A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF MINDFULNESS OF CURRICULUM

DIRECTORS IN A MIDWEST STATE

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial

fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

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2011

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An abstract of a Dissertation Proposal by
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May 2011
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Problem: Today's educational leaders face a growing barrage of challenges that threaten
to detract from their ability to sustain resonant leadership over time. Leaders who ignore
the signs and signals around them not only debilitate themselves as leaders but their
organizations as well. These leaders simply are not getting enough, accurate, or timely
information that helps them to sustain successful leadership over time.

Procedures: In the rich tradition of qualitative research, this phenomenological study
explored the phenomenon of mindful as it relates to curriculum directors. The grand tour
question is "How is the phenomenon of mindfulness manifested in the work of
curriculum directors?" The curriculum directors were selected using purposive sampling.
A semi-structured interview, conducted with seven curriculum directors, explored various
questions about mindfulness in their personal and professional lives. Upon the conclusion
of the interviews, participants were asked to describe their understanding of mindfulness
through the use of a journal response. Data analysis was conducted through the use of
open, axial, and selective coding and was used to identify key themes. Verification of
data included member checks, triangulation, rich, thick descriptions, and a reflexive
journal. The findings were written up in a phenomenological structure to provide a
narrative description of the experience.

Findings: This study revealed eight mindful practices utilized among curriculum
directors that help to sustain their success in their position. Those practices involve the
use of feedback for learning and leading others, reflection for personal and professional
growth, collaboration to build trusting relationships and the development of relationships
through collegial support. In addition, mindful curriculum directors used planning and
preparation to achieve success developed an awareness of themselves and others, saw
dialogue and discussion as opportunities for growth, and saw purpose in their work.

Conclusions: While reflection can seem unnatural and unrewarding, those who persevere
acknowledge the power in the process itself. Leaders who seek the thoughts and insights
of others set themselves up to lead confidently with the greatest amount of understanding.

Recommendations: Educational leaders at all levels, especially curriculum directors,
should engage in regular practice of mindful habits to develop their skills. They should be
purposeful to set aside time with specific opportunities for reflection and renewal, and
discover ways that the findings can be incorporated into their work with individuals and
their organizations. Most importantly, leaders should seek to work from a mindful state
of awareness.

Dedication

To my parents, Tony and Fran Carenza, who have taught me that there is no greater joy than the joy of learning. Through their love and support, patience and generosity, I have come to understand the power of lifelong learning. I will always be grateful beyond words for the encouragement and help they have provided me.

"Vai con fiducia nella direzione dei tuoi sogni. Vivi la vita che hai immaginato."

To my wonderful wife, Allison, who has been so patient and understanding in so many ways as I have completed my schoolwork. Your strength as a wife, mother, and best friend is truly amazing! I would not have wanted to go through this journey with anyone else—thank you for allowing me to pursue this dream.

"Be glad of life because it gives you the chance to love, and to work, and to play and to look up at the stars."

- Henry Van Dyke

And, finally, to my boys—Tyson John, Beau Michael, and Colin James—whose unconditional love and support have helped to sustain me through this journey and through all of my school experiences. It is my hope for each of you that you will find the same happiness and joy in learning as I have found in my own life. You have each taught me more about love, laughter, and life than you'll ever know and for that I am grateful.

"To love what you do and feel that it matters—how could anything be more fun?"

- Katharine Graham

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

A Personal Leadership Quest

My journey of reflection and discovery as a doctoral student has been personally and professionally rewarding. The reward, a growing understanding of the skills necessary to reach my full potential as a leader and individual, has helped to make certain my success as an educational leader in challenging times. The journey, and its rewards, have had an intense impact on me and have shaped my view as an elementary principal and educational leader.

Reflection, the cornerstone of the Drake University doctoral program, required students to openly and honestly reflect upon their work. Personally, the possibility that my beliefs and actions might be misaligned, that I am unable to act in the way that I know I need to lead, has driven me at times to avoid examining the topic of successful leadership altogether. This gap, referred to as the knowing-doing gap (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000), represents the challenge of taking what I know about successful leadership and applying it through my actions as a leader. I was fearful that my reflection might reveal to me that, while achieving some success as an educational leader, my efforts and achievements in my professional life had consumed all other areas of my personal thoughts and actions. The result of my journey through this program was a clearer understanding of how my work as an educational leader was consuming my life.

Prior to the doctoral program, I was struggling to understand how to balance the responsibilities in my daily life, which was manifesting itself in my thought processes. This ongoing struggle prohibited me from having the energy and insight to remedy the

conflict. Instead, I was becoming increasingly ineffective in both roles. I felt physically,

emotionally, and intellectually drained. Helpless to confront my growing discontent in

effectually balancing all my responsibilities, I sensed a growing dissatisfaction with both

my personal and professional life.

Therefore, while reflection was the cornerstone of the doctoral program,

discovery was the consequence. Shortly after I began the doctoral program, I took the

Advanced Leadership class designed to help learners understand various leadership

theories and styles. In this class, I was required to read the book *Resonant Leadership* by

Boyatzis and McKee (2005). I learned that leaders can fail to recognize and address the

stressful conditions in which they operate and, as a result, come to realize the personal

results of that stress. Ultimately, leaders may not be able to avoid the Sacrifice Syndrome

(Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; McKee, Boyatzis, & Johnston, 2008). This is explained as a

state in which our bodies are not equipped to handle the growing pressures of our work,

thus forcing individuals into a compounding feeling of helplessness. However, the writers

make it clear that leaders can overcome dissonant leadership and maintain resonant

leadership. This positive outcome is possible by identifying with the traits of hope,

compassion, and mindfulness.

In reflecting upon the keys to successful leadership, I was particularly intrigued

by the concept of mindfulness and its implications for educational leaders. Mindfulness,

as defined by Boyatzis and McKee (2005) is, "being awake, aware, and attending—to

ourselves and to the world around us" (p. 73). Much like the doctoral coursework I

completed, using mindfulness to improve one's success as a leader will take awareness,

honest reflection, and thought to be successful. As Boyatzis and McKee (2005) state,

"self-awareness really does matter, but so does consciously managing our thoughts, feelings, and responses. We need self-awareness and a willingness to be vulnerable" (p. 137). Through that vulnerability, however, the leader can expect to discover the true benefits of mindfulness.

A Leadership Paradox

Educational leaders today must adapt quickly to the ever-changing landscape of leadership. "To be able to handle complexity and change we need a radically different mind-set—a mind-set that is more attuned to continuous learning" (Blakeley, 2007, p. 17). Leading others successfully, however, requires great skill and a sense of flexibility. Nicholson (2009) states:

> These times require a different kind of leadership…to which we had become accustomed. They call for a much more savvy, psychological style of leadership that is emotionally intelligent and visionary in order to lead people beyond their overwhelming immediate concerns. (p. 39)

As McKee et al. (2008) explain, "resonant leadership requires that a person be highly self-aware, manage himself or herself in stressful and complex environments, read other people, empathize with their needs, and lead others to get the job done" (p. 43). Boyatzis and McKee (2005) believe, "leaders move people…all while managing the inevitable sacrifices inherent in their roles" (p. 2).

In reality, however, bright leaders, whose personality traits promote arrogance and an unconscious need to fail, make poor choices that block their ability to be a good leader (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Otherwise well-intentioned leaders behave in such a way they often ignore what is so obvious to others around them. The paradox, according to

Boyatzis and McKee (2005), is that in focusing on doing the right thing as a leader, many individuals often find they are really doing absolutely nothing right. In essence, they are working harder but not smarter. They fail to see that successful leadership starts with understanding themselves as leaders first (Cashman, 2008; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Maxwell, 2007; Whitaker & Whitaker, 2008). In agreement with this idea, McKee et al. (2008) write, "paradoxically, if you want to lead others in building resonance and effectiveness, you must start with yourself" (p. 177). Leaders are often working so hard to lead that, unfortunately, they themselves fail to notice the signs of their own growing dissonance and are subsequently unable to understand their needs, both emotionally and physically.

For these leaders, it appears they are resistant to the types of changes needed to keep them leading successfully. This resistance only leads to growing frustration and an inability to lead at high levels. Instead of critically examining the changes that they need to make in their leadership, they dismiss the warning signs and repeat their same mistakes repeatedly over time. In examining the various reasons for this resistance, Kotter (1996) writes, "arrogant…employees can have difficulty seeing the very forces that present threats and opportunities. And the lack of leadership leaves no force inside these organizations to break out of the morass" (p. 27).

