WHAT CAN I, AS A LEADER, REALLY DO?

LEARNING TO LEAD THROUGH AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to those who inspire me to become better everyday. First, to Juan, and to all students like him, who, in spite of difficulties find hope and happiness. Second, to teachers who seek to lighten the loads of others and enrich lives through love and learning. Finally, to my family, who teach me how to love.

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ha abierto los ojos. Quien me ha ensenado tanto que no puedo expresar cuanto. La única

forma de expresarlo es por una lágrima. Mil gracias y más, maestro.

ABSTRACT

This research study, while highly personalized, contributes in various ways to the literature on public schooling. First, this study includes a critique of the public schools and posits that while public schools are the problem, potentially public schools may also be the solution. This allows multiple and novel interpretations of the critique of public schools. Second, while reflection and reflective practice has been emphasized in the teaching profession for decades, this research study offers a reflection within the context of a practicing principal, therefore, expanding the possibility of reflection application to school leaders. Third, this study and my analysis of the alignment of theories of action and theories-in-use will provide a rich description related to the application of the work of Argyris and Schön to the contemporary principalship. Fourth, there is much research regarding principals as school leaders, however, this autoethnographic study adds another perspective to what it means to be a leader in the current context of public schooling through an under-utilized, but potentially powerful, methodology. Finally, this research study may provide a new perspective to how one's narrative can be used to learn and give voice to the voiceless.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research methodology and process. Through this methodology, I was able to respond to my research questions. The primary research question for this autoethnographic study was, what can I, as a leader, really do and also included were the following sub questions: How aligned are my theory of action and

theory-in-use? What did I do as a leader of a new school? What can the narrative teach

me and others?

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PROLOGUE

Welcome to My Story

This is not another "feel-good" story that makes you cry in the end. Certainly you may cry, and it may even be at the "end." This is a story of doubt, skepticism, rage, exhortation, hope and possibility; emotions rarely reserved for "scholarly" writing. This is where I begin my story, a story started years earlier, and finally being told, to be re-lived, re-experienced, and felt again.

Some may have you believe that schools are free from emotion, free from human feelings, free from those aspects of humanity not easily defined or measured. How do you measure hope? How does one measure an individual's ability to show sympathy and/or compassion? Are schools only about the three Rs: Reading, writing, and arithmetic? Schools are much more than the three Rs. To reduce the complexity of the daily occurrences in schools to these would be wrong.

This story is also about a few daily occurrences in a school and what these occurrences may mean. Welcome. Bienvenido.

Hiring: No Ready, Set…Just GO

After teaching and then working as an after-school program director in a small rural school district, I applied to be a principal in a new school. Prior to this time, the school had not existed. I do not recall much from the interview, other than there was a

conference room full of people who were on the interview committee and a note I later wrote that stated, "I was me."

It was June 30th and principal contracts begin the 1st of July, so I knew it would not be long before the committee would have made their selection. In fact, it was that same day, later in the afternoon following the interview, that I received a phone call from the school district's superintendent offering the principal position to me. I had already applied and interviewed. Of course I was going to take the position, I thought during that phone conversation.

There were no long lists of requirements for this school. The only direction I received for its opening was to contact the middle school principals for the list of students who would attend the school and "do a good job." For some, this might have been a nightmare; for me, it was a dream come true. I realized later how much work this task would require, but this was not a deterrent for the excitement that I felt. I was given the task of opening a new school, never having existed. I could make the school whatever I wanted. I was thrilled. But where would I start? We'll get to that…

The School and the Students

At the time I was hired, I knew only a few details about the intent for the new school. It was designed to only enroll ninth grade students who qualified under the state's designation of "at risk." The state's Administrative Code 08.02.03.10 states,

> An at-risk youth is any secondary student grade seven through twelve (7-12) who meets any (3) of the following criteria: a. Has repeated at least one (1) grade. b. Has absenteeism that is greater than ten percent (10%) during the preceding semester. c. Has an overall grade point average that is less than 1.5 (4.0 scale) prior to enrolling in an alternative secondary program. d. Has failed one (1) or more academic subjects. e. Is two (2) or more semester credits per year behind the rate required to graduate. f. Is a limited English proficient student who has not been in a program more than three (3) years. g. Has substance abuse behavior. h.

Is pregnant or a parent. i. Is an emancipated youth. j. Is a previous dropout. k. Has serious personal, emotional, or medical problems. l. Is a court or agency referral. m. Upon recommendation of the school district as determined by locally developed criteria for disruptive student behavior. (Idaho State Department of Education, 2015).

I also knew was there was a list of approximately 50 potential students from each of the two middle schools in the school district, and the previously condemned elementary building was being rebuilt to house the new school.

While there will be much discussion later about the students who would later fill the hallways of this new school, I'll characterize my early perceptions of the students briefly. The students who fit the "at risk" definition are complicated and often lead complex lives. There are a myriad of reasons why students are "at risk," many of which are beyond the individual's control. Some of these reasons will be discussed in Chapter 1. Nevertheless, the affect frequently played out in schools, is often described by educators as students who are disengaged or disinterested in school. These "at risk" students are also described as disciplinary problems, attendance problems, and some educators believe these students will ultimately drop out of school.

Nothing to Take for Granted

I had never been a principal before taking on this role. There was much to learn and even more to do. While I was excited about the experience and asked myself big picture questions, there were a multitude of details that had to be worked out prior to the school year starting. What was the school's mission and vision? What was the daily school schedule? What classes would be offered? What supplies were needed? What would teachers have and what would they need? Curriculum? Assessment? Staff handbook? Student handbook?

I began a list of the details that I needed to attend to on a yellow legal-sized notepad dated July 1st. There are six single spaced pages filled with these details. Among the list are:

> Schedule? Bus schedule? Classroom furniture? Staff books to read? Articles? Professional development plan? RtI [response to intervention] training? Class schedule? Electives offered (hire two teachers)? Student transfer? Assembly to start year? Sports? Student roster? Summer home visits? Summer bbqs? Budget? Mission/vision? Mascot? Meet with every student and parents? Transitions? Standardized test scores [students' scores]? [Students'] grades? [Students'] attendance? [Students'] discipline? Student council/leadership? Campus improvements and public relations? Checklist for kids? Registrations? Groups for the counselor? Lockdown and fire drills? Weekly notes on Friday for Monday staff meetings? Parent nights' dates? Forms-enrollment, RtI? Library? Grants? Incentives? Calendar? Parent Newsletters? Music? Talent shows? Dances? Conferences? Ropes course? Yearbook? Class pictures? First week activities? Talk with teachers about relationships. Calculators? Students that leave? Money for extra curricular- plays/groups/clubs? Breakfast/lunch? Potluck Fridays? Supplies? Supply room? Whiteboards? Projectors? Office? Who compiles attendance? Who calls students' parents? Books? Curriculum? Textbooks? Teambuilding activities? Monitoring- hall, before/after school and transitions? Detention- how/why/when/who? Mentoring projects? Create credit checklist for students. College info?

Realizing that this new school had not existed was a source of excitement, but at the same time, I was not completely naïve in my understanding of what it would take to develop a positive school culture. The task was daunting, but I constantly reminded myself of the "big picture." (We'll get to the "big picture" in much more detail later.) I noted on the bottom of one of the yellow pages of lists, "Create opportunities that make them [students and teachers] want to be there."

Teachers

While the many details were important, I also knew that the teachers would be the most important factor in student learning, so during the first few days on the job, I scheduled a meeting with the school district's assistant superintendent to find out about

the teaching staff. The meeting was brief, and it was not terribly informative, although I did listen to what the assistant superintendent had to say and I took notes.

There would be eight full-time teachers. In addition, a part-time counselor and a part-time special education teacher who would work from the new school one day a week to manage paperwork. Of the eight teachers, three were involuntarily transferred to the school, and I was instructed that they would retire in the next few years. There were also three teachers who voluntarily transferred to the new school from other schools in the school district as well as an art teacher who was recently hired, and was not certified, but had just graduated college and "has lots of energy." (I noted this statement in quotation marks in my notes.) Finally, one teacher needed to be hired, and I was told the job vacancy had already been posted to the school district's website and the teacher would be assigned to teach business classes.

The assistant superintendent also provided brief descriptions of the teachers. I was cautioned to be watchful of the three teachers who were involuntarily transferred. Tylar was assigned to teach a content area for which he was certified but had never taught in his previous thirty-two years of teaching. Tylar had also recently had some legal troubles and he only needed to teach another year to be able to retire. Shelly had taught a number of years and would most likely retire in a few short years. Shelly was a teacher who, as I was instructed, would only do what was required, and I should not expect any more from her. Corrine was eligible to retire but was in remission from a bout with cancer. When describing Corrine, the assistant superintendent stated that after retirement the next big event in a person's life is death and sometimes continuing to work delays the inevitable.

This information was provided, in my interpretation, as "the bad news first." The assistant superintendent quickly switched to his brief descriptions of the three teachers who had voluntarily transferred to the new school. Two of the three were extremely experienced and would be primary contributors to the school, but one would be out on maternity leave during the first nine weeks of school. The remaining teacher who had voluntarily transferred, Ashley, had taught two years and was becoming a good teacher, but still may need some direction.

As I write and review my notes, I realize the bleak picture this depicts; nonetheless, I was not deterred. I remember thinking; people do not go into teaching asking themselves, "How am I going to get by?" Instead, my assumption was most people study and become teachers for a different purpose, sometimes to "change lives," or to "mold the future generations." My task, as I saw it, was to ignite, or in some cases, re-kindle, the fire that drove these individuals into teaching.

Final Words…at the Beginning

What follows is what I have come to know. I do not claim to have answers or to be an expert in any field. What I have learned, I will gladly share. This journey has already begun and you are welcome to become a part.

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

My Background of the Uncovering of a Problem

As an undergraduate student, I was exposed to the works of critical pedagogues such as Paulo Freire, Donaldo Macedo, Henry Giroux, Peter McClaren, and others. It was at this time that my growing passion and desire to change the system was born. I began to recognize the problems inherent in schools and decided to make my own practice a model that would challenge the status quo. I chose to follow what Purpel (1999) described as the "prophetic voice" in "critique, outrage, exhortation, hope, possibility and vision" (p. 117). I decided that I would teach, not in a traditional sense, but in a way in which all students would be allowed to learn and grow, acknowledging my own biases, and constantly reflecting upon daily practice. I would not participate in what Freire (1970) called "banking education." This was not an easy course of action.

Public schools in the United States have long been characterized as unequal and inequitable (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Gutierrez, 2004; Kozol, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lomawaima & McCarty, 1999; Macedo, 1994; McLaren, 1989; Oakes, 2005; Spring, 2006). The unequal and inequitable nature of public schools have arguably worsened in the past decade, even to the point of pre-Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka et al. (Kozol, 2005), when apartheid schooling was common in the United States. *De facto* school segregation is often compounded by the political nature of school district boundaries and the way in which public education is funded in most states.

An Example of Inequity in Idaho

The "Constitution of the State of Idaho" states in Section 1, "Legislature to establish system of free schools. The stability of a republican form of government depending mainly upon the intelligence of the people, it shall be the duty of the legislature of Idaho, to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools" (Idaho State Constitution, art IX, § 1). The legal definition of the term "uniform" includes the synonyms "equal, identical, invariable, same, universal" (Burton, 2007). Therefore, Section 1 in the Idaho State Constitution establishes the legal responsibility to maintain "free schools" that are also "equal" or "invariable."

In my home state of Idaho, Elementary School A is located in a community where the income per capita is $15,693 (Sperling's Best Places, 2015) and the per pupil expenditure is $5,286 (Idaho Ed Trends, 2015). The demographics in Elementary School A includes "67.5% Hispanic" and "29.3% White" and 90% of the students who attend this school are eligible for the free or reduced meal program (Idaho Ed Trends, 2015). In the school district where Elementary School A is located, the teacher salary schedule ranges from $31,750 to $47,174 (School District A website, 2015). Elementary School B is located in another Idaho town where the income per capita is $39, 980 (Sperling's Best Places, 2015). Elementary School B has a per pupil expenditure of $16,973 (ID ED Trends, 2015). The demographics in Elementary School B includes "63% White" and "31.6% Hispanic). Only 29% of the students who attend Elementary School B are eligible for the free or reduced meal program (Idaho ED Trends, 2015). Furthermore, in

the school district where Elementary School B is located, the teacher salary schedule ranges from $40,918 to $86,239 (School District B website, 2015).

Elementary School B receives almost three times the amount of money to spend per pupil than Elementary School A. The upper end of the teacher salary schedule in the district where Elementary School B is located almost doubles that of the district where Elementary School A is located. In Elementary School B, where more money is allocated per student and the teacher salary schedule almost doubles that of the other, the school population is almost two-thirds white, while Elementary School A, where there is one-third less spent per pupil, the student population is almost two-thirds Hispanic. It is likely students attending the school where more money is allocated for her/his education may have access to not only more but also better resources.

Are Schools the Great Equalizer?

Inequities such as those between these two Idaho schools are not anomalies in public education in the United States. In fact, the trend that exists and rarely differs, is where there is a higher population of Hispanic, black or other minority groups, there is also a higher rate of poverty and a lower per pupil expenditure in schools (Kozol, 2005). Yet, schools are sometimes referred to as the "great equalizer" (Howard, 2010), where a student who comes from poverty has the same opportunities as any other student, regardless of background. There is an abundance of research and scholarly articles indicating public education has not lived up to this promise.

Another example that illustrates the inequities in public schools is through a disaggregated analysis of the high school graduation rates or drop-out rates. Orfield (2004) indicates the rate of students who have dropped out of school during the last two

decades has increased. When data are disaggregated by ethnic and racial groups, Latino and African American students have the lowest graduate rates, with a graduation rate of 56% and 52% respectively, while 76% of White students graduated high school (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004).

"Bootstrapping" or "lifting oneself up the social and economic ladder through individual effort, hard work and personal responsibility" (Rooks, 2012) is often given lip service in public schools. Rooks (2012) continues,

> Those born at the bottom-in other words those who would typically be candidates for bootstrapping-are now more likely to stay there. This is particularly true for African Americans who are stuck at the bottom more than any other group and may even fall farther behind from one generation to the next.

Public schools are not the great equalizer, but are one of many systemic social problems. Schools most often sort students into categories along socioeconomic, racial and ethnic lines. Schools have even been credited for "pushing students out" (Bahruth, 2004). Teachers have been as equally duped as the students, as teachers are typically the people who unknowingly deliver the bootstrapping myth to their students. Even when a teacher may recognize the contradictions inherent in schools, it is an extremely complicated matter about which to do something. Certainly, I have wrestled with these ideas and how to respond in the classroom.

The Last Hoop

While student teaching, I wrote an essay titled "The Last Hoop." In this essay, I described an experience where I witnessed one student reprimanded quite fiercely by my mentor teacher for being out of his chair while attempting to help another student. I wrote,

He not only didn't care why the student was out of his desk but when the student told his story, the teacher didn't stop yelling but criticized the student on a personal level and told him to get to his desk and not leave until the bell rang. I heard the story from the crying distraught child that told me that he wouldn't "be back tomorrow," because the teacher is "mean." I was also told it wasn't the first time he had been yelled at and/or criticized, and I'm sure that it won't be the last.

