How Teachers Define and Enact Reflective Practice:
It’s All in the Action

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Abstract
In “How Teachers Define and Enact Reflective Practice: It’s All in the Action” Joseph M. Shosh studied the action research practices of 22 Pennsylvania and New Jersey (USA) teachers meeting within the Reflective Practice Seminar of Moravian College’s Master of Education Program during the fall semester of 2010. Teachers defined reflective practice as the process of observing their teaching and their students’ learning carefully in order to think deeply to improve their teaching practice, with more than two-thirds of teachers including action as a specified rather than implied facet of the definition. 75% of the study participants agreed that reflective writing and collegial conversation were the most valuable means of thinking more deeply about their practice, and teachers compared reflective practice to notions of self-discovery, improved senses, overcoming a challenge, and joy or accomplishment. An analysis of the 104 theme statements (or findings) from the teachers’ action research studies identified the specific actions teacher researchers took within their diverse teaching environments to (1) support student achievement, (2) encourage active student engagement, (3) facilitate student metacognition, (4) develop collaboration among learners, (5) promote student ownership, (6) differentiate instruction, and (7) address inevitable challenges as teachers and researchers. The author concludes that reflective practice cannot be directly taught but instead emerges through the reflection on action that occurs when teachers are conducting action research.

Key Words: reflective practice, action research, student achievement, student engagement, knowledge construction

1. Introduction

Since the publication of Donald Schön’s The Reflective Practitioner (1983) and Educating the Reflective Practitioner (1987), the concept of reflective practice has become a key philosophical construct underlying teacher education programs in North America, Britain, Australia, and throughout the rest of the world (Zeichner, 1994). As Elizabeth Kinsella (2009) points out, though, the term is used in a myriad of ways and often without a clear conceptual or epistemological framework. Her extensive review of the literature suggests that five key facets undergird the way in which reflective practice is conceptualized in the literature, including (1) a critique of technical rationality, (2) the notion of professional practice as artistry, (3) a grounding in constructivist notions of learning, (4) the importance of professionals’ tacit knowledge, and (5) a transcendence of a Cartesian mind/body duality, each of which will be explored here in the context of one teaching cohort’s action research efforts. Edwards & Thomas (2010) ponder whether or not reflective practice can or should be taught at all, stressing that “context-free reflective practice is a chimera and therefore attempts in education to teach it [devoid of context] should stop” (p. 405). I argue that teachers conducting action research
within Moravian College’s Master of Education program engage in the highly contextualized action research that is needed now more than ever to position teachers as generators of the knowledge of professional practice rather than as mere technicians called upon to carry out the agenda of those outside the classroom (Elliott, 2010; Shosh, 2011, 2012).

2. The study: The categories of analysis and the analysis project

During the fall semester of 2010, I wanted to learn how teachers gathering classroom data in an action research context, reflect on their action, identify what they’ve learned through layers of reflection, and evaluate their effectiveness as reflective practitioners. To do so, I examined the reflective practice of 20 Pennsylvania and New Jersey (USA) certified and practicing K-12 teachers ranging in age from 26 to 64 (with a median age of 33), who met weekly within a Reflective Practice Seminar to share their evolving research practice and findings within their teacher inquiry support groups (Hammerman, 1999). Here the teachers developed and enacted their self-designed data collection plans to enact professional practice in alignment with their own epistemological and ontological belief systems (McNiff & Whitehead, 2010; Hendricks, 2008). Topics of inquiry centered on new ways to empower students in public school classrooms through the use of dialogue journals, portfolio assessment, formative assessment, goal setting, Socratic circles, play, comprehension monitoring, learning centers, self-regulation, descriptive writing, literature circles, authentic assessment, autobiographical inquiry, self-directed learning, visual literacy, project-based learning, student-generated questions, and blogging. To download pdf copies of the individual teacher research studies, visit the Moravian College Master of Education Teacher Research Action Research Database for 2011 master’s degree thesis documents at http://home.moravian.edu/public/educ/eddept/mEd/thesis/2011.htm.