Ultimately, their unwillingness to see or acknowledge the problems or concerns can take a toll on both themselves and the organization. It doesn't take long before the devastating effects of this unwillingness are felt in the organization. The authors acknowledge that changing oneself isn't necessarily easy as our patterns of behavior are deep-seated and, as a result, we are no longer fully aware of what we do or why we do it.

Research Problem

Creating and sustaining resonant leadership is not easy, especially given the challenges and demands of federal and state requirements, shrinking budgets, technology advances, and changes in students and staff dynamics. When leaders fail to pay attention to signs and signals that run counter to their true beliefs, they risk becoming ineffective leaders who are out of touch with those they lead. The result is an organizational culture in which individuals, groups, and the organization as a whole become debilitated and each entity is incapable of achieving their full potential.

I believe that individuals who become dissonant leaders may do so because of their own choices and behaviors. Whether these choices or behaviors occur consciously or unconsciously, Boyatzis and McKee (2005) remind us:

> When we get caught in this prison of our own making, we lose the ability to see ourselves, others, or our environments as they really are! We begin to make decisions based on what we think rather than what is. (p. 45)

In essence, dissonant leaders ignore the signs that are so obvious to others, but that remain hidden for us. And why is that? When we feel most dissonant, many of us cope by reverting to those past habits of mind and behavior that we think serve us well. Heemsbergen (2004) argues that we try to escape from our faults simply by denying them and seeing other individuals as a part of the conflict rather than ourselves. It is, according to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), a case where leaders are simply not getting enough, accurate, or timely information that can help them to improve their practice. They believe that oftentimes the problem is compounded not only by our organization's expectations,

but also by our own inability to cope effectively with the stress. The hope is that educational leaders today can avoid dissonance and thus feel good about their work.

Purpose of the Study

Serving as a leader, whether in curriculum or in other educational areas, requires individuals to quickly adapt to changes in the organization they are leading. This challenge is often compounded given the lack of resources or time dedicated for improvement of both the individual and the organization. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the phenomenon of mindfulness (Langer, 1989) as it is manifested in the work of curriculum directors.

Regarding the true essence of mindfulness, Boyatzis and McKee (2005) posit, "like 'self-development,' mindfully attending to all aspects of our humanity enables us to reach our full potential as individuals while becoming more fully engaged with people, with our communities, and with our environment" (p. 73). Through my research, I examined the many ways in which curriculum directors exhibit the qualities of mindfulness in their thinking and in their work with other individuals in their organization. Discovering the power of mindfulness will help curriculum directors to understand how it can be used it to improve their leadership.

Rationale and Significance of the Study

As Dickmann and Stanford-Blair (2009) assert, "leadership, whether exercised by presidents or parents, is always a process of influencing others toward the achievement of a goal" (p. 35). I have always enjoyed leading and helping others to achieve their greatest potential and the principalship offered me that opportunity. Unfortunately, my love of

leadership and working with others was beginning to suffer as a result of my inability to maintain a sense of mindfulness.

Describing the complexities of leadership, Dickmann and Stanford-Blair (2009) explain, "the process of leadership, or the act of influencing others, always stays the same as goals change. However, the context directs the game. That is, *how*, leaders influence others adapts to the environment in which leadership is attempted" (p. 35). The context in which school leaders, especially curriculum directors, work is changing rapidly. Federal and state regulations, rapidly changing student demographics and increasing demands on the time of individuals still remain challenges for these leaders. Regardless, however, of these contextual changes, Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) explain how the curriculum director's leadership style, personal relations, and personal contact with those that are leaders in the district are crucial to effect change and implement innovations that are being led in the organization. Therefore, it has never been more important that educational leaders be able to manage those changes and the stress that accompanies them as well.

Educational leaders can easily ignore the context in which they are working. They ignore the emotional reality that surrounds them and instead perceive their own actions and behaviors as adequate for leading the organization. "Seeing yourself as others see you and honestly considering your impact on people is probably one of the most difficult developmental challenges" (McKee, Johnston, & Massimilian, 2006, p. 3). The result of this dangerous habit is a sort of blindness that can stifle our potential as a leader. Perhaps Langer (1989) says it best when she writes, "we build our own and shared realities…and then we become victim of them—blind to the fact that they are constructs, ideas" (p. 11).

Resonant leaders are eager to understand and embrace today's challenges as well as tomorrow's promise. They are willing to deal with whatever realistically may happen, yet are unflagging in their commitment to personal values, without being locked into narrow-minded or narcissistic ways of viewing the world (Carroll, 2007; McKee et al., 2008; Daft, 2008). By examining the ways in which curriculum directors utilize mindful approaches in their work, we can help leaders to avoid the dangers of dissonant leadership. Mindfulness, as Heemsbergen (2004) explains, is both a discipline and an attitude of the mind. He explains that, in order to be a successful leader, individuals must stay critically informed and be willing to see the world in its reality rather than how one would like it to be. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) support that notion by adding, "successfully managing the inherent stress of leadership over time enables us to leverage our strengths and compensate for our shortcomings, even as things are tough" (p. 19).

Understanding the ways in which curriculum directors utilize mindful approaches to navigate the frequent changes and stress they face in their work, the reader can begin to understand what actions he or she might take in sustaining their own resonant leadership. In thinking about the mindfulness and leadership connection, Heemsbergen (2004) writes that leaders must be interested in new concepts and ideas in their organizations to stay mindful and sustain that effective leadership. Curriculum directors are critical in helping students and teachers work and learn at high levels. They have a crucial role in becoming mindful themselves and in modeling mindfulness for those they work with on a daily basis.

Daft (2008) states, "a leader with a positive self-image who displays certainty about his or her own ability fosters confidence among followers, gains respect and

admiration, and meets challenges" (p. 39). The notion that a positive self-image can create excitement and commitment in other individuals is extremely powerful. In describing the best leaders, Boyatzis and McKee (2005) agree that the best leaders are not only highly motivated, but they share that positivity, sparking the same positive energy and enjoyment in those around them. Mindful individuals enjoy a positive mindset that can help them to be successful in their work. "Whatever mindsets or paradigms we choose determine the form of our perceptions, which in turn shape our decisions, actions, experiences, social systems, worlds, and futures" (Heemsbergen, 2004, p. 32). Understanding the benefits of mindful approaches to leadership is critical to creating an educational system that will create leaders and learners for the future.

Research Questions

A key part of the qualitative research study was the development of a grand tour question (Yin, 2010), which establishes a broad topic without the threat of researcher bias with regards to questioning. The grand tour question that guided my work in this study was, "How is the phenomenon of mindfulness manifested in the work of curriculum directors?" It was my hope that, by asking this question, I could first come to understand the curriculum directors' experiences with successful leadership so that I could better understand how mindfulness helps them to shape that success.

In addition to the grand tour question (Yin, 2010) used to guide the study, procedural subquestions (Creswell, 2007) were developed to elicit greater in-depth answers from interview participants. Through the use of procedural subquestions (Creswell, 2007), I was able to identify the major concerns and issues to be resolved. Procedural subquestions (see Appendix D) that shaped my research include:

Mindfulness Quality: Creation of New Categories

1.   How do you approach your work as a curriculum director?

2.   To what extent is reflection helpful to your work?

3.   How do you tailor your approach for the different stakeholders you work

with each day?

4.   How skilled are you at perceiving your feelings and emotions in your

work?

5.   When faced with a challenge, how do you go about meeting it?

6.   What are the ways you handle the stress of this position?

7.   What impacts your decision-making skills?

Mindfulness Quality: Openness to New Information

1.   What kinds of information do you use to guide/inform your work?

2.   Can you describe how you stay focused on your work?

3.   How have you recognized change in yourself and others?

4.   Do you think feedback is important to your position? Why?

5.   How do you use your past experiences to guide your work?

6.   What are the factors that can prevent you from giving you full attention to

a task at hand?

7.   In what ways are you attune to the feelings of others?

8.   In the light of an ever-changing political landscape, how do you know

who to listen to in your work?

