, I discuss the tensions emerging from problematic conditions under the same three themes: "Time," "Trust," and "Relevancy".

Time

"When Do We Find the Time to Reflect?"

Working in the current policy environment, most principals felt pressed for time – personally struggling to balance work and home responsibilities and grappling with managerial and instructional activities at school. Reflection was seen as critical to professional learning and ultimately school improvement; however, most ROP participants "felt really rushed" attending multiple sessions and engaging in action research. Others appreciated engaging in the projects but felt that "the timeframe of one year doesn't fit the cycle of an administrator's life." For a recently-appointed principal and his assistant principal, the one year timeline (for completion of the action research project) was beneficial because:

> We were kind of forced into collaborating because we were all so new to everything ...It was great to be able to throw ideas off of each other. The timeline forced us to think more frequently and with more intensity... instead of just having casual conversation.

There was no evidence indicating that an extended timeframe for the action research projects would enhance reflection and professional learning.

When questioned about "finding time" for reflection and professional development, a central office administrator highlighted times to avoid, including "report card times ... Christmas, Easter, semester breaks and change-over [high school semester change]." These were deemed as the "impossible months to shoehorn anything in." Although espousing the importance of reflective practice and professional learning, there was little desire to rethink traditional uses of time within the district as "it is difficult to change how things have been done around here for years" and "it only makes sense to do such work at specific times of the year." Most principals and central office administrators were reluctant to tamper with the status quo in an effort to make reflection, collaboration and professional development a priority. The annual cycle of the school year served as a framework that organized the recurring sequence of events that preoccupied principals' time and thinking. The structure inherent in such a long-standing, cyclical process resulted in a form of rigidity that limited creativity and spontaneity. Within the turbulent and unpredictable nature of schools, principals appeared to feel a sense of comfort in the predictability of the yearly schedule. Yet at the same time, it was this structure that defined their roles – even more so than policy. Furthermore, the predictability of this structure afforded principals with many excuses as to why there was no time for reflection. Discussion related to the relationship between the cyclical nature of the school year and principals' thinking was noticeably absent in the educational literature.

Professional learning was considered a good use of time or resources when external support was received from central office. However, with a perceived lack of time during the work day, many online discussions were scheduled outside of the professional workday. One facilitator discussed the assumption made by program developers who expected learning to occur outside of work hours:

> You're going to meet as a group with your facilitator for one hour every two weeks.... We've also structured how they are going to do some homework and that involves making a commitment on a Sunday night to meet with the facilitator.

Principals expressed frustration and resentment with the assumption that they should engage in collaborative reflection and learning outside of regular working hours. This was viewed as acerbating the already diminishing quality and satisfaction within principals' personal and professional lives. Moreover, principals argued that "reflection is not something that can be squeezed in a specific time slot." Despite these claims, principals often saw reflection as a finite process. Reflection, specifically the action research, was "another thing to get done." One

principal liked the year-long timeframe for the action research "because the longer the timeline you have, the longer its homework hanging over your head.... I don't think you would do any more or any less." Such contradictions were prevalent in principals' comments as they tried to understand the relationship between the principalship and reflective practice.

As I listened to the principals speak, several intimidated that reflection and learning primarily occurred in the context of the *ROP Institute* and other formal professional development activities. With the exception of the scheduled time for the *ROP Institute*, few principals considered how they could structure and utilize the time in the workday differently to support reflection. When asked how to make the role of the principal more manageable, few solutions were provided. Only one principal argued, "Time is used as an excuse" and that:

> It takes discipline, weekly rather than daily planning, and keeping things in perspective... Not very often do things arrive being life-and-death issues.... Even most requests from supervisors can wait if I am truly engaged in things that matter most. This takes a bit of courage, coupled with consideration, but it can be done.

The "prioritization of what's really important" was shared by many participants who suggested that traditional school and organizational structures, routines and artifacts need to be reconceptualized to support the professional learning of school principals. One participant shared the value of taking time to reflect:

> Professional development is so multi-layered and complex. It is like talking about sharpening a saw in the Seven Habits of Work. The person is trying to cut down the tree with a dull blade and the person says, "Well, why don't you stop and sharpen the saw?" And, the answer is that, "I'm too busy cutting down the trees." I think that too often, in many ways and in many organizations, schools being one of them, we don't have enough time to stop and "sharpen the saw". We're not exactly sure that this is the best practice or most effective practice for what I am doing in my terms of my work.

At the large group sharing session, I recorded several quotes from participants that indicated that they "appreciated the time to get together with professional colleagues on a regular basis in a collaborative manner." However, opportunities to engage in collaborative reflection were still seen as "adding to the full plate." Furthermore, being away from the school also had implications for principals as "it takes to reorient myself after being out of the school for meetings. We have had a multitude of meetings and I feel a disconnect which makes efficiency more difficult." Suggesting that "this process has probably more rigor and expectation than many of us would have been use to in a professional development model," it was recommended that "the participants felt that it [the action research project] was reasonable and that the timelines afforded" were manageable. This recommendation suggested that learning activities and approaches should take into consideration diverse and busy schedules of participants. At times,

principals felt that the external partners failed to appreciate the complexity and intricacies of the principals' work day when they scheduled meetings and assigned tasks.

Substitute teachers were used to relieve principals from administrative or teaching responsibilities. A central administrator recognized that "symbolically, that was huge... but I wonder about the impact that this really has on an administrator's time. How did that really help with decreasing workload?" The provision of substitute teacher time was not deemed to alleviate the work responsibilities of school principals engaging in professional development. At times, support, such as the provision of substitute teachers, was recognized to be symbolic at best. Principals also worried about the optics of taking time from the school day to further their own professional learning. In fact, most principals expressed feelings of guilt. As I considered the challenge of "finding time," I recognized the validity of Grant and Zeichner's (1984) claim that reflective practice requires a delicate balance between thought and action. It is incumbent upon principals to find opportunities to reflect within the fast-paced boundaries of school life. Yet principals cannot become obsessed with carving out large periods of time to think – reflection should not paralyze practice.

Contrived Use of Technologies – "It's Way Simpler to Phone Each Other"

Participants within the program told me that they valued "interactive", "learner-centered", and "collaborative" features of professional development. During the *ROP Institute*, principals indicated a strong preference for face-to-face collaboration. Online discussions were viewed as contrived – particularly because "we are all so geographically close" and that "it is way simpler just to phone each other." Emphatically arguing that they "never got to know the person [the online facilitator] because of the technology," several principal indicated that online meetings evolved into conference calls that were better "in regards to sharing information, talking about ideas." Subsequently, the online discussions were typically unsuccessful in enhancing reflection as a form of professional learning.

The questionnaire probed the effectiveness of the *ROP Institute* website. Participants indicated the degree that the "ROP website served as an effective means to dialogue with colleagues, presenters, and facilitators." Respondents generally disagreed or strongly disagreed that the website was an effective means of dialoguing with colleagues (a descriptive summary of the questionnaire is included in Appendix D). One principal shared that "the technology just kept letting us down, we just became frustrated.... Every time, at least one of us couldn't get on, so it excluded somebody." Others suggested that "it was a horrible experience. I never had one effective conversation through that means." This data suggested that the online system did not

allow for the relationship building that principals felt were integral to reflection. This contradicts current educational research that purports the benefits of online communities of practice (Schlager & Frusco, 2003).

While the facilitators illuminated the use of online technologies as having "potential for developing longer-term relationships around practice" or to "connect minds from anywhere," most participants felt that the website basically "serves a purpose in being a repository for the documents and gives them access to stuff that is only available via technology – like the periodical databases." One facilitator attributed principals' frustration to "a wide variety of capacities to use technology and, of course, the technology within itself is somewhat limiting or it requires a certain level of expertise to navigate." During some sessions within the computer lab, I also observed that principals varied in their technological skills (e.g., their ability to log on to the website and understand how files are stored and uploaded onto the *ROP Institute* website). Reflection was inhibited and rarely evident as I reviewed the discussion postings on the *ROP Institute* website.

During the interviews, I also noted miscommunication between stakeholders that were manifested in "mixed emotions" and "hostility." Described as "very poor communication of what the expectations were, where we were suppose to be, and when we were suppose to be there", one principal, shared how last-minute e-mails resulted in miscommunication:

> We were all told to go online, on this certain day, at a certain time and there was nobody there. Like everybody was phoning every other in the district saying, "I'm online, are you online?" "Yah, I'm online. There's nobody in my meeting group." Nobody knew what was going on.

When considering the usefulness of online discussions, one principal revealed, "We gave it a try but recognized early that this was not a good use of our time, so we weren't even doing it in compliance anymore." These findings suggest that school leaders are likely to become detached from school improvement efforts if they are denied opportunities to design, implement and evaluate their own professional learning. Moreover, expected or mandated "compliance" within the online web site did not result in improved practice or learning.

Trust

"How Do You Speak the Truth?" in the Absence of Trust

Overlap was noted between participants' perceptions of the conditions that support learning with the features of effective professional development that are described within the contemporary educational literature. However, participants illuminated, to a greater extent, the

inherent play of power that is manifested within structural-functionalist systems. Within the bureaucracy of the district and the current educational policy context, principals' ability to be reflective seemed to be constrained. Undertones were present (implicit in body language and explicit in the prefacing of comments as "off the record") and indicative of little organizational trust. During the course of data collection that took place in the central office building, I informally conversed with several *ROP Institute* participants who apologized for being unable or unwilling to participate in the focus groups or individual interviews. As recorded in my researcher's journal, one principal intimated, "It is not that we don't have lots to say – we do. But how do you speak the truth in such a small district? Perhaps if I was closer to retirement, maybe, even then I am not sure."

Initially, a lack of clarity around the goals of the *ROP Institute* prompted questioning about whose "agenda" was driving the program:

> I remember it over lunch, the first day [of the *ROP Institute*]. The whole situation created parking lot conversations that we don't like to have. People stepped out of the building and said, "What's happening? Where is this going? Is this what you thought it was going to be?" When we asked those questions...there weren't really good answers. I thought maybe the vagueness would become crystallized. It didn't address what my expectations were – ever.

Another principal stated:

> It wasn't until the first meeting of the ROP group, to introduce the project in September, that I recognized what this was and what it wasn't. It wasn't what I had bargained for. It wasn't what I had understood it to be. I actually thought I had either missed a very important meeting or was at the wrong one. So, it really wasn't close to what I had perceived...It seemed very foreign to me. I couldn't see myself in it. I wasn't sure what this meant.

This jurisdiction used a "show of hands" to indicate willingness to participate in the *ROP Institute*. Despite the appearance of voluntary consent, one facilitator reflected:

> I think that at the jurisdiction level, one of the lessons we learned was that there were some misunderstandings as to what the project was going to be... I sometimes wonder about the perception is of how truly optional participation is...I think that we can't ever underestimate that there is always a power relationship within districts.

In contrast, one principal spoke to the "show of hands" as a sense of obligation, rather than a lack of trust:

> I wouldn't say there was peer pressure because it's not really. But, there is that commitment to the collective .... We certainly didn't feel any pressure from the Superintendent to stay, or Central Office people, or ATA people, or U of A people.

Similarly, other participants indicated "we could have dropped out any time we wanted" and that the "only obligation that I feel is as a member to this group and a member of the district to help move things forward. You know I'm loyal and so I wasn't coerced."

Individual and organizational learning was impacted by quality of information available to participants. On several occasions, principals told me that ongoing, open communications about program goals and processes was critical. This was illustrated by the participants' demands for greater communication related to the formative and summative evaluation of the *ROP Institute*, whereby "the steering committee itself needs to meet probably more often. Maybe some more reflection on the process as it unfolds and how we can improve it so that it's a growing process."

Communications related to the *ROP Institute* seemed exclusively unilateral. Decisions, plans, goals, and timelines were often revealed to principals rather than reached though conversations with the principals. Content and processes within the *ROP Institute* validated the principals' role as being engaged deeply in teaching and learning. The established status hierarchies within the district reinforced and established expectations related to participation, format and purpose. Although principals expressed mixed feelings in regard to their ability to participate or opt out of the *ROP Institute*, it was generally understood that participation and compliance was expected.

Trust also impacted the criteria used by participants to select their collaborative groups. For instance, one principal indicated, "I wanted to be a part of that group because I respect their opinions. I respect the way they do things." Similarly, an assistant principal remarked, "I know exactly who I would choose to go to with my questions, to go to with my concerns." When determining collaborative groups, it appeared that school leaders selected like-minded colleagues "who understand with how I go about my work." However, collaboration and dialogue with these like-minded colleagues had a tendency to reinforce extant notions of leadership and at times hindered reflection and perpetuated existing beliefs and practices. In these cases, reflective practice was limited in the absence of differing or new perspectives.

Although most principals self-identified as being the "lead learners" or "instructional leaders" of their schools, they acknowledged that it was extremely difficulty to admit, "I don't know what to do" or "I am not sure right now." Such public admissions took great courage. The action research process required a degree of vulnerability on behalf of the principals as they worked and reflected on their professional growth plans in relation to their roles as defined by policy. Despite a desire learn, the very public nature of the action research process left some principals unwilling to take risks and to embrace the opportunity to reflect on their leadership

practice. Principals often worried about the perceptions of the staff, parents and senior administrators. Most principals were unwilling to engage in projects that would highlight any "deficiency or short comings." I was left wondering if the "classroom" of the school and the larger district really supported the role of the principal as learner. These questions were magnified as I considered how principals appreciated having "*permission* [emphasis added] to take time to meet with our colleagues" to engage in collaborative reflection and dialogue. Such language suggested that it was not appropriate or permissible to self-initiate collaboration with colleagues during the regular work day.