This specific experience was the norm of my student teaching experience, which led me to question myself. In the concluding paragraph of that essay I wrote,

Student teaching has definitely taken its toll on me and in many ways has affected the ways I view education. Maybe the most detrimental part of this experience is what it is becoming, a list of reasons why I don't want to be involved in a system devoted to the promotion of the status quo. (Skousen, 2001)

A Teacher's Comment and the Response: An Expression of Power

My early experiences as a teacher, while difficult and certainly negative, incited more passion and desire to do something about schooling, than did the hopelessness or despair. During this time, I continued developing my pedagogy, educating myself through daily reading, and reflection of my own classroom practice and through further formal education in the form of master degrees. Nonetheless, I continued to struggle with those who were my "leaders." For example, following mandatory professional development training in phonics instruction and vocabulary, we were all given an anonymous survey to complete. The following week, I was teaching in my classroom when the phone rang. It was my principal. He abruptly asked, "What did you do?" and continued, without waiting for a response, with, "I'm sending someone to watch your classroom; you need to come to my office immediately. Stan Smith [school district superintendent] and Walter Herman [school district assistant superintendent] are coming down here right now!" I could not think of anything I had done wrong or what might be the issue. I hurried to the principal's office, scared as if I were one of my middle school

students awaiting punishment. When I arrived at my principal's office, I was again asked, "What did you do?" I responded saying that I did not know. My principal instructed me to stay quiet and agree to what the superintendent and assistant superintendent were about to tell me and he would help me. I sat down at the principal's round conference table in his office and just moments later the superintendent and assistant superintendent arrived. As the superintendent approached the table, he tossed the document he was holding in his hand across the table toward me and stated, "Is this yours?" I quickly recognized the document as the anonymous survey I had completed the previous week following the professional development. I responded, "Yes." The superintendent began telling me that this sort of insubordination would not be tolerated and that if I were unhappy and did not want to do what was asked, he would accept my resignation immediately. The superintendent continued with some comments about the school district's direction and what I would be required to do. When the superintendent finished, the assistant superintendent stated something about bringing concerns to the appropriate channels. Then, as quickly as they had arrived, they turned and walked out. After the superintendent and the assistant superintendent left, my principal asked to see the anonymous survey. He read the survey and said, "That's it?" as if he were expecting to see something and it was not there. (At the bottom of the survey I had written that I viewed literacy as more than just phonics and vocabulary and that a more holistic approach would allow for deeper learning and literacy development.)

Defining "Leadership"

Leadership, as I had come to know it, was synonymous with a title, such as principal or superintendent. Leadership was a position. Leadership was about power and

control. Leadership in schools was about managing adults and kids. Leadership was about talking football. I was once told, "Those who can't, teach. Those who can't teach, teach PE. Those who can't teach PE, become administrators."

Realizing that I was not making much progress in changing the system, I thought that widening, what some call my "sphere of influence," could have more affect. Even though I was skeptical, it was at this time I applied to enter the educational leadership master degree program. While I realized that earning an administration degree did not guarantee an administrative or leadership position, I completed this degree. The culminating activity of this program was to write a theory of action paper. In my theory of action paper, titled *Changing the Discourse in Public Schools*, I discussed not only my frustrations with the contradictions found in public schooling, but also a new definition of what it means to be a leader. I wrote,

> Leadership is not a job, nor a title. Being a leader has everything to do with the individual. Bennis (2003), in his book *On Becoming a Leader,* stated, "...people begin to become leaders at that moment when they decide for themselves how to be" (p. 47). However, making the decision "to be" is much easier said than done. "All of the leaders I talked with," continued Bennis, "agreed that no one can teach you how to become yourself, to take charge, to express yourself..." (p. 49). Therefore, while societal and other individuals' influences are great, "...other people are the mirror in which we see ourselves" (Tatum, 1997), and often determine who people become, the ability to lead can be recognized through the ability of 'self' to overcome the world's power to manipulate. (Skousen, 2007b).

Writing, as described by Richardson (1994), is a "method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic" (p. 516). Authoethnography is a research methodology that is inclusive of a process and a product (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Therefore, as I write and come to know through my own experience, I once again hope to raise consciousness and promote change.

Stating the Problem and Issuing a Challenge

My dismay of public schooling stemmed from the unequal, inequitable, racist, and classist backdrop of public schooling, as well as schools lacking leaders and reflective practitioners. Nonetheless, I persisted, earning two master degrees, one of which was in educational leadership. As I concluded the degree in educational leadership, I wrote a theory of action paper. In this paper, I also issued a challenge to myself, to become the type of leader I had described, one who would be able to build a school where equity, equality, and critical consciousness would be the norm.

In response to this challenge, I accepted a position as principal. In this position, I had the opportunity to open a new school, based upon a new concept which had not existed in the past. Many questions arose in my mind as I took on this challenge, but the most dominant was: Would I be able to live up to my convictions and lead others in providing schooling that was responsive to what was really troubling me? I wondered, "What the hell can leaders really do?"

As a newly hired principal, I was charged with opening this new school in a partially renovated former elementary school that would serve the most at-risk student population of 9th grade students in the school district. The students were described as failures and many had already begun discussing dropping out. The teachers who were sent to teach in this school were considered "left-overs," two of the eight had already begun planning their retirements. It was early July and I had received little direction from the district office of what the school was to be, but the opportunity of creating a school that would better serve historically marginalized students was an answer to the challenge

I had issued myself. It was this experience that provides the context and background to this research study.

Purpose of the Study

Autoethnography is a research method and product "that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience to understand cultural experience" (Ellis, et al., 2011). Sparkes (2000) wrote autoethnographies "are highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological meaning" (p. 21). The primary purposes of this study are two-fold: First, systematically investigate my own experiences to understand, gain, and extend meaning; second, to provide an account of my own experiences for the purpose of raising consciousness and promoting change (Ellis, 2002) and giving voice (Boylorn, 2006) to my experiences and myself.

Autoethnographic method emerges from the postmodern era and is grounded primarily in feminist theory and research. It is a response to the positivist perspective that "there is only one way to 'do science' and any intellectual inquiry must conform to established research methods" (Wall, 2006). Therefore, it might be viewed as an ironic twist that I, a white male, would choose this methodology. Why would I have need of voice? Wall (2006) states, "I find that the relentless nudging of autoethnography against the world of traditional science holds wonderful, symbolic, emancipatory promise. It says that what I know matters. How much more promise could it hold for people far more marginalized than I?" (p. 2). Certainly, there are others far more marginalized than I; nevertheless, all deserve the right and opportunity to have a voice and a critique.

Significance of the Study

This autoethnographic study is important and is needed for multiple reasons. First, the opening words of Argyris and Schön (1974) in their book *Theory in Practice: Increasing Professional Effectiveness* provide insight into why this study is important: "Integrating thought with action effectively has plagued philosophers, frustrated social scientists and eluded professional practitioners for years" (p. 3). This study offers one case in which "thought" and "action" are questioned, described and then analyzed, giving the possibility of answering how thought and action may be integrated.

In addition, the implications of this study hold significance for me as a practitioner, researcher and scholar. Holman Jones (2005) in the chapter titled "Autoethnography: Making the personal political" stated autoethnographies "help us create, interpret and change our social, cultural, political and personal lives" (p. 767). This study allowed me to question, describe and analyze my own understandings, which ultimately changed my life.

Finally, this study is significant to researchers, scholars and especially practitioners as they find meaning in my descriptions and analyses and question the trustworthiness, dependability and warrantability of my findings. These are key components in qualitative research and this is especially true in this study.

Research Questions

The central research question in this authoethnographic study is: What can I, as a leader, do? This study also addresses the following research sub-questions:

1. How aligned are my theory of action and theory-in-use?

2. What did I do as a leader of a new school?

3.   What can the narrative teach me and others?

The research questions posed in this study and the methodology require a foundation from which to construct possible responses. Therefore, in order to create an understanding, there are four central tenets that build this background: critique of public schooling, reflection, theory of action and theory-in-use, and leadership. Through these four tenets, this autoethnographic study takes form.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter provides an introduction to this study, situating this study against a problem statement, the purpose of this study, the significance of this study, and finally the research question. Chapter Two presents a comprehensive review of literature. The third chapter describes the research methods, including the rationale for selecting the research method, the forms of data collected, a description of how the data was analyzed, the strategies used to increase the validity and reliability of the study, potential ethical concerns and my role and background as the researcher. Chapter Four presents and highlights a series of vignettes. Finally, in the fifth chapter, the implications of the study are discussed, the strengths and limitations drawn out and the applications of this study presented with discussion about possible future research studies.

CHAPTER 2 – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section describes my critique of schooling in the United States, which highlights not only the structure of schooling, but also day-to-day occurrences in schools. Beginning with critique is essential because it outlines, in part, the underlying problems to be examined in this study. The second section reviews the idea of reflection, including discussion of theory and practice. I include a review of the literature on reflection as a professional practice because it was through the reflective process that I began to analyze my experiences as a teacher and principal. The third section details "theory of action" and "theory in use" (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Having been exposed to the work of Chris Argyris and David Schön and having the experience of working through and writing a "theory of action" in my educational leadership degree studies, these ideas have been central to my practice and reflections as a principal. Finally, the fourth section is an analysis of leaders and leadership in schools. Through my experiences as a principal, the research questions and therefore this study, has emerged.

Critique

Kozol (1991), in his seminal work *Savage Inequalities*, describes various public schools in differing regions of the United States illuminating the vast disparities that exist. He vividly describes "ghetto schools" and "inner-city" schools that were literally

falling apart, "…full of sewer water and the doors are locked with chains" (p. 35). Kozol also notes these "ghetto schools" and "inner-city" schools are comprised of ethnic and racial minority groups, describing them not as anomalies, but as the realities of growing up black, Hispanic or in any other marginalized minority group that is also poor.

Kozol (1991) quotes some of the children in the schools he visited. One student stated, "It does not take long, for little kids to learn they are not wanted" (p. 35). Another student stated,

> Now you hear them sayin' on TV, 'What's the matter with these colored people? Don't they care about their children's education?' But my mother did the best for me she know. It was not my mother's fault that I was not accepted by those people. (p. 35)

Finding "fault" with the oppressed, as the one student so eloquently stated, is also part of Kozol's findings. Kozol (1991) states,

> Children, of course, don't understand at first that they are being cheated. They come to school with a degree of faith and optimism, and they often seem to thrive during the first few years. It is sometimes not until the third grade that their teachers start to see the warning signs of failure. By the fourth grade many children see it too. (p. 57)

Although *Savage Inequalities* was published over twenty years ago, in 2005, Kozol published another book, *The Shame of the Nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*, where he describes schools as worsening. Kozol (2005) found schools to be more segregated today than they were pre-Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, et al. and the discrepancies in school funding have equally worsened.

Kozol is not the only scholar who has established the case for inequity in schooling. The case that widespread inequities exist along racial and class lines is well documented (Anyon, 2005; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 2005; Orfield, 2004).

Darling-Hammond (2007) contends there is a "legacy of inequality in U.S. education" especially when comparing student outcomes across racial and social class. Ladson-Billings (2006) not only agrees but goes as far as stating that changing the way schools are funded to create equity is the "equitable and just thing to do" (p. 9).

U.S. schools have a long, complex and contested history of disparities among low income and minority students (Banks, 2009; Spring, 2006). These differences in race and social class often correlate to poorer academic performance in school. Scholars contend this is due, in part, to educational opportunities U.S. schools have denied certain groups of students as a result of race and class segregation (Gutierrez, 2004; Lomawaima & McCarty, 1999; Min, 2004; Myrdal, 1944; Tyack, 2004). Furthermore, Howard (2010) would also argue that non-white and poor students have been and continue to be marginalized in U.S. schools, as shown in achievement levels, quality of education, resources, and in overall school experience. Illich (1971) in his book *Deschooling Society* argues that schools further disenfranchise the poor. McLaren (1989) in his book *Life in Schools* states, "These [immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America and the Carribean] are the students most clearly devalued…[who] continue to be culturally and linguistically biased in favor of middle-class Anglo-Saxon students" (p. 13). Howard (2010) states, "According to NAEP data, persistent gaps have existed in the educational outcomes of white and certain Asian American students in comparison to their African American, Latino and Native American counterparts across several important indicators of school success for close to 20 years" (p. 14).

While the discrepancies in achievement and the overall school experience in U.S. public schools are consistent and continue to sort students across race and social class,

another aspect may also contribute to this growing problem: cultural differences. Howard (2010) states,

> Because the cultural characteristics that students of color possess may be diametrically at odds with the cultural features of a largely, White, middle-class teaching population and institutional ethos of schools, some scholars suggest that a 'cultural mismatch' is a primary factor in the underachievement of students of color. (p. 30)

Language is one aspect of culture. In Idaho, when a student enrolls in public school at the age of five, unless that student has acquired a certain set of knowledge and skills in the English language, she/he is considered deficient. Therefore, a student whose mother tongue is Spanish, arrives the first day of school and is already "behind," regardless of what knowledge and skills the student has in her/his mother tongue. Rendón (1971), in his book *Chicano Manifesto,* cited a Time Magazine article from July 4, 1969 that stated, "One major impediment to the Mexican American is his Spanish language because it holds him back in U.S. schools." Howard (2010) states, "European culture and way of being, thinking and communicating are considered 'normal'" (p. 29). He continues, "Teachers…typically seek to 'rid' students of their cultural knowledge and means of communicating, and to replace their ways of knowing with more standard forms of English and mainstream cultural norms" (Howard, 2010, p. 30).

Scholars have also found that the curricula often found in schools is anglo-centered, limited, and ignores and depreciates the set of knowledge that non-white students possess (Davis & Sumara, 2000; Giroux, 1983; Howard, 2010; Lipka, Mohatt, & the Ciulistet Group, 1998; McLaren, 1989; Spring, 2006). Furthermore, Hollins (2000) states that not only does school curricula have a "limited inclusion of ethnic minorities"

(p. 223), but that the European American culture is preserved through the inventing of historical legends about themselves that is part of school curriculum.

The teaching and learning process is also a way in which students are marginalized. Freire (1970), in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* critiques the teaching and learning model that is most commonly found in schools. Freire calls this model "banking education" and describes it,

> through the following attitudes and practices, which mirror oppressive society as a whole:
>
> (a) the teacher teaches and the students are taught;
> (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing;
> (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about;
> (d) the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;
> (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;
> (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;
> (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;
> (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it;
> (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;
> (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (1970, p. 73)

In a critique of the teaching and learning process in the 1930s, John Dewey (1933) asked,

> How many students for example, were rendered callous to ideas, and how many lost the impetus to learn because of the way in which learning was experienced by them? How many acquired special skills by automatic drill so that their power of judgment and capacity to act intelligently in new situations was limited? How many came to associate the learning process with ennui and boredom? (p. 26)

Furthermore, Macedo (1994) states that schools "anesthetize students' critical abilities" (p. 18).

Minority groups are punished in schools at a higher rate than their white peers. Howard (2010) cites data from a 2003 NAEP report which shows "rates of suspension by race and ethnicity, and reveals that African American and Latino males are more likely than any other group to fall into this category" (p. 21). After reading similar reports while completing my degree in educational leadership, I decided to run a disciplinary analysis in the middle school where I was teaching at the time. I found similar results to the NAEP report. My analysis demonstrated that while only 62% of the student population was Latino, over 80% of the disciplinary actions recorded in the student data management system were associated with Latino students (Skousen, 2007a).

Some scholars point to the problems the accountability and standards movement create in schools. Kohn (2000) states, "The current accountability and standards movement has a good claim to being the most profoundly undemocratic movement in the history of American education and that is true in teacher education as well as in the classroom." Kohn (2000) argues that as "teachers and students are compelled to focus only on what can be reduced to numbers, the process of thinking has been severely compromised and the best programs and classes can't survive" (p. 35).