Mindfulness Quality: Awareness of More Than One Perspective

1.   How have you sought the opinions and thoughts of others?

2. How do others know when you are listening and/or interested?

3. What is/are the major advantage(s) to multiple perspectives?

4. What is/are the major advantage(s) to multiple perspectives?

5. What characteristics do you think lead to a culture where multiple perspectives can safely be shared?

6. When, in your position as curriculum director, is it important to consider the perspectives of others?

7. Do you think your vision for curriculum leadership is or can be compromised when you consider the perspectives of others?

8. What skills do you need to possess to be successful in gathering input?

Summary

Peter Senge (1990), in describing the critical work of leaders in dynamic organizations, writes, "they are responsible for *building organizations* where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models—that is, they are responsible for learning" (p. 340). Never has this quote meant more than it does for today's leaders. Educational leaders should feel compelled to first become learners themselves; capable of thinking mindfully about the individuals and the organization they work for on a daily basis. For, as Dweck (2006) writes, "you can still be in the process of learning from your mistakes until you deny them" (p. 37).

My greatest hope, through this research, was that the reader could come to a deeper understanding of the power of mindfulness in leadership and how mindfulness could be used to unleash greater potential for successful leadership. After all, "a mindful

leader is one who is consciously attentive to the nature of intelligence in the process of influencing others toward the achievement of goals" (Dickmann & Stanford-Blair, 2009, p. 51). For those leaders who are mindfully aware of their own leadership, they act in ways that empower themselves and those around them to much higher levels of productive work and learning.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

To understand more about mindfulness as it relates to sustaining effective leadership over time, it was important to examine pertinent literature. The literature review is important for many reasons, all of which support the notion that I have given consideration to all of the information that exists to the date of the research study. Galvan (2006) explains that researchers conducting literature reviews must clearly communicate to readers that a comprehensive and up-to-date review has been done for the topic and that they fully understand what they have read.

In writing about this important part of the research process, Creswell (2009) explains that literature reviews serve several purposes that aid the researcher in his or her work. First, the literature review should reaffirm the importance of, or the need for, of the study that is being conducted. This is accomplished when the researcher explains the gaps in the existing literature that will be filled by the results of his or her study. As Marshall and Rossman (2010) explain, "researchers develop an argument, throughout the literature review, by identifying the literatures that are useful, and demonstrating that some literacies are dated, limited, or leave some questions unanswered" (p. 79). In other words, the literature review process can indicate that there is a true need to understand more about the topic by identifying such a need.

A second and equally important goal of the literature review, according to Creswell (2009) is that, "it provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study as well as a benchmark for comparing the results with other findings" (p. 25). Also,

as Marshall and Rossman (2010) explain, the literature review can establish how the research could potentially be significant for updating or improving existing policy and practice. By reviewing the available information and sources, the researcher can establish that more knowledge about the topic could improve practice for individuals or organizations.

For these reasons, the literature review is an important step in the research process that must be done in a thorough manner. Creswell (2007) reiterates the need for the literature review, pointing out that it provides the rationale for the problem and establishes one's study within ongoing literature about the topic. For some qualitative researchers, though, questions exist as to the best time in the research process to conduct the literature review. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain that they believe the literature review process is enhanced when researchers have spent some time in the field before reviewing related literature. My current and previous experiences in the field of educational administration, and having served as a district curriculum director, have given me the background I need to better understand and be informed by the literature review process. These opportunities have given me the chance to see how educational leaders can operate from a mindful perspective.

Challenges of Educational Leadership

The field of educational leadership continues to be a challenging, yet elusive topic for individuals to understand. Forms of management and organization that just a few years ago were effective, are now simply obsolete (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Researchers, in their quest to better understand and make sense of leadership, often shed light on successful leadership behaviors, but the question becomes whether those behaviors can

be applied with similar results in other leadership situations. Rosenbach and Taylor

(2006) write, "leadership is widely discussed and studied but continues to remain an

elusive and hazy concept. Although the study of leadership has emerged as a legitimate

discipline, one still finds little agreement about what leadership really is" (p. 1).

Publications in leadership or management sections of a bookstore will yield hundreds of

books promoting the key leadership behaviors needed to be a successful leader. For some

individuals, however, making sense of these books and leadership tips is futile in helping

them to develop and maintain successful leadership, as they simply do not seek renewal

in their jobs.

Educational leaders face a challenging and ever changing society and

environment where they must constantly work to balance the demands they face in their

personal and professional lives. As McKee et al. (2008) describe it, "as we attempt to

respond to the many demands placed on us in very uncertain environments, our stress

mounts past the point that our bodies are quipped to handle it physically, psychologically,

or emotionally" (p. 57). And, as McKee and colleagues (2008) explain, while most of us

have learned how to respond and cope with the stress in our lives, over time these

responses are no longer helpful and may not be as effective as they once were. The

challenge then becomes trying to create and maintain a sense of balance in a world where

situations, individuals, and the context change rapidly.

The reality, however, is that many leaders, like myself, continue to struggle to

find this balance, and in doing so are losing focus of their true leadership gifts. The result

is a sense of frustration with and a general disregard for effective leadership practices. In

their book, Boyatzis and McKee (2005) describe how our habits of mind, otherwise

described as "defensive routines," protect or distract us from our current and true emotional state. Breton and Largent (1996) agree, describing how defensive routines limit the ability for concerns or confusions to surface and ultimately divert our energies into preserving our image rather than helping us to deal with our own realities. The result is that, while intellectually and emotionally we understand that we need to change our attitudes or behaviors, somehow we can't deal with our reality and end up stuck and resistant to change.

Many researchers, however, point out that in order to cope effectively with the constant stress and difficulty that can have a negative effect on leaders, these individuals must instead cultivate and utilize productive habits of mind and behavior (McKee et al., 2008; Stanford-Blair & Dickmann, 2005). Among the behaviors that sustain effective leadership are reflection, honesty and self-assessment. These behaviors can ultimately lead to the renewal that leader's seek to improve their leadership. Langer (1997) believes that, "in the perspective of every person lies a lens through which we may better understand ourselves" (p. 135). When leaders use reflective behaviors, and thus examine their own role in this process of renewal, they are very likely to maintain successful, resonant leadership over time.

As the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu (1997) once wrote, "knowing others is intelligence, knowing yourself is wisdom" (p. 44). Good leaders know the power that comes from examining one's life and being open to possibilities for improvement. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) share that great leaders are mindful individuals who seek to live consciously, with a full awareness of how their actions impact others, nature, and society. But, knowing others and knowing yourself cannot be separate acts, but rather a

progression of growth towards resonant leadership. This sense of enlightenment, as referenced in the quote above, is also referred to as self-awareness, or your ability to recognize your own emotions as they happen and their effect on oneself or others (McKee et al., 2008). Ultimately, working closely and becoming familiar with those around you will, by nature, help you to learn more about yourself. And, by learning more about yourself through purposeful reflection, you can begin to better understand the factors that will help you to reach and sustain successful leadership.

As Boyatzis and McKee (2005) acknowledge, leaders who are successfully able to manage the stress of leadership over time are thus better able to find leverage in utilizing their strengths and can easily overcome what the leader or others might identify as their shortcomings. They further point out that both resonant and dissonant leadership behaviors emerge because the emotions that leaders face, and try to manage, are contagious. Without the ability to stay positive and to be mindful, leaders can quickly become dissonant. After all, "attending carefully to our human environment and relationships enables us to see details we may have missed and generate more accurate ideas about what is really going on" (p. 120).

Perhaps Goleman et al. (2002) put it most succinctly when they said, "no creature can fly with just one wing. Gifted leadership occurs where heart and head—feeling and thought—meet. These are the two wings that allow a leader to soar" (p. 26). As we study the concept of mindfulness and how leaders can use it to sustain effective leadership, we must also look closely at leadership that occurs from our thoughts (the head) and our actions as well (the heart). The result is that we must study and understand the causes and implications of mindlessness, habits of mind, mindfulness, and emotional intelligence.

Mindlessness

To better understand mindfulness and its benefits to successful leadership, we must first examine and understand the characteristics of and reasons for mindlessness, and the subsequent cost it can take on leadership. Leaders today face many difficult challenges that can leave them feeling agonizing stress and emotions. Thompson (2010) reminds us that, "prolonged stress causes a vicious cycle of negative physiological and psychological impact on the body and on a leader's ability to make good decisions (p. 117). As a result, instead of dealing with the pressures appropriately, many leaders choose coping measures that, in essence, shut them down and limit their success (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005; Goleman et al., 2002; Ogden & Meyer, 2007).