As I stepped away from the Hillview district, these findings prompted my thinking about the extent to which principals can act on the results of their action research inquires and reflection. Within the current social context, principals were restrained by institutional pressures, their own biases, and prescribed roles and responsibilities. As Grant and Zeichner (1984) argue, there is

> A constant interplay between choice and constraint.... There will always be some degree of conflict over what is natural and right and some amount of space for you to act alone or with others to reshape the nature of the school in which you work. (p. 62)

In the absence of organizational trust, were principals only serving as bureaucratic functionaries?

Based on the data collected, it appeared that rebuilding trust was a process – not an event. Central office staff and school principals had just gone on a retreat to "repair relationships and to figure out how we can work together." Yet until the question of trust was addressed, principals were hampered in their ability to collectively plan, dialogue and reflect in meaningful ways to address school and district issues. Trust came with an element of risk. The complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty of school improvement required principals put their trust in others, indirectly or directly, to improve educational opportunities for all students.

Relationships with External Partners – "There Were Too Many Outsider People"

Strong, positive relationships were integral to the work of these principals. As such, the credibility of the external facilitators was dependent upon the degree to which rapport and trust was established with participants. Emphasizing credibility, one principal suggested "bringing people who are engaged in the field, doing similar kinds of things, to share the issues and best practices, and generate solutions because...the people who are engaged in the work know the most." Stating that facilitators need to have recent, practical experience within the principalship, it was also suggested that having "a longer-standing relationship with the district" furthered credibility. One principal stated, "there's a culture...doing it here might be different than doing it

somewhere else." Consequently, participants were adamant that the steering committee "needs to engage in formative assessment and make necessary changes and adaptations to the program" on an ongoing basis. This becomes particularly important "when you're [ATA and the University] coming from the outside you don't know the district and their specific needs." The credibility of the facilitators impacted the degree to which participants were willing to reflect and contribute to small and large group discussions. The reluctance to engage in online discussions appeared to be impacted by a lack of trust between participants and the facilitators as "we never know what they will do with our online postings. Once you write things down, they become public." Reflection was hindered because the postings were identifiable. Principals felt more comfortable sharing in a face-to-face, conversational setting. Repeatedly, participants questioned the degree to which postings were protected, who "owned" the posted reflections, how postings would be used and how long the postings would be retained.

An open and trusting climate was required for participants to candidly discuss concerns. Many participants felt discomfort because they had not developed trusting relationships with the external partners:

> There were too many outsider people who were there. You had this lady from Toronto. You had the team that was from Edmonton.... How do you start voicing all of these frustrations in front of all these people that have come from distant places to ... help us with the project?

Principals were unwilling to "air our dirty laundry" in front of the external partners. Principals felt compelled to "present our best face and deal with issues when we are alone." Subsequently, principals felt the need to balance external perspectives with the actual realities of the local context.

Principals also expressed the desire to have flexibility and choice in selection of their online facilitator (who was external to the district). The facilitators were "selected for us, and that association was a part of that framework that was imposed." For some, "the interaction with whoever was suppose to be our web facilitator did not happen" as participants "weren't clear what his purpose was entirely." Within the *ROP Institute*, the selection of online facilitator who served in the capacity of mentor or critical friend, was in contrast with research stipulating that mentorship must be predicated on mutually supportive and trusting relationships (Daresh, 1986; Glickman et al., 1998).

Miscommunication was also derived from what principals perceived as conflicting interests and motives of stakeholders within the *ROP Institute*. For example, one participant described:

> The ATA was interested in participating and helping to fund it… The University was interested in being a part of it to give it some academic rigor and to help with the actual research. The District was committed to it. But, the "it" that we were talking about was two different things.

It was often suggested that "the Association and the University have had a real vested interest in trying to make this work." However, participants did not explain what the "vested interest" was. I recall one focus group where the participants acknowledged that they preferred to meet with me, rather than my colleague from the University, because "it is much easier to talk to you because you are one of us. You understand what it means to be a principal." On another occasion, when speaking about his action research project, a participant indicated to a University facilitator that "whether we're doing a great job of that or not, you'll be the judge." The facilitator indicated, "Actually, we won't judge. You guys will judge." However, further interviews illuminated how most principals felt that projects would be evaluated despite communications that reinforced otherwise. This lack of trust inhibited meaningful reflection. Consequently, positive relationships with external partners should not be left to chance. Like the work required by principals to build positive community relations, internal and external partners need to plan thoughtfully and coordinate carefully to establish a positive, trusting, and productive relationships.

During the course of the *ROP Institute*, it was evident that the dialogue and interactions at the *ROP Institute* changed when the superintendent and other senior administrators were present. On several occasions, I observed the change in body language and overall demeanour and openness when central office administrators left the room. One participant also admitted that "who spoke, what was discussed, and the decisions made naturally shift when the superintendent attends." Emerging discourses were manifestations of these interactions. In the absence of central office administrators, *ROP Institute* participants appeared to be more willing and open to engage in collaborative reflection and to share their ideas and questions with the larger group. Principals were also observed to be more open within the interview setting than within the context of the regular *ROP Institute* sessions. Those holding positional power within the district influenced interactions and learning. However, as I returned to the literature to explore these micro-political issues, I found a relative paucity of research related to power and trust issues inherent in the role of the principalship.

Relevancy

Role-Identity Transformation

Interviews with the assistant principals and the newly-appointed principals illuminated the complexity of role-identity transformation from teacher to principal. One assistant principal

felt that participation in the *ROP Institute* provided a "new lens to see what it would be like to walk in the shoes of the principal." In another case, a newly-appointed principal emphasized "that I will always be a teacher at heart" and that "when the staff knows you are thinking like a teacher, they are more likely to support you as a principal." For some participants, they perceived their role-identity as both teacher and principal. Others felt that "becoming a principal requires a real paradigm shift. You have to choose – either you are a teacher or you are the principal. You can't be both." New principals often described themselves as having a "split image," "multiple roles," and "dual personalities." They felt confused as they struggled to assume the role of a principal while simultaneously letting go of their identity as teacher.

The role-identity of the "principal" was shaped through interactions with other principal colleagues and mentors. However, in most cases, principals retained the identity of "teacher" to some degree. "Teaching students is like teaching teachers," remarked one new principal who saw role transformation as a continuous process. However, as these principals faced increased managerial responsibilities that hindered their ability to manage role discontinuity, they struggled with *how* to reflect. One principal remarked,

> When I reflect, I don't know who I am anymore. What role am I in? Are my personal reflections the same or different than my professional reflections? How do I reflect from multiple perspectives when I deal with so many stakeholders that have different opinions? I never stop thinking about this.

Findings indicated that principals' experiences with reflective practice, prior to and while participating in the *ROP Institute*, helped to redefine their identity within the principalship. Newly-appointed principals seemed aware that their identity transformation began much earlier as they engaged in dialogue and collaboration with other principal colleagues. Most saw role-identity formation as a career-long process rather than a reflective process that was compacted within a year-long professional development program.

It appeared that "still being a teacher" was how these principals established credibility and reclaimed their professional practice. That is, the instructional role of the teacher naturally melded into the instructional leadership responsibilities inherent in the principalship. In this way, a degree of continuity existed as principals moved from the role of teacher to principal. As I left the Hillview district, I reflected on the notion that instructional issues are common to both the roles of teacher and principal. Despite the commonality, I still noted that both new and more experienced principals were frustrated because managerial tasks hindered their ability to keep instructional matters at the forefront of their practice. Consequently, I still question if the role of teacher and principal are continuous or discontinuous in regard to their specific work responsibilities and domains.

For some principals who struggled with role discontinuity and conflict, collective forms of reflection and alternate leadership frameworks (such as distributed leadership) allowed them to reconceptualize leadership, manage change, and address problems. Unfortunately, the structure of the *ROP Institute* focused on one leadership approach – instructional leadership. The narrow focus of program materials and structured activities limited opportunities for participants to reflect on their leadership practice through a variety of approaches.

Summary

Within this chapter, I discussed the conditions that either support or constrain reflection and professional learning under the following themes: "Time," "Trust," and "Relevancy." Findings suggested a number of congruencies between practitioners, scholars and policy makers' understandings of the conditions that support reflective practice as a form of professional learning. However, as principals shared their perceptions of the conditions that support reflection as a form of professional learning, *ROP Institute* principals also elucidated problematic conditions that potentially constrained reflective practice within the principalship. Reflecting on the data discussed in Chapters Four and Five, I will now present an overview of the study, a summary of my interpretations, and implications for practice and future study. The final chapter also concludes with my closing reflective and reflexive comments.

Chapter Six – Summary and Closing Reflections

Based on my review of the literature, a discussion of the data, and my interpretations presented in Chapters Four and Five, this chapter provides an overview of the purpose of the study and reviews key interpretations for each of the three research questions. These interpretations create a context for implications for the practice and future study of educational leadership. Lastly, this chapter draws to a close with my revised conceptual framework that is embedded within my final reflective and reflexive comments.

Overview of the Study

There is consensus among all levels of educational governance (policy makers, teachers' associations, school boards, and school personnel) that the role of the principal has and continues to evolve (Alberta's Commission on Learning, 2003; Alberta Teachers' Association, 2006a; Wallace, et al., 2007; Wright, et al., 2007). In addition to responsibilities for teaching and learning, the principal's role has continued to expand with the addition of new and complex administrative responsibilities stemming from a multitude of reforms and innovations. However, as principals navigate new management and leadership roles along with school improvement structures and policies, the approaches for professional development and learning have remained largely the same.

Until recently, the role and professional learning of the principal has been somewhat ignored in Alberta's provincial policy. The professional practice of school principals is not reflected within Alberta's Teaching Quality Practice Standard (Alberta Education, 1997). However, principals are required by policy to develop an annual professional growth plan (Alberta Education, 1997; Alberta Teachers' Association, 2004b). The role of the school principal was highlighted and explored with the development of the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA) Leadership Quality Standard (2004a) and the Model Policy for Principals Professional Growth, Supervision, and Evaluation (2004b) documents. Most recently, seven leadership dimensions that further define the role of the principal were included in the working draft of the Principal Quality Practice document (Alberta Education, 2006).

With an emphasis on school improvement, reflective practice is receiving great attention and increased support in recent public K-12 educational discourse. However, relatively few studies seek the informative voice of principals regarding their experiences and understandings of reflective practice in relation to their roles as defined by legislation and policy. This case study aimed to address this gap and report on an investigation of Alberta principals' perspectives of

reflective practice during and after participation in the year-long *ROP Institute*. This study described principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice and elucidated conditions that principals perceive as supporting or constraining reflection within professional learning.

In an effort to create a context and rationale that forms the theoretical basis of this research, I drew upon three major strands in the contemporary educational literature: "School Leadership and the Principalship," "Reflective Practice," and "Professional Development." My literature review illuminated the significance of this study, particularly in light of the changing role of the principal within the Alberta reform context. A review of the educational literature revealed a degree of ambiguity surrounding how principals experience and understand reflective practice. Although reflective practice is prevalent in literature related to teacher as inquirer (Day, 1999a), researcher (Stenhouse, 1983), and reflective practitioner (Schön, 1983), contemporary educational literature does not specifically address school principals' understandings of reflective practice and the conditions that support or constrain reflective practice as a form of professional learning.

As the aim of this investigation was to examine principals' experiences, perceptions and understandings, I decided that a constructivist orientation would be most appropriate to document principals' views of reflective practice. Therefore, to carry out my research, a collective case study approach (Merriam, 2001) and comparative thematic analysis (Stake, 2000) were used. Data were collected primarily through individual, semi-structured interviews (Stake, 2000) and focus groups (Mertens, 2005). The other data sources that I used included field observations, questionnaires, and a researcher's journal. Three focus groups were held prior to the ten individual, semi-structured interviews. Both focus groups and individual interviews were audio-recorded with transcripts and interpretations of interview data being returned to respondents for a member checks before my final analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

The first stage of data analysis occurred while I collected the data and the second stage occurred after data collection had been completed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Through thematic analysis, I coded and categorized data according to patterns and emergent themes. In addition to member checks, prolonged engagement at workshops and on the website provided me with opportunities to capture salient issues and note divergent themes (Guba, 1981). Regular peer debriefings allowed me to consider new perspectives and present opportunities to challenge my biases when engaging in data analysis. Continued use of a researcher's journal also supported my own practices of reflection and reflexivity as I explored my research questions.

Summary of Interpretations

What are principals' experiences and understandings of reflective practice as a professional development approach?

Definitional diversity existed in principals' descriptions of reflective practice; although most indicated that there is a lack of physical and metaphorical space to engage in reflection within the current educational context. As principals engaged in specific reflective activities within the *ROP Institute*, it became increasingly apparent that reflection can not be mandated nor structured at the same time, and in the same way, for all practitioners. Rather, principal comments underscored the highly individual and personal nature of reflection.

It was observed that the majority of principals focused on generating knowledge and skills about their own and others' practice for the purpose of school improvement. Participants commonly assumed that the principal had important influence on school improvement processes and outcomes. When faced with a problematic situation or the need to make a decision, principals often engaged in reflective practices – both individually and with trusted colleagues. Principals often questioned what was done in the past (in regard to what worked or did not work) and how others may possibly respond to a given action or decision. It was widely believed that reflection was enhanced through deliberative intentions to garner differing viewpoints. Principals also emphasized the importance of risk-taking and role modeling reflective practices for teachers and other school members. However, *what* principals reflected on, within the context of the *ROP Institute* and in their daily practice, was ambiguous.