As teachers enrolled in the Reflective Practice Seminar collected and analyzed data according to their own data collection plans, I administered a series of surveys throughout the semester, asking each to define reflective practice in his or her own words, to compare the action research process at its best and worst to other activities, and to evaluate the effectiveness of their own action research processes. By the end of the semester, when each teacher had completed his or her unique inquiry project, I coded the emergent theme statements from their research reports and then identified the frequency with which each code appeared in the data set. I also conducted a series of digital video interviews in which teachers commented upon the actions they took as they attempted to learn more about teaching and learning within the context of their individual classrooms.
3. Reflecting On Action

Prior to joining the Reflective Practice Seminar, the 20 teachers in this study completed individual courses in teacher inquiry and teacher research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), classroom assessment and evaluation (Burke, 2009; Popham, 2011), contemporary issues in education; four elective courses in different facets of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986); and a Curriculum Development & Action Research course in which participants designed their data collection plans, drafted their initial literature reviews, and received the required Human Subjects Internal Review Board approval to conduct their studies. For a more in-depth discussion, see Shosh & Zales, 2007.

The Reflective Practice Seminar asked teachers to consider two essential questions. First, how does systematic reflection on my own teaching and my students’ learning lead to changes in practice that promote greater student engagement and student achievement? Second, what do participant observation, student work, and student interview/survey data tell me about teaching and learning in my classroom context? In their pursuit of answers to these questions and those they posed to guide their own inquiry, teachers collected, coded, analyzed, and interpreted data for their self-designed action research study; examined a philosophical base for reflective practice; and analyzed praxis through a multiplicity of lenses. Philosophically guiding the design of the Reflective Practice Seminar was the notion of inquiry that occurs when

*The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings, which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation.* (Schön, 1983: 68)

When defining *reflective practice* in their own words, 17 of the 20 teachers identified the need to observe their teaching and their students’ learning carefully in order to think deeply to improve their teaching practice. One teacher explained, “Reflective practice is a method that requires individuals to look at their own practices as a teacher or group of teachers, some may say through a microscope, in order to see how those practices affect students’ growth and community learning.” More than two-thirds of the definitions included *action* as a specified rather than implied facet of the definition, thereby transcending the customary mind/body duality and placing them squarely in alignment with Schön’s notion that, “Doing and thinking are complementary. Doing extends thinking...and reflection feeds on doing and its results” (p. 280). One teacher explained, “Reflective practice is a constant metacognitive look at the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom, and then making improvements to the process.” Another explained, “Reflective practice begins by thinking
about my teaching. As an educator, I need to determine what works and what doesn't work with a particular group of students. I then gather data to help me become a more effective teacher.” Three teachers, though, provided circular definitions that defined reflective practice in terms of reflection. Perhaps most intriguing to me here was the fact that only one teacher wrote in terms of a technical rationality in which the reflective practice process was defined as an application rather than a generation of knowledge to solve classroom problems: “Reflective practice is an opportunity to improve my teaching by truly evaluating what I do in the classroom and apply what methods might work.” In the video clip that follows (Figure 1), high school English teacher Bridget Doklan explains how her reflective practice changed as reflection became a joint social process with her students as co-researchers. As Whitehead (2010) reminds us, Schön’s (1995) call for a new epistemology must be answered, at least in part, through the use of evidence-based multimedia narratives in which practitioners share their own living educational theories and methodologies.

![Figure 1. Teacher researcher Bridget Doklan defines reflective practice. Available http://youtu.be/bq964f9an7s](http://youtu.be/bq964f9an7s)

All teachers in the Reflective Practice seminar wrote a great deal and engaged in whole class and teacher inquiry support group discussions to support their collegial reflection on professional practice in the classroom. They began by articulating their own epistemological and ontological belief systems within a values-based researcher stance and trustworthiness statement (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997; McNiff, 2010). They penned analytic memos to examine data through a series of progressive (Dewey, 1938/1997), dialogical (Freire, 1970/2003), social constructivist (Vygotsky, 1978), and sociolinguistic (Delpit & Dowdy, 2002) lenses. They wrote to learn about their data along the way, utilizing a wide array of narrative conventions, including anecdotes, vignettes, layered stories, pastiches, dramas, and poems (Ely, 2007; Richardson & St Pierre, 2005). Data were coded (Saldaña, 2009; Bogdan & Biklen, 2003) and then categorized in graphic organizers.
75% of the study participants agreed that reflective writing and collegial conversation were the most valuable means of thinking more deeply about their teaching practice. High School Economics and American Government teacher Matthew Quartuch (2011) explained the importance of philosophical reading to his own reflective practice. John Dewey’s principles of continuity of experience and interaction resonated with Matt, whose strong desire to elicit civic engagement among his students in a democratic society necessitated a rejection of transmission models of teaching. Here and in the video clip that follows (Figure 2), Quartuch notes the importance of engaging in dialogue with John Dewey and Paulo Freire.