Langer (2000) explains mindlessness by writing, "when we are in a state of mindlessness, we act like automaton who have been programmed to act according to the sense our behavior made in the past, rather than the present" (p. 220). Langer (1989) further defines mindlessness through three categorizations of behavior. The first categorization, entrapment by category, happens when individuals rely too rigidly on categories and distinctions they have made in the past to guide their current actions. According to Langer (1989), "we build our own and our shared realities and then we become victims of them—blind to the fact that they are constructs, ideas" (p. 11). The result is, as Langer (1989) describes, a sort humdrum approach to looking at the world.

The second categorization of behavior in mindlessness, known as automatic behavior, occurs when we take in and use limited signals from the our environment while at the same time ignoring other signals that try to penetrate as well (Langer, 1989). This type of behavior can be characterized by doing something out of habit that you have done

many times before. Langer (1989) supports this notion by saying that, "habit, or the tendency to keep on with behavior that has been repeated over time, naturally implies mindlessness" (p. 16).

The third categorization, which is acting from a single perspective, occurs when we let specific ideas in our mind, but then quickly shut our minds down and not let in any new signals no matter the source (Langer, 1989). This type of behavior has also been referred to as having tunnel vision. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) agree that an intense focus on any one area in particular can cause a kind of mindfulness when individuals have an inaccurate view of how others perceive them or the world around them.

Reasons for mindlessness. The source of mindlessness in individuals, often past habits or paradigms, is important in understanding why mindlessness occurs. As Peter Senge (1990) writes, "mental models are deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action" (p. 8). Heemsbergen (2004) points out that, "we live in the present with a map drawn in the past. Our mental models are worn hand-me-downs. These models and maps also carry with them built-in action programs that are past due" (p. 31). Because these mental model are so ingrained, "we can be blinded by our expertise, our mindsets, filters, paradigms, beliefs, orthodoxies, and rules of engagement, many of which we are not conscious or aware of" (Heemsbergen, 2004, p. ix). Without even knowing, the results of being mired down in these mindsets are often fatigue, conflict, and burnout (Langer, 1989).

Given this understanding of existing mental models, it is easy to understand Langer (1989) as she explains how individuals have a tendency to keep on with behavior

that has been repeated over the course of time. This very behavior, called repetition, is one reason that mindlessness occurs. Langer (1989) writes, "as we repeat a task over and over again and become better at it, the individual parts of the task move out of our consciousness" (p. 20). Langer (2000) further clarified repetition by writing, "if we repeat something over and over, we come to rely on our mind-set for how to accomplish the goal" (p. 220). The resulting mindlessness occurs when our ultimate desires and beliefs fall victim to a mentality of thoughtless repetition.

A second cause of mindlessness, according to Langer (1989), is called premature cognitive commitments, which occur when individuals first encounter something and form a mindless mindset about it, and hold that very mindset for years to come. Langer (2000) clarifies this concept by stating, "if when first given information we process it without questioning alternative ways the information could be understood, we take it in mindlessly" (p. 220). Langer (1989) further explains that mindless individuals allow for only one predetermined use of the information they take in and ignore or fail to explore other possible uses or applications. With premature cognitive commitments, people take cues from what they have already learned and continue them, regardless of the context in which it occurs (Langer, 1997).

Mindlessness can happen for many reasons. As Heemsbergen (2004) states, "whatever mindsets or paradigms we choose determine the form of our perceptions, which in turn shape our decisions, actions, experiences, social systems, worlds, and futures" (p. 32). Acknowledging the problem with our paradigms or mental models, Heemsbergen (2004) writes, "the problem is that while we have the ability to think in new paradigms, our minds are optimized to think with existing paradigms" (p. 33). The

challenge to think with new paradigms can help leaders to overcome the costs of mindlessness to their organization.

Costs of mindlessness. The costs of mindlessness in any organization manifest themselves in both personal and organizational costs. On a personal level, human beings are emotional beings, and as such, we often ignore the reality of our situation. Organizations, on the other hand, can be too rigid and too conservative in their approaches, rendering learning about the reality at hand difficult (Kotter, 1996). The result, according to Boyatzis and McKee (2005) is that individuals, "see what we think, rather than think about what we see" (p. 124). Senge (1990) confirms this notion by writing, "more specifically, new insights fail to get put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works, images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting" (p. 163).

The first, and most personal cost of mindlessness is, according to Langer (1989) a narrow self-image. Characterized by a focus on outcomes rather than process, an individual's self-image is narrowed as they are unable to think outside of the box at their solutions that expand their limits or abilities. The result, according to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), is a downward emotional spiral where individuals use self-talk to focus on their limits rather than their possibilities. Langer (1989) confirms this when she writes, "the consequence of such negative mindsets is an interactive spiral…gradually wearing us down" (p. 92).

Dweck (2006) further articulates the notion of a narrow self-image by explaining how fixed mindsets can frame the thinking for individuals who are struggling in their leadership. These mindsets can easily guide each person's interpretation of the world

around them in a debilitating manner. She describes individuals with a fixed mindset who, in the process of learning, are only focused on the outcome rather than the approach they take to their learning. Dweck (2006) states, "the fixed mindset limits achievement. It fills people's minds with inferior thoughts, it makes effort disagreeable, and it leads to inferior learning strategies. What's more, it makes the people into judges instead of allies" (p. 67). Boyatzis and McKee (2005) would call this narrow self-image a defensive routine that serves to protect the individual from the realities of the world around them.

A second cost of mindlessness, unintended cruelty, results from a lack of attention to the novelty of every situation or activity we attend to in our world (Langer, 1989). Langer (1989) writes, "if we fall into a routine rather than make decisions anew each time, we can get mindlessly seduced into activities we wouldn't engage in otherwise" (p. 49). The consequence of such beliefs and actions is a lack of creative thought, the inability to innovate, and an overreliance on your natural intuition. "When our minds are set on one thing or on one way of doing things, mindlessly determined in the past, we blot out intuition and miss much of the present world around us" (Langer, 1989, p. 118). Goleman et al. (2002) explain that these behaviors simply become automatic over time and individuals are unable to break the habit of these responses,

Heemsbergen (2004) supports the notion of unintended cruelty, by describing what he calls inattentional blindness, or a lack of awareness in detecting signal changes as they occur. He writes, "the cost of inattentional blindness can be seen in the limit of the leader's ability to make good decisions, recognize changes in other people, and see things from a variety of perspectives" (p. 49). Simply put, the leader possesses a lack of awareness that information is available and relevant to one's context (Dickmann &

Stanford-Blair, 2009). This debilitating behavior indicates a lack of awareness in leaders in detecting changes in the environment. The result, according to Heemsbergen (2004), is that, "we are blind to what *we don't know we don't know*" (p. ix).

For individuals, mindlessness can result in a third, and devastating cost called loss of control, or a learned helplessness (Langer, 1989). Loss of control happens when individuals experience repeated failure as they seek new ways of understanding the world around them (Langer, 1989). Dweck (2006) likens their loss of control to those individual with a fixed mindset who, when given the opportunity to overcome a difficult situation, refuse to look at new solutions or ideas. Dweck (2006) summarizes the fixed mindset well when she writes, "and in the fixed mindset, a loser is forever" (p. 58).

The fourth, and greatest cost of mindlessness to organizations and their leaders comes in the stunted potential that results when self-image narrows, we act in automatic ways, and a sort of learned helplessness is developed (Langer, 1989). With regards to the mindlessness and stunted potential, Siegel (2010) states, "without mindsight, people become objects, rather than subjects themselves with minds like ours worthy of respecting and even knowing" (p. 257). Unfortunately, many good leaders never get the chance to truly lead because they lack a sense of respect and trust in their own work. In the end, according to Langer (1989), "whether we are very familiar or we think we know about a situation, we notice only the minimal clues necessary to carry out the proper scenario" (p. 34).