Reflection

Reflection has been a long advocated practice for the teaching profession (Dewey, 1933; Harris, 2010; Schön, 1983). Moon (2004) argues,

> It is probably true to say that most writers on reflection begin their articles with a preamble that refers to one of four writers whose work or models have influenced the manner in which the term is viewed. These writers are John Dewey, Jurgen Habermas, Donald Schön and David Kolb. (p. 11)

Dewey's focus on reflection was primarily on the "nature of reflection and the how it occurs" (Moon, 2004). In contrast, Habermas' focus on reflection rested in the

underlying drive one has for reflecting and "ideals of empowerment and political emancipation" (Morrison, 1995 cited by Moon, 2004). While Dewey's and Habermas' work in reflection are theoretical, Schön and Kolb emphasized reflection in context and practice (Moon, 2004).

Contemporary scholars have written much about reflection, the process of reflecting, the ways in which types of reflections differ and the definition and purpose of reflection (Freire, 1998a; Moon, 2004; Schön, 1983; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Among the definitions of reflection, Bigge and Shermis (1992) say reflective learning is problem raising and problem-solving. Fact-gathering is combined with deductive processes to construct, elaborate and test hypotheses. Brubacher, Case, and Reagan (1994) argue that reflective thinking is an attempt to comprehend and make sense of the world. Norton (1994) states that reflective thinking is a disciplined inquiry into the motives, methods, materials and consequences of educational practice. Dewey (1933) contends that reflective thinking is active, persistent, and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends.

Reflection also refers to the capacity of a teacher to think creatively, imaginatively and at times, self-critically about classroom practice to thoughtfully examine conditions and attitudes that impede or enhance student achievement (Lasley, 1992). Ross (1989) argues that reflective thinking is a way of thinking about educational matters that involves the ability to make rational choices and to assume responsibility for those choices. Similarly, Ross and Hannay (1986) posit that reflective thinking is a process involving decision-making in a socio-political context, identification of

problems, a search for satisfactory answers, and investigation of social problems realized in living.

Reflection is also viewed as a cycle. Schön (1983) states that the cycle of inquiry is initiated by the perception of something troubling or promising, and it is determined by the production of changes one finds on the whole satisfactory or by the discovery of new features which give the situation new meaning and change the nature of questions to be explored.

Grant and Zeichner (2001) state, "openmindedness, responsibility, and wholeheartedness are the characteristics of reflective thinking. Van Manen (1977) argues that there are three levels of reflection: Technical rationality, practical action and critical reflection.

"Theories of Action" and "Theories-in-Use"

In their book, *Theory in Practice,* Argyris and Schön (1974) explored organizational learning and presented two "theories of action" to explain how individuals construct mental maps upon which all decisions and actions are based. "Theories of professional practice," they concluded, "determines all deliberate behavior" (p. 7). Therefore, in order to ensure that an individual's "action strategies" lead to desired "consequences," one must come to an understanding of their "theory of action" (p. 7).

Argyris and Schön (1974) argue that all have mental maps that pertain to how to act in situations. Although most are unaware of the existence of their own mental maps or theories they use, these maps include the ways one plans, implements and reviews their actions (Argyris, 1980).

"Theories-in-use" are not static (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Argyris and Schön

(1974) state, "Theories-in-use are vehicles for achieving and maintaining governing variables within acceptable ranges" (p. 30). When conflict around the "governing variables" come into question, "taking the form of infrequent, discontinuous eruptions that are initiated by dilemnas" that one must consider the dilemma and then change. This is what Argyris and Schön (1974) call "theory-building or theory-learning" (p. 30).

Argyris and Schön (1974) state "dilemmas consist of conflicts of requirements that are considered central and therefore intolerable" (p. 30). There are different types of "dilemmas" that lead one to "theory-building or theory-learning" (p. 30). These include, "dilemmas of incongruity," "dilemmas of inconsistency," "dilemmas of effectiveness," "dilemmas of value," and "dilemmas of testability" (p. 32).

Central to this study is the "dilemma of incongruity" (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Argyris and Schön (1974) state, "dilemmas of incongruity arise out of the progressively developing incongruity between espoused theory and theory-in-use" (p. 30). Having been directed to write and describe my theory of action at the conclusion of the master of educational leadership, part of this study is to analyze my experiences as a principal and question the alignment of my theory of action and theory in use.

Leadership

Researchers have found a simple correlation between leadership and student achievement (Scheerens, 2012). In fact, when principal effectiveness is analyzed, it has been stated that principals are the second most influential school-related factor in student achievement (Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2003; Seashore, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Furthermore, there has been much discussion regarding the impact a principal can have in public schools. Marzano, Waters,

and McNulty (2005) and Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2012) found that principals play a key role in high poverty and high minority schools to raise the bar and close the achievement gap.

House (2004) defines leadership as, "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (p. 54). This definition of leadership does not specify that a leader is someone who has the role and title of leader, administrator, etc. For House (2004), leadership can include any, regardless of job title, to "influence, motivate and enable others to contribute" (p. 55).

Scholars have found that leaders in successful schools possess certain characteristics and/or employ certain practices. Howard (2010) says that these characteristics include "(1) visionary leadership, (2) teachers' effective practices, (3) intensive academic intervention, (4) the explicit acknowledgement of race, and (5) engagement of parents and community" (p. 134). The Wallace Foundation's (2013) publication suggests that there are five components of successful school leadership. These include:

> (1) Shaping a vision of academic success for all students, one based on high standards. (2) Creating a climate hospitable to education in order that safety, a cooperative spirit and other foundations of fruitful interaction prevail. (3) Cultivating leadership in others so that teachers and other adults assume their parts in realizing the school vision. (4) Improving instruction to enable teachers to teach at their best and students to learn to their utmost. (5) Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement. (p. 6)

Lynch (2012) found that there are 10 components of effective leadership:

> (1) Transformational Leadership: The (Un)Disputed Champion of Leadership Strategies; (2) Instructional Leadership: A Catalyst for the Promotion of Teaching and Learning; (3) Distributed Leadership: A Humanistic Approach to Shared Governance; (4) Ethical Leadership: Using Your Moral Compass to Steer the

Ship; (5) Emotional Leadership: Using Your Heart to Lead; (6) Entrepreneurial Leadership: How Schools can Learn from Business Leaders (7) Strategic Leadership: Those Who Fail to Plan, Plan to Fail. (8) Sustainable Leadership: The Race is Won by Those Who Endure; (9) Invitational Leadership: Developing a School Culture of Trust, Respect, and Hope; (10) Constructivist Leadership: A Framework for Building Sustainable School Improvement. (p. xi)

Leithwood et al. (2003; see also Leithwood & Reihl, 2003) claim basic school leadership practices include building vision and direction, understanding and developing people, designing the organization to bring function and structure together and managing teaching and learning. Still others suggest that family and community partnerships are key to effective school leadership (Auerbach, 2012; McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996). MacNeil, Prater, and Busch (2009) argue that school culture, has a large impact on student success and substantiate the evidence concerning the importance of leadership in creating good schools through school culture.

Creating learning opportunities for educators is also an important aspect to leadership (Haynes, 2007; Mosca, 2006). Scholars have found that effective leaders include principals who offer ongoing appropriate professional development to teachers and other staff (August & Hakuta, 1998; Calderon & Carreon, 2000; Coady, Hamann, Harrington, Pho, & Yedlin, 2008; Echevarria, 2006; Haberman, 1999; Lucas, Henze & Donato, 2004; Reyes, 2006; Stritikus, 2006; Walker, 2005; Walqui, 2000). Lucas et al. (2004) suggest that offering professional development for nonteaching staff is equally important for schools to be effective.

Scholars also suggest that principals must lead teachers to work collaboratively to meet students' needs (August & Hakuta, 1998; Lucas et al., 2004; McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996; Shaw, 2003; Walker, 2005). McLaughlin and McLeod (1996) found that successful principals may restructure class schedules and instructional time for teachers

and staff to meet and collaborate. Similarly, others discovered that effective principals must find time for staff to engage in a collaborative effort to meet students' needs (Echevarria, 2006; Genesee, 2006; Walqui, 2000).

Effective leaders place a high value on and strive to ensure that families and communities are connected to the school (August & Hakuta, 1998; Calderon & Carreon, 2000; Coady et al., 2008, Haberman, 1999; Lucas et al., 2004; McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996; Montecel & Cortez, 2002; Stritikus, 2006; Walker, 2005: Walqui, 2000). Similarly, Wenger et al. (2004) found that effective principals facilitate families' involvement in school in their home language.

Still, scholars and researchers have found that there are other aspects of leadership that lead to success. August and Hakuta (1998), Genesse (2006), Lucas et al. (2004), and McLaughlin and McLeod (1996) state that the principal is key to selecting, implementing and supporting curriculum. A leader's focus on maintaining smooth transitions from one grade level to the next is also important for creating effective leadership (Genesee, 2006). Also, for school to succeed, leaders must have a belief in students' capacities to meet rigorous standards and a commitment to students as well (McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996: Shaw, 2003). Effective principals raise equity concerns (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005) and seek social justice (Anderson, 2009; Powers & Hermans, 2007; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007a; Theorharis, 2007b).

Contributions to the Four Tenets

This research study contributes in various ways to the literature on public schooling. First, this study includes a critique of the public schools and posits that while public schools are the problem, potentially public schools may be the answer to the

problem. This allows multiple and novel interpretations of the critique of public schools. Second, while reflection and reflective practice has been emphasized in the teaching profession for decades, this research study offers a reflection within the context of a practicing principal, therefore, expanding the possibility of reflection application to school leaders. Third, this study and my analysis of the alignment of theories of action and theories-in-use provide a rich description related to the application of the work of Argyris and Schön to the contemporary principalship. Fourth, there is much research regarding principals as school leaders, however, this autoethnographic study adds another perspective to what it means to be a leader in the current context of public schooling in one place through an under-utilized, but potentially powerful, methodology. Finally, this research study may provide a new perspective to how one's narrative can be used to learn and give voice to the voiceless.

CHAPTER 3 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A Definition of Autoethnography

Autoethnography, situated among qualitative research, "is both process and product" (Ellis et al., 2011). Holman Jones (2005) describes autoethnography as "a balancing act" (p. 764). Autoethnographers must balance the multi-facets of this research methodology: *Auto*, personal experience: *Ethno*, understanding of the experience through a cultural lens: *Graphy*, description and analysis of the experience (Ellis et al., 2011).

Chang (2008) posits that autoethnography is a methodology with six steps. These steps include: identifying the research topic, situating the researcher in the setting and among others in that setting, a plan for methodology and data, deliberate attention to the ethical treatment of others involved in the research study, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and finally, writing the autoethography.

"Autoethnography does have a story," states Holman Jones (2005, p. 765). She continues describing autoethnography as,

> Setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation…and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives.

> Making a text present. Demanding attention and participation. Implicating all involved. Refusing closure or categorization.

> Witnessing experience and testifying about power without foreclosure-of pleasure, of difference, of efficacy.

> Believing that words matter and writing toward the moment when the point of creating autoethnographic texts is to change the world. (p. 765).

Holman Jones (2005) also states that even these descriptions "[are] not the end of a story about autoethnography, only a beginning" (p. 765). Therefore, authoethnography, as Holman Jones (2005), Ellis and Bochner (2000), Neumann (1996), Reed-Danahay (1997) among others, would suggest that authoethnography has yet to be fully realized as a methodology.

Ellis et al. (2011) wrote, "Gradually scholars across a wide spectrum of disciplines began to consider what social sciences would become if they were closer to literature than to physics, if they proffered stories rather than theories, and if they were self-consciously value-centered rather than pretending to be value free" (p. 2). Autoethnography is a research methodology that not only recognizes the myriad of ways experience influences research, but also "acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist" (Ellis et al., 2011).

Why Autoethnography?

Ellis and Bochner (2000) wrote,

> Autobiographical genre of writing and research displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth autoethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations. (p. 739)

Although I recognize that my experiences are by no means unique or special, they are how I have come to learn and know. It is through this journey that I turn to autoethnography as a process and product to further analyze my experiences, "assembled using hindsight" (Bruner, 1993; Denzin, 1989; Freeman, 2004) to respond to my research question, as a leader, what can I do, and my research studies' sub-questions:

1. How aligned are my theory of action and theory-in-use?

2. What did I do as a leader in a new school?

3. What can the narrative teach me and potentially others?

Through this autoethnography, I hope to contribute to the knowledge and understanding of leadership, public schools, narrative and autoethnography.

My experiences as an undergraduate student and student teacher, then as a teacher and finally as a principal have each contributed to my learning. Through autoethnography, I hope to re-live specific past experiences in order to make further meanings and gain insight through the narrative. This is significant. As both the researcher and the person who's lived experiences are being closely examined, autoethnography allows me to acknowledge the emotion and feelings that accompany those experiences.

Authoethnographic research opens one up to becoming vulnerable. This is challenging and rewarding. Ngunjiri, Hernandez, and Chang (2010) wrote, "Vulnerability is part of what makes reading autoethnographic works so compelling as researchers expose their pains, hurt, loss, grief, heartbreak, and other emotions experienced as they travail through events in their lives." Becoming vulnerable, I expose selfhood, my experiences and the interpretations of those experiences to the critique of others. Nevertheless, through the narrative and close analysis of myself and my experiences, I hope to raise consciousness and give voice to the narrative and myself.

Data Sources

After receiving the phone call announcing my new role as principal, I began writing, documenting my work through reflective journaling, and my writing continued

throughout the three years I was principal. These writings filled one legal-size note pad and fourteen college-ruled notebooks, each one consisting of 120 pages. In these notebooks, I also stored notes taken during meetings or discussions with others on other loose-leaf paper, documents that were shared with parents, students and school personnel, and notes to me from students, parents and school personnel. Other documents that were used as a data source were the weekly notes I prepared and sent to all staff outlining that week's activities, events, staff assignments, agenda items for the weekly staff meeting, a quote and a paragraph or two of my own thoughts to staff. These documents were archived weekly and stored in a three-inch three-ringed binder. Although I did not consider my writings and notebooks, and weekly notes to the staff, as a source for future research at the time, I documented activities on which I was working and experiences I was having, together with my thoughts and feelings. It is through these writings the narrative was created and the stories in this autoethnography are illustrated.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state, "Photography has been closely aligned with qualitative research and it can be used in many different ways" (p. 141). During the three years, many school-related activities, events, and experiences were documented with photographs and digital video recordings. There were approximately 10,522 photographs and 9 hours and 47 minutes of digital video recordings. These photographs and videos are used "as a means of remembering and studying detail that might be overlooked if photographic images were not available for reflection" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Similar to the notebooks that documented activities, experiences, thoughts, and feelings, the photographs were originally taken for use with students to document activities and

experiences; nevertheless, the photographs are also a "researcher's tool" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) for analysis, to gain further understanding.

Although much of the data is free of information that could identify specific students, school staff and students' families, I have ensured that complete anonymity is established through the use of pseudonyms. The use of pseudonyms are used to protect the anonymity of all names and place names. I used an online "random name generator" to generate the list of pseudonyms to ensure the randomization and complete deviations from using similar names.

Data Analysis

The enormous amount of data that had been collected for this research study required that I remain focused on the research questions specific to this study. Therefore, the research questions were constant in the process of data review and coding to guide data analysis. In fact, the research questions were written in a large font and posted next to my tables where I analyzed data.