Not surprisingly, with the role of the principal clearly defined within policy and at a pragmatic level, principals mediated and ultimately appeared to align their actions with the official ideologies of their district and the province. Throughout the *ROP Institute*, these principals lived the tension between what they envisioned the principalship to be and how the principalship was actually shaped, enabled, and constrained by institutional powers. Although these principals felt compelled to act with authoritative certainty, they experienced continuous instability and uncertainty within their roles. Competing regimes of truth, conscious and unconscious, and traditional structures featured, celebrated, and promoted some forms of identity, while shutting out and largely ignoring other facets of the principalship. These principals described identity as being provisional at best, and at times even contradictory. In a changing educational landscape, principals questioned the predominant emphasis on instructional

leadership and instead espoused the value of transformational forms of leadership. However, as principals struggled to cope with various demands, emerging issues, and changing work priorities, they did not leverage their autonomy – legal or moral – to challenge, influence, or change the very system that they felt constrained their practice.

What conditions do principals perceive support reflection as a form of professional learning?

Emerging from the data, I noted numerous similarities between practitioners, scholars and policy makers' understandings of the conditions that support reflective practice as a form of professional learning. In particular, some *ROP Institute* principals used the metaphor of the classroom to describe how a learner-centered environment, within the school and district, allowed for reflection and professional learning. Within a learner-centered environment, reflection was enhanced by recognizing individual learning needs. Within individualized professional development offerings, principals indicated more purposeful engagement and participation in reflective activities. The ability to be reflective was also impacted when the purpose and outcomes of learning were clear and goals were perceived as manageable and relevant. These principals who did not experience meaningful engagement in their projects quickly became frustrated, cynical, and disengaged. Those participants with clearly-defined goals for their projects and professional growth were highly engaged in their learning. When learning was perceived as being relevant, principals demonstrated higher degrees of ownership and motivation that resulted in a commitment to action and greater likelihood of reflective practice.

Paradox permeated many principals' descriptions of reflective practice. Principals stressed the importance of finding balance between local and global contextual understandings within professional learning. Mediating the dissonance between the conflicting expectations inherent in their roles allowed principals to engage in what they described as a "more reflective and ethical" practice. The establishment of a trusting and collaborative communities of practice that "typically holds norms of continuous improvement and professional growth as well as the norms of mutual respect" (Leithwood, 2002, p. 99) created an important condition for learning.

Explicit in principals' understandings of reflection as a form of professional learning was the need to rethink existing structures and the use of time (e.g., the Hillview district demonstrated a commitment to professional learning by changing the principals' meeting format, allocating specific time for collaboration among principals, and piloting the year-long *ROP Institute*). Changing existing structures and redistributing time and resources signaled the development of new norms that elevated the importance of collaboration, dialogue, reflection and learning.

Constructivist instructional strategies that incorporated principals' craft expertise and background knowledge with relevant theory connected principals' practice with theory. Furthermore, as principals oscillated between theory and practice, meaning making evolved into more reflective and, at times, reflexive thinking. In a similar vein, new and diverse perspectives offered by external partners were viewed as facilitating deeper thinking and reflection.

As many principals assumed the role of researcher and engaged in their own action research projects they came to value reflective professional development approaches that allowed them to focus on specific aspects of their leadership practice. Integral to action research was a desire to expand one's knowledge base, foster awareness or understanding, and provoke improvement or change. In some cases, action research enabled some school principals to challenge current assumptions about learning and what constitutes a knowledge base for educational leadership. For a few principals, action research served as a potent form of professional learning that showed promise in supporting individual and collective improvement.

What conditions do principals perceive limit or constrain reflection as a form of professional learning?

Congruencies were noted in the conditions that principals perceived as supporting or inhibiting reflection and learning across both the interviews and large group sharing session. Implicit in principals' descriptions was the notion that meaningful learning and sustainable behavioural change only flourishes under certain conditions. In the absence of these conditions, individual and organizational benefits are not readily apparent. *ROP Institute* participants highlighted several problematic conditions that limit or constrain reflective practice. Not surprisingly, a lack of time and relevancy permeated much of the discussion during the focus groups and interviews. The online website was used to provide an any-time, any-place forum for principals to engage in collaborative reflection. Despite the promise of these emerging technologies, principals found that they wasted time as they navigated what they described as an unstable and unwieldy website. Furthermore, principals indicated a clear preference for face-to-face collaboration and reflection. As a result, the website seemed highly impersonal and principals were reluctant to publicly post their reflections.

As principals lived the challenge of balancing leadership responsibilities with the management roles of the principalship, they felt unable to find the time or the space to engage in reflective practice. With a diminished sense of organizational trust and miscommunication with external partners, some principals were less willing to engage in reflective practice within the context of the *ROP Institute*. Moreover, these principals were determined to hide their

vulnerabilities and minimize any areas that might be perceived as being deficient. For other principals who perceived and experienced a sense of organizational support and trust, they were more willing to engage in reflective activities and more inclined to integrate reflective activities within their work with the teachers in their respective schools.

Newly-appointed principals and assistant principals struggled with moving from the position of teacher-leader to that of principal. It was unclear as to how identity is redefined, named, and produced when a teacher is socialized into the principalship. The extent to which collaborative reflection with other principal colleagues impacted role-identity transformation was also ambiguous. However, it was evident that tension existed between principals' personal identity and school improvement reform agendas.

Principals' notions of reflection also elucidated how reflective practice, embedded in professional development, may limit and undermine intended purposes. From the onset, "expected" participation in the *ROP Institute* produced unintended and undesirable effects. Some participants felt that the program goals implied that they were not reflective – thereby perpetuating subservience and undermining the confidence and autonomy of principals. Other principals worried that their action research projects would be used to document their reflective thoughts for disciplinary or socializing (Fendler, 2003).

Popularized treatments of reflection appeared to create "silver bullet" solutions that would likely be inadequate to address complex problems, such as racism, diversity and poverty – particularly within the structural and ideological milieus within which reflection was usually encouraged. Moreover, sustained observations also illuminated how reflection with like-minded colleagues as "critical friends" allowed for politically-engaged social reconstruction that supported dominant values and traditional power relations. Although collective reflection disrupted some habituated patterns of thinking, it appeared to only interrogate beliefs, values, and practices at a superficial level when like-minded peers or central office administrators were present. Reflexivity was rarely evident or promoted.

Ambiguity Surrounding the Impact of School Improvement Structures and Policies on Principal's Roles

Many times, the principals shared with me that they had little latitude to initiate change and be reflective within school improvement efforts. I often wondered if it was even possible for principals to be reflective when their identity as instructional leaders was so clearly defined by policies and practices indicative of predictable structures and predetermined responses for

problem-solving and decision-making. Tension existed between individual reflection and the demands of systemic school improvement.

During the interviews, many principals referred to time, practices and policies – much of which is out of principals' direct control – that are barriers to reflective practice. Rarely did participants interrogate ethical issues inherent in school improvement. In my role as "critical friend," I met with one group to provide feedback about their action research project. I pointed out that it may be difficult for teachers to opt out of participating in their action research project related to professional growth planning. I shared how I would have felt obligated, as a teacher, to participate in the project if my principal had asked. Moreover, I shared other ethical implications that occurred when only the certain teachers would have additional support for professional learning. The participants in the group did not agree with the perspective that I offered. Although this same group of principals espoused the need for conflicting viewpoints and opposing values, these principals largely ignored my suggestions. They did not reflect on the potential use or misuse of their positional power. The role of the principal and micro-politics inherent in the action research projects were not subject to critical analysis.

Despite dispelling notions of the heroic principal or instructional leader, tension also existed as principals navigated between "top-down" and "bottom-up" approaches to building leadership capacity. One newly-appointed principal simply stated that reflection was not always practical, "Sometimes I need to ensure that things get done and are done right and in a timely manner. I just take care of those tasks and make those decisions by myself." As principals tried to relinquish decision-making authority and engage others in reflection, they faced a serious tension with the all-pervasive culture of accountability in which principals operate vis-à-vis their senior-level district administrators and external stakeholders. When asked about expectations to magnify individual and organizational potential, principals were not always confident that pooling the thinking and expertise of school members was more effective and efficient than relying on more directive leadership approaches.

Tension around the issue of influence and inclusion were magnified within Alberta's culture of accountability. One newly-appointed principal critiqued recent discourse about the broad-based involvement of the school community. He pondered his ability to be reflective, "We can say that we're site-based management but we're not. We're so far from site-based management. It's a top-down decision [implementation of a proliferation of educational improvement initiatives from the district and province] and you're expected to follow those." He goes on to describe the tension between school, district and provincial needs. He argued that there is no room for reflection within the current educational context:

> The problem then is that you have important things that are coming down from the Minister [of Education]...that have to be done. I mean you are told. The problem then is that might not be something that's really fitting your guiding principles, yet you are expected to do it.

He continues to explain how reflective practice is not viewed as critical to the principalship when "I personally feel [principals] probably aren't as recognized in our District as they should be. They're sometimes maybe viewed more of the middleman."

There seemed to be a great degree of ambiguity surrounding the impact of school improvement structures and policies on principals' roles as they negotiated dissonance among competing discourses and contradictory practices of the current reform context. Although Alberta's reform policies appear to decentralize accountability, the school principals felt that there was a simultaneous move to centralize and control the educational system. Principals were trying to balance their own values with the overwhelming demands of school improvement. Principals recognized that students often had the least influence in the system and they needed to trust that they could "go to sleep at night knowing my decision was in the best interest of kids." But in the absence of space, both physical and metaphorical, principals were unable to engage in deep and meaningful reflective practice that might promise improved educational opportunities for all children. Being bombarded with conflicting and competing demands, principals were feeling as if they were constantly compromising and seeking moral balance. Yet many of the stories that principals shared about their schools and practice illuminated that reflection is necessary and in fact critical to transforming and enriching the quality of education provided to students.

Implications for the Practice and Study of Educational Leadership

My analysis of the data and discussion of the findings resulted in the formulation of six implications for the practice and future study of educational leadership that I offer for the reader's consideration. These implications included the need to: (a) problematize traditional notions of school organization and leadership, (b) attend to affective and motivational dynamics that impact individual and collective reflection, (c) consider alternate frameworks to evaluation the professional learning of school principals, (d) rethink practitioner- and university-based preparation and professional development programs for school principals, (e) examine the relationship between principal identity and educational reform, and (f) identify a multiplicity of methodologies to study the school principalship.

Under each implication, I included my own reflective questions that emerged from my new learnings and unanticipated findings. These questions suggest possibilities for future research and study. While some of my new questions are extensions of my own original research questions and findings, others questions were unanticipated and have come to me as this study draws to a close.

The Need to Problematize Traditional Notions of School Organization and Leadership

Recognizing the role, accountability, autonomy and responsibility tensions inherent in a reflective principalship, I continue to consider the extent to which principals were able to construct or reimagine their roles as principals within the current policy context. Throughout the *ROP Institute*, principals reflected on their roles and most disputed traditional role-bound theories of leadership. Many principals tried to reconceptualize their traditional roles and both encouraged and welcomed multiple sources of leadership that naturally emanated from the school community. This was exemplified in a newly-appointed principal's explanation:

> We [the leadership team] were forced into collaborating because we were so new to everything...It forced us to think more frequently and with more intensity. Instead of just having casual conversation, it [reflection] led us to talk about what is it that we do, what's working, what's not working and why it is important.

Another principal shared why she valued collaboration, "By being introspective and thinking and just keeping things to myself I'm not going to learn." Several principals surmised that the creation of learning communities and the promotion of distributed leadership prompted reflection. At times, diverse viewpoints and conflict were viewed as a means to deepening understanding.

But even as principals extended opportunities for distributed sources of leadership, principals, by virtue of legal authority and designated position, were still "managers of organizational meaning" (Anderson, 1990, p. 43). Despite having multiple opportunities within the *ROP Institute* to engage in individual and collective reflection, principals rarely challenged the routine and insular context of their formal positions. Rarely did participants interrogate ethical issues inherent in any school improvement – nor was the role of the principal and micro-politics subjected to critical analysis. Only one facilitator alluded to the power inherent in the principalship. This participant noted, "You need to hold up the mirror to yourself ... What do I need to do differently to change? ... You're a big variable in the equation." For this participant, examination of power differentials provided her with greater insight into the potential effects of her own actions within her work.

The principals' role and responsibilities limited their opportunities to engage in meaningful and regular reflection. Considering his workday and a notable proliferation of reform, one principal conceded, "Reflective practice…is something I have to do consciously…It's not integrated into my practice yet, but I understand the value …I'm engaged in that process of trying to make it a part of my practice on the habitual level." Principals often tended to transactional leadership matters first (e.g., budgeting, writing newsletters, and managing the facility). Principals expressed satisfaction when such jobs were completed or "out of the job jar." Principals felt professionally and personally accountable for meeting the prescribed responsibilities as outlined in policy. Pressing issues, as identified by principals (e.g., addressing the needs of English as a Second Language learners and dealing with bullying), were often "relegated to the back burner." I wondered if these principals focused largely on operational aspects of their roles because the completion of these transactional tasks allowed them to feel a sense of accomplishment and resulted in greater confidence and self-efficacy.