By understanding the three characteristics of mindlessness, the reasons why mindlessness occurs, and the costs of mindfulness on individuals and organizations, it becomes clear that mindless individuals treat information as though it were context-free,

that is, true regardless of the context in which it occurs (Langer, 1989). Langer (1989) further goes on to say that, "mindlessness is the application of yesterday's business solutions to today's problems" (p. 152). Unfortunately, mindlessness not only prevents us from making new, novel choices, but also can have a costly effect on leaders and the organizations they lead. But Siegel (2010) insists, "we can look at our auto pilot behaviors and come to a deeper understanding that may permit us to behave differently in the future" (p. 33). "To move from where we are now to where we want to be, we need to have a sense of how others see us, and how that image matches (or does not match) with how we see ourselves" (p. 92).

Mindfulness

Whereas mindlessness was about the consistent application of past solutions to new problems, Langer (1989) states, "mindfulness is attunement to today's demands to avoid tomorrow's difficulties" (p. 152). As leaders seek improvement in their personal and professional lives, mindfulness can help them learn new abilities that will help them thrive as leaders. As Goleman et al. (2002) asserts, "being mindful of learning opportunities when they arise—and spontaneously seizing them as a way to practice new abilities—offers ways to improve more quickly" (p. 140). Langer (1997) reiterates this by adding, "at every moment in a mindful state, we are learning something, we are changing in some way, we are interacting with the environment so that both we and the environment are changed" (p. 137). To create this positive change, it is important to understand the characteristics and benefits of, as well as the rationale for, mindful approaches to leadership.

According to Boyatzis and McKee (2005), "mindfulness means being awake, aware, and attentive" (p. 116). Mindful individuals ultimately live in a state of full awareness of one's self, others, and the context in which we are working or living at the time (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Langer (1989) poses three key qualities of a mindful state of being:

1. Creation of new categories.

2. Openness to new information.

3. Awareness of more than one perspective.

According to Langer (1989) mindfulness means the continual creation of new categories. In contrast to mindlessness, where individuals are often trapped by categories that have been created in their minds, the creation of new categories occurs when individuals pay close attention to both the situation and the context in which they are living or working and subsequently make new distinctions that enhance learning (Langer, 1989). Langer (1997) asserts, "drawing distinctions allows one to see more sides of an issue or subject, which is more likely to result in greater interest" (p. 76). And, an important part of drawing those distinctions is understanding the context in which you are living or working.

"Mindfulness enables us to be sensitive to context and to notice the present. We remain open to new ways in which information may differ in various situations" (Langer, 1997, p. 87). Students (or adults) learning information must be open to factors that could operate in a new context. If we simply memorize the known past, we are not preparing ourselves for the as-yet-to-be known future. According to Siegel (2010):

Openness implies that we are receptive to whatever comes to our awareness and don't cling to preconceived ideas about how things 'should' be. We let go of expectations and receive things as they are, rather than trying to make them how we want them to be. Openness enables us to sense things clearly. It gives us the power to recognize restrictive judgments and release our minds from their grip. (p. 32)

Heemsbergen (2004), in writing about habits of mindful practitioners, supports this notion of the creation of new categories. He writes about the beginner's mind and tells how these mindful individuals see with fresh eyes and are willing to set aside their own categories and examine the bias they may have in their thinking. Heemsbergen (2004) summarizes well the challenge of examining one's own bias by writing, "mindful leaders tolerate making conscious their previously nonconscious actions and errors" (p. 61).

The second characteristic of mindfulness, openness to new information, describes how mindful individuals actively attend to changed signals in their environment, whether through listening or watching, and in effect improve their ability to make sense of the world in novel ways (Langer, 1989). McKee et al. (2008) state, "people who deliberately practice mindfulness are consciously self-aware and self-monitoring; they are open and attentive to other people and to the world around them" (p. 45). This type of self-awareness is critical to developing a mindful perspective.

Whereas a fixed mindset described those individuals with a narrow self-image, Dweck (2006) describes individuals who are open to new information as having a growth mindset. In describing the growth mindset, Dweck (2006) writes:

People with a growth mindset are constantly monitoring what's going on, but

their internal monologue is not about judging themselves and others in this way.

Certainly, they're sensitive to positive and negative information, but they're

attuned to its implications for learning and constructive action. (p. 209)

Dweck (2006) best summarizes the value of a growth mindset when she writes, "this

growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate

through your efforts" (p. 7). Simply put, individuals with a growth mindset value the

process by which they learn about the world around them, not by the outcome of their

learning. Langer (1989) reinforces the importance of an outcome-oriented focus by

arguing that it not only sharpens our judgment but also makes us feel better about

ourselves.

Siegel (2010) affirms this openness to new information with something he calls

observation. Observation is, as he describes, the ability to perceive oneself while

experiencing an event. This type of self-awareness or self-perception, while difficult to

establish, can help individuals to learn more about themselves and how they make sense

of new situations. "Metacognition and metaperception allow one to assess one's ability to

identify information needs and to employ strategies for sense-making and decision-

making" (Heemsbergen, 2004, p. 102).

The third characteristic of mindfulness, awareness of more than one perspective,

requires individuals to be open not only to new information, but to the varied

perspectives and beliefs of the individuals around them (Langer, 1989). Heemsbergen

(2004) asserts that a leaders ability to listen and to learn from others insights and views is

a direct indicator of his or her ability to grow in that position. And, this ability does not

just extend to individuals, but to organizations as well. Gardner (2007) states, "it is evident that organizations and communities work more effectively when the individuals within them seek to understand one another (despite their differences), to help one another and to work together for common goals" (p. 116).

Langer (1989) further elaborates that with awareness of others' views comes to realization that there are as many different viewpoints as there are individuals. This can cause frustration for many individuals, who try to make sense out of their new learning. Goleman et al. (2002) reiterates that this kind of awareness does not mean that leaders will compromise their own views as they learn about others' perspective. Quite the opposite will happen. "When leaders are able to grasp other people's feelings and perspectives, they access a potent emotional guidance system that keeps what they say and do on track" (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 50). Mindfulness actually serves to reinforce the leader's decision-making skills because they have more information in a timely and accurate manner.

In summarizing the characteristics of mindfulness, it is not possible to think about the individual benefits without realizing the benefits to the entire organization. McKee et al. (2008) remind us:

> Leaders lead people, who are constantly assessing and trying to make sense of these leaders and their experiences. It is important, therefore, to stay current and attuned to the changing emotional reality of your groups, relationships, and organizations, as shifts within them will deeply affect how your leadership is experienced. (p. 146)

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) share that, "mindfulness requires connection with other people. You cannot really understand others unless you are in contact with them" (p. 136). Mindfulness can help leaders to sustain effective leadership that builds meaningful relationships with those around them. As Gardner (2007) so vividly reminds us of the work of leaders everywhere, he writes, "rather than ignoring differences, being inflamed by them, or seeking to annihilate them through love or hate, I call on human beings to accept the differences, learn to live with them, and value those who belong to other cohorts" (p. 107).

      Benefits of mindfulness. Achieving a mindful state of being as a leader is neither easy nor quick. It is a process by which individuals grow and learn about their world through self-assessment and self-perception. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) write, "like 'self-development,' mindfully attending to all aspects of our humanity enables us to reach our full potential as individuals while becoming more fully engaged with people, with our communities, and with our environment" (p. 73). It is this potential that allows leaders to have more cognitive flexibility, creativity, and problem solving skills (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

      One of the most important benefits of mindfulness is that it reduces the devastating effects of mindlessness on the leadership capabilities of leaders and individuals within any organization. Heemsbergen (2004) reminds us, "the goal of mindfulness is to use a wide array of data and categories in order to make informed choices and decisions, thereby avoiding inattentional blindness" (p. 61). He calls this process of recognizing the value of new information, absorptive capacity. According to Heemsbergen (2004), "critical to leadership is absorptive capacity, a term which

describes the ability to recognize the value of new external information, assimilate it, and apply it" (p. 100). This is an example of the power of mindfulness to increase the leader's potential in maintaining successful leadership.

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) identify a second benefit of mindful thinking that is that attending mindfully to others effectually minimizes the distortion that leaders experience in understanding the reality of the situation in which they live or work. They recognize that the ability of leaders to see themselves as others see them, and to reflect upon their own internal beliefs and emotions, can be extremely difficult. Dweck (2006) believes that when leaders with a fixed mindset feel they are better than those they lead, and act on that belief, they begin to ignore the needs and the feelings of those around them. This ignorance towards the varied perspectives merely allows for dissonant leadership to continue. In describing growth mindset individuals, however, Dweck (2006) writes, "they're not constantly trying to prove they're better than others. Instead they're constantly trying to improve. Because of this, they can move forward with confidence that's grounded in the facts, not built in fantasies about their talent" (p. 110).