I began my data analysis by first organizing all data into chronological order by month and year. The notebooks, documents and a memory card containing the year specific events were placed in chronological piles beginning with the first year of my principalship, followed by the notebooks, documents and digital photographs and videos on a memory card from the second year and finally the notebooks, documents and memory card containing the digital photographs and videos from the third year.

Another strategy that was used at the preliminary stages of data analysis was through a self-interview, reflecting upon the experience as a principal and writing down events that I thought might arise during the data analysis process and coding of data. In

order to do this, I asked myself the question, "What experiences, events or actions, stand out as important and meaningful during the three years as principal?" I completed a list of nine experiences and actions I made as principal.

Early in my experience as a principal, I recognized that I would need help and support. I also knew that my family would need to be understanding of the time spent away from home, not only the nights and weekends during the school year spent away from home working, but also the days spent working during the summer and other vacation times. In order to balance these needs, I enlisted the support of my spouse. She spent countless hours with me going on home visits, taking photographs and videos, preparing meals, setting up parent nights, setting up for new student orientation, and being a supporter of my work. Acknowledging my spouse's experience, I interviewed her and asked her the same question I asked myself, "What experiences, events or actions, stand out as important and meaningful during the three years I was principal?" I noted her responses on a single sheet of paper. The responses included nineteen experiences and actions I made as a principal.

Miles and Huberman (1994) discuss this strategy, saying; "Event listing…arranges a series of concrete events by chronological time periods, sorting them into several categories" (p. 111). This strategy supports data analysis to build narratives in chronological order, showing the sequence of events and experiences, noting how experiences build upon each other and are not found in isolation. (See Appendix A.)

Miles and Huberman (1994) state, "Coding is analysis" (p. 56). They continue, "Codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 56). The notebooks, other documents,

photographs and digital video were reviewed and coded; however, I did not limit the coding to a set of pre-specified codes, which allowed the possibility of unknown themes to develop or reveal themselves during the process of data analysis.

Having organized all data sources into chronological piles, I began reading, analyzing and coding, starting with the data sources for the first year of my principalship, continuing through the second and finally the third year as principal. While the digital photographs and videos were placed in chronological order with the notebooks and other documents, I did not review the digital photographs and videos until I had completed reviewing the notebooks and other documents found within the notebooks.

After coding the notebooks and documents, I analyzed the codes and the number of occurrences of each of those codes in all the notebooks and documents. I took those findings and only coded the photographs and videos with the top ten most used codes from the coding of the notebooks and documents.

When I had finished coding the notebooks, documents, digital photographs and digital video, I constructed a matrix showing the cross-over of events that were listed prior to the data analysis in the self-interview and the notes I took from the interview of my spouse, and the actual occurrences that these events were coded in the data sources. (See Appendix B).

Addressing Research: Reliability, Generalizability and Validity

Autoethnographers have received many critiques (Atkinson, 1997; Buzard, 2003; Gans, 1999; hooks, 1999; Keller, 1995). Nevertheless, Ellis et al. (2011) argue, "autoethnographers find it futile to debate whether autoethnography is a valid research process or product" (p. 9). Instead, autoethnographers value the methodology and posit

that while the research does include personal experience that can be emotional and therapeutic, autoethnography is also rigorous and scholarly (Ellis et al., 2011).

Ellis (1995) posits that a narrative can be scholarly and is dependent upon the readers' belief as to whether the experience is possible, believable and authentic. Furthermore, "autoethnographers value narrative truth based on what a story of experience does-how it is used, understood, and responded to for and by us and others as writers, participants, audiences and humans" (Ellis et al.,2011).

"Validity means that a work seeks verisimilitude; it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true" (Ellis et al., 2011). Feldman (2003) lists four criteria upon which data collection should be based, through which a studies' validity can be established. These include:

> Provided clear and detailed description of how we collect data and make explicit what counts as data in our work. Provide clear and detailed descriptions of how we constructed the representation from our data. What specifics about the data led us to make this assumption? Extend triangulation beyond multiple sources of data to include explorations of multiple ways to represent the same self study. Provide evidence that the research changed or evolved the educator and summarize its value to the profession. This can convince readers of the study's significance and validity. (Feldman, 2003, pp. 27-28)

The "clear and detailed descriptions" are illustrated through the notebooks of reflective journals I kept throughout my principalship, the documents created and shared with school staff, students and their parents, and the photographs and video archived on my computer's hard drive. Through this data, I am able to construct detailed descriptions and "make explicit what counts as data in our work" (Feldman, 2003). Furthermore, I again listed the help of my spouse, who had first-hand experience and knowledge of the events that transpired during the three years, as a member check. Although in other

qualitative studies the researcher is studying a context, in an authoethnography the context is oneself; therefore, the member check supports the researcher to add clarification and details to descriptions and add or delete comments that may further improve the researcher's interpretations.

In writing an autoethnography and using narrative, "reliability refers to the narrator's credibility. Could the narrator have had the experiences described, given available 'factual evidence?'" (Ellis et al., 2011). Through rich description, I describe the experiences thoroughly, using reflective journals that were written at the time of the experience, together with photographs and other documents that illustrate the experience. Through such triangulation of evidence, I would hope to build credibility and therefore reliability.

"Generalizability is also important to autoethnographers, though not in the traditional, social scientific meaning that stems from, and applies to, large random samples of respondents. In autoethnography, the focus of generalizability moves from respondents to readers, and is always being tested by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know" (Ellis et al., 2011). My experiences are not unique or special. My experiences are ways in which I have come to learn and know, understanding that regardless of how similar experiences may be no two are exactly alike. Nevertheless, through this autoethnography, I hope readers will think about how their lived experiences are similar and different to mine. While the experiences found here are derived from events and people unfamiliar to the reader, they may inform the reader and lead to their learning and ways of coming to know.

Limitations

This autoethnographic study does have limitations. First, the highly personalized accounts of the 9th Grade Learning Institute are from a single perspective, my own. Found within this single perspective exist my biases and assumptions. Albeit the purpose of this study as authoethnography was to focus on my own perspective, as seen and documented through my own daily accounts through writing, pictures and video and the documents created and used during the principalship; nevertheless, this remains a limitation of this study.

Furthermore, this study incorporated a member check to ensure that the research is trustworthy, the member check was my spouse, who, as a member participant in this study, has her limited perspective, biases and assumptions.

CHAPTER 4 – VIGNETTES

Introduction and Descriptions

In this chapter, I present vignettes from my experience as principal of the 9th Grade Learning Institute. These vignettes were selected because they share commonalities with the list of experiences that I created shortly before analyzing and coding my data and the list my spouse created of experiences she remembered.

To understand the vignettes and their significance, I first provide a description of the school setting and the students. The idea to create a 9th Grade Learning Institute came from the superintendent of the small rural school district I described in Chapter One. The community has a per capita income of $15,693 (Sperling's Best Places, 2015) and a per pupil expenditure of $5,286 (ID Ed Trends, 2015).

The school district faced many problems, one of which was the large number of dropouts. Most students dropped out between 9th and 10th grades. Therefore, creating a school to specifically address the needs of students transitioning to 9th grade, identifying the most at-risk in the 8th grade and assigning those students to that school, was the strategy developed to address the high dropout rate. During the last quarter of the school year, each of the two middle schools in the district would be asked to identify 50 students from approximately 250 eighth-grade students who were the most at risk of dropping out.

The groups of students who were identified and selected to attend the 9th Grade Learning Institute during the three years were similar from year to year. The demographic

make-up of the student body changed very little (a few percentage points during the three years I was principal). Approximately 95% of the students lived in poverty. Twelve percent received special education services and 23% were identified as English language learners. Seventy percent were Latino, 29% White and 1% identified themselves as "other." Fifty-seven percent were male and 43% were female. Many of the students who attended our school also had extensive disciplinary files, attendance issues, failing grades in many or most of their classes during middle school and approximately 25% had probation officers.

The location of the new 9th Grade Learning Institute was an old elementary school site that included two separate buildings and was located in the center of town. The buildings needed extensive remodeling and construction, including the demolition of a section of one of the buildings that was literally falling apart. The new 9th Grade Learning Institute was located almost completely in one of the buildings, and the other building was extensively remodeled as the new school district office.

The 9th Grade Learning Institute's layout included the main building, with the main office, five classrooms, a gym, a cafeteria and a kitchen. The adjacent building, which housed the school district's administrative offices, also housed two classrooms and a computer lab for the school's use.

The design of the school was purposeful, limiting the school to approximately 100 students; although, a three-year average showed only 86 students. There were eight full-time certificated teachers, one safe-school paraprofessional, one secretary, one principal, a part-time English language teacher and a part-time special education teacher. Class size remained relatively consistent, between 12 and 15 students. The school day was from

7:55 a.m. until 2:50 p.m. During the first year, there were four 90-minute classes each day and a thirty-minute lunch period. The second and third years, there were four eighty-five minute classes each day, a thirty-minute lunch period, and a twenty-minute "club" time.

Home Visits

I had just received the phone call from the superintendent and I was anxious to get started in my new role as the first principal of a new school. "Where do I start?" I asked myself. I knew that I needed to first get to know students who would fill the hallways in a few short months. Who were they? Where did they live? With whom did they live? What were their schooling experiences like? Dozens of questions like these flooded my mind.

The next day I went into the school district office and made a few phone calls. I was able to get a list of the students and their addresses and phone numbers. I was also able to find out some basic information about the students. That day, Susana, my spouse, and I poured over the students' addresses and talked about where they lived. We devised a plan to go to each students' home. We divided the town into five sections. Within the five sections there were three different mobile home parks, a migrant farm worker labor camp and a neighborhood close to the freeway. We decided to spend five evenings, from 5:00pm until 9:00pm visiting the five different parts of our small rural town.

Prior to going to each students' home, we made a list of the information parents needed to know about the school, such as important dates, registration, dress code guidelines, some expectations, a note from the principal and my contact information. I spent some time on the computer making a flier that would have this information in English and Spanish.

The first evening, I was feeling a little anxious and unsure of how I would be received by parents. It was July, rarely do schools make phone calls, send letters, or visit the homes of students. Susana and I dropped our children off with her parents and headed to the first home. When we arrived, as I parked our van along the street in front of the first house, Susana reminded me that we had fourteen other houses to visit and I had to be concise, and at the same time answer any questions or resolve any concerns that may arise. As we walked to the doorstep with one of the fliers in hand, I could hear the sound of a TV and what sounded like children running and jumping inside the house. I knocked and we waited. The house got silent and then the door was opened. "Bueno," was the comment made by an older, short Latina women. In Spanish, I introduced myself as being the new principal of the 9th Grade Learning Institute and asked if she was the sister of Javier, who would be going to our new school in August. The women laughed, as did my Susana, and she said that she was Javier's grandmother. She asked what the school was and I reintroduced myself, asked for her name and then responded to her question. I stated that it was a new school designed to support individualized instruction with smaller class sizes and more one-on-one support.

Javier's grandmother explained that Javier had not done well in school and often did not behave appropriately. She continued, asking why she had not heard about the school before and called for Javier. A smaller child standing nearby and listening to our conversation quickly ran into the house. I assumed he left to get Javier. I began to explain that this upcoming year would be the first year of the school's existence. Just then Javier walked to the door. Susana held out her hand and said "Hi Javier!" I immediately stopped and introduced myself and then I continued to explain that Javier had been selected to

attend because the middle school where he had attended thought that he would benefit from this new school. Javier said he recalled his counselor at his old school saying something about him going to a different school but he wanted to go to the regular high school. Javier and his grandmother communicated back and forth about where he was going to go to school. I interjected a few comments into the familial exchange, feeling like I needed to "sell" the school. I remember thinking, the school was going to be great! Why wouldn't anyone want to go there?

The conversation continued with me reviewing some of the information on the flier and we set a date and time for an individualized orientation meeting with Javier and his parents, grandparents or guardians to review his class schedule, tour the school, review expectations and complete registration paperwork. At this point, I thought I must have done a good job with the "sell" as we set a date and time for their individual orientation meeting. Finally, I asked if Doña María and Javier had other questions. They both responded with "no" and I thanked them for their time and said that I was looking forward to meeting with them again in the near future. I explained, if they thought of other questions or concerns, they could call my cell phone number, which was on the flier.

As Susana and I walked to our van to go to the next house, she looked at me and said, "What did I tell you?" Approximately forty minutes had passed since pulling up to the first house. We talked about how to cut down the conversation, but we both agreed that time could not govern the home visits. "It is a new school," Susana stated, "it may take people some time to get used to the idea." I agreed and we both admitted that we needed to acknowledge the cultural background of the people we were visiting. Latinos

needed a conversation and time to get to know, as Susana would say, "who this white guy is, why he speaks Spanish and why he's at my house."

This home visit was definitely not the norm. Although there were some similarities in each home visit, each one was unique. The time we spent at each house varied as well. Sometimes we spent fifteen minutes; sometimes it was thirty or forty-five minutes. The longest home visit was more than 90 minutes. Sometimes we were invited to come into family's home; sometimes we stood outside their door or stood under the shade of a tree. Sometimes we were offered food; sometimes we were told to leave. Sometimes parents and guardians were pleased at the idea of a new school that would give more attention to their son or daughter; sometimes they wanted to know who to call to get their son or daughter off of the recommendation list. Nevertheless, after every home visit, my spouse or I would write down a few notes about each student, his or her family, and something special or unique about him or her that would be remembered later.

A day later, Susana and I were again out doing home visits. On this evening, the plan was to visit the fourteen students who lived in the migrant farm laborers housing. We started at about 6:30pm, knowing that many, both old and young, work in the fields from early in the morning to sometimes late in the evenings. It was during these series of home visits that I began to really identify the needs our new school would have to address.

The first residence we visited was Estephany's. Susana knocked on the screen door of the small residence, and a girl came to the door. Susana said, "Hello. Is this Estephany's house?" The girl said that she was Estephany. I noticed she appeared to be

pregnant. Susana asked if her parents were home. "No, they're working," was Estephany's short response. Susana introduced herself and then I introduced myself and explained what we were doing. Susana interrupted me in the middle of talking about the new school and asked, "When are you due?" Estephany said that she was due in September and was not going to go to school.

We, really Susana, spoke with Estephany for about thirty minutes and was able to convince her that she could go to school, that there was a school that would be able to accommodate her needs as a teenage parent who needed to complete high school. Susana gave Estephany her cell phone number and further explained that it was she who taught teen parenting classes, early childhood development classes to teen parents and supervised the on-site daycare.

After leaving Estephany's door step, we walked to the next student's residence, which looked empty. I had learned from three years of conducting home visits in the housing camp as a middle school teacher that during the warm months there are almost always people walking around outside, little children playing, larger children riding bicycles and adults standing, walking, and talking. Seeing that the residence was empty, my spouse asked a few kids who were playing nearby if Juan lived there. The kids said he had moved to a different house on the other side of the housing complex.

So as we walked to the other side of the "campo," we asked others, children, adults, everyone, if they knew which house was Juan's. We eventually asked Juan, without knowing that were asking the person whom we sought. "Juan who?" was Juan's response to the question. We responded with Juan's last name and he responded abruptly, "Why are you looking for him?" I asked, "You're Juan, huh?" And without waiting for a

response I told him that he should not worry because we were not "the migra or the police." I thought I was pretty funny and Juan even smiled. Susana quickly explained who we were and why we were looking for him. "Are your parents home?" my spouse asked. Juan said, "Yah" and Susana said, "Can we speak with them?" Juan said that we could and that they were at his house.