Traditional structures within the school and district constrained principals' capacity to be reflective practitioners. Principals felt that reflection was particularly challenging in the absence of social trust at school, jurisdictional and provincial levels:

> It is very difficult to…have those conversations because at the onset, you create winners and losers. You have to get people beyond that. We're not in here for your way or my way…it's just that we're looking at things a different way.

Participants felt that space, structures, and time were needed to engage in reflection and access differing viewpoints. Reflective practice was problematic within the confines of the current educational milieu.

As I left the last scheduled session of the *ROP Institute*, I questioned:

- *Was it even possible to be reflective when these principals were expected to follow predictable structures and predetermined responses when problem-solving and decision-making?*
- *As the work of Alberta principals becomes increasingly more complex as new ideologically-driven external interventions by government are mandated, is it realistic for principals to assume the role of reflective practitioner?*
- *How does the presence/lack of trust impact principals' leadership practice? How are bonds of trust formed and shaped within schools, districts, and the larger educational system?*

The Need to Consider Alternate Frameworks to Evaluate the Professional Learning of Principals

Arguments in the professional development literature suggest that learning is enhanced when participants contribute to clear statements of goals for professional development and are

actively engaged in ongoing evaluation of the program in relation to established goals (Barth, 1986a; Guskey, 2002; Knowles, 1989). Feeling "un-involved" in the development of program goals, principals argued that professional development frameworks should be considered in light of contextual factors and individual needs prior to, and during, program implementation. Although recognizing the merit of summative program evaluation, principals argued that formative assessment is critical to gather data about strengths of the program in addition to limitations or challenges that must be addressed to maximize participants' learning.

As I used Guskey's framework (2002) to evaluate this professional development model, I agreed with Guskey's premise that multiple indicators and perspectives must be considered. However, I found that Guskey's framework failed to consider participants' capacity to engage in reflective and reflexive practices that allow for sustainable, second-order change. Within the existing framework, little attention is given to the higher-order thinking skills (e.g., reflection, synthesis, or analysis) necessary for problem solving and theory building. In addition to cognitive learning (i.e., mental skills and knowledge), I argue that greater attention should be given to affective aspects of learning. One principal shared, "Reflection isn't easy. I am not always comfortable with what I learn about myself, but I take these understandings and try to use them to be a better leader." Such a comment points to the need to identify and understand the feelings and emotions provoked by reflection. Reflection and professional learning was not always easy – it was tiresome and emotionally draining for many of the principals. The affective aspects of learning (e.g., feelings, values, motivations, preoccupations, fears, and attitudes) should be considered within the evaluation frameworks used by districts, policy makers and academics. As principals respond to emotional aspects of their work, they formulated new knowledge or refined their understandings. Without understanding internalized values and feelings, principals were less likely to see discrepancies between espoused theories and theories-in-use. Professional commitment to ethical practice entailed consideration and interrogation of these discrepancies.

Guskey's framework evaluates participants' learning (i.e., Did they acquire the intended knowledge and skills?) and participants' use of the new knowledge and skills. The use of such linear evaluation frameworks to focus on specific knowledge acquisition tends to neglect the dialectical, holistic and personal nature of reflective practice and professional learning. The mere absence of reflective practice within existing frameworks may negate the value of stimulating learning and encouraging reflective dialogue about important issues pertaining to school improvement.

As I think about the effectiveness of the ROP Institute, I question:

- *In addition to cognitive aspects of learning, what effectiveness criteria could be used to consider the intrapersonal (self-knowledge) and interpersonal (relationships with others) awareness that is developed within, and integral to, more reflective professional development approaches?*

The Need to Rethink Practitioner- and University-Based Preparation and Professional Development Programs for School Principals

Engaging in reflection as a form of professional development, as described by *ROP Institute* principals, was increasingly important as they navigated continuous technological, societal, economic, and political change. Professional development that was reported as meeting the perceived needs of principals was comprised of theoretical learning that was embedded within practical school-based problems or administrative issues. Exploring conflicting values, unanticipated issues, or problematic situations prompted reflection. For example, action research was described as a powerful tool to prompt reflection on concrete issues of importance (for many participants, the foci of the action research projects emerged from the PQP document as they explored instructional challenges related to school improvement).

Through the unfolding of the action research projects, principals self-initiated reflection, dialogue, collaboration, and problem solving independently and with colleagues. In addition, some principals also argued that opportunities to engage in professional learning must extend beyond formally-designated leaders to include diverse representation from the school community (e.g., students, counselors, teacher leaders, parent council members). Participants' experiences and perceptions reflect current educational theory and practices related to instructional pedagogies that promote learning. The extent to which these theories and practices are integrated within current professional development and preparation programs is relatively unknown.

Yet consideration must also be given to the negative emotional impact of mandatory certification processes. Beyond stress and work overload, principals experienced a loss of power and control under the current accountability regime. With the presence of fear, anger, and at times emotional paralysis, it called into question the practice of seeking school improvement by mandating professional development.

At this time, I still wonder:

- *To what extent do professional development programs for principals reflect local and provincial educational legislation and policy?*
- *What are the strengths and limitations of action research as a form of professional learning for school principals?*
- *What professional development approaches may be used with school principals to foster reflexivity?*

- *How, and to what extent, are constructivist and critical pedagogies integrated within university-based preparation programs and graduate coursework?*

The Need to Attend to Affective and Motivational Dynamics that Impact Individual and Reflection

Reflection demanded both physical and metaphorical space to disseminate diverse ideas and to reduce principal isolation. Study participants emphasized how social trust is necessary for individual and organizational reflection and learning. Additional research is required to explore, in greater depth, the effects that reflective practices within professional development programming have in morphing extant notions, conceptualizations, and lived experiences of power within our schools and the larger educational system.

As principals assumed greater managerial roles, they felt accountable for effective and efficient school operations. Limited space existed for what these principals desired and perceived as more humanistic leadership approaches. Little time was allowed for relationship building. Suppression of these more affective and emotional aspects of the principalship were of significant interest and concern to the principals in this study. Attending to affective and motivational dynamics, one experienced principal was overcome with emotion as he shared the importance of being fully present for others:

> When you see people really change, that's an immeasurable, powerful thing.... You've made a difference in someone's life. You've helped them be a little bit better in doing something or you given them some understanding that's made their life easier to deal with.

As I think about his words, I ask:

- *How do principals negotiate both the humanistic and managerial aspects of the principalship?*
- *How do principals navigate distinct and competing leadership approaches?*

The Need to Examine the Relationship between Principal Identity and Educational Reform

As *ROP Institute* principals engaged in reflection online and during the workshops and interviews, they often described the tension that existed between their personal identity and beliefs and current reform agendas. One principal commented, "I have no choice but to support this work. Yet, this is not who I am and who I want to be." With a recent barrage of education reforms, Alberta is an ideal setting to study the principalship and how current discourses of educational reform and school improvement may promote, privilege, and dictate normalizing behaviours or identities for school principals. Additional research is required to investigate the role of the principal in relation to reform policies for school improvement.

I urge consideration of the following questions:

- *How do principals negotiate dissonance among competing discourses and contradictory practices of the current reform context?*
- *What are the discourses and structures (e.g., practices, policies, and language) that inform, shape, and socialize principals' identity?*

The Need for a Multiplicity of Methodologies to Study the School Principalship

Undoubtedly, the association of reflective practice with a variety of individual and organizational benefits will result in continued interest. However, to more fully address Heck and Hallinger's (1999) "blank spots" and "blind spots," I argue that deeper understanding of reflective practice needs to be garnered through descriptive methodologies such as longitudinal observations, interviews, case studies, and ethnographic fieldwork to ascertain a more nuanced understanding of the principalship and school leadership. The opportunity to engage in prolonged observations and multiple interviews afforded me a deeper and richer understanding of reflective practice and the principalship. Moreover, evocative cases viewed through a multiplicity of perspectives and comprised of rich descriptions of integrative practices may elucidate richer images of the relationship between the "openness" to engaging in reflective practice and a variety of factors that may include the: (i) principal's age, (ii) principal's stage of administration career, and (iii) type of school or district. Considering the imminent principal leadership shortage in most provinces, such research would be timely and significant for informing both policy and practice.

As this study draws to a close, I am left wondering:

- *To what extent does reflective practice support school improvement? How does reflective practice contribute to improved student learning and enhanced teaching performance?*
- *How might alternate and multiple theoretical frameworks and epistemological perspectives impact our understanding of the principalship?*
- *How does the use of alternative frameworks impact the preparation of new educational researchers?*

Perhaps, as educational researchers study theories and paradigms that differ from their own and as they explore alternative research methodologies, these researchers will also engage in the critical reflection that may open new possibilities for understanding the school principalship. Certainly, my own reflective and reflexive practices have afforded me a more holistic and nuanced perspective of the school principalship.

Closing Reflective and Reflexive Comments

As this study draws to a close, I must pause. Societal pressures, and the current reform context in Alberta, have all of us working, learning, and leading at a break-neck, numbing pace. However, through this study, I have come to appreciate and search for the pauses, interludes, stops, and lulls.

Although this study originated from my own frustration, I write these final words with a sense of hopefulness. Hopeful because I see the potential opportunities that lay ahead of all educators who aspire to and continue to dedicate themselves to the principalship. Hopeful because I have derived great personal and professional satisfaction from engaging in this reflective and reflexive process. As I prepare to pursue my new questions in the future, I am hopeful that I can contribute further to our understanding of the principalship within the current context of reform. This cyclical process of coming *to be* and *to understand* began with many questions. As I embarked on my Master's research, I initially hoped and expected to find the answers. Over time, I have learned to love the questions and the potentiality within them. I am exhilarated by the new understandings and questions that have emerged from this learning experience.

Those early days around the kitchen table are still at the forefront of my mind. It was the process of reflecting with those I trusted – through our dialogue, questions, debates, brainstorming, trying, and debriefing – that energized me and provoked my thinking. Finding a solution to a problem was secondary to the process of reflecting with each other and being present for each other. My parents did not view problems as being problematic. They often reminded us to focus on the opportunities, the possibilities, the learning experiences, and the character builders inherent in any situation.

As I think about my principalship, I gravitated to the simple, orderly responsibilities and tasks that could be efficiently and effectively completed. Although I loved to debate, question, and brainstorm, few of my colleagues felt comfortable wading into discussions about value-laden issues, controversial problems, or "messy" challenges. At times, I felt alone – wondering why I didn't experience and understand the role of the principal in the same way as my colleagues.

Semantics are important. How we come to reflect is influenced by semantics. In the educational literature, and in our daily work, we speak continuously about *problems* and *problematic situations*. We talk about *problematizing* certain constructs as a sometimes linear and logical process. The negative connotation associated with *problems, conflict, challenges, dilemmas, issues* causes us to shy away from or avoid reflecting on that which is perhaps most important. In a similar vein, we present reflection as a *task*, *activity*, *professional development*, or

a *job*. Might we come to reflection differently if we consider reflection as *learning*, a *process*, or *state of mind*? This is not unlike the connotation of the term *practice*. This term conjures up *institutionalized images, pre-established routines, normative behaviours,* and *technical responses*. It is no wonder that I, and my principal colleagues, cringed when we were told to be *reflective practitioners*.

For me, this study about reflective practice has deepened my understanding of the principal's role. In fact, I have come to understand that the most important work of the principal is to confront controversy, to interrogate value-laden issues, and to think imaginatively when facing those daunting and insurmountable situations. The real work, the work that may potentially improve educational opportunities for all of our children, is not simple, clearly-defined and replicable. The real work is hard, messy, abstract, emotional, and undeniably risky.

As I reread the literature that has influenced my work the most, I often return to this passage from Schön. Schön (1987) elegantly described the choice practitioners face:

> In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high hard ground overlooking a swamp. On the high ground, manageable problems lend themselves to a solution through the application of research-based theory and technique. In the swampy lowland, messy, confusing problems defy technical solution. The irony of this situation is that the problems of the high ground tend to be relatively unimportant to individuals or society at large, however great their technical interest may be, while in the swamp lie the problems of the greatest human concern. The practitioner must choose. Shall he remain on the high ground where he can solve relatively unimportant problems according to prevailing standards of rigor, or shall he descend to the swamp of important problems and nonrigorous inquiry? (p. 3)

Despite the legal and political frameworks within which we work, I believe that the work of the principalship is inherently moral and ethical. It is incumbent upon us, upon me, to choose to descend to the swamp. I may find myself there alone, or I may find others who have found the courage to go there too. The problems, dilemmas, ambiguity, conflicts, disturbances, doubts, and challenges in the swamp are endless, but important. Lying in the depths of the swamp are hidden possibilities, freedoms, chances, and potentialities. In the swamp we no longer focus on ridding our lives and schools of problems; rather we embrace each opportunity to create and understand what is most important to our students and to us. It is letting go of our quest for purity, coherence, clarity, harmony, and perfection. When I return to the principalship, I will choose the swamp.

But in choosing the swamp, what will that mean? How will my practice as a principal change when I descend to the "swamp of important problems" (Schön, 1987, p. 3)?

In the swamp, everyday experiences and happenings are rich sources of learning. Learning may be provoked by tension, chaos, doubt, struggle, choice, uncertainty, obscurity, conflict,

shock, and dilemmas. On the other hand, learning may also be prompted by new situations, opportunity, innovation, creativity, change, surprise, or a desire to learn. While some principals will ignore these everyday experiences, others will respond intuitively. However, I argue here that principals have the moral responsibility to engage in informed professional decision making and leadership practice that is predicated on understanding. That is, if we are truly committed to improving schools, principals must continuously engage in reflective and reflexive practices.