Perhaps Maxwell (2007) put it best when he said, "how you see the world around you is determined by who you are" (p. 92). After all, you are who you are because of your pre-existing lenses through which you have made sense of the world. Sergiovanni (1992) calls those habitual lenses mindscapes, defining them as the pictures that individuals hold in their head about how the world works. Sergiovanni (1992) writes, "they program what we believe counts, help create our realities, and provide a basis for decisions" (p. 8). He believes that these individual views of reality can lead individuals to behave vastly different ways (Sergiovanni, 1992). Mindfulness can help individuals to

avoid those lenses that so firmly guide our thinking and help us to broaden our understanding of the world around us.

Another benefit to mindfulness is the ability for individuals to build and maintain meaningful relationships with those they live and work with each day. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) acknowledge that as leaders take a mindful approach that considers others viewpoints and feelings, they are in turn building strong, trusting relationships with others. For leaders, even something as simple and fleeting as their voices, gestures, and posture can help build those resonant relationships with others. Siegel (2010) writes:

> When we attune to others, we allow our own internal state to shift, to come to resonate with the inner world of another. This resonance is at the heart of the important sense of "feeling felt" that emerges in close relationships. (p. 27)

While building resonant relationships as a leader is just one aspect of leadership, sustaining them over time cannot be taken lightly. McKee et al. (2008) explain, "creating and sustaining resonance in relationships requires paying attention to a number of powerful social realities that interact to form shared experience, norms, culture, aspirations, and emotion" (p. 181). Sustaining those relationships over time takes patience and persistence and, with the ability to see others for their strengths and skills, can make the meaningful relationship even stronger.

Rationale for mindfulness. Peter Senge (1990) believes, "the organizations that will truly excel in the future will be the organizations that discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at *all* levels in the organization" (p. 4). Mindfulness can be the vehicle by which leaders help not only their organization, but also themselves, to work and learn at high levels. Resonant leaders who are mindful possess a deep

understanding of themselves as a leader and thus act in ways that are not only meaningful, but inspiring as well (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Mindfulness is invaluable to helping the resonant leader to find the balance he or she needs to sustain this leadership over time. McKee et al. (2008) state, "when we attend mindfully to the clues and cues in our environment, we are more likely to manage ourselves in ways that allow us to achieve balance as we face life challenges" (p. 63). Finding balance is an important part of sustaining resonant leadership for all leaders. As Dickmann and Stanford-Blair (2009) assert, "Ultimately, mindful leadership aspires to the purpose of building and sustaining a mindful culture—a culture that collectively attends to the cultivation of intelligence" (p. 194).

In summary, the literature suggests that mindful practices are often the key to helping leaders to sustain successful, or resonant, leadership over time. Especially in the challenging world of education, and most notably educational leadership, smart, energized, and persistent leaders are needed to help improve the system. In these difficult times, leaders who are able to remain focused, with the ability to pay clear attention to the context in which they are living and working, will be able use their leadership strengths to continue to lead at high levels. Becoming more mindful in one's work and practice can be difficult, but the process begins with ourselves first. When leaders can recognize their own capacity for change, and model their new habits for those around them, they will begin to feel better about their work. Ultimately, mindfulness may increase flexibility, productivity, innovation, leadership ability, and satisfaction (Langer, 1989). These are the traits successful leaders know and use to sustain successful leadership. In the end, the

pursuit of mindfulness is an important one, as individuals and organizations alike cannot

afford the alternative kind of thinking.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Overview of Qualitative Research

To appreciate qualitative research is to understand the various ways that individuals participate in and view the world around them and make sense of their experiences. Curriculum directors today work in an ever-changing environment with constant demands to meet the not only state and federal legislation, but to meet the needs of a student population that is growing dramatically more diverse. In acknowledgement to the growing demands leaders and organizations face today, Flick (2006) writes, "rapid social change and the resulting diversification of life worlds are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives" (p. 12). As a result, qualitative research becomes an effective way to understand and make sense of the world around us.

There are multiple strengths to qualitative research methods (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2010; Merriam, 2009) each of which serve to strengthen the data that is collected in the study. An important strength of the qualitative research design is that researchers can utilize any one of a number of approaches to intensively study a phenomenon and learn more about what makes that phenomenon unique.

Perhaps it is best, however, to first understand what qualitative research is and why researchers choose this method to conduct their research. In describing the qualitative research process, Rossman and Rallis (2003) write:

Qualitative research begins with questions; **its ultimate purpose is learning**. To

inform the questions, the researcher collects data—the basic units or building

blocks of information. Data are images, sounds, words, and numbers. When data

are grouped into patterns, they become information. When information is put to

use or applied, it becomes knowledge. (p. 4)

Merriam (2009) writes, "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how

people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning

they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). They are interested in making sense of the

world through the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of those they study. Qualitative

researchers are in search of answers to their questions in the context of the real world

(Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Carrying out qualitative research is a complex process. Creswell (2007) points out

that this type of research takes time, involves an ambitious plan for data analysis, results

in lengthy reports, and often does not follow firm guidelines that can assist the researcher.

Ultimately, the qualitative researcher needs to think differently in order to find success.

As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) explain, "learning to do qualitative research means

unlearning this social construction of 'research,' and opening oneself to the possibility of

employing a different vocabulary and way of structuring the research process" (p. 4).

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) identify five features of qualitative research that help

to support a quality research experience. First, qualitative research is naturalistic in that it

uses "actual settings as the direct source of data…[as] qualitative researchers assume that

human behavior is significantly influenced by the setting in which it occurs, and…go to

that location" (pp. 4-5). Second, this type of research is descriptive and, "the data

collected take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers…[and] are particularly

important because qualitative methods enable researchers to study what people take for granted" (pp. 5-6). Third, according to the authors, "qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products" (p. 6). This emphasis on process can be especially beneficial as individuals seek to clarify the phenomenon they are studying. Fourth, qualitative research is an inductive process. Creswell (2007) writes, "the logic that the qualitative researcher follows is inductive, from the ground up, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer" (p. 19). Finally, according to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), meaning is the essential characteristic most concerning to the qualitative researcher. "Researchers who use this approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives…[also known as] *participant perspectives*" (p. 7). All of these characteristics are important to the development of a qualitative research project, but how they are used is up to the researcher. "The question is not whether a particular piece of research is or is not absolutely qualitative; rather it is an issue of degree" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 4).

Qualitative research can yield rich results for the researcher as he or she carefully studies the environment in which their study takes place. "Research is inquiry, deliberate study, a seeking to understand…and the more we study human affairs (as contrasted with physical mechanisms), the more we expect that things will work differently in different situations" (Stake, 2010, p. 13). The goal of my research is to clearly understand how curriculum directors experience and make sense of mindfulness in their lives. I am interested in this research in the hopes that myself and other leaders can understand the role of mindfulness in curriculum leadership. Stake (2010) reminds us of the value of qualitative research when he writes, "many people who do qualitative research want to

improve how things work. And empathy and advocacy are and should be part of the lifestyle of each researcher" (p. 14).

Phenomenological Research Design

Research design is a critical consideration that must be made prior to beginning a qualitative research project. Researchers should think of it like a checklist that one must review prior to leaving on a vacation or before heading out for the grocery store. "The process of designing a qualitative study emerges during inquiry, but it generally follows the pattern of scientific research" (Creswell, 2007, p. 51).

Qualitative researchers must consider several topics in the research design process before they proceed with the study. There is much value in doing this. As Marshall and Rossman (2010) explain,

> The research design section should demonstrate to the reader that the overall
> plan is sound and that the researcher is competent to undertake the research,
> capable of employing the chosen methods, and sufficiently self-aware and
> interested to sustain the effort necessary for the successful completion of the
> study. (p. 90)

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) write, "'design' is used in research to refer to the researcher's plan of how to proceed" (p. 54). "How they proceed is based on theoretical assumptions,…on data-collection traditions,…and on generally stated substantive questions" (p. 55). Ultimately, the design should be created in such a thorough way the researcher clearly understands how to proceed. "After all, the design must convince reviewers that the researcher is able to handle a complex and personal process, often

making decision in the field during the unfolding, cascading, rolling, and emerging" (Marshall & Rossman, 2010, p. 90).