Dewey’s (1938/1997) work particularly resonated with my study. I analyzed the educative experiences that I was creating for my students with specific focus on whether their experiences were authentic enough to avoid being noneducative, as well as impactful enough to influence future learning experiences. I analyzed my study through the dialogical lens that Freire (1971) advocates. It was critical to my study to ensure that I did not perpetuate a banking model of education, but instead opened doors, which might facilitate greater understanding of my students place in the world and motivate them to be active participants and critics. (Quartuch, 2011: 107)

Figure 2. Teacher researcher Matthew Quartuch explains the importance of Dewey and Freire to his reflective practice.
Available http://youtu.be/qwNbYBiwtfk

Four teachers felt that time spent with the field log in quiet contemplation yielded the greatest insights. Finally, the only participant of the 20 who did not complete a teacher research study, served as a negative case, explaining, “It seemed that opportunities for reflection were forced. Concern over research methods and assignments took time away from reflection.” This same participant was also the teacher who defined reflective practice in terms of technically applying the
findings of others to his own practice, rather than generating new knowledge of his own, suggesting to me, that in order for the reflective practice to become meaningful to him, he must be supported in seeing how he may be a knowledge generator as well as a knowledge consumer.

Noting that reflection itself occurs tacitly as part of professional practice (Polanyi 1967), I asked study participants to compare their own reflective practice process at its most fruitful to some other event (Lakoff & Johnson 2003, 1999; Saban 2006). Teachers likened reflective practice to notions of self-discovery: “starting/reading a new chapter,” “unwrapping a mystery,” “figuring out what happens in a riddle,” “learning by doing,” “renewing one’s self;” improved senses: “opening your eyes,” “taking a look in the mirror and seeing change,” “seeing my class/teaching as an outsider,” “tuning an instrument;” overcoming a challenge: “winning a level of Tetris,” “climbing up flights of steps,” “riding out a storm in an open field;” and sense of joy or accomplishment: “discovering money in your pocket over and over,” “listening to a symphony,” “putting lights on a Christmas tree,” “a student coming back after graduating and saying thank you,” “being a mother.” At its worst, reflective practice found candidates “stuck in a revolving door,” or “scraping nails across the chalkboard,” and “working as a one-armed paper hanger.” As one teacher explained, “When the process isn’t working, it’s like being trapped/sinking in mud while holding something precious. Once you get a little under, you quickly sink. The road back is messy and frustrating. It takes a lot of hard work to stay afloat and still manage other responsibilities, including the non-professional, precious stuff in life.” Another teacher explained, “Engaging in reflective practice is an all-consuming addiction - you cannot get enough . . . and you always want more.”

4. Changing Classroom Practice

Theme statements emerged as teacher researchers explained how the field log data contained within each category related to the research questions. Through my analysis of preliminary thematic statements, survey data, inquiry support group observations, and digitally recorded teacher interviews, I identified the actions that teacher researchers took within their diverse teaching environments to (1) support student achievement, (2) encourage active student engagement, (3) facilitate student metacognition, (4) develop collaboration among learners, (5) promote student ownership, (6) differentiate instruction, and (7) address inevitable challenges as teachers and researchers. An analysis of the 104 theme statements created by the 20 participants demonstrated a clear belief among the teachers that knowledge is constructed by individual learners, and teachers must take action as an integral part of their reflective practice.

A third of the 104 theme statements dealt with student achievement. To support student achievement, teachers provided clear, focused, and developmentally appropriate direct instruction;
helped students to read required and self-selected texts in a variety of genre both actively and critically; and utilized a wide array of formative, summative, and authentic assessment devices. In her study “Allowing Students To Think For Themselves: Critical Thinking Through Socratic Circles,” Bridget Doklan (2011) shared this theme, which was one of the 28 themes I placed within the student achievement category: “Socratic circles encourage the development of critical thinking skills by providing ample opportunities for the analysis of literature and textual details, questioning of ideas and views, connection to outside sources and experiences, comparison and contrast with outside sources and experiences, exploration of multiple perspectives, evaluation of ideas and interpretations with support, synthesis of multiple ideas, and consideration of the author’s purpose.” (p. 128).