We walked for a minute to his house making small talk about what he was doing over the summer, how his family was, etc. As we got to his house, we waited outside and Juan entered the house and said, "Mamá, te buscan" (Mom they are looking for you). Juan's mother was at the door before she even finished saying, "Quien?" (who). I responded, in Spanish, introducing Susana and myself and stated that we were from the school district. Juan's mother then asked if this was about him getting kicked out of school. Puzzled, I inquired about Juan getting kicked out of school. She described Juan getting into fights and not being allowed to finish the school year. Juan's mother asked if he was going to be allowed to go to school again. I responded to her inquiry with information about the new school and that Juan was on the list I had received and he would attend the new school. Juan's mother was happy that he would be going to school and we scheduled an orientation meeting.

In the two weeks following, Susana and I spent each evening visiting the home of each student who would attend the new school. These home visits enlightened me to the concerns of the parents and students and helped me begin to understand the students on an individual basis. Furthermore, the home visits supported the ideas I had about ways in which we would need to create a school to enrich our students' lives through coming to truly know each student.

Each of the following two years I was the principal, Susana and I continued to conduct home visits prior to the beginning of the school year. My anxiousness and excitement about the learning and understanding I gained through each home visit remained the same each year. I noted in my journal after concluding home visits the second year that I was surprised each home visit was unique and the understandings gained were also unique. This was a pleasant realization, as I had wondered if the process would become normalized and therefore not appreciated.

School Supplies

Knowing that the majority of the students were identified as impoverished, it was important to not exacerbate the issue with long lists of school supplies parents and families would be required to purchase. Therefore, in spite of the already prepared school supply list, I decided to look at the "penny" sales for school supplies during the summer. My wife and I made a list of supplies needed, from the lists given to me by the teachers to determine what could be purchased for a penny, dime or quarter. We calculated how many notebooks, 3-ring binders, pencils, pens, markers, highlighters, notecards, loose-leaf notebook paper, rulers, protractors, pocket folders, composition notebooks, etc. would be needed to supply each student with school supplies each quarter of the school year.

We went to multiple stores each day, and "price-matched" in the stores that would let us. Sometimes limits would apply and my spouse and I would enlist the help of our children, giving each the exact amount of money needed and the supplies that needed to be purchased. This was almost a daily process. Each week when the Sunday paper would

arrive at our doorstep, we would scour over the ads and devise a plan to purchase school supplies during that week.

During the first meeting with the teachers, I told them what Susana and I had done and why. I was nervous, but they were accepting of the idea and we collectively devised a plan to ensure all students, in all classes, would receive the needed supplies.

Individual Orientation Meetings

Not long after my spouse and I had finished all home visits, I began to meet with individual students, parents, guardians and other family members. Because the school remodeling was not complete, I met with them at the school district office. These meetings were scheduled from 6:30 in the morning to 8:30 in the evening, to accommodate each individual family's schedule.

One late July evening, long after all district office staff had left the building, I awaited the arrival of a student and his father. This meeting was scheduled just days earlier. Both the student and his father worked in the fields which necessitated a late evening meeting to accommodate their work schedule. As I waited, standing outside holding open the front door of the district office, I hoped they would be able to make it, because after speaking to the father on the phone I knew there was some hesitation in going to a formal meeting immediately after leaving work. The father had asked if it would be okay to go to the meeting having just left work and being dirty. I had assured him on the phone that it would be okay, because it was only me in the meeting; nonetheless, I worried this father's self-consciousness would outweigh my request to meet.

I waited only a short time and then a truck pulled up to the district office parking lot. The doors on the truck opened and I saw the father get out of it. On the other side of the truck, the mother and son exited and were followed by three small children. I greeted them as they walked up to the door. I asked about their day at work and at the same time noticed all were dressed in formal clothing and it appeared they all had just bathed, as the children's hair was wet. The father, who I had met just weeks earlier during a home visit, explained they received permission to leave work a little early to be at this meeting. I felt awful; while at the same time inspired and hopeful. This was the time of the year when this family, and others who work long hours in the fields make the bulk of their annual income. Yet, this family left work early for a meeting about school, took the time to bathe, put on formal dress clothing (the girls in dresses and the boys in white button shirts) and came to an office for a meeting with a school principal whom they had just met.

After briefly talking outside the office, I invited them in to the conference room where I had been meeting with parents and students and we walked inside. As we entered the conference room, I offered the three small kids coloring pages and crayons and asked the parents if it would be ok if they colored. They responded in the affirmative and I then invited them to sit down.

We sat together at one end of a long conference table and we continued the conversation about how work was going and what they were working on, etc. I then asked where they were from, much of the conversation was in Spanish but some of the language with the kids and the student was in English. The parents responded almost immediately that they were from California and I followed up by asking, from what part

of Mexico did they come. They told me they came from a small town in Michoacán. I told them that I lived in Morelia, Michoacán for a time during my studies. We discussed Mexico and different places in Michoacán for a little while and they asked me where I was from. It is not uncommon for people to ask me this question when we are engaged in conversation in Spanish. I responded, "Soy de aqui" (I'm from here). Their next question, which is also typical, was about where my parents were from. My typical response to that question is "Son de aqui tambien" (They are from here also). Then I will often state, "Soy gringo" (I'm white) and offer the reason I speak Spanish explaining, "I lived in Nicaragua for two years and I learned to speak Spanish there." The topic of the Spanish speaking "gingo" would invariably come up during home visits or orientation meetings with parents and families, who seemed fascinated by it.

During the individual orientation meetings, I would review the student's class schedule, school expectations and rules, as well as the dress code. The dress code was often a long discussed topic. After hearing the specifics about the dress code, students would often question the restrictiveness of the policy. Parents would often equally question the dress code policy, adding it would require they purchase more clothing for their son or daughter. I would ask questions to ensure I understood their specific concerns and would then address them. I was often able to adequately answer their questions and would frequently mention how it would make getting up and getting dressed for school really easy. There was no question about what to wear and what others would think about what was being worn, because everyone would wear about the same thing.

Also during the individual orientation meetings, I would tell students and parents a little about myself and how this would impact the manner in which our school would

operate. I would regularly tell parents and students about my upbringing and how I spent a lot of time with my grandfather on his farm as a child. I would tell them something my Grandfather told me, "You can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink." I discussed with parents and students what the statement meant and how it applied to going to school.

It may have been because the school was new that the individual orientation meetings often included parents and students who questioned why this school, instead of attending the traditional high school. We would often speak at length regarding what this school had to offer and why going here would be beneficial. At times, our discussions seemed to go nowhere and the student and parent would grow impatient. At these times, I would often ask questions about what they believed school to be. I found students and parents with whom I spoke had not considered this question and they would take time to think about it. I would often respond with, "School was what we make it. A school is not the building, it is the people and what they decide to do in the building." I would often conclude with this statement, "What were we going to decide to build? What is our school going to be like? It's our choice." I would put a special emphasis on the words "we" and "our" and sometimes students, parents and I would discuss this further and sometimes we did not.

The individual orientation meetings would often prompt parents and students into discussing their many past problems and issues with school. Almost every parent and student would tell stories of suspensions, getting into trouble, fighting, school officials' accusations of gang involvement, teachers and principals targeting specific students and treating them unfairly, problems with other students, and racism and discrimination.

These stories again helped me understand the students, their perceptions and issues that may arise in the future.

During the three years of orientation meetings, while there were some parents and students who felt like the "new school" would not be right for them, most individual orientation meetings provided the foundation for a positive parent, student and school relationship. Many parents and students would leave our meetings and would make comments like, "I came in thinking this was going to be another argument with the school, but now I think this is the best school for my son/daughter."

Under Construction

It was mid-August and the first day of school was looming a week away, but there was a problem; the school building remodel was not complete and the new desks, tables and other school furniture was arriving in boxes, "unassembled." I was extremely worried, but I was assured by the construction manager the classrooms and bathrooms would be finished. However, the front door, entryway, landscaping in the front of the building, and sidewalks would not be finished until September, a few weeks into the school year.

At this same time, the teachers had also begun to call my cell phone and arrive at the school construction site and wanted to get into their classrooms. It was a busy time. My days filled with meeting with parents and students, talking with teachers, and making plans for the school year to begin. Also, my nights and weekends were consumed with opening boxes, assembling desks, and moving furniture where it belonged.

Finally, with only a few days before the first day of school, the classrooms, bathrooms, hallways, and cafeteria were complete. The teachers, custodian and I worked

together to assemble the rest of the furniture, move desks and tables, hang whiteboards, hang bulletin boards, set up classrooms and create and organize the school office. It was a whirlwind, but the excitement for the first day of school was upon us all; although, a few teachers later admitted in an after-school discussion that the excitement was mostly mine and they did their best to hide their skepticism.

Preparing for the First Week of School

The days leading up to the first days of school, while busy with setting up the school's physical appearance, also included meetings with the teachers to prepare ourselves for the daily operations of school. The teachers had communicated with me via email and phone about setting up the school, rules they would like to see in the school handbook, questions about classroom management and discipline, students' schedules, the master schedule and what the school would be like in general. As I previously mentioned, while intimidating, this was the reason I was extremely excited about this opportunity. I had the opportunity to establish school culture.

Our meeting agendas were packed with daily operational management items because I knew the teachers were really interested in those items. But what I was most excited to present were my ideas on how to begin the school year and what the first week of school would look like.

First Week of School

After a great deal of planning and preparations, the first day of school finally arrived. There was much anxiousness and extra planning because the front of the building and entryway were not complete, but I was excited to begin the school year. I had posted large sandwich boards with written instructions directing students where to go as they got

off buses or were dropped off. The teachers and I welcomed students as they arrived and helped direct them to where they needed to go. Some teachers were positioned in the cafeteria to direct students through the breakfast line and two others, together with our school counselor, were waiting at tables placed at the end of the cafeteria with student schedules, which I had completed only the night before.

The first day of school started well. Teachers, staff and I agreed we would do our best to welcome students and provide a welcoming environment for each student. We had also agreed during the first week of school our daily schedule would be modified to dedicate half of the day to the scheduled classes in which teachers would review the student handbook, discuss classroom rules and expectations, practice classroom procedures, review their course syllabi and begin teaching, while the second half of the school day was reserved for school-wide "team building."

After lunch on the first day of school, I was feeling apprehensive because I knew in a short period of time all the students and staff would convene on a grass hill under a tree on the playground for the beginning of the school-wide team building activities. I felt as if this were the opportunity I had always wanted—to open a school and build a school culture that would be truly designed for human development and social justice. For me, social justice meant to value diversity and challenge injustice through providing equitable treatment of our students, who almost all belonged to a minority group or were identified as impoverished. I opened my speech welcoming both student and teacher alike to an afternoon I had never previously knew existed in public schools. "We would spend time learning how to work together," I told them.

Prior to that afternoon, I had discussed the team-building activities with the teachers and they had selected the activities they would lead. We also discussed, as is taught in *Tribes* (Gibbs, 1987)*,* the need to observe carefully as students worked to together in the activity. This would allow them to notice as leaders emerged and enable them to learn much about each student.

The activities required a great deal of preparation, which had also been completed only the night before. As it was explained in a document that was shared with the teachers, the activities for the first day included:

> Spider Web: Outside activity involving teamwork to get all team members from one side of the "web" to the other. Silhouettes: Using an overhead, each student will create a silhouette of themselves along with representation of their name.

> Cooperation Squares: Working in silent teams the students will put together square puzzles.

> Building a Web: Using a ball of yard.

I walked around to each activity, spending a few minutes observing and taking pictures as our students worked together, talked, laughed and completed the team building activities.

As the first day came to an end and we walked our students to the buses and said our goodbyes, I reminded each teacher that we would meet for a brief discussion and reflection of the day's events, as well as ensure that we were ready for the next day's activities. We sat together in Marylyn's classroom and informally discussed what went well and what could be improved. All teachers were pleased with the activities and said they were surprised our new students participated so well. We discussed the fact that the groupings would be different on the following day and we would need to again watch and learn about our students as they worked through the activities.

The next day was busy, with new students arriving with their parents or guardians, construction work on and around the building, helping teachers with their classroom concerns and phone calls, but I was again excited about the afternoon. The students and teachers met on the grassy hill on the playground and I addressed the group. Once again, I welcomed everyone and expressed my gratitude for them being a part of our school. I asked the students, "Why are we were doing team building activities instead of sitting in the classrooms learning math or reading?" It was supposed to be a rhetorical question, but students shouted responses. One student stated, "To get to know each other!" I acknowledged the responses and told the group that today's activities were different from those they had participated in the previous day. I expressed my hope that they would equally work together, participate and be an active part of the activity. The activities included,

Handprint: Students will create ownership of the school by "painting a stairwell.

All Aboard: Fitness activity involving teamwork in getting all the team members onto a platform.

Mousetrap Land: Partners help each other cross a minefield of mousetraps, while one partner is blindfolded.

Lines of Communication: The importance of not gossiping and how words can change and be hurtful.

Similar to the first day, while teachers lead our students through each activity, I walked around to each group, during each activity, taking pictures and observing the interactions between students and teachers.

As we concluded the second day of school, the teachers and I again discussed the day's successes and areas in which we could improve. We also discussed our students and the observations teachers were making as students participated in the second day's

team building activities. We were learning; and we conjectured that our students were learning as well. Overall, we hoped that they were learning they could take chances and open up to the idea of school. We had an idea of the negative, pre-conceived notions our students had about school because two of our teachers were coming from schools from which some of our students came. Therefore, we had previously discussed the students who were assigned to the school and the importance of our students giving school a chance and start with an open mind. Although we hoped that our students were learning how to work together, and with their teachers, we were also learning how we, the staff as a whole, would work together.

The third day of school brought another afternoon of team building with different activities, which were equally rewarding as the previous two days. The fourth day of school was the conclusion of our school week and team building activities. In the afternoon, we again met on the grassy hill on the playground and again I addressed our students. I remembered being explicit, telling our students what I hoped we had gained from the previous days and the time and effort spent to realize the team building. I was honest. I was hopeful. I told them how much I appreciated the opportunity to work with each student, and I wanted to make sure that they knew our school was ours and we could make it a great place. It was our choice and this school could be a great school, I told them. I asked if they remembered me taking pictures during the team building activities and of course they remembered, as there were many pictures in which students posed. I explained I had created a slide show and we would be going back inside the school to watch it together, after which we would eat snow cones and talk for the remainder of the day.

As we talked and walked towards the school building, I remember watching as the students laughed as they talked and I thought, "We are going to do it!" I was thrilled. All enjoyed the slideshow. Students and teachers laughed and talked as they watched their pictures on the screen. It was a day to remember.

After the slideshow, the teachers and I made snow cones for our students and talked with them as they got their snow cone and selected their flavor. I remember asking multiple students, "When was the last time your principal made you a snow cone?" Sometimes I would ask, "When was the last time that your school ate snow cones and talked outside at the end of the first week of school?" "Never," was the most common response. I thought at the time the students understood my point. This school was going to be different and that was okay.

For the next two school years we again planned the first week of school as we had the first year. Although, different games were added and some of the dynamics and interactions changed because the students were different, the first week of school was a time for team building. It was a time "to get to know each other," and for students to learn school would be okay, no matter what their previous experience with school had been.

"My Head Hurts"

After such a positive first week of school, the following weeks provided opportunities for teachers to continue to build relationships with students and to teach. While we were still very busy with new students arriving daily and dealing with the construction, the construction crew and everything that goes with a construction site, we were starting to get into a rhythm of school. We created routines and things were good.