For this study of mindfulness, I have chosen to conduct a phenomenological study. According to Creswell (2007), a phenomenological study describes for the researcher the meaning that several individuals have for a shared or lived experience. "From the philosophy of phenomenology comes a focus on the experience itself and how experiencing something is transformed into consciousness" (Merriam, 2009, p. 24). The phenomenological study ultimately serves to get to the essence of the experience of some phenomenon.

First used as a philosophical tradition by German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl, the main assumption of phenomenological research was that individuals could only know what they experience by understanding the perceptions and meanings that others around us attached to it (Patton, 2002, p. 105). As times have changed and phenomenology has been subject to various interpretations, one thing remains the same. That which stayed the same is the idea that phenomenological research is the study of a lived experience, which functions to provide the researcher with a deeper understanding of the meaning of our everyday experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Perhaps Patton (2002) says it best when he writes, "this requires…thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (p. 104).

Ultimately, as Moustakas (1994) writes, "in phenomenological studies the investigator abstains from making suppositions, focuses on a specific topic freshly and naively, constructs a question or problem to guide the study, and derives findings that

will provide the basis for further research and reflection (p. 47). He further goes on to explain the value of this type of research by writing:

> Phenomenology, step by step, attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way, not threatened by the customs, beliefs, and prejudices of normal science, by the habits of the natural world or by knowledge based on unreflected everyday experience. (p. 41)

With the goal of getting at the essence of human experience, phenomenological research can provide rich detail about various areas of study. Researchers, however, must work to plan for and adhere to the core values of phenomenological research.

Qualitative researchers conducting a phenomenological study must first think of their research design from a broad view, identifying their own thoughts and biases, in order to begin their research. "Qualitative research begins with assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens, and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 37). Here, it is acknowledged that both the meaning and the process are important to understanding the phenomenon. "Researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). This broad view of the study helps to focus thoughts on one's own beliefs before heading into the field to collect data.

There are many different data collection opportunities available to researchers that can each yield different types of responses and information from the study participants. Therefore, researchers must next focus on data collection traditions that could possibly

help to yield the information they are seeking. To avoid the collection of data from one data source, researchers must review the data sources and make sense of how they could enhance their study (Creswell, 2007). Various sources of information include journals, art, poetry and music that can help to enhance the researchers understanding of the concept they are studying.

Finally, qualitative researchers focus on the development of generally stated, yet substantive questions that will help participants to share all of the rich details of their experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). While some researchers may have more structured questions, other researchers may prefer to ask very general questions. Regardless of the structure of questions one chooses to ask, as a researcher, I must think clearly about the people that will be studied and whether or not the questions that are asked will illicit the kind of answers that will help me succeed in studying mindfulness in the work of curriculum directors.

Selection and Recruitment of Participants

A critical part of the research study is the careful selection of participants who will provide key information to help the researcher successfully answer their research question. Creswell (2007) reiterates this by writing, "an important step in the process is to find people or places to study and to gain access to and establish rapport with participants so that they will provide good data" (p. 118). While there are a wide variety of ways in which a researcher could look at which subjects to choose for their study, careful attention to the individuals selected will only serve to strengthen the study.

In a phenomenological study, according to Creswell (2007), participants must all have experienced the phenomenon that is being studied and be able to explain or

articulate, in detail, their experiences. Therefore, it is important that a purposeful sample is selected so as to best inform the researcher about the problem that is being studied. Patton (2002) further clarifies the idea of purposeful sampling writing, "information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling" (p. 230). Maxwell (2005) supports the use of purposeful sampling by describing it as a strategy in which particular individuals are selected deliberately to provide information that cannot be collected from other subjects.

In his writing about purposeful sampling, Creswell (2007) explains, "one general guideline in qualitative research is not only to study a few…individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studied" (p. 126). Dukes (1984) recommends studying between 3 and 10 subjects in phenomenological research. Creswell (2007) further supports this sample size by explaining, "the intent in qualitative research is not to generalize…but to elucidate the particular, the specific" (p. 126). For the purpose of this study, a small sample of seven curriculum directors were chosen to be studied with regards to their experiences with mindfulness in their leadership positions. Mertens (2010) cautions that with a small sample size, "in such cases, the researcher needs to plan a sample of sufficient size to make the disaggregation meaningful" (p. 415). The individuals selected for this study represented a purposeful sample (Patton, 2002) and, at seven individuals in size, sufficiently informed my understanding of the application of mindfulness in their curriculum leadership positions.

With the point of phenomenological research being the ability to describe the meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007), or in this case, mindfulness, it was

important that the individuals chosen held the position of curriculum director for their public school district. The seven individuals selected from public school districts in this Midwest state all held the position of curriculum director for their district. In larger public school districts, this individual may oversee additional administrators assigned to work with curriculum matters while, in smaller districts, this individual may be the sole person responsible for all curriculum activities in the district. Thus, individuals who work in the curriculum department of a selected school district but are not the leader of the department were excluded from the study. This was not because their experiences in the field of curriculum were not important—indeed quite the opposite—but because we were seeking the experiences of those in administrative curriculum leadership positions.

For purposes of this study, the decision was made to conduct research in an area surrounding the capital city of a Midwest state. Using an educational directory published by that state's Department of Education, the names of all public school districts immediately surrounding the capital city were identified. From that list, seven school districts of varying sizes were identified from which the curriculum directors were chosen for this study. The district representing the employer of the researcher was removed from this list to avoid any potential conflicts of interest and to avoid distortion of the interview process because of his relationship with the participant (Seidman, 1991). Of the seven districts subsequently selected, the district with the largest total enrollment had 8,795 students and the district with the smallest student population had 2,109 students. The public school district representing the median of the seven school populations had 6,206 students. Five of the school districts chosen could best be described as suburban school districts and two would most likely be considered rural districts.

I chose to study curriculum directors for both personal and professional reasons. Personally, I was very interested in understanding more about the role of mindfulness in improving the leadership skills of curriculum directors. From both a stress management and a leadership success perspective, I wanted to learn if or how mindfulness was used in their work as leaders. As a former pre-school–twelfth grade curriculum director, who was also simultaneously a building principal, I experienced first-hand how difficult it was to do either job well. The resulting stress from this role was a factor in my feeling unsuccessful as a leader. As a building principal working with curriculum, or as an individual hoping to move into a curriculum position, studying curriculum directors will help to prepare me to deal with the challenges that lie ahead in the field of educational leadership.

From a professional perspective, curriculum directors are facing an ever-changing system where demands from federal and state legislation, businesses and organizations, post-secondary institutions, parents, and research for greater teacher accountability and improved student achievement are growing. Add to that the knowledge that curriculum directors serve a key role in producing successful citizens prepared for the 21st Century and it becomes easy to see why studying curriculum directors and their ability to use mindfulness to sustain successful, or resonant, leadership becomes so important.

As a requirement for conducting research using human subjects, I worked to ensure that the Drake University Institutional Review Board approved my research study. According to the Drake University website (2010), "this [IRB] committee is responsible for reviewing all research proposals involving human subjects in order to protect and

assure the rights of research subjects as defined by ethical considerations and government guidelines" (http://www.drake.edu/academics/irb/admin2.php).

The IRB application process involved submitting electronic documentation of the proposal detailing all aspects of the research study. For example, information explained how participants would be invited to participate in this study, however, participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also provided a written document outlining the purpose of the study, their rights as the participant, and confirmation that their information would remain anonymous throughout the entire process. This anonymity is critical to the trust that is to be built between the researcher and the participant.

With the participants for my research identified from the educational directory, I began by making a personal phone call to each individual to request their participation in my study. I introduced myself and my affiliation with Drake University and explained the reason for the call and the purpose of my study. Were participants to express their interest in participating in the study, a time was be set up for me to meet with them in person to explain the research study process.

Participant Profiles

A total of seven individuals were chosen for participation in this study. A brief description of the participants and their backgrounds is provided to help provide perspectives related to their experiences in education. For each participant a pseudonym is provided to ensure confidentiality and to protect their identities. They are presented in alphabetical order, not in order of their participation in the study.