Throughout her research process, Doklan constructed numerous first-person narratives from students’ points of view, including this one (Figure 3), where Vanessa explains how this process was personally transformative for her.

In the beginning, I talked a lot and didn’t really listen. I also didn’t really care and thought what I thought was right. Now I listen to them and consider new ideas. This makes me more open-minded because I think out of the box. I also got better at expressing my ideas clearly and not rambling. It gets us ready for the real-world because it boosts our capability of working together. The best thing is that anything we talked about stuck in my mind a lot easier. It’s so much better than other English classes I had where we just went over questions. The other thing I noticed is that I read differently. For the first Socratic circle, I read no differently but now— without even meaning to—I start asking questions and looking at the text differently. I also enjoy knowing the background of the author so I can make connections. And now I always think about connections to the real world, too. Overall, I really enjoyed them [Socratic Circles]. I love to talk and let people know what I think, so this was a good opportunity to do that. It helped me learn the material more thoroughly and gave me a better understanding. I’d like to keep doing them because I finally found a way that I enjoy going over literature—and it forces me to do the reading and work!

Figure 3. Teacher researcher Bridget Doklan constructed this first-person narrative using field log data to give voice to one student’s perspective of Socratic circles in the classroom. (Doklan, p. 105)

Nearly 20% of the teachers’ theme statements addressed some facet of student engagement. To encourage active student engagement, teachers promoted student self-expression; allowed students to discuss and debate issues of personal and collective interest; promoted student inquiry and project-based learning; ensured that students encountered meaningful success that builds confidence; and provided opportunities for students to work collaboratively in technology-rich instructional environments. Music teachers Marianne Gross and Megan Tucker (2011) taught in middle schools
only a few miles geographically from one another, one situated in an urban core of one of the largest school districts in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania serving some of its poorest students and the other in a wealthy suburb. Yet, each trusted in her respective knowledge of how students learn best to develop both musical literacy and student engagement. Tucker’s students use computer software to construct their own musical compositions using Finale Note Pad, Garage band, iPhoto, flip cameras, and iMovie. Gross discovered through her research an important theme that she had heretofore understood tacitly, that musical performance motivates practice and that practice motivates musical performance. In Figure 4, we see that Gross trusted in her own artistry to create a layered story (Ely, 2007) to juxtapose her own evolving understanding of one student’s engagement in her instrumental music practice.

Phoenix’s Discovery:
A Layered Story in Dramatic Form

Mrs. Gross
As Phoenix entered the room for her lesson I explained that today she would be able to practice whatever she chose to practice for the 30- minute lesson period. She smiled, and got her instrument out immediately. As she practiced I asked her to record the steps that she took to practice and the details for each step.

Phoenix
This type of practice is kinda helpful to me. I don’t usually write down the steps that I take to practice, I just start to play and that is it! I think that I will try this. I need to practice Finale and Can-Can. I usually make mistakes when I play these songs.

Mrs. Gross
Phoenix is a seventh grade bass player; she also plays percussion in band. Although unable to take her instrument home to practice due to its size, she is extremely conscientious about attending her lessons in school. I wonder where the other scheduled bass player is. Phoenix doesn’t seem to mind though, because she prefers to take her lesson alone rather than with the rest of her group. Let’s see how she does with this step-detail charting.

Phoenix
Okay, I have my music out now; what part do I have difficulty with? Let me play a little bit and see how it goes. Uh oh, there it is, that measure I keep screwing up. I am going to have to study that measure...slow down the tempo and pizz [icato]
rather than bow it. Okay, now, I got the fingering down. Now I can start to bow.

Mrs. Gross
Phoenix usually practices informally with no defined goals. She just plays. She identified songs that she thought that she had difficulty with, stopped at her problem spot, slowed down, put her bow down and used pizzicato focusing on the notes, then the rhythm. Now she is writing the steps and she is following them, too! It is great to see that she filling in the step-detail diagram. This is her practice, observe, and do not jump in. Yes, she has begun adapting using analytic practice through goal setting, identifying problems and is focused. It is working!