When we descend to the swamp, Dewey's (1933) three attitudes are perquisites to engaging in reflective action, including: (a) openmindedness – genuinely listening to alternative viewpoints and recognizing the potential error in one's beliefs, (b) responsibility – considering consequences of one's actions, and (c) wholeheartedness – being unswerving in one's efforts to ensure that behaviour is a manifestation of one's beliefs and philosophy. As society and schools change, principals must be reflective and refrain from fixed and patterned behaviours or simplistic solutions to complex problems. These attitudes, as described by Dewey, constitute the very *state of mind* and the *way of being* a reflective and reflexive practitioner who goes beyond routine and impulsive responses to reflection *in* and *on* leadership (Schön, 1987). This active, persistent and careful consideration of one's practice and beliefs is integral to my understanding of the experiential cycle of reflective and reflexive practice (see Figure 2). Rather than providing templates, surefire remedies, or one-size fits-all prescriptions for practice, tacit knowledge and educational theory provide conceptual insights that inform our thoughts about practice. In this more complex, nuanced view of leadership, professional judgments and accompanying actions are derived from unique practice problems.

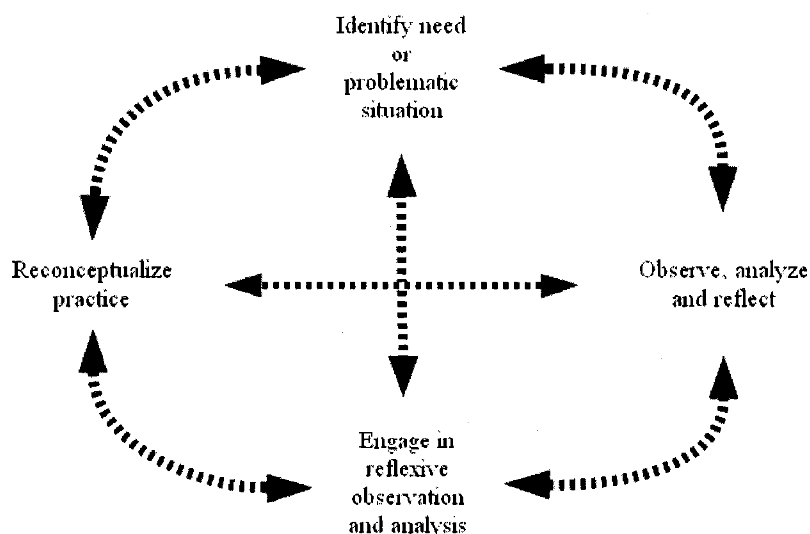

Figure 2 – Experiential Cycle of Reflective and Reflexive Practice

This cycle is based on constructivist assumptions whereby learning is viewed as dialectic, collaborative and experiential. Moreover, learning is actively constructed, personal and holistic. Figure 2 does not intend to present a series of linear steps; rather, Figure 2 depicts the continuous, deliberate, and expansive thinking that occurs as one goes about "managing messes" (Schon, 1983, p. 16). Reflection, and the search for understanding, requires vulnerability and risk taking – more so than just *thinking* about the problem in a technical manner. The depth of thinking that may potentially occur is depicted in Table 4.

Possible Questions within the Experiential Cycle of Reflective and Reflexive Practice	
Identify a need or problematic situation	• What is the persistent need (or question, issue and controversy) I face? • What is the nature of the need or problematic situation? • What do I want to learn or understand? • Why is this significant? • What might I do to address this situation?
Observe, analyze and reflect	• What happened? Why? • How have others interpreted this problem or situation? • What theoretical frameworks may inform my understanding of this situation? • What are the educational, social, political and moral contexts inherent in this situation?
Engage in reflexive observation and analysis	• What are my values, assumptions and beliefs that impact this situation? • How is my leadership motivated or interpreted by my personal values? • What actions did I take? Why? • What was my reaction? Feelings? Intentions? • How have I interpreted this problem? How would others describe my interpretation of this problem?
Reconceptualize practice	• Are my espoused theories aligned with my theories-in-use? • Does reflective and reflexive thinking elucidate the need to maintain my current conceptualization? Modify or refine my conceptualization? Develop a new conceptualization? • Have I introduced new strategies consistent with my refined or new conceptualization? Have these strategies led to desirable outcomes?

Table 4: Possible Questions within the Experiential Cycle of Reflective and Reflexive Practice

Reflection is metaphor for learning in the swamp. This continuous reinterpretation of that which we perceive as already understanding makes reflection stand apart from mere thoughtfulness. Reflection enables us to own our practice and be accountable to ourselves and to others.

The importance of engaging in reflexive observation and analysis (as depicted in Table 4) is relatively absent in the emerging literature related to reflective practice and teacher professional development. When I look back on this study, I did not anticipate the importance of the *self*, the *me*, or the *I* in practice. Yet in many instances, the *self*, the *me*, or the *I* define practice and its supports or consequences. The awareness of positionality on practice is integral to leadership practice in the swamp. When we interrogate how a problem is shaped by our practice, we are able to see how our assumptions, biases and beliefs create contradictions and paradox. As we come to terms with a problem, so too must we be willing to come to terms with ourselves. We must embody Dewey's attitudes of openmindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness, in addition to rendering ourselves vulnerable to reconceptualizing and recreating not only our practice, but ourselves. Reflexivity becomes the discovery of one's self through the exploration of a problem. In the swamp, there needs to be a constant interplay, both intentional and serendipitous, between a change in thought and a change in practice.

As I consider this experiential cycle, I see the need to link the practice of the principal to the larger system in which practice is enmeshed. In each bulleted question (in Table 4), *we* could be substituted for *I*. Relational engagement is integral to the reflective and reflexive practices of the principalship. This experiential cycle does not occur within a vacuum. Rather, principals leverage and harness the potential of reflective and reflexive practice as they consider how they continuously enter, negotiate, and exit this cycle concurrently as individuals and as part of differing personal and educational ecosystems (see Figure 3).

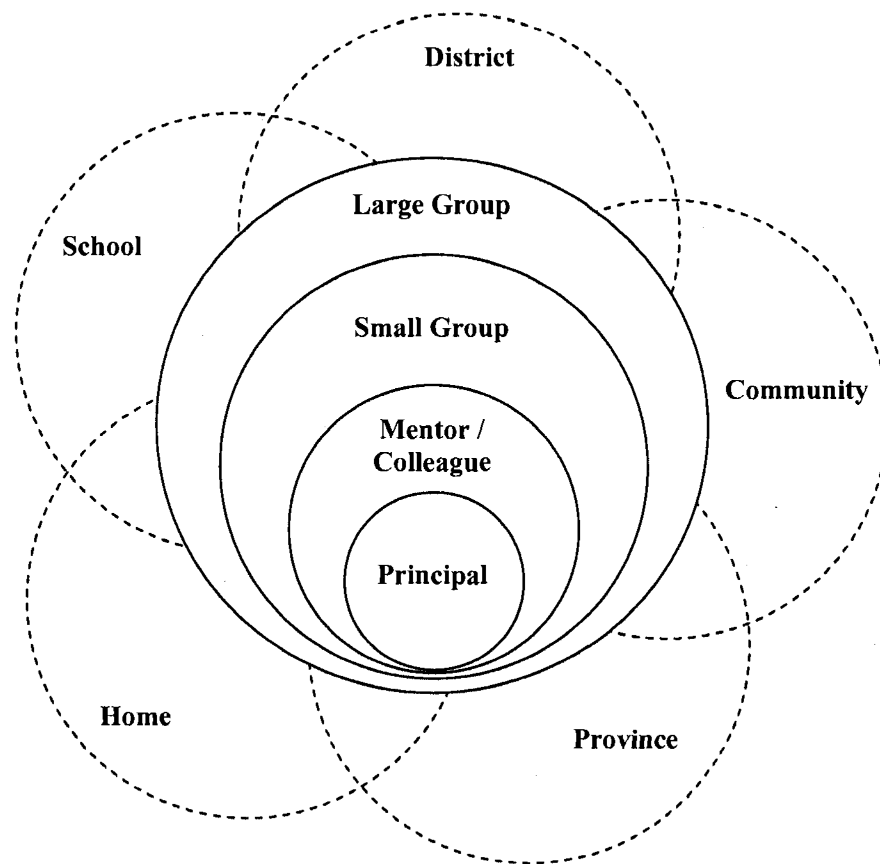

Figure 3 – Relational Engagement in Reflective Practice

Thus, the practice of the principal occurs at a highly personal and individual level, yet practice is enhanced in the interactions between persons (i.e., ranging from reflection with a mentor, to engaging in dialogue with one's action research team or "critical friends", to participating in whole group activities such as the *ROP Institute*). Practice is also defined by the contextual factors inherent in different ecosystems which influence practice and are influenced by practice (e.g., the school, district, community, province, and home). This model illuminates how we individually and collectively compose ourselves and schools within distinct and overlapping contextual ecosystems.

When I began this study, I was clinging to the assumption that all principals valued reflection – that all principals were thinking deeply around issues such as equity and diversity. I wanted to believe that each of us yearned to reclaim our professionalism and assume a greater moral and ethical stance on issues of importance. I believed that my struggle to *become a principal*, permeated out of my newness, my own inexperience in the role of principal.

Ironically, I did not uncover this in my study. Initially seeing this perhaps as a sign of weakness, disillusionment, cynicism, deficiency or apathy on behalf of the principals I studied, I have come to understand the pressures of the current policy context more deeply. I am more aware of how the current reform context has shaped, dictated, and largely ignored these principals' identities. This realization has been an important part of my learning and my own reflections about my principalship. Yet, I can't help but think there is more to reflection.

Why is reflection so unsettling, disturbing, frightening and even paralyzing to us? Perhaps we are fearful of critiquing the system in which we work. In this study, I too wrestled continuously with what and how I should reveal the stories and revelations from the principals that I interviewed as well as my own narrative. As a principal and researcher, I was mindful of the fact that my place within certain social groups constrained my interpretations. I struggled with finding the correct words to convey the participants' stories while trying to protect their privacy. As I moved these private narratives into a more public space, I was highly aware of the potential ramifications that these participants might face. I often reflected on how to communicate my findings in a way that contributed original theory, yet still honored the work of these practitioners. Just as the principals in this study seemed afraid to speak freely within the current accountability context, I too found myself feeling uneasy and vulnerable as I wrote my thesis.

There is great tension and paradox inherent in reflective practice:

> You enlarge the possibility of a space of freedom, of a liberating awakening of self-consciousness that brings within rational reach historical possibilities hitherto excluded by symbolic domination and by the misrecognition implied in the doxic understanding of the social world, while, on the other hand, you simultaneously effect a radical disenchanting that makes this social world in which we must continue to struggle almost unlivable? There is a strong tension, perhaps a contradiction, between this will to provide instruments for increasing consciousness and freedom and the demobilization that an overtly acute awareness of the persuasiveness of social determinisms threatens to produce. (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 194)

It is simply naïve to assume that the educational system is value-neutral. Moreover, it takes courage to face and confront that which we recognize as disenchanting about our schools and ourselves. Through reflection we come to see the world and ourselves differently. We accept the messiness, ambiguity, and uncertainty. We value the never-ending process of challenging our practice. However, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) so eloquently expressed, reflection can create a prison of awareness for us.

My own admissions and thoughts here, in this closing reflective and reflexive piece, have shed light on *who I was* and *who I might be*. I have become more reflexive as I experienced a heightened awareness and desire to examine my own assumptions, values and biases that shape

my practice. I have come to understand the lenses which shape my perception of the world. In questioning how my own or school practices perpetuated norms and practices of larger society, I have considered how my beliefs may have promoted and at other times prevented access to learning. In the spirit of reflection, I have learned to listen closely and appreciate the diverse perspectives offered in times of conflict. But in the process, I have experienced great discomfort, agitation, uncertainty, ambiguity, and even heartbreak as I have reflected upon the beliefs and practices that defined *who I was*. Yet in critiquing the extent to which my colleagues were reflective and reflexive, I felt compelled to force myself to be more transparent. In doing so, I felt vulnerable because I did not always like my new view of my principalship and of myself. Might we, might I, be afraid of *seeing*? Do we, do I, have the disposition to fulfill the moral obligations of reflective and reflexive practice?

It seems paradoxical that while some principals believe strongly that they need to influence the system and chart their own course, they are not assertively taking advantage of opportunities to favourably influence the political and moral will to bring that about. Certainly there are many reasons why principals refrain from being reflective. Yet throughout this study I have been reminded of Greenfield's (1991) notion that organizations are created through human intention and decision-making despite the great influence organizations have on those who work in them. In accepting bureaucratic ethos, we give up moral, political, and professional autonomy. It follows that in order to foster and maintain autonomy, we need to regularly engage in reflection about our decision making and moral and social purposes. As we engage in self-conscious and self-directed searching, and collaborate with others in and outside of school, we must test our experiences, intuition, and emotions. Although we work in a policy context that is ideologically-driven, these small, deliberate, and reflective actions can send out tiny ripples that may impact this complex social system. But there are choices to be made.