During the third week of school, there was an administrator's meeting at the district office, which happened to adjoin our newly remodeled school building. The superintendent started the meeting by saying he had been walking through the hallway to his office the previous afternoon and saw one of my students in the hallway holding his head. I immediately was thinking, "Crap! What happened? Am I in trouble?" The superintendent continued his story by stating he was worried, "Why was this student holding his head? Had something happened?" He asked the student if he was okay and the student stated, "My head hurts" as he rubbed his head.

The superintendent stated, at that point, he was getting more worried and was about to inquire into what had happened to cause this student's head to hurt when the student offered an explanation. "I've never learned so much and we just started school," the student stated and then continued, "I don't know if my head can handle it." During the meeting the superintendent laughed and described the new school as already better than he had hoped. "No pressure," I thought to myself.

Student Opportunities

Early in the first year, I received a visit from the community's fine arts organization's director. I was informed of the many events and opportunities in which schools could participate during the school year. Even though I was extremely busy, I knew offering a fine arts experience to our students would be an opportunity many, if not all, of our students had never been afforded. Offering our students multiple opportunities to learn and grow, especially through experiences, was a priority.

During early November, the first year, I arranged for our student body and staff to attend a professional dance company's performance of "The Nutcracker," which was to

be staged in December. I was so hesitant to present this idea to the teachers. I remember thinking the teachers might agree we have come a long way in terms of behavior and learning with our students in a few months, but taking them to a ballet—poor kids from "the hood?" Although what I perceived as one of the teachers' arguments against us attending, "What would these poor kids from the "hood" have to gain from a ballet," was a source of hesitation for me, the perceived arguments for why our students should attend the ballet were also the motivating factors for me to insist that we attend. I thought our students needed this type of exposure to something they would not necessarily choose for themselves. Then they could choose if they enjoyed ballet or not, having had an experience with it, I reasoned.

I extensively prepared for the staff meeting in which we would discuss our school's attendance of the performance. Thinking the teachers may argue there were too many preparations to go on a field trip in such as short period of time, I created a modified schedule to ensure all students would attend all classes that day, a seating chart for students in the performance hall and corresponding teachers to supervise areas in the performance hall, a parent letter and permission form, two lessons to be taught prior to attending to prepare our students for what they would encounter in the performance, a list of expectations and consequences for our students and a plan to remove unruly students if needed. As anxious as I was for the meeting, the teachers had questions, but they agreed our students should get an opportunity such as this. There were suggestions on how to improve my preparations, but my hesitations were unfounded.

The afternoon we attended "The Nutcracker" was phenomenal. The teachers prepared our students for the experience and our students enjoyed it. In fact, our school

got the opportunity to meet personally with a few of the dancers, who told us of their lives and how they became ballet dancers. One male dancer told us of his story of growing up in inner-city Portland, in a poor family. He explained to the students he had not known about ballet dancing or that a person could make a living dancing and enjoy it too. Our students asked many questions and were fascinated by the individuals and their stories.

When we returned to the school, our students talked to their teachers about the experience and some wanted to know more. After school, in an impromptu faculty meeting, we talked about the experience, the doubts some teachers had, but had not expressed, and how we could again offer experiences such as the ballet to our students.

During the first year of the 9th Grade Learning Institute, our school participated in three events with the fine arts organization. In February, two months after watching "The Nutcracker," we attended a piano recital of a professional pianist in the same performance hall. Again, we prepared our students and again we got the opportunity to meet personally with the pianist after the recital. The experience also proved enriching and informative. Finally, our school had the opportunity to have a professional mariachi group come to our school, play music and then interact and speak with our students individually.

During the three years as principal at the 9th Grade Learning Institute, we continued our partnership with the community's fine arts organization. Each year, our group of students experienced fine arts, an experience that many would not have had otherwise.

Mural "Accept No Limits"

The 9th Grade Learning Institute students had the opportunity to put their mark on our school literally. During the first week of school, our students were asked to put their handprint on the wall and sketch their initials in the palm. The student's handprints were assembled in the form of the school's initials. This activity was important for our students to feel like they belonged at school and were an important part of our school.

The activity also served as the springboard for the idea to paint murals in our school, which would be designed and painted by our students. The first year of the 9th Grade Learning Institute, we were fortunate to have received a grant to pay for an Artist-in-Residence program, which provided our school with two professional artists. Both were muralists and worked with our students for three weeks. Our students learned about murals, designed three murals, and then painted them on our school walls. The professional artists were at our school every day during the three weeks and supported the students, but allowed them creative ownership of their murals.

One group of students painted a large (20 ft. x 30 ft.) mural with the words "Accept No Limits" in the center of their mural in large bold letters on a yellow banner. I had walked past their mural dozens of times each day. The last day, when the three weeks were coming to an end, I went to the mural as the students were putting their signatures on the mural and asked them to explain their mural and what it meant to them. They told me their design was purposeful and the central theme "Accept No Limits" was something they all felt needed to be stated for everyone, those currently in the school and those who would come later. The twelve students who collaborated on the design and painting of the mural took turns talking about why they would "accept no limits." Each student had a

story of a person or people in their lives, including teachers, who they said did not believe in them. The stories about past teachers who told them that they would "amount to nothing" or "would end up in jail" were heartbreaking. "Accept No Limits" was their way of saying they would succeed in spite of the people who did not believe in them.

Awards Assembly

The 9th Grade Learning Institute's daily schedule and calendar allowed students to earn credits towards the completion of the requirements for high school graduation each quarter. At the conclusion of each quarter, as a school, teachers, staff and students, celebrated students' successes and recognized their efforts in school. This was particularly important because so many of our students had experienced very little success in school.

Teachers and students worked together to make sure that everyone completed their assignments, learned the required material and passed assessments. All teachers frequently used their lunchtime to work with students, as well as before and after school. These efforts made by students and teachers allowed our school to have a consistent passing rate of approximately 95%.

Over the three years, there would be 50 or 55 awards given during the awards assemblies. Since our enrollment was between 85-90 students, this was significant. More than 30 students would made the "honor roll" and had a grade point average of 3.5 to 4.0.

After the first awards assembly, as we were dismissing for the school day, a student came up to me to show me his two awards. He was beaming with joy with a big smile on his face. I was puzzled why this student would be so happy for getting two awards. This student told me that he had never gotten an award before, "ever!" he stated.

I was skeptical and thought he was exaggerating and said, "You must have gotten at least one award in elementary school. Right? Doesn't everybody get an award in elementary school?" He was adamant that he had never received an award and most often he "got into trouble" during awards assemblies and was removed. He went on to say how much he hated awards assemblies and how stupid he always felt because everyone else always got awards and he didn't. I was again puzzled, but this time, wondered, "What is our problem in schools?" I congratulated him on his accomplishment and said that he had another opportunity to earn more awards during the next quarter and that he should "keep up the good work."

Meeting Student Needs

During the many meetings and informal discussions, some of which occurred during our passing in the hallway, the teachers and I would discuss the importance of remembering the focus for all decisions was the students. I worked to make decisions based on student needs, and I expected that each teacher would do the same, in contrast to making decisions based on what would be the most convenient or easy. The specific focus on the students was to ensure their needs were met. There were many occasions in which I would add a class not previously offered, create a new option for specific students, make phone calls to service organizations or go to the store to purchase something that a specific student needed.

The teachers did the same. One warm spring afternoon Casey approached me and asked if she could have permission to take one of her students to get a haircut. I began to think of questions and was about to say something about following our school district

policy when Casey said, "Good because I already spoke to Stephan and his mom and we are going during my prep."

One early September afternoon, Chelsey walked into my office and sat down giving a huge sigh. Chelsey expressed to me her frustration that the kids needed another option on the weekend. "The weekends they get into trouble," Chelsey stated. She continued saying something about wanting to do something for the community. I agreed with her. Many Mondays I spent time sorting through the trouble that had transpired over the weekend. Chelsey then asked if she could do a car wash or something that would cause the kids to get together and fundraise for a community project. Two weeks later, I pulled in to a local car tire business on a Saturday afternoon to have my family's minivan washed by about ten 9th Grade Learning Institute students, where about another ten were washing another vehicle. I got out to congratulate Chelsey on a doing such a great service to our school and community. She told me over 30 students had come to participate.

Off with His Hair!

It was the day before spring break. The assembly was scheduled to begin in less than an hour and the preparations were almost complete. Only one thing remained to finalize the preparations, hair clippers.

Earlier in the year, my spouse and I had prepared a fundraiser to support each student's ability to purchase a yearbook. We prepared baskets that would be raffled after two weeks of ticket sales. The goal was to raise enough money to ensure all students received a yearbook at no expense to the student or their families. Students and school personnel sold tickets for the raffle. Similar to other types of fundraisers, the person who sold the most tickets would win something. But instead of a gift card, a DVD player or

some other prize, the person who sold the most tickets would get to shave my head. In addition, each student who sold 15 tickets would receive a free yearbook!

The opportunity to get to shave the principal's head was motivation enough to raise the required amount of money to pay for the yearbooks. There is a difference between planning on having a student shave your head and actually doing it. It was quite nerve-racking knowing that I would have my head shaved by a student in front of the school. But the time came, and as I sat on a chair in front of the student body with a clear plastic bag around my neck, draped over my body, something happened that I had not anticipated. Students got up from their seat in the gym and went to the front to get a closer view and to have a clear shot to record the entire event on their cell phone. Students stormed to the front laughing, pointing and yelling out commands, "No, leave a patch of hair on the top! Shave his head like an old man! Bald on top and hair around the sides."

Open House

At the end of the first year of the 9th Grade Learning Institute, I decided the July home visits were too late to talk to students and parents about our school. I wanted to be more proactive and show the incoming students and parents how good our school was becoming. Therefore, in May, I planned an open house in our school and arranged with the middle school principals for a group of our students, accompanied by me, to go to their schools. The purpose was to talk to prospective students, invite them to the open house, and give them a flyer inviting their parents to the open house.

Our visits to the middle schools were well received and our students did an outstanding job of talking about our school and the opportunities that were provided. Our

students urged the middle school students, only one year removed from them, to work hard. They also told them they were in their place the previous year, didn't care about anything and knew what it felt like. They encouraged them to take advantage of the opportunity they were given to go to the 9th Grade Learning Institute.

In planning for the open house, I invited a few of our current students and their parent or guardian and asked if they would be willing to speak during the open house to the prospective students and their parents or guardians. I was hopeful they would say something positive, but purposefully did not want to fill them with ideas about what they could or should say. I wanted their thoughts to be authentic and not staged. Of course, this created some anxiety in me. I thought, "What if they say something negative towards our school or staff?" Nonetheless, I believed it was worth the risk to provide a real and authentic experience for prospective students and their parents.

The open house started with a self-guided or guided tour and after about thirty minutes I announced we would start a formal meeting in the gym with a presentation about the school as well as time to ask questions. As we guided adults and children to the gym, I realized quite a few people were in attendance. In fact, after later checking the sign-in sheet, I noted over half of our prospective students and their parent or guardian had come to the open house.

I began the formal meeting with a welcome, followed by an introduction of the teachers and myself. After the introductions, I started a slide show of events and activities in which our students had been involved in the first year of the school existence. I discussed the various activities as the slide show progressed. Then I announced I had

asked a few parents of current students to talk during the open house and introduced the first parent.

Kevin's mom began by telling the group that she does not usually talk in front of people but made an exception. She continued to tell the group that she had moved their family to this town the previous summer because Kevin had gotten into so much trouble, and she and Kevin's stepfather did not know what else to do. She said that Kevin had gotten into trouble with drugs and law enforcement and she thought he was "lost." At this point Kevin's mother began to cry but kept talking. She said when she arrived, she was told Kevin would have to go to the 9th Grade Learning Institute and would not be allowed to attend the traditional high school. All she wanted was for Kevin to have a new chance and going to an "alternative school," she worried, would get him involved with the same type of kids that got Kevin into trouble in the first place.

Kevin's mom said she was worried and was ready to give up, but after speaking to the principal she decided to just give it a chance. She described how Kevin was a different child than he had been just months earlier and he had earned straight A's all year. she continued saying their house is much calmer now and she and her husband, Kevin's stepfather, do not yell and fight with each other anymore. Then to my astonishment, Kevin's mother, through her tears said, it was "this school that made the difference in Kevin's life and in our family."

Seeing Is Believing

During the first week of school in each of the three years I was principal, we would have "traditional" school picture day with a local portrait studio. The studio typically took pictures for the school yearbook and the student management system and

the pictures were available for purchase to the families. I saw this opportunity and re-negotiated the agreement to include an additional photograph of each student dressed in graduation regalia identical in color and design to our district high school. In the negotiation, the studio also agreed to provide a CD with the photographs. I took the disc to the local Walgreen's and had a 5x7 of each student's photograph printed. The graduation photographs were used on a bulletin board outside the main office, with a heading above that read "Class of 2015."

In addition to the wall display, I also used the photographs in a slide show during the 3rd Quarter Awards Assembly. After all the awards had been given and the students were a little restless having sat for a little more than thirty minutes, I told the students I had a special presentation. At that point the lights were turned off and I began the slide show. There was some talking and restlessness during the time that the lights were turned off and the slide show was started, but as the music began and the first picture was projected, there was silence. Silence and all eyes, both students' and staffs', were glued to the screen. About forty seconds would pass and more than a dozen graduation pictures were shown before there was a sound in the gym. The first sounds were a few giggles and some whispers. The sound increased and the kids talked and laughed but their eyes were still glued to the screen. The talking and laughter was not in malice. They had been in school for three-fourths of the school year and they had all but forgotten they had taken the graduation photos.

When the slide show ended, I asked, "Why did we take the graduation photos and why did I show them to you right now?" Silence. I would like to think the students were pondering deeply the significance of this event. I answered my own question,

"Sometimes seeing is believing." I repeated my response, "Seeing is believing." I continued to ask the students to raise their hands if they had thought about dropping out of school and did not believe they could actually graduate. Almost in unison, as if practiced, nearly every hand went up. "Do you believe you can graduate now?" Without asking for students to raise their hands, the same hands raised high in the air.

I asked them to look around and take in what was happening. "It is okay to do well in school. In fact you are doing awesome!" I exclaimed. I then asked them to look at the back of the gym, where their teachers were standing. As the students turned to look, I said, "These are the people who believe in you. They knew the first day you came you would do well and they know now you will continue to be successful."

Teacher Growth

The first year of our new school brought new opportunities for everyone. Students learned through new experiences, were engaged, and worked hard. Teachers also had new opportunities.

Shelly was a veteran teacher who was involuntarily transferred to the new school. I was warned that while Shelly had a lot of experience teaching, I should not expect more out of her than what could be done during contracted hours. I was concerned throughout the beginning of the school about Shelly. She was assigned to teach reading, which she had done in the past and had experience teaching at-risk students as well. This was not my concern. Instead I was concerned Shelly would have a negative attitude and would not support the staff or me, as the principal.

Although Shelly and I had many conversations during the first weeks of school about student placement, assessment and curriculum, I discovered she not only had

knowledge but would also engage students in classroom activities and discussions.

Within the first semester, I wondered why I had received the warning about Shelly. Even

more baffling was the day I received an email from Shelly requesting a meeting with me

to discuss a grant she was writing to receive more technology and other supplies for her

classroom. Shelly and I met and discussed the grant, and I agreed to read her grant and

provide feedback, which I did. Days later, in passing, Shelly let me know she submitted

the grant. "It was the first grant I have ever written," Shelly told me. She seemed insecure

about it and worried about whether or not it would be awarded. I told her it was her extra

efforts that made the difference; while inside my own mind, I was unsure if she would be

awarded the grant. Nonetheless, I tried to be encouraging.