Phoenix
I like to select my own music to practice for my lesson. Usually we practice the same song that we are studying in orchestra rehearsal at lessons. That is not always what I need! When I get to choose the song, it is something I need to practice more. Just getting a chance to pick a song is more helpful because I can work with the things I have difficulty with.

Mrs. Gross
As Phoenix is playing she is stopping and by evaluating her practice, Phoenix is beginning to see the benefits of self-regulation. She is making improvements in her performance.

Phoenix
It was difficult writing the steps when you usually just get a song out and play. Writing things down in music? Who would think that this would be something that would be helpful? When I had to write stuff down I recognized that we do this...I just do it. As I played and wrote my steps I realized I do this!

Mrs. Gross
Phoenix has discovered that she has developed a strategy for practicing in her self-evaluation.

Figure 4. Teacher researcher Maryann Gross creates a layered story to juxtapose the interior monologue of her reflection-in-action with the self-reflection of one student in her classroom (Gross, 2011: 76-77).
15% of the 104 theme statements directly addressed what teachers did to help students think about their own thinking. To facilitate student metacognition, teachers modeled how and why to self-monitor reading comprehension; help students to set goals and monitor their progress in achieving those goals; and encourage students to track their own growth in learning over time. High School English teacher Sarah Fiske (2011) subverted her urban district’s test preparation mantra by replacing the district-sanctioned workbooks with authentic reading tasks that mattered to her students, including an analysis of song lyrics by Kanye West and Taylor Swift at the MTV Music Awards. Her students taught her firsthand what she already knew, namely that the best test preparation is a meaningful literacy curriculum—not a district sanctioned curriculum map of basic skills. Of course, to reach her goal of having students explicitly think about their thinking, she needed to introduce them to authentic social justice issues and allow them to create their own responses. In Figure 5, two of Fiske’s students, both of whom scored basic or below basic on Pennsylvania’s System of School Assessment examination, share their response to “blood diamonds” in Africa.

![Figure 5. Teacher researcher Sara Fiske’s “at risk” students created presentations on self-selected social justice issues (Fiske, 2011: 113).](image)

The final 35% of theme statements were divided fairly evenly among collaboration, ownership, and instructional differentiation. Each teacher generated an average of 5 thematic statements, and, while I categorized using a primary code for each, there was certainly overlap among the coding categories, which were not intended to be mutually exclusive.

To develop collaboration among learners, teachers provided multiple opportunities for students to speak and listen to one another via small group and partnered classroom discussions, literature and Socratic circles, and electronic media like blogs and wikis, ensuring the development of a community of learners that may extend beyond the classroom. In “Using Student Generated Questioning to Increase Critical Thinking Skills in Secondary English Language Arts Students,” Bernadette Varela
abandoned her technically rational plan to apply Pearson and Johnson’s (1978) QAR strategy to increase critical thinking among her Honors students and instead allowed her students to teach her that they didn’t need an externally imposed questioning structure to think critically but could indeed spur one another’s thinking collaboratively when she could trust in their own abilities to do so. She shares an epiphany within her teacher researcher study and offers additional commentary in the video clip below (Figure 6).

I realized something about myself: I was afraid to trust my students. I’m not sure if this is due to my control issues or if this is the pragmatist in me, but I realized even just saying something like ‘Let’s talk about Pearl [from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s Scarlet Letter], put me in the driver’s seat of the discussion. I steered the discussion where I wanted it to go. In my field notes that day I had written, “I get too involved in what I want to do, in what I want them to get out of this...” Surely the students directed the route, but I still drove the car. I think this lack of trust in my students is mostly due to fear on my part—fear that each period of students would take the discussion in a different direction; fear that some periods would find key issues on their own while others would not…; fear that I would have three different lessons going on any different day, with more fear that I would end up needing to create three different assessments for the same class. The worst thing about this revelation is that I knew better. In the past I had let students lead the discussion, period by period, and they mostly discovered key issues on their own. “So why the control factor now?” I wondered ” (Varela, 2011: 75).