Embodied in the relations between policy and practice is a dilemma. Policies are intended to solve problems and create accountability for school improvement; yet the perspectives of the principals (and others) who *own* the problem in the first place are largely ignored within policy development and problem solving processes. If we truly want schools to improve, and if all levels of governance have a vested interest in school improvement, reflective practice should assume its place within policy. What is deemed to be important should be defined through principals' reflective practices rather than through the policy itself. Policies should not dictate what matters most in our practice.

As principals choose to reclaim their moral, professional and ethical autonomy, reflection could promote the *seeing* and *understanding* that presses us *to act* and hopefully *to change* for the

better – whatever that may be. Reflection is a state of mind – it is how we create and encourage action while upholding virtues of justice, empathy and optimism. Through the attainment of greater autonomy, principals, myself included, could possibly generate a vision of the future by identifying, analyzing, and solving problems impeding the realization of the vision. Reflective practice is an invitation for principals to reclaim our moral, professional, and political autonomy. Reflective practice is at the heart of learning and creates possibilities for changes that may improve the quality of educational opportunities for all students. It is about *being* open, accountable, and vulnerable as we enter into different and important conversations about our work.

As this study draws to a close, I continue to contemplate how these principals were often unable or unwilling to reflect on and critique the contradictory nature of their role and identity as defined and produced by current reform discourses. At times, principals seemed unaware as to how their identity may be shaped by competing and contradictory reform discourses. As I wrote the implications for the practice and study of educational leadership, I realized that there is a need to link the identity of the principal to the larger system in which identity is enmeshed. If the principal's leadership is deemed crucial to sustainable school improvement, consideration should be given to the relationship between principal identity and educational reform. Emerging from this study, I am now left wondering: (a) What is the role of the principal in relation to reform policies for school improvement?; (b) Which specific educational reforms are of concern to principals?; (c) What are the discourses (e.g., practices, policies, structures, and language) that inform the principal's identity formation?; (d) What are the tensions that principals face between their personal identity and reform agendas?; and (e) How do principals negotiate dissonance among competing discourses and contradictory practices within the current reform context? With a recent barrage of education reforms, we have yet to explore how the current discourses of school improvement may shape, promote, privilege, and dictate the identities of school principals. How principals navigate reform policies for school improvement is of importance due to the profound influence individual principals may have directly and indirectly have on professionalizing teaching, enhancing student learning, and potentially improving schools.

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Appendix A – *Reflections on Practice Institute* Program Plan for 2006 - 2007

Dates	Face-to-Face Workshop Topics	Dates	Online Tasks (ROP Web Site)
Early October	One full day: • Program overview • Professionalism • PQP and the role of school administrator/leader • Instructional leadership • Reflective practice and journaling		
Late October	One evening and one full day: • Online learning communities • Collaboration within a professional learning community (trust issues) • Overview of action research	October	• Hands-on web site tour and "Getting to Know You" • Developing online protocols • Use of focus conversation method to reflect on principals' use of time over the course of one week (and the impact of activities on instructional leadership)
Late November	One full day: • Review orientation of the ROP web site • Literature review • Research ethics (Code of Professional Conduct, FOIP, ethical research practice) • Action research data sources and proposals • Peer review process	November - Mid-January	• Developing a good research question • Exploring the link to Federal Ethics web site • Accessing online professional literature databases (area of interest) • Posting literature reviews
Late January	One half-day: • Peer review of action research project proposals	January-February	• Posting draft action research proposals • Review critical friends protocol • Use peer review template to provide feedback to group • Ongoing feedback regarding projects
Late February			• Discussion and problem solving related to action research projects and progress (cancelled)
Mid-April	1 day (optional): • Work on completing action research report		
Late May	One half-day: • Presenting action research findings • Celebration of professional learning	April-May	• Preparation of research reports • Feedback on research reports, from team members

Appendix B – Letters of Invitation and Consent Forms
Invitation Letter and Consent Form to Superintendent

March 20, 2007

Dear <Superintendent>,

Our names are José da Costa (Professor in Educational Administration and Leadership) and Lisa Wright (Masters graduate student in Educational Administration and Leadership) in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. The purpose of this letter is to invite your school jurisdiction to participate in a research study entitled Principal Professional Development: Reflections on Practice. The purpose of the study is to investigate principals' and central office administrators' perceptions and expectations of professional development and reflective practice models that may assist principals in exemplifying the skills and knowledge outlined in the draft Quality Practice Standards for Principals in Alberta, as well as supporting leadership for school improvement. It is our hope that the findings from this study will inform policy makers and educators about flexible programming structures that may be supportive of principals' personal and professional growth plans. This study will take place over six months and is funded by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the University of Alberta (Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Policy Studies). Findings from this study will be compiled in a report submitted to the Hillview Public School Division, the Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta Education; the data gathered will also form the basis of Ms. Wright's Master's in Education thesis.

In particular, we have heard and witnessed many positive and informative comments about your jurisdiction's year-long participation in the *Reflections on Practice Institute*. With your permission, we would like to carry out our study with your principals and central office personnel. If you agree to involve your school jurisdiction in this study, we will contact the principals and central office personnel and invite them to become involved.

Attached to this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please contact one of us. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

During this study, informed and written consent will be obtained from all participants before interviews begin. The 20 participants (you, 17 principals, and 2 other central office personnel) will be invited to become involved in the completion of a questionnaire (approximately 30 minutes to complete) and a focus group interview (approximately 60 minutes duration). The administration of a questionnaire and the completion of the focus groups will take place before the individual interviews (lasting approximately 60 minutes). We will invite five principals and two central office personnel from the group to volunteer for the individual interviews. The five ROP facilitators hired by the ATA will also be individually interviewed. We will be asking participants for permission to audio-record and take notes during the focus group and individual interviews. In all cases, our interpretations of the emerging themes from the interviews will be shared for confirmation by the participants who provided us with the data. In other words, you will asked to read through brief summaries of our understandings and make additions and deletions to these before the information is analysed and synthesized in preparation for our report writing. In addition, we are seeking consent to view the ROP website and to make observations in ROP meetings in an effort to elucidate understanding and perceptions of participants involved in this professional development program. The interview schedule has been appended to this letter as information.

Given the nature of the study, we do not anticipate there will be any risk to the participants – this is not a program assessment. Rather, we are interested in principals' perceptions of how their professional growth was stimulated and generally affected by the Reflections on Practice project initiated in your jurisdiction. Before providing written consent, however, the participants will be told of their right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. We will repeat this before each focus group and interview begins. At that time, the participants will also be informed that every effort will be made to provide anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any identifying information, but anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. They will also be informed that to maintain confidentiality, when the final research report, thesis, manuscripts for scholarly journals, and other conference presentation materials are disseminated, we will not use quotes that might specifically identify individuals. While conducting the study, all notes and audio recordings will be kept secured in password-protected computers in our locked offices. Only we will have access. All notes, audio-recorded interviews, and any transcriptions will be destroyed after 5 years. Before we begin the project, I, José da Costa, will review with Lisa Wright, our graduate assistant, the ethical standards for research conducted at the University of Alberta. We anticipate completing this study and the reporting no later than December 2007.

Participants will be provided with feedback on the progress of the research during our May ROP meeting. They will also be informed at the outset, that they can request and be e-mailed a copy of the final written report and thesis sometime after January 2008. Upon completing the final written report, we will send a copy to you to share within the jurisdiction. The results of this research will also be used for publication and presentation to scholarly groups and policy makers.

If you are willing to accept this invitation and would like your school jurisdiction to participate in the study, we would ask that you please read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to us in the stamped self-addressed envelope.

Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: lisa.wright@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

José da Costa, Ed.D.
Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
CANADA
T6G 2G2
780-492-5868

Lisa Wright
Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
CANADA
T6G 2G2

Written Consent Form - School Jurisdiction

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation of your school jurisdiction in the *Reflections on Practice* research project and agree. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researchers: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: **José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca**) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: **lisa.wright@ualberta.ca**).

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep for your records and reference.

School Jurisdiction Name: Hillview Jurisdiction

Printed Name and Position of Designated School Jurisdiction Authority giving written consent:

____

Signature of Designated School Jurisdiction Authority giving written consent:

____ Date: __________________

Work Telephone Number: __________________

E-mail: ________________________________

______ **No**, I choose not to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study.

______**Yes**, I agree to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study (including questionnaires, focus groups, individual interviews, observations at ROP sessions, ROP web site).

Invitation Letter and Consent Form to School Principals and Assistant Principals

March 20, 2007

Dear <Principal or Assistant Principal>,

Our names are José da Costa (Professor in Educational Administration and Leadership) and Lisa Wright (Masters graduate student in Educational Administration and Leadership) in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. The purpose of this letter is to invite your school jurisdiction to participate in a research study entitled Principal Professional Development: Reflections on Practice. The purpose of the study is to investigate principals' and central office administrators' perceptions and expectations of professional development and reflective practice models that may assist principals in exemplifying the skills and knowledge outlined in the draft Quality Practice Standards for Principals in Alberta, as well as supporting leadership for school improvement. It is our hope that the findings from this study will inform policy makers and educators about flexible programming structures that may be supportive of principals' personal and professional growth plans. This study will take place over six months and is funded by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the University of Alberta (Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Policy Studies). Findings from this study will be compiled in a report submitted to the Hillview Public School Division, the Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta Education; the data gathered will also form the basis of Ms. Wright's Master's in Education thesis.

In particular, we have heard and witnessed many positive and informative comments about your jurisdiction's year-long participation in the *Reflections on Practice Institute*. With your permission, we would like to carry out our study with you and your principal and central office colleagues.

Attached to this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please contact one of us. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

During this study, informed and written consent will be obtained from all participants before interviews begin. The 20 participants (you, 16 other principals, and 3 central office personnel) will be invited to become involved in the completion of a questionnaire (approximately 30 minutes to complete) and a focus group interview (approximately 60 minutes duration). The administration of a questionnaire and the completion of the focus groups will take place before the individual interviews (lasting approximately 60 minutes). We will invite five principals, , and two central office personnel from the group to volunteer for the individual interviews. The five ROP facilitators hired by the ATA will also be individually interviewed. We will be asking participants for permission to audio-record and take notes during the focus group and individual interviews. In all cases, our interpretations of the emerging themes from the interviews will be shared for confirmation by the participants who provided us with the data. In other words, you will asked to read through brief summaries of our understandings and make additions and deletions to these before the information is analysed and synthesized in preparation for our report writing. In addition, we are seeking consent to view the ROP website and to make observations in ROP meetings in an effort to elucidate understanding and perceptions of participants involved in this professional development program. The interview schedules have been appended to this letter as information.

Given the nature of the study, we do not anticipate there will be any risk to the participants – this is not a program assessment. Rather, we are interested in principals' perceptions of how their professional growth was stimulated and generally affected by the Reflections on Practice project initiated in your jurisdiction. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. We will repeat this before the focus group and individual interviews begin. Every effort will be made to provide anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any identifying information, but anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. To maintain confidentiality, when the final research report, thesis, manuscripts for scholarly journals, and other conference presentation materials are disseminated, we will not use quotes that might specifically identify individuals. While conducting the study, all notes and audio recordings will be kept secured in password-protected computers in our locked offices. Only we will have access. All notes, audio-recorded interviews, and transcriptions will be destroyed after 5 years. Before we begin the project, I, José da Costa, will review with Lisa Wright, our graduate assistant, the ethical standards for research conducted at the University of Alberta. We anticipate completing this study and the reporting no later than December 2007.

You will be provided with feedback on the progress of the research during our May ROP meeting. At the completion of our report we will provide you and your district with an electronic copy of the final written report and an electronic copy of the thesis sometime after January 2008. The results of this research will also be used for publication and presentation to scholarly groups and policy makers.

If you are willing to accept this invitation and would like to participate in the study, we would ask that you please read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to us in the stamped self-addressed envelope. When we receive the written consent form, we will call you at your work telephone number to confirm an appropriate time meet and to conduct the study.

Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: lisa.wright@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

José da Costa, Ed.D.
Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
CANADA
T6G 2G2
780-492-5868

Lisa Wright
Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
CANADA
T6G 2G2

Written Consent Form –Principal/Assistant Principal

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation of your school jurisdiction and school in the *reflections on Practice* research project and agree. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researchers: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: **José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca**) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: **lisa.wright@ualberta.ca**).

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Name:

____

School Name:

____

Work Telephone: ________________**Home Telephone:** ___________________

E-mail: ____

______ **No**, I do not choose to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study.

______**Yes**, I agree to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study, including the following **(please check those you consent to):**

	Questionnaire
	Focus group
	Individual interview
	ROP web site
	Ongoing observations of ROP sessions

Participant's Signature ______________________________ **Date:** ______________

Invitation Letter and Consent Form to Central Office Administrators

March 20, 2007

Dear <Central Office Administrator>,

Our names are José da Costa (Professor in Educational Administration and Leadership) and Lisa Wright (Masters graduate student in Educational Administration and Leadership) in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. The purpose of this letter is to invite your school jurisdiction to participate in a research study entitled Principal Professional Development: Reflections on Practice. The purpose of the study is to investigate principals' and central office administrators' perceptions and expectations of professional development and reflective practice models that may assist principals in exemplifying the skills and knowledge outlined in the draft Quality Practice Standards for Principals in Alberta, as well as supporting leadership for school improvement. It is our hope that the findings from this study will inform policy makers and educators about flexible programming structures that may be supportive of principals' personal and professional growth plans. This study will take place over six months and is funded by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the University of Alberta (Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Policy Studies). Findings from this study will be compiled in a report submitted to the Hillview Public School Division, the Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta Education; the data gathered will also form the basis of Ms. Wright's Master's in Education thesis.