Betsy. Throughout her high school years, Betsy knew she wanted to be a teacher. She felt this way as a result of her own successful high school experience. After teaching at both the junior high and high school level, Betsy began to take coursework for her degree in educational administration. Now, with over 20 years in education, Betsy currently serves as curriculum director for her district. In addition to her curriculum responsibilities, Betsy is responsible for special education programming and professional development at the district level.

Cheryl. Having served the education field for over 20 years, Cheryl's passion for helping all students to work and learn at high levels started when she was in college. Having worked closely to help a close family member find success in school during difficult times, Cheryl made a commitment to providing the same support to students in the districts where she worked. With responsibility for curriculum, instruction, and assessment matters, as well as several special programs, she attributes her success to those individuals she has worked with over the year who have provided mentoring and support in helping her to work at high levels.

Chris. Having held a wide variety of positions over the past 30 years in education, Chris has always been conscientious about working to provide the best teaching and learning experiences he could to those he worked with, whether they be children or adults. With experiences at the elementary and middle school levels, Chris has always found a strong interest in doing curriculum work at the building and district level. This strong interest in curriculum has led him to his current position working with curriculum and instruction for his district.

Donita. With just over 20 years in education, Donita has experienced teaching and learning at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. These experiences have helped to shape her educational philosophy and her love of helping both students and adults alike to work and learn at high levels. Having developed a love of teaching during a practicum course in her sophomore year of college, Donita has served students in both general and special education settings. After pursuing her degree in administration, Donita led teachers and staff at both the building and district levels. She enjoys the challenge of new experiences and credits her success to the variety of experiences she has had in her career.

Jackie. With just over 15 years in education, Jackie is currently serving as curriculum director for her district. In this position, she is focused on school improvement efforts at all levels. Her previous experiences in education have helped to shape her philosophy for teaching and learning. With experiences at both the elementary and middle school levels, in both general and special education, she understands the importance of helping all students to work and learn at high levels.

Mary Ann. With a variety of experiences to shape her educational philosophy, Mary Ann has served both students and adults at a variety of levels during her 20 plus years in education. At least half of those 20 plus years were spent as a teacher and the other half as an administrator at both the building and the district level. With a strong belief that all children can learn, Mary Ann serves as her district's curriculum director. She values her time spent working with teachers who work with the children she wants to help succeed.

Shirley. Having started her career as a high school teacher, little did Shirley know that nearly 4 decades later she would still be working to help students and adults to work and learn at high levels. With both national and international teaching experiences, Shirley has developed a true love of lifelong learning that has served her well in her position working with curriculum and instruction at the PK-12 level, a position that she has held for over 20 years. Shirley sees herself as a lifelong learner who uses her experiences to shape her understanding of students and their learning.

Data Collection Methods

No matter what data I hope to collect, or from whom I hope to collect it, as a qualitative researcher I have an important amount of pre-fieldwork decisions that must be made in order to gather the appropriate information. Among the decisions to be made are those related to data collection, instrumentation, recording of data, and secure storage of the data collected. With the participants of my study identified, I was able to focus on the selection of the most appropriate data collection method for this study.

Corbin and Strauss (2008), in their interpretation of the various methods utilized in the data collection process, state:

> One of the virtues of qualitative research is that there are many alternative sources
> of data. In any study, the researcher can use one or several of these sources alone
> or in combination, depending upon the problem to be investigated. (p. 27)

While there are many data collection methods that can be used, it is important to remember that careful consideration must be given to how the collection method will impact and enhance the rest of the study.

Creswell (2007) identifies interviews as one way that data can be gathered in a phenomenological study. "Qualitative interviewing is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their worlds" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 1). Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) further describe interviews as a kind of conversation between the researcher and the interviewee that requires active asking and listening—a sort of partnership in a meaning-making endeavor. In addition to the interview, I also asked each participant to complete a journal reflection to help provide additional information that would help me in my interpretation of the participants' responses. Through the use of the interview and the subsequent journal reflection, I gathered quality responses from participants that helped to enhance the data analysis process and resulted in a rich description of the participants' experiences with mindfulness. After all, as Kvale (2009) suggests, "qualitative research interviews give voice to people in expressing their opinions, hopes, and worries in their own words" (p. 311). That was my greatest hope.

Semi-Structured Interview and Participant Reflection

In describing phenomenological studies and data collection, Creswell (2007) writes, "the important point is to describe the meaning of the phenomenon for a small number of individuals who have experienced it" (p. 131). To achieve this goal, it is important for the researcher to consider the best method for gathering rich and descriptive data. For the purpose of this study, I chose first to collect participant information through the use of a semi-structured interviews with each of the curriculum directors selected for my study. Through the use of these semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the curriculum directors, I was better able to ascertain their experiences with mindfulness in their work and leadership.

In semi-structured interviews, researchers generally want more specific information and achieve that level of detail by introducing the topic of study and asking the participants very specific questions (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Arthur and Nazroo (2003) believe that these specific, in-depth questions are organized to reflect a broad agenda, but that flexibility allows the researcher to vary the order and wording in which they are addressed. Thus, with semi-structured interviews, the researcher can be assured that the data they collect will be comparable across their subjects (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The one-on-one interviews I conducted for this study were semi-structured to allow for the participants to have the opportunity to share their ideas openly yet allow me to get details, examples, and contexts.

Interview Protocol

As suggested in Creswell (2007) and reiterated in Seidman (1991), it is critical that an interview protocol form be developed prior to the interviews and that the researcher adhere to the protocol to ensure that the purpose of the interview is honored. Perhaps the most thorough model for developing an interview protocol comes from Seidman (1991) in what he describes as the three interview series. He believes that this format allows the researcher to build a trusting relationship with the participants, thus removing barriers to successful communication. For the matter of this study, I conducted the semi-structured, one-on-one interviews in a three-step process. While the tasks for each step did not mirror those proposed by Seidman (1991), he acknowledges that researchers will have various reasons for choosing alternatives to the structure he recommends.

The first step of the interview process, once the individuals agreed to participate in the study, was to meet with them individually and to familiarize them with myself as the researcher, the process for ensuring confidentiality, the purpose of the study, and to ascertain the personal and professional background of the participant. This was critical, as Seidman (1991) explains, because, "people's behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them" (p. 10). Another benefit of this meeting was to build a meaningful relationship with the participant. "The more care and thoroughness interviewers put into making contact, the better foundation they establish for the interviewing relationship" (p. 37). In addition, as interviewer, I reviewed the consent documents carefully and ascertained their signature granting permission for their participation. During this first interview, the purpose of the research study was explained in depth so as to help participants understand the focus of the study.

The second step of the interview process consisted of the semi-structured interview that was at the core of the research. As Seidman (1991) explains, "the purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present experience in the topic area of the study" (p. 11). Participants were asked several questions that allowed them to describe their experiences with mindfulness in their work as curriculum directors, however, additional questions were asked to gain clarification of participants' thoughts or experiences. The one-on-one interview should lasted, at a minimum, 60 minutes in length and did not run longer than 90 minutes in length to respect the time of these very busy individuals.

The third step of the interview process involved asking participants to reflect upon their understanding of mindfulness through the use of a journal reflection piece. Ultimately, according to Seidman (1991) reflection involves getting at the meaning of their experience, not their satisfaction with the experience of the interview. "Rather, it [reflection] addresses the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants' work and life" (p. 12). It was my hope that the journal reflection piece allowed participants the opportunity to elaborate upon thoughts they shared during the second interview or to describe, free of the interview's presence, their thoughts and beliefs about mindfulness. Participants responded through the use of a journal in written form or electronically and subsequently sent that document to the researcher.

With qualitative interviewing, the goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study (Seidman, 1991). Using this three-step interview process ensures that the interviewer provides participants the opportunity to share their story in an comfortable manner, yet allows the researcher to gain the most information from the data collection process. Ultimately, it is important to be present in the moment of the interviews and to listen carefully to the thoughts and experiences of those that participate. As Seidman (1991) reminds us, "most important and almost always, interviewing continues to lead me to respect the participants, to relish the understanding I gain from them, and to take pleasure in sharing their stories" (p. 104).

Recording Procedures

Important consideration was made for the procedures used to record the one-on-one participant interviews. It was critical that appropriate recording equipment be used to capture the results of the participant sharing. According to Seidman (1991), "the primary

method of creating text from interviews is to tape-record the interviews and to transcribe them" (p. 87). Tape-recording served