It was late spring, a few months after Shelly had submitted her grant proposal, and

I was sitting in my office when I got the phone call. Shelly had been awarded the grant.

Furthermore, I was told the granting organization wanted to come to our school to present

the check and take some pictures for public relations purposes. I was thrilled and could

not wait to tell Shelly the great news, which I did immediately. I got up from my desk

and walked to Shelly's classroom with a huge grin on my face. The grin was too obvious

because when I got to the classroom Shelly immediately asked why I was so happy. "You

got your grant!" I exclaimed. The look on Shelly's face was of complete exhilaration.

"You're kidding?" she questioned. "No. You got it. Congratulations!" I stated proudly.

End of the First Year Learning

The first year of the 9th Grade Learning Institute ended as quickly as it had

started. There were tears on the last day of school and I have to admit I cried some too.

We, students, staff and myself, knew that our school was only for 9th grade students and

our daily interactions would end and therefore our relationships would be changed. We had learned and grown a lot individually but also together as a community. Knowing that this was about to end was the source of some sadness.

For a few weeks following the last day of school, our students would stop by. We would be in meetings or teachers would be in their classrooms working, and two or three students would walk in as if they owned the place. We would often laugh when we would see our students coming back to visit. We remembered at times fighting them to come to school, and days when we fought them during school, but here they were walking the halls, sticking their heads in classrooms, and some even asked if they could help with anything.

I was always impressed with the teachers during these visits. Even though they had a lot to do before leaving for the summer, they would stop whatever they were doing and talk with the students who came to visit. They would ask about their families and their siblings or cousins. The teachers learned a lot about each student during the school year and knew many of the personal conflicts or familial concerns that each student had faced and were worried about. They knew the importance of asking about these things. After a conversation, students would say goodbye and leave.

After School Chats

Multiple times each week, teachers would come to the office and sit down to talk after school. These meetings were never planned and sometimes included two or three teachers, our school secretary Maria, and me. At times, everyone would show up. All were welcomed and we would find space for everyone even if that meant sitting on the base cabinets or just standing. We would discuss struggles, we would brainstorm

solutions and we would talk about our students and how we could help them in their struggles.

One early spring afternoon, not long after Collin's sudden and tragic passing, we all ended up in the office. Collin was our business and computer/technology teacher. He was only 38 years old when a brain aneurism caused his sudden passing. Collin had come into teaching after playing professional basketball in Europe and then working in banking. Our students enjoyed Collin for his ability to communicate with our students and build relationships. Even though Collin was a big man, standing almost seven feet tall and weighing over three hundred pounds, he was always so calm and kind.

As we sat in the office after school, we pondered aloud how we could honor Collin's passing. We wanted to create a memorial for him at our school, recognize his contribution to the students, staff and building, and help ourselves and our students continue to deal with the grief of his passing. We came up with a few ideas and discussed how we could make them happen. With Earth Day on the horizon, one idea was to plant a tree in Collin's honor and with a plaque marking the tree and why it was planted. However, another suggestion sprung from Collin's love of basketball. We decided we would formally name our gym in memoriam of him and have a sign made of iron and wood to mark this decision outside the main entrance to the gym.

CHAPTER 5 – FINDINGS

Introduction

This autoethnographic study is a highly personalized account of some of the experiences documented during the three years I was principal at the 9th Grade Learning Institute. The vignettes produced from the experiences discussed in Chapter Four are the responses to the research questions posed in this study. In this chapter, I further discuss those experiences, describing how they relate to the four tenets in Chapter Two, and elaborating on their connection to the study, particularly how they are responses to my research questions.

In this study, my central research question was; What can I, as a leader, do anyway? My research studies' sub-questions were:

1. How aligned are my theory of action and theory-in-use?

2. What did I do as a leader in a new school?

3. What can the narrative teach me and potentially others?

Discussion

In this section, findings are discussed through each of the four tenets: Reflection, theories of action and theories-in-use, leadership, and critique. In Chapter Two, the four tenets were presented in a different sequence, situating the critique as the first and leadership as the last. I purposely selected the order of discussion starting with reflection, followed by theories of action and theories-in-use, then leadership and concluding the

discussion with my critique. While I discuss my critique explicitly in a separate section, I also address my critique through each of the four tenets.

<u>Reflection</u>

Reflection is central to this study and as I have come to realize, central to my work as a whole. During my principalship at the 9th Grade Learning Institute, there were many examples of reflective practice. Similar to Lasley's (1992) and Ross's (1989) definitions of reflection, the staff and I would think about and question why choices were made, discussing the implications of those choices and thoughtfully analyzing ways in which student needs could be addressed and student success could be enhanced. For example, after the students and staff came together for an afternoon of team building activities on the first day of school, the teachers and I met to reflect about and discuss what went well, what we learned from the experience, and how we may need to respond in the future. This reflection process began the first day of the 9th Grade Learning Institute and continued throughout the next three years.

This type of reflective meeting occurred often, sometimes formally and sometimes informally. The process and goal were always the same: dialogue, think and be critical about the practices we were incorporating at the 9th Grade Learning Institute. Reflection is one of the primary reasons why this study exits. Had I not been reflective and written extensively to document and reflect upon the daily occurrences as principal, this study would not have been possible. Reflection has become the means for me, as Brubacher et al. (1994) would say, to make sense of my world.

Finally, as the leader of the school, I was able to model and lead the reflection process. This process was critical to address equity issues and to enhance our students'

experiences in school as well as create opportunities for them. Furthermore, this reflection process was vital for the staff to become a community.

Theories of Action and Theories-in-Use

In Chapter One, I wrote,

As I concluded the degree in educational leadership, I wrote a theory of action paper. In this paper, I also issued a challenge to myself, to become the type of leader I had described, one who would be able to build a school where equity, equality and critical consciousness would be the norm.

Central to this study was the discussion of the "dilemma of incongruity" (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Specifically, I sought to question the alignment of my theory of action and my theory in use.

I am hesitant to say I realized all that I had sought and therefore have a completely aligned theory of action and theory-in-use; nevertheless, there are examples in which I strived to realize equity, equality and critical consciousness. I think it is also important to note that during the process of working on this dissertation, I learned that even if I am unable to create complete equity and equality, it is the daily efforts that are important and meaningful for me. The task of a school leader is daunting and often overwhelming. I learned that a leader has the ability to address the big issues by starting small. Even if the action seems miniscule compared to the big issues, it is important to begin. I would often make "to do" lists in my notebooks. This was my way of starting with one thing at a time and when I was able to check off those items in the lists, I felt a sense of accomplishment.

Furthermore, through this autoethnographic study, I learned that I am unable to control others or how others may think, feel and act, especially regarding issues of equity or equality. However, I am able to control how I think, feel and act and sometimes this

has an effect to influence others. There were times during the three years I was principal at the 9th Grade Learning Institute that I made decisions based upon my governing principles, which I knew would affect the teachers and may even cause some controversy. One of those decisions was choosing to purchase all school supplies. Prior to my experience at the 9th Grade Learning Institute, I had observed the school supply conundrum play out in schools. This challenge would begin with teachers making a list of school supplies students needed to bring to school and then this list would be distributed to students. When students, most often the students living in poverty, did not bring the required school supplies, the teacher would repeatedly tell those students to bring them. Students would then feel badly because they knew they would not get school supplies and often did not know what to do. As the leader, I intervened. I acted on behalf of the students and then had a discussion with the teachers to explicitly discuss why this decision was made. This action not only acknowledged the inequity that many of our students faced at the beginning of every school year, but established a tradition of addressing the issues of inequity.

There were a number of ways in which I came to understand equity and equality issues as they played out in the lives of the students who attended the 9th Grade Learning Institute. My background knowledge dictated to me that in order to really understand the issues the students faced, I would have to get to know them beyond a superficial level, including understanding the conditions in which they lived, where they lived and with whom. Through visiting their homes and then meeting individually with all the students before school started, I was able to observe and recognize the ways in which equity and

equality would need to be addressed. It was through such concrete enactments of my

theory of action that I learned the power of leading by example.

Inequality in schools is often observed through the clothing students wear. The 9th

Grade Learning Institute had a specific dress code policy. Forming partnerships to

provide school-appropriate dress at no cost to students or families was another way in

which equity was addressed. Finally, equality was addressed by providing enriching

experiences to students through field trips, experiences many students would not

otherwise have had.

I have attempted to develop critical consciousness within myself since exposure

to critical theorists during my undergraduate degree studies. Although in some instances

at the 9th Grade Learning Institute, I was hesitant to question the norms of schooling, I

ultimately did through many of my actions as principal, some of which have been

mentioned previously. Further, the teachers observed my actions and as participants in

the school, they would learn what actions were chosen and why those actions were

selected, especially through our group reflections. Therefore, as teachers recognized the

inequities through observation and understanding, they too worked to develop a critical

consciousness as they responded to the inequities that affected our students' lives.

As Argyris and Schön (1974) state, "Theories-in-use are vehicles for achieving

and maintaining governing principles within acceptable ranges" (p. 30). I found that even

though I was anxious or hesitant sometimes to act upon my governing principles, I did. I

was hesitant because after years of teaching and working in the same school district, I

knew the schools in this school district would rarely address inequity issues. Therefore,

knowing something about the teachers' past experiences, and the fact that their leaders

did not address issues of inequity, I feared what I was asking would be too foreign. Thus, while my theory of action paper may be different today than it was when originally written, it has been central to my actions as principal at the 9th Grade Learning Institute.

Through my efforts to maintain my governing principles and act accordingly, I was able to address inequity issues in a number of different ways. Leaders can, and should, know their theory of action and act accordingly.

<u>Leadership</u>

Leadership is not about controlling, but inspiring. Leadership is not management, but engagement. Leadership is not necessarily a position or title, but who a person is and chooses to be. This autoethnographic study allowed me to question my traditionally held beliefs about leadership and experience leadership as House (2004) describes, "the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organizations of which they are members" (p. 54).

Although I had a traditional leader's title, principal, I was able to experience leadership as something different from what I had believed school leadership to be previously. In Chapter Two, I discussed building family and community partnerships (Auerbach, 2012; McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996) as an important function of leadership. In the 9th Grade Learning Institute, this was accomplished by visiting students and their families in their homes, meeting individually with students and their parents at school, and hosting events in the school which invited parents and families to be part of the school. One key component of creating successful family and community partnerships was my ability to communicate with all parents and students. Being bilingual in Spanish

and English, I was able to speak directly to parents and did not have to speak through an interpreter.

Often public schools with minority groups and students who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds have teachers and school administrators who are not of the minority group and do not speak the native language their students speak. These teachers' and school administrators' too often lack an understanding of their students' backgrounds, lived experience, and language, which creates a barrier between the students and their families and the school. This often exacerbates the issues related to equity and equality. Living in Nicaragua for two years, holding a master's degree in bilingual education, and being married to a woman of Latina decent, allowed me to more easily connect to the students and their families, starting with the ability to communicate with them in their native language.

Effective leadership is also working collaboratively to meet students' needs (August & Hakuta, 1998; Lucas et al., 2004; McLaughlin & McLeod, 1996; Shaw, 2003; Walker, 2005). The teachers and I worked to create opportunities to meet students' needs, whether academic (setting up a specific class for one individual), physical (providing clothing or food for those students in need), or social (through teachers arranging weekend activities to engage students in activities which could help them stay out of trouble).

Leadership is being present and listening. As I described in Chapter Four, it was not uncommon for teachers to gather after school to sit and talk about school. They would share concerns they had about students and we would problem solve issues together. The

teachers would show up often, knowing the office was a place they could go to express frustrations and others would be there to listen.

Leadership is doing whatever it takes to help another. Sometimes this included building furniture and helping set up classrooms on weekends and nights before school. A leader does more than what is in his or her job description and between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. I learned that leadership is altruistic. I would ask myself, and still ask myself the same questions, "If not me, who? If not now, when?" A leader is a person who does not delegate their responsibility to others. Instead, a leader asks when something needs done and will do it.

Leadership is having a vision and being purposeful in actions. Leithwood et al. (2003), The Wallace Foundation (2013), Lynch (2012), and Howard (2010) include vision as being a key characteristic of effective leadership. It was purposeful that during the first week of school students and staff would spend hours building community through activities. In having students place a painted imprint of their hand on the building, I hoped they would gain a connection and even ownership of the school and make it their own. I negotiated and scheduled to have a photographer take a picture of each student in graduation regalia to allow students to envision their future.

My lived experiences with public schooling prior to those at the 9th Grade Learning Institute dictated that schools had a vision statement, but that statement existed only as rhetoric and was never realized. The schools in which I had worked did not address issues of inequity; rather, these schools were places in which the inequities in society were observed and replicated. Furthermore, there was no place for critical consciousness in these schools; instead, conformity to the norm (and the norm was

inequity) was demanded. Dissenters were threatened by authority to conform or they would be punished. At the 9th Grade Learning Institute my vision was to create a school in which issues of inequity and inequality were addressed and critical consciousness was present. I learned that as a leader, I was able to realize my vision. I was purposeful in my actions and through those actions I was able to build a school where issues of inequity and inequality were addressed and critical consciousness was present.

Leadership is creating opportunities to raise equity concerns (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005) and see social justice (Anderson, 2009; Powers & Hermans, 2007; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007a; Theoharis, 2007b). By providing school supplies, clothing and new experiences, such as attending a professional ballet production or sitting in a concert hall while a professional pianist performs, I not only attempted to raise concerns about inequity, but also address those inequities through action. Furthermore, I lead first through example and then by supporting teachers as they began to address these same social justice issues.

Leadership is creating opportunities for teachers to learn (Haynes, 2007; Mosca, 2006). For me, creating these opportunities begins with believing in people. Teachers, just as students, need to know they are capable and their leader is supportive. Most important, they need to know their leader believes in their abilities. Shelly had taught in the school district many years when she was involuntarily transferred to the 9th Grade Learning Institute. However, this was not the first time Shelly had been involuntarily transferred. Shelly had taught in six different schools in the school district prior to being assigned to the 9th Grade Learning Institute. In the Prologue, I described how the assistant superintendent had warned me about Shelly and told me not to expect too much. Rather

than "not expecting much," I believed in Shelly and her abilities. Shelly and I spoke often and I would praise her efforts. Shelly became a key teacher leader in our school and, in fact, wrote and received a grant that provided more resources for her students and classroom.

Critique

My growing critique of public schooling brought me to a point of saying, "schools are the problem." The data related to the failure of minority and impoverished students in public schools makes it difficult to believe there is hope and another possibility. Certainly, there are formidable obstacles to overcome. Nevertheless, my experiences at the 9th Grade Learning Institute and writing this dissertation give me hope. It has taught me it is possible to create a school where issues of equity are addressed and in spite of the bleak statistics, poor and minority students can be successful in public school.

Public schools can be the solution to the problem. Leadership, in spite of my own initial skepticism, is the key. With effective leadership, public schools can mitigate the negative influences on students of violence, gangs, substance abuse and despair. Through leaders' actions, students' lives and those of their families can be transformed. Kevin's story, while remarkable, was not the only success story of the 9th Grade Learning Institute. There were many others.

What I Learned

The vignettes provided the background from which my learning was framed. The lessons I gained through my experiences at the 9th Grade Learning Institute are many, but I will focus on only a few.