In particular, we have heard and witnessed many positive and informative comments about your jurisdiction's year-long participation in the *Reflections on Practice Institute*. With your permission, we would like to carry out our study with you and your principal and central office colleagues.

Attached to this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please contact one of us. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

During this study, informed and written consent will be obtained from all participants before interviews begin. The 20 participants (you, 17 principals, and 2 other central office personnel) will be invited to become involved in the completion of a questionnaire (approximately 30 minutes to complete) and a focus group interview (approximately 60 minutes duration). The administration of a questionnaire and the completion of the focus groups will take place before the individual interviews (lasting approximately 60 minutes). We will invite five principals, and two central office personnel from the group to volunteer for the individual interviews. The five ROP facilitators hired by the ATA will also be individually interviewed. We will be asking participants for permission to audio-record and take notes during the focus group and individual interviews. In all cases, our interpretations of the emerging themes from the interviews will be shared for confirmation by the participants who provided us with the data. In other words, you will asked to read through brief summaries of our understandings and make additions and deletions to these before the information is analysed and synthesized in preparation for our report writing. In addition, we are seeking consent to view the ROP website and to make observations in ROP meetings in an effort to elucidate understanding and perceptions of participants involved in this professional development program. The interview schedules have been appended to this letter as information.

Given the nature of the study, we do not anticipate there will be any risk to the participants – this is not a program assessment. Rather, we are interested in principals' perceptions of how their professional growth was stimulated and generally affected by the Reflections on Practice project initiated in your jurisdiction. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. We will repeat this before the focus group and individual interviews begin. Every effort will be made to provide anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any identifying information, but anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. To maintain confidentiality, when the final research report, thesis, manuscripts for scholarly journals, and other conference presentation materials are disseminated, we will not use quotes that might specifically identify individuals. While conducting the study, all notes and audio recordings will be kept secured in password-protected computers in our locked offices. Only we will have access. All notes, audio-recorded interviews, and transcriptions will be destroyed after 5 years. Before we begin the project, I, José da Costa, will review with Lisa Wright, our graduate assistant, the ethical standards for research conducted at the University of Alberta. We anticipate completing this study and the reporting no later than December 2007.

You will be provided with feedback on the progress of the research during our May ROP meeting. At the completion of our report we will provide you and your district with an electronic copy of the final written report and an electronic copy of the thesis sometime after January 2008. The results of this research will also be used for publication and presentation to scholarly groups and policy makers.

If you are willing to accept this invitation and would like to participate in the study, we would ask that you please read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to us in the stamped self-addressed envelope. When we receive the written consent form, we will call you at your work telephone number to confirm an appropriate time meet and to conduct the study.

Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: lisa.wright@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

José da Costa, Ed.D.
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Faculty of Education
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780-492-5868

Lisa Wright
Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
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T6G 2G2

Written Consent Form – Central Office Personnel

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation of your school jurisdiction and school in the *reflections on Practice* research project and agree. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researchers: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: **José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca**) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: **lisa.wright@ualberta.ca**).

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Participant's Name:

____

Work Telephone: ____________________ **Home Telephone:** ____________________

E-mail: ____

______ **No**, I do not choose to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study.

______ **Yes**, I agree to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study, including the following **(please check those you consent to):**

	Questionnaire
	Focus group
	Individual interview
	ROP web site
	Ongoing observations of ROP sessions

Participant's Signature: ______________________________ **Date:** ____________

Invitation Letter and Consent Form to Workshop and Online Facilitators

March 20, 2007

Dear <Facilitator>,

Our names are José da Costa (Professor in Educational Administration and Leadership) and Lisa Wright (Masters graduate student in Educational Administration and Leadership) in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta. The purpose of this letter is to invite you to participate in a research study entitled Principal Professional Development: Reflections on Practice. The purpose of the study is to investigate professional development and reflective practice models that may assist principals in exemplifying the skills and knowledge outlined in the draft Quality Practice Standards for Principals in Alberta, as well as supporting leadership for school improvement. It is our hope that the findings from this study will inform policy makers and educators about flexible programming structures that may be supportive of principals' personal and professional growth plans. This study will take place over six months and is funded by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the University of Alberta (Faculty of Education, Department of Educational Policy Studies). Findings from this study will be compiled in a report submitted to the Hillview Public School Division, the Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta Education; the data gathered will also form the basis of Ms. Wright's Master's in Education thesis.

Attached to this letter is a consent form. This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, please contact one of us. Please take time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

During this study, informed and written consent will be obtained from all participants before interviews begin. You are invited to volunteer for an individual interview (lasting approximately 60 minutes). We will be asking participants for permission to audio-record and take notes during individual interviews. In all cases, our interpretations of the emerging themes from the interviews will be shared for confirmation by the participants who provided us with the data. In other words, you will asked to read through brief summaries of our understandings and make additions and deletions to these before the information is analysed and synthesized in preparation for our report writing. In addition, we are seeking consent to view the ROP website and to make observations in ROP meetings in an effort to elucidate understanding and perceptions of participants involved in this professional development program.

Given the nature of the study, we do not anticipate there will be any risk to the participants – this is not a program assessment. Rather, we are interested in principals' perceptions of how their professional growth was stimulated and generally affected by the Reflections on Practice project in which you have participated over the past year. You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. We will repeat this before the interview begins. Every effort will be made to provide anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any identifying information, but anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. To maintain confidentiality, when the final research report, thesis, manuscripts for scholarly journals, and other conference presentation materials are disseminated, we will not use quotes that might specifically identify individuals. While conducting the study, all notes and audio recordings will be kept secured in password-protected computers in our locked offices. Only we will have

access. All notes, audio-recorded interviews, and transcriptions will be destroyed after 5 years. Before we begin the project, I, José da Costa, will review with Lisa Wright, our graduate assistant, the ethical standards for research conducted at the University of Alberta. We anticipate completing this study and the reporting no later than December 2007.

At the completion of our report we will provide you with an electronic copy of the final written report and an electronic copy of the thesis sometime after January 2008. The results of this research will also be used for publication and presentation to scholarly groups and policy makers.

If you are willing to accept this invitation and would like to participate in the study, we would ask that you please read and sign the attached Consent Form and return it to us in the stamped self-addressed envelope. When we receive the written consent form, we will call you at your work telephone number to confirm an appropriate time meet and to conduct the study.

Should you have any questions or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: lisa.wright@ualberta.ca).

Sincerely,

José da Costa, Ed.D.
Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
CANADA
T6G 2G2
780-492-5868

Lisa Wright
Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
CANADA
T6G 2G2

Written Consent Form –Workshop/Online Facilitators

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation of your school jurisdiction and school in the *Reflections on Practice* research project and agree. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Principal Researchers: José da Costa (Tel. 780-492-5868; e-mail: **José.da.Costa@ualberta.ca**) or Lisa Wright (e-mail: **lisa.wright@ualberta.ca**).

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751. A copy of this consent form will be given to you to keep for your records and reference.

School Name: ____

Facilitator's Signature: ______________________**Date:** ______________

Work Telephone Number:____________________

Home Telephone Number:____________________

E-mail: ______________________________

______ **No**, I do not choose to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study.

______**Yes**, I agree to participate in the *Reflections on Practice* research study, including the following **(please check those you consent to):**

	Individual interview
	ROP web site
	Ongoing observations of ROP sessions

Participant's Signature ____

Date: _______________

Appendix C – Reflections on Practice Institute: Principal Quality Practice Standards Questionnaire

Participation in the completion of this questionnaire and other aspects of this study is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time and/or to refuse to answer specific questions. The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines and approved by the Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB) at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Chair of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

SECTION A

Please complete the following:

Career profile:

1. _____ years as a Teacher
2. _____ years as a Vice or Assistant Principal
3. _____ years as a Principal
4. _____ years as "Other". Please specify (central office administrator, position with an external jurisdiction, etc.):

____

5. Highest degree held: _______________________________________

Please indicate if you are in the process of completing one of the following graduate degrees (please circle your response):

6. Master's Degree yes no
7. Doctoral (PhD) Degree yes no

SECTION B

Using the scale below, please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- *Strongly disagree (SD)*
- *Disagree (D)*
- *Neither agree nor disagree (N)*
- *Agree (A)*
- *Strongly agree (SA)*

A. Leadership Dimension - Supporting Effective Relationships

The school principal builds trust and supports effective working relationships within the school community and education system on the basis of sound moral and ethical foundations.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
8.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of how principals support effective working relationships within the school community.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	*Institute* readings broadened my understandings, beliefs, and values.	1	2	3	4	5

10. Additional comments:

B. Leadership Dimension - Providing Visionary Leadership
The school principal collaboratively involves staff, students, parents/guardians, school council members, and the school community in creating and sustaining shared values, vision, mission and goals.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
11.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of what principals do to provide visionary leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	The *Institute* activities and processes modeled how to collaboratively involve staff, students, parents, school council members, and the school community in creating and sustaining shared values, vision, mission and goals.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	The *Institute* provided sound research and experiences that informed my leadership philosophy.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Participants, presenters and facilitators shared a common vision and goals for the *Institute*.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	The action research projects enabled thoughtful data analysis that assisted in determining progress towards my professional/school improvement goals.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	The *Institute* allowed for the communication of learning and results of individuals, schools, and district.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	The *Institute* allowed for the celebration of accomplishments of individuals, schools, and district.	1	2	3	4	5

18. Additional comments:

C. Leadership Dimension - Leading a Learning Community
The school principal nurtures and sustains a school culture that values and supports learning.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
19.	The *Institute* had an appropriate emphasis on the principal as nurturing and sustaining a school culture that values and supports learning.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	The *Institute* served as an effective means for the principal to model a desire to engage in continuous improvement and lifelong learning.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Through the *Institute*, a culture of high expectations for principals and central office personnel was established.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	Action research projects provided an opportunity for other staff, students, and parents to be engaged in learning and school improvement efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	During the *Institute*, the collaborative dialogue was beneficial and supported my learning.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	The *Institute* deepened my understanding of the value of reflective practice.	1	2	3	4	5

25. Additional comments:

D. Leadership Dimension - Providing Instructional Leadership
The school principal ensures that all students have access to quality teaching and have the opportunity to meet the provincial goals of education.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
26.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of how principals provide instructional leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	The *Institute* provided an appropriate emphasis on instructional leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	My participation in this *Institute* has enhanced my daily supervision of teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
29.	Through my participation in this *Institute*, I have improved my ability to support teachers with curriculum, instruction and assessment.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	The ROP website served as an effective means to dialogue with colleagues, presenters and facilitators.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	The ROP website served as an effective means to disseminate information.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	My interaction with facilitators, presenters, and colleagues in this *Institute* enriched my understanding of instructional leadership.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	The *Institute* enabled me to provide my teachers with individual and collective opportunities to engage in meaningful reflective practice.	1	2	3	4	5

34. Additional comments:

E. Leadership Dimension - Developing and Facilitating Leadership in Others
The school principal promotes the development of leadership capacity through the active involvement of staff, students, and parents/guardians in a variety of leadership roles for the overall benefit of the school community and education system.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
35.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of how and what principals do to develop and facilitate leadership in others.	1	2	3	4	5
36.	During the *Institute*, I learned processes that facilitate the active involvement of others and team work within the school community.	1	2	3	4	5
37.	The *Institute* informed my understanding of decision making through open dialogue and consideration of multiple perspectives.	1	2	3	4	5

38. Additional comments:

F. Leadership Dimension - Managing Effectively
The school principal manages school operations and resources to sustain a safe, caring and effective learning environment.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
39.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of what principals do to manage effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
40.	The *Institute* raised greater understanding as to how to allocate and manage school resources for an effective learning environment.	1	2	3	4	5
41.	The *Institute* was an effective use of district resources that supported the growth and development of school principals.	1	2	3	4	5
42.	The content and processes used in the *Institute* assisted me in exemplifying the qualities outlined in the Principal Quality Practice Standard.	1	2	3	4	5

43. Additional comments:

G. Leadership Dimension - Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context
The school principal understands the larger political, social, economic, legal and cultural contexts impacting the school and responds appropriately by giving consideration to the unique and diverse community characteristics and needs.