Figure 6. Teacher researcher Bernadette Varela shares new insight on empowering students to ask their own classroom questions.
Available [http://youtu.be/X8Vbshs7zVc](http://youtu.be/X8Vbshs7zVc)
To promote student ownership, teachers provided self-directed learning opportunities; helped students make clear connections between in-school assignments and their out-of-school lives; provided meaningful choices for students to make within clearly established parameters; included opportunities for students to take on leadership roles and held one another accountable for their learning. In “Renaissance of the Heart: Building Student Relationships,” former New York City special education teacher Lauren Black transcended her eastern Pennsylvania urban district’s desire for technical rationality. She explained, “What started out as a means to support reading strategies and student engagement, turned to a means to develop relationships of caring and nurturing in the classroom. This study also examined student engagement within the classroom and school in general. The study suggests that students need an outlet for non-academic needs within the school day. When given the opportunity to express themselves, students will respond with honesty about their emotions and experiences. This study also found that when students are given the choice to write about their own topics of interest, student engagement will increase” (2011: iv).

To differentiate instruction, teachers identified prior knowledge; considered cultural and functional literacy; provided a multiplicity of ways for students to exhibit what they know and are able to do; and employed the concept of scaffolding in a variety of individual, small group, whole-class, and extra-curricular settings. Autistic support special educator Gabrielle Fanelli (2011) came to realize that only through differentiating play activities could she work with her students as a partner to enhance their abstract thinking and social skills in ways that simply weren’t possible when she tried to deliver a pre-packaged curriculum. Similarly, Lisa Simon (2011) discovered that only through instructional differentiation could she empower her elementary school students to succeed in pursuing their own inquiry activities.

Challenges teachers faced and addressed included ineffective district-sanctioned programs and instructional materials, lack of student background knowledge to meet course and grade-level objectives, insufficient time to complete the required curricular sequence, increasingly low student self-efficacy and self-confidence as students proceed through the intermediate-level and secondary school program of study, and limited support for integrating the use of electronic learning technologies.

5. Evaluating The Action Research Process

In an end of semester survey in which teachers were asked to identify the single most important thing they learned about reflective practice, answers were quite varied, with teacher citing many of the insights that would later be incorporated within the theme statements of their teacher research studies. In addition, they focused on the Freirean notion of the students as the teachers of
the teachers. One explained, “My students have so much to teach me! I really have witnessed how rewarding it is to work together with students towards a common goal as we all learn from each other.” Another commented, “My students constantly need a voice. While surveys and interviews were sometimes exhausting for me, they really helped the students become invested in their learning. They loved the ability to select readings and discuss their struggles/successes.” Another concluded, “I realized that I am too stressed about the pressures of my job. This research helped me relax and enjoy the projects. I'm learning to enjoy my students again.”

Table 1. End-of Study Response (1.0 strongly disagree; 5.0 strongly agree)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am able to access, understand, and apply key research findings.</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am able to document my practice and make changes based on systematic inquiry.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a trustworthy teacher action researcher.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher action research benefits my teaching and my students’ learning.</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Moravian M.Ed. program has helped me become a more reflective practitioner.</td>
<td>5.00</td>
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</tbody>
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After sharing their action research findings with colleagues and faculty, the participants of this study completed a final program evaluation, which, in part, asked them to respond to several questions on a Likert Scale, with 1 representing strong disagreement and 5 representing strong agreement. While the number of respondents remained constant at 20, one original participant opted to continue gathering data and left this cohort. Another teacher who had taken a year’s leave of absence returned. Teachers unanimously reported that their graduate education experience helped them to become more reflective practitioners and overwhelmingly believe that action research benefits their teaching and their students’ learning.

John Elliott (2010) explains that, “If teachers believe that they are mere functionaries in the educational system and have little control over what students learn and how they learn it, they will see themselves as technicians implementing a learning system prescribed by external authority” (p. 1). Only through the process of conducting research in the classroom do teachers not only change their practice but also generate important new understandings for themselves and for the profession. In this study, teachers set out to improve student achievement and engagement, and 50% of their theme statements address how they learned to do so effectively. Through their willingness to study their
new actions, teachers also learned a great deal about metacognition, collaboration, ownership, and instructional differentiation. They explored their embodied practice and tacit ways of knowing as they engaged in dialogue with Dewey, Friere, Delpit & Dowdy, Vygotsky, and, most importantly, one another. Through their self-designed inquiries, these teachers created new knowledge not for the sake of transmission or technical rationality but rather as a means of going public with their praxis to encourage meaningful professional dialogue. Can reflective practice be taught? Indeed not. Instead, action research must become the primary means through which teachers learn as they engender achievement and engagement in their classrooms, generate new knowledge about teaching and learning, and, in the process, reclaim their professional lives.

References