First, I learned that leaders have the potential to do much. I learned that as a leader, I was able to be true to my governing principles and myself and lead others to do the same. In his book *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to those who dare teach*, Paulo Freire (1998b) stated:

> …the task of the teacher, who is also a learner, is both joyful and rigorous. It demands seriousness and scientific, physical, emotional, and affective preparation. It is a task that requires that those who commit themselves to teaching develop a certain love not only of others but also of the very process implied in teaching. It is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up. In short, it is impossible to teach without a forged, invented, and well-thought-out capacity to love. …We must dare, in the full sense of the word, to speak of love without the fear of being called ridiculous, mawkish, or unscientific, if not antiscientific. We must dare in order to say scientifically, and not as mere blah-blah-blah, that we study, we learn, we teach, we know with our entire body. We do all of these things with feeling, with emotion, with wishes, with fear, with doubts, with passion, and also with critical reasoning. However, we never study, learn, teach, or know with the last only. We must dare so as never to dichotomize cognition and emotion. We must dare so that we can continue to teach for a long time under conditions that we know well: low salaries, lack of respect, and the ever-present risk of becoming prey to cynicism. We must dare to learn how to dare in order to say no to the bureaucratization of the mind to which we are exposed every day. We must dare so that we can continue to do so even when it is so much more materially advantageous to stop daring. (p. 3)

For me, leading is teaching. Therefore, leading is also, as Freire states, about love. Love, not only for the process of leading, but love for the people for which one is steward. As a leader, one must commit oneself to the responsibility and the wellbeing of others. I recognize that this is a daunting task, but this task is not meant for one person alone. Instead, it is to be shared with and among the same people who are being lead. To further illustrate this point, in Chapter Four under the vignette titled "Individual Orientation Meetings," I state, "I would put a special emphasis on the words 'we' and 'our' and sometimes students, parents and I would discuss this further and sometimes we did not." I learned that as a leader, the emphasis should be placed on the "we" and "our"

and not "I" or "my," as I have witnessed so much since the beginning of my work in public schools.

In creating the vignettes, I was reminded and re-learned the importance of what Paulo Freire calls "patient impatience" (Darder, 2002). A leader must also be patient, knowing that what is sought will be realized, and at the same time exhibit impatience, or the urgency and effort to realize immediately for that which is sought. For example, I knew the teachers with whom I worked at the 9th Grade Learning Institute knew words such as justice or equity, but may not have known what those terms would mean in the public school setting and how they would be contextualized. Through enactments of my governing principles, such as not distributing the teachers' school supply lists for students to purchase school supplies, with the help of my family, we purchased school supplies for every student. In this enactment, as described in the vignette in Chapter Four I stated, "I was nervous, but they [the teachers] were accepting of the idea and we collectively devised a plan to ensure that all students, in all classes, would receive the needed supplies."

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Recommendations

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In this section, I make recommendations based on what has been learned through this study. These recommendations are my own and should no way limit other interpretations and learning that might occur through this work. Through answering my research question, what can I, as a leader really do, and sub questions, how aligned are my theory of action and theory-in-use, what did I do as a leader of a new school, and what can the narrative teach me and others, I was able to construct these recommendations.

<u>Autoethnography</u>

As mentioned previously, Autoethnography as a research method may be underutilized; nonetheless, it is a powerful methodology. This methodology could be more widely used by teachers and principals to find voice. Although my discussion of voice was limited and was not a central theme of this study, it was nonetheless an important realization. During this study, I was able to gain confidence in my voice, and the narratives in Chapter Four highlighted that voice.

I am currently a principal in another school in a different school district. I find that my past experiences as a principal and the writing of this dissertation together with a renewed confidence in my voice, helps me as I work to daily incorporate that which I learned from the 9th Grade Learning Institute into my new setting. Part of this entails working with teachers through a process of shared decision-making and asking all to participate and voice their thoughts, concerns and questions.

<u>Relationships</u>

Key to the successes of our students, staff and school were the relationships we built. In order to build relationships, it is paramount to get to know the people with whom you learn--colleague and student alike. At the 9th Grade Learning Institute, we did this through team building activities with students and by providing enrichment opportunities. The staff and I were able to do this by meeting frequently, reflecting and acting together as a community. Furthermore, once the relationships are built and knowledge of the other is established, it is wise to individualize as much as possible—with staff, individualized interactions and opportunities for growth and with students individualized instruction, courses and opportunities. With relationships built on trust and the knowledge of each

other, comes the ability to deal with and manage difficult situations in meaningful and positively impactful ways.

Based on what I have gained from this dissertation and the narratives, I would recommend school leaders to do whatever it takes to get to know students and staff and build a meaningful and trusting relationship. This can be done, as I did, by going to students' homes and speaking to the students and families in a positive manner with the goal of building relationships. When school administrators visit students' homes, which rarely happens, too often the reason for the home visit has something to do with discipline or punishment. This is not the way to build a strong and positive school and home relationship. Instead, as I mentioned previously, start small. Without an alternative motive, select only a few and go to students' homes and talk to students' parents and introduce yourself. It may be wise to have a list of comments and questions that could aid in the conversation. For example, one could ask, what can I do to enhance your son's/daughter's experience at school?

Vision

In order to be effective, schools and particularly the leader, must have a vision for the future. That vision cannot be secret and should include something larger than self, such as equity and/or social justice. The leader must be purposeful in his/her actions, always thinking ahead and planning to realize that vision.

Through my experience at the 9th Grade Learning Institute and this dissertation, I learned the leader can have a vision, but the real impact happens when that vision becomes shared. A shared vision is purposeful and the realization of that vision is equally purposeful. I would recommend that leaders flush out their governing principles and

understand how these principles impact the vision for which she/he will strive. Through explicit knowledge of my own governing principles, articulated by writing a theory of action paper, I was able to pursue actions as a leader that aligned with my governing principles. It was through these actions, reflection, and being explicit about my purposes with the teachers, a shared vision was developed and supported by all.

Learning

Antonio Machado (as cited in Macedo, 1994) wrote, "Caminante, no hay camino; se hace el camino al andar" (Traveler, there is no road; the road is made as you walk.) When the 9th Grade Learning Institute began, I had some ideas but moreso I desired nothing more than to put my best effort into realizing what I had outlined in my theory of action paper: a school where equity, equality and critical consciousness were the norm. I am not unique or special. I do not possess any skill or ability that others do not have. I would recommend we all to do as Machado suggested, make the road as we go.

Recommendations for the Practitioner

This work helped me conceptualize five suggestions for the practicing principal. First, recognize and know the people with whom you work. For example, a leader should be able to respond to the following: Where did the teachers with whom you work attend college? What are their individual passions? Where do the students with whom you work live? What are a few hobbies or activities in which they participate? What are their individual dreams and goals in life? Describe each student's family life.

Second, as a leader, one should facilitate such understandings of the students in teachers. As the group of adults in the school come to a deeper understanding of each

student as an individual, realizations about how they and the school should operate will come to light.

Third, as understanding of the students deepens, the school should be flexible to meet individual student needs. Although, this is a difficult task, it is necessary. Meeting student needs--physical, emotional, psychological or academic--is of utmost importance.

Fourth, building and maintaining community partnerships to create opportunities for students and staff is key to building equity within your school. Limited school resources too often becomes the justification for not meeting students' needs. Therefore, it is paramount that leaders reach out to others and build and maintain community partnerships that offer further resources, which ultimately allow schools to address equity issues.

Fifth, reach out and build deep and lasting relationships with the students' families. While there is much discussion and literature about this point, public schools most often reach out on a superficial level and rarely dig deep to get to know the families of their students. Building deep relationships goes well beyond a monthly newsletter or automated phone calls sent through a computer program. Such has been the primary sources of communication with families in my experience. My grandfather would say, "You get out what you put in." Meaningful relationships take time, energy and effort to build and this cannot be done through one-way communication such as a newsletter or a recorded phone call.

Future Research

This autoethnographic study, especially as I analyzed data, made me realize there are a myriad of possibilities for future research. Conducting a study analyzing the

teachers' and students' perspectives and experiences at the 9th Grade Learning Institute

would be fascinating. Following up with the students and teachers who were members of

the 9th Grade Learning Institute in longitudinal studies would also be interesting. This

type of study could enhance the work that has been explored through this dissertation:

leadership, theory of action and theories-in-use, and what can be learned through

narrative.

As I analyzed data, I gained a post-experience perspective of daily activities and

events. A time analysis of a "typical" day in the life of a principal, may also be an area of

future research. This type of research has most likely been conducted; however, an

interesting study may be matching principals with similar governing principals, theories-

in-action and then observing their daily activities or theories-in-use and then analyzing

how those daily activities are similar or different. Argyris' and Schön's (1974) theories

have been central to this dissertation, specifically their assertion that leaders who have

aligned their governing principles and their actions are more effective. The contributions

of such a study would further establish the application of Argyris' and Schön's work to

the contemporary principalship.

Conclusion

This study has reminded me of what I consider a special and unique experience in

a public school. As I analyzed the data and was reminded of the experiences I had while

principal at the 9th Grade Learning Institute, I was able to recall the feelings and emotions

that went along with those experiences. These emotions forced me to rethink and

reconsider the experiences and their meanings.

Holman Jones (2005) described autoethnography,

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reconsider the experiences and their meanings.

Holman Jones (2005) described autoethnography,

Setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation…and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their own lives. (p. 795).

As Holman Jones stated, I equally hope that at the conclusion of this story those

who read these words will ponder them deeply enough to apply them to their own lives.

EPILOGUE

I sit with a smile and a tear in my eye. "Was that real?" I ask myself. Three years passed like a blink of an eye and almost two years have passed since then; yet I sit, feeling the rush of emotions that I had a few years ago. This story, our story, of the 9th Grade Learning Institute, is important.

Success

You may be wondering, "What happened to the students? Where did they end up? Did they graduate?" The students who attended the 9th Grade Learning Institute had much success. To illustrate these successes, let me briefly describe the students who attended our school during the first year. Sixteen of the first group of students who attended the 9th Grade Learning Institute graduated high school two school years after attending. This means that sixteen students earned all the required high school credits and graduated high school in only three years, one year early. These students, who were the most at risk group of students in that grade, transformed into some of the most successful students, graduating high school a year early.

While graduating high school early may be an accomplishment, what is even more astounding is what happened after they graduated. Prior to graduating, all sixteen had applied to attend college at local community colleges and had taken the entrance exam. Twelve of the sixteen students attended community college. Three of the sixteen had already been accepted and were planning on attending technical programs. Finally,

the remaining student went to work to support her family, but had plans to later return to school. Due to familial circumstances, she viewed going to work as her only option, because her father, who was the only person in the family working and earning money, was deported shortly after graduation.

Of the three groups of 9th graders who attended the school during those first three years, about 90% graduated high school and a handful of other students had either completed a GED program or were enrolled.

Providing a "Threat of a Good Example[1]"

During the second and then again during the third year of the 9th Grade Learning Institute, the school district had new superintendents. Also, during this time there were school board elections and three new board members had been elected. Near the conclusion of the third year of the 9th Grade Learning Institute, I was informed that my contract would not be renewed as principal and the 9th Grade Learning Institute would be closed.

The 9th Grade Learning Institute was a school that was able to take the most at-risk students--students who had a record of failing in school, were disciplinary problems, and did not want to continue attending school--and successfully teach them, providing the foundational year of high school that would lead to graduation. Many of the students were the first in their family to graduate high school. Furthermore, upon its inception, half of the teaching staff had been involuntarily transferred and did not select to be there. The principal was hired a short time before the school would be opened, and construction

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[1] "The Threat of a Good Example" is the subtitle of the book *Nicaragua: The Threat of a Good Example* published in 1985 by Dianna Melrose. Noam Chomsky uses this same terminology in his work "What Uncle Sam Really Wants."

on the school was not completed when the school year began. It seemed the stage was set for disaster. But disaster did not happen, at least not right away. The school, in spite of the odds, was a great place to be for students and the adults who learned along with them. The 9th Grade Learning Institute provided a "threat of a good example." Disaster eventually did strike, after three successful years the school was closed. The 9th Grade Learning Institute demonstrated how successful schools can be in supporting poor and minority students. Further, when the 9th Grade Learning Institute was closed, it provided another tragic example of the way in which public schooling too often reinforces the inequities in our society.

One More Story

Tylar, one of the teachers who was involuntarily transferred to the 9th Grade Learning Institute and had intended to retire at the end of the first year of our school, had become a vibrant and re-energized teacher. Tylar spent summers and weekends improving his teaching, spending his own money to provide more activities, more resources and more opportunities for his students. Tylar was positive and talked about teaching another ten years.

Shortly after finding out my contract would not be renewed and he would be transferred again, Tylar submitted his resignation and decided to retire. The last day of school, Casey hosted a BBQ in celebration and farewell at her house. We were sitting around a table in Casey's back yard, eating hamburgers, potato salad and chips, as our children ran around and played, laughing, talking and telling stories. Tylar abruptly stopped the conversation and raised his glass and said, "I taught for thirty-four years and

didn't know anything about kids or teaching until I went to our school and it was this guy [pointing at me] who taught me."

Final Words… About the End

Every week, I would send out a document to the teachers and staff of the 9th Grade Learning Institute that I called "Week at a Glance." This document contained a calendar of events for the upcoming week, a daily outline of which events could be expected on each day of the week, agenda items for the weekly faculty meeting, the lunch menu, a cartoon or picture, a list of items to "think about," a quote, and a message from me. On the last "Week at a Glance" I wrote:

> Dear Distinguished Faculty,
>
> I have been doing a lot of reflecting lately and the binder in which I have placed a copy of each "Week at a Glance" document has been interesting to review. Two years ago, at the conclusion of our first year I wrote:
>
> These last days will be both bitter and sweet. So much of ourselves has been invested to ensure the success of our students and our school that it will be hard to watch our students move on, yet we may also think, *It's about time!* Our students will most likely struggle with the same dilemma. (We may see some behaviors this week created out of the inability to cope. Be ready to have this conversation with your students and have some ideas to help each student cope."
>
> "If you want a happy ending, that depends, of course, on where you stop your story." (Orson Wells) Wednesday is surely not the end of our story with our students.
>
> I still do not think that this is the ending of the story with our kids!

This dissertation has helped me realize, even after an additional two years have passed, the end has still not arrived. Recently, I received an email from Marylyn who said, "I think of our school and you often, and miss it. I like where I am teaching now, but it isn't family…" (Personal communication, March 2015).

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APPENDIX A

Events Listing

Jacob	Spouse
Home Visits	Incentives
Orientation Meetings	Home Visits
Yearbooks	Parent Student Meetings Before School
Graduation Photos	Team Building
School Supplies	Meeting Kids in the morning
Homecoming	Art
Building Furniture	Field Trips
Scheduling Students	Open House and Orientation
Dress Code	Language- Spanish and English
Lifetime Sports: Bike Unit	Scheduling
Nutcracker	Buying School Supplies
Mariachis	Health Screening
Club Time	Observations
Open House	Grants
Grant Writing	Hesitation to Not Push too Much
Teacher Passing	Statement From the Retirement Party
Meetings After School	Always at School
Eating Together	Teachers' Funerals
Students Coming Back	Handwritten Cards to Students
Team Building	Slide Show

APPENDIX B

Coding

V	
R	
FW	
OM	
HV	
SJ	
St Per	
Par Per	
M	
Stf Rel	
KS	
Dis	
IL	
Go	
Par	
ToDo	
Cul	
Cop	
Int	
Meet	
Demo	
Build Maint	
Needs	
S Voice	

Orient	
Team	
Pro Dev	
Admin	