		SD	D	N	A	SA
44.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of what principals do to respond to the larger societal context.	1	2	3	4	5
45.	Journaling served as an effective means for me to reflect on my practice, changing school contexts, issues, etc.	1	2	3	4	5
46.	The action research project allowed me to scan the environment, identify and communicate trends and issues and then respond appropriately.	1	2	3	4	5
47.	The *Institute* provided opportunities for reflection on my role as school leader.	1	2	3	4	5

48. Additional comments:

Please provide us with your insights regarding the following questions:

49. How effective was this *Institute* as a professional development strategy for school administrators? Please explain.
50. To what extent has this professional development experience impacted your understandings and practices of:
    a. Reflective practice?
    b. Instructional leadership?
51. What was the **most useful** feature of the Institute? Please explain.
52. What was the **least useful** feature of the Institute? Please explain.
53. Do you feel that this *Institute* was effective in fulfilling the goal of serving as a means to support the professional growth of school principals as outlined in the DRAFT Principal Quality Practice Standard? Please comment.
54. Other comments you wish to share:

Appendix D – Questionnaire Descriptive Statistics[2]
(open-ended questions not summarized here)

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Notes
	Demographics			
1.	Years as a teacher	21.0	10.0	
2.	Years as a vice or assistant principal	5.4	5.0	
3.	Years as a principal	8.0	6.4	
5.	Highest degree held			N = 1 BEd N = 4 MA/MEd N = 3 PhD/EdD
6.	In the process of completing a master's degree			N = 3
7.	In the process of completing a doctorate			N = 0
	Leadership Dimension: Supporting Effective Relationships			
8.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of how principals support effective working relationships within the school community.	3.6	0.8	
9.	*Institute* readings broadened my understandings, beliefs, and values.	4.0	0.0	
	Leadership Dimension:Providing Visionary Leadership			
11.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of what principals do to provide visionary leadership.	3.6	0.5	
12.	The *Institute* activities and processes modeled how to collaboratively involve staff, students, parents, school council members, and the school community in creating and sustaining shared values, vision, mission and goals.	3.1	0.9	
13.	The *Institute* provided sound research and experiences that informed my leadership philosophy.	4.0	0.0	
14.	Participants, presenters and facilitators shared a common vision and goals for the *Institute*.	3.7	0.9	
15.	The action research projects enabled thoughtful data analysis that assisted in determining progress towards my professional/school improvement goals.	3.9	0.7	

[2] Wright, L., da Costa, J., & Peters, F. (2007). *Principal professional development: Reflections on practice.* Final research report, Edmonton. AB: University of Alberta.

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Notes
16.	The *Institute* allowed for the communication of learning and results of individuals, schools, and district.	3.9	0.6	
17.	The *Institute* allowed for the celebration of accomplishments of individuals, schools, and district.	3.5	0.9	
	Leadership Dimension:Leading a Learning Community			
19.	The *Institute* had an appropriate emphasis on the principal as nurturing and sustaining a school culture that values and supports learning.	3.9	0.8	
20.	The *Institute* served as an effective means for the principal to model a desire to engage in continuous improvement and lifelong learning.	4.1	0.7	
21.	Through the *Institute*, a culture of high expectations for principals and central office personnel was established.	3.6	0.5	
22.	Action research projects provided an opportunity for other staff, students, and parents to be engaged in learning and school improvement efforts.	4.0	0.4	
23.	During the *Institute*, the collaborative dialogue was beneficial and supported my learning.	4.5	0.5	
24.	The *Institute* deepened my understanding of the value of reflective practice.	4.2	0.8	
	Leadership Dimension:Providing Instructional Leadership			
26.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of how principals provide instructional leadership.	3.7	0.6	
27.	The *Institute* provided an appropriate emphasis on instructional leadership.	3.9	0.7	
28.	My participation in this *Institute* has enhanced my daily supervision of teachers.	3.3	1.0	
29.	Through my participation in this *Institute*, I have improved my ability to support teachers with curriculum, instruction and assessment.	3.3	1.0	
30.	The ROP website served as an effective means to dialogue with colleagues, presenters and facilitators.	1.7	0.5	
31.	The ROP website served as an effective means to disseminate information.	1.9	0.7	
32.	My interaction with facilitators, presenters, and colleagues in this *Institute* enriched my understanding of instructional leadership.	3.9	0.8	
33.	The *Institute* enabled me to provide my teachers with individual and collective opportunities to engage in meaningful reflective practice.	3.7	1.1	

		Mean	Std. Dev.	Notes
	Leadership Dimension:Developing and Facilitating Leadership in Others			
35.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of how and what principals do to develop and facilitate leadership in others.	3.4	0.8	
36.	During the *Institute*, I learned processes that facilitate the active involvement of others and team work within the school community.	4.0	0.4	
37.	The *Institute* informed my understanding of decision making through open dialogue and consideration of multiple perspectives.	4.0	0.4	
	Leadership Dimension:Managing Effectively			
39.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of what principals do to manage effectively.	3.1	0.8	
40.	The *Institute* raised greater understanding as to how to allocate and manage school resources for an effective learning environment.	3.2	0.9	
41.	The *Institute* was an effective use of district resources that supported the growth and development of school principals.	2.9	1.0	
42.	The content and processes used in the *Institute* assisted me in exemplifying the qualities outlined in the Principal Quality Practice Standard.	3.0	0.9	
	Leadership Dimension:Understanding and Responding to the Larger Society Context			
44.	The *Institute* enhanced my understanding of what principals do to respond to the larger societal context.	3.5	0.7	
45.	Journaling served as an effective means for me to reflect on my practice, changing school contexts, issues, etc.	3.1	0.9	
46.	The action research project allowed me to scan the environment, identify and communicate trends and issues and then respond appropriately.	3.7	0.8	
47.	The *Institute* provided opportunities for reflection on my role as school leader.	4.1	0.8	

N=11

Appendix E – Guiding Questions for the Focus Group Interviews

To accommodate the size of the group, multiple focus group interviews will be held on April 25, 2007.

The semi-structured focus group interviews will be conducted in the manner described by Stake (2000). José da Costa and Lisa Wright will conduct the interview and take notes during the discussion.

Before beginning the interview, we will thank all principals and assistant principals for their involvement and remind them about their rights as participants by reading the following passage:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study of *Principal Professional Development: Reflections on Practice.* We are interested in learning more about professional development and reflective practice that supports your leadership in school improvement in your school. The questions we will ask you during this and potentially a subsequent individual interview have been designed with that purpose in mind. We would like to remind you that your participation is voluntary and that you are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty; you are not obligated to answer any of the questions. When we write the final report, thesis, or articles for publication, every effort will be made to provide anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any identifying information, but anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. We promise that everything you say will be held in our confidence. Today, we will be audio-recording and taking notes from our conversation and will synthesize my notes - summarizing our understandings of what you have told us. We will then provide you with those brief summaries for you to review and make additions and deletions before we use them in our reports. Only the two of us (J. da Costa and L. Wright) will have access to the data and following the ethical standards of the University of Alberta, these data will be kept secured in our offices for 5 years and then destroyed. Do you have any questions before we begin?

The 60-minute semi-structured focus group interviews, with **school principals and assistant principals**, will be guided by the following questions:

1. How has this research-based professional development experience with your colleagues changed your understandings of leadership? In other words, how do you think differently about your role as a leader?

2. How has this research-based professional development experience with your colleagues changed your understandings of reflective practice?

3. How have your practices as a principalchanged as a result of this professional development experience?

4. How would you improve this project so that it would have better met your professional development needs?

5. Based on your participation in this project, do you have any additional comments that you wish to share with us?

Thank you for participating and for your time. Remind participants that they will be provided with interpretations via e-mail for their review and approval prior to the commencement of data analysis.

Appendix F – Guiding Questions for the Individual Interviews

The semi-structured individual interviews will occur after the questionnaire is administered and the focus group interviews take place. They will be conducted in the manner described by Stake (2000). With the permission of each of the participants, the individual interview will be tape-recorded and will last no more than 60 minutes. Joe da Costa and Lisa Wright will conduct the interview and take notes during the discussion.

<u>May 1, 2007:</u>
Principal A from 9:15 – 10:15 am
Principal B from 10:45 – 11:45 am
Principal C from 1:15 –2:15 am
Principal D from 2:45 – 3:45 pm

<u>May 2, 2007:</u> Central Office Administrator A from 9:00 – 10:00 am
Central Office Administrator B from 10:30 – 11:30 am
Principal E from 1:00 - 2:00 pm

Before beginning the interview, we will thank all participants for their involvement and remind them about their rights within the study by reading the following passage before beginning each individual interview:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study of *Principal Professional Development: Reflections on Practice.* We are interested in learning more about professional development and reflective practice that supports your leadership in school improvement within your school. The questions we will ask you have been designed with that purpose in mind. We would like to remind you that you are free to withdraw without penalty from this study at any time and that you are not obligated to answer any of the questions. When we write the final report, thesis, and prepare articles for publication, every effort will be made to provide anonymity and confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any identifying information, but anonymity and confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. We promise that everything you say will be held in our confidence. Today, with your permission, we would like to tape record our conversation. We will have our taped conversation transcribed and then return the typewritten pages to you for review and approval before we use them as data. Only the two of us (J. da Costa and L. Wright) will have access to the data. Do you have any questions before we begin?

The individual interviews, with **school principals**, will be guided by the following questions:

1. Participant life and school experiences.
   e.g., Tell me about your school experiences (e.g., schools attended, job/career experiences). How long have you been at this school/jurisdiction? How did you come to be at this school/jurisdiction?
2. How did you become involved in the ROP project?
3. What are your impressions of the project to date?
4. What is your understanding of leadership? How has your understanding of leadership changed as a result of this project?
5. What are your understandings of reflective practice? How has your understanding of reflective practice changed as a result of this project?
6. What are your understandings of professional development? How has your understanding of professional development changed as a result of this project?
7. Given your involvement in this project, what would you leave the same? What would you change? Where did it fall short of what you had hoped would have been addressed for you?

8. If you were involved in developing a professional development program for school improvement, what issues do you think need to be addressed to move toward an even more "effective" leadership that meets the *Quality Practice Standards*?
9. Based on your participation in this project, do you have any additional comments that you wish to share with us?

The individual interviews, with **workshop and online facilitators** ("critical friends"), will be guided by the following questions:

1. Tell us about yourself and your educational background.
2. How did you become involved in the ROP project?
3. What are your impressions of the project to date? Given your involvement in this project, what would you leave the same? What would you change?
    i. Impact (benefits/limitations) the project had on school principals' (ROP participants) learning.
    ii. Impact (benefits/limitations) the project had on your own personal/ professional learning.
4. What is your understanding of leadership? How has your understanding of leadership changed as a result of this project?
5. What are your understandings of reflective practice? How has your understanding of reflective practice changed as a result of this project?
6. What are your understandings of professional development? How has your understanding of professional development changed as a result of this project?
7. Tell us about the involvement of the different stakeholders and how they helped shape this professional development program.
8. What do you consider as important issues or factors, at the jurisdiction level, as we conceive of implementing the project in other places?
9. What issues do you think need to be addressed as we move toward an even more "effective" leadership that meets the *leadership quality practice standards*?
10. Based on your participation in this project, do you have any additional comments that you wish to share with us?

The individual interviews, with **central office administrators**, will be guided by the following questions:

1. Remind us of how you became involved in the ROP project.
2. How did this professional development project enhance your understanding of:
    School leadership?
    Reflective practice?
    Professional development?
3. Tell us about the involvement of the different stakeholders and how they helped shape this professional development program.
4. If you implemented this program again, what would you keep the same? What would you change?
5. What do you consider as important issues or factors at the jurisdiction level, as we conceive of implementing the project in other places?
6. If you were involved in developing a professional development program for school improvement, what issues do you think need to be addressed to move toward an even more "effective" leadership that meets the *Quality Practice Standards*?
7. Based on your participation in this project, do you have any additional comments that you wish to share with us?

Thank you for participating and for your time. Remind participants that they will be provided with interpretations via e-mail for their review and approval prior to the commencement of data analysis.

Appendix G – Ethics Approval for Proposed Research

FACULTIES OF EDUCATION, EXTENSION AND AUGUSTANA
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD
(EEA REB)
I. Application for Ethics Review of Proposed Research
(revised August 30, 2006)

Principal Investigator -
Joe da Costa
Complete mailing address -
7-111 EdN., Educational Policy Studies
Faculty of Education
Co-applicant(s) -
Lisa Wright

Department/Faculty -
Educational Policy Studies
E-mail -
Jose.daCosta@ualberta.ca

Lisa.Wright@ualberta.ca

Project title - Principal Professional Development: Reflections on Practice
Project Deadlines
Starting Date (year/month/date)
ROP Project: 2006/09/01
M.Ed Thesis: 2007/01/30

Ending Date (year/month/date)
ROP Project and MEd. Thesis: 2008/03/31

If your project is not finished before the Ending Date, you must apply for an extension by submitting the appropriate *Status of Research Study* form.
Annual Reporting
If your project extends beyond one year from the date of EEA REB approval, you will be required to submit an *Annual Report for Multi-Year Studies* at the end of each year of the project. Projects are normally subject to a complete re-submission after 3 years.
Status (if student) -
( ) Master's Project
(X) Master's Thesis (for L. Wright)
( ) Doctoral Dissertation
(X) Other (Collaborative research project among the University of Alberta, Alberta Teachers' Association, Alberta Education, and Medicine Hat Public Schools)

Funding (if applicable) -
(X) Grant Application (ATA provided funding to support project costs including travel, Research Assistantship)
( ) Contract Research
(X) Non-Funded Research for MEd. (for L. Wright)
( ) Other (specify)

Do you plan to gather data in University of Alberta units other than Education, Extension or Augustana? Yes ( ) No (X)
If yes, name the unit(s) N/A

Is another post-secondary educational institution involved in this project? Yes ( ) No (X)
If yes, name the institution(s) and the nature of the involvement. N/A
I, the applicant, agree to notify the EEA REB in writing of any changes in research design, procedures, sample, etc. that arise after the EEA REB approval has been granted. A *Request for Change in Methodology* form must receive approval from EEA REB before the modified research can proceed.

I also agree to notify the EEA REB immediately if any untoward or adverse event occurs during my research, and/or if data analysis or other review reveals undesirable outcomes for the participants.

I have read the University of Alberta Standards for the Protection of Human Research Participants [GFC Policy Manual, Section 66 http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/gfcpolicymanual/policymanualsection66.cfm] and agree to comply with these Standards in conducting my research.

Signature of Applicant — Date: Feb 5/07

Signature of Applicant — Date: Feb. 5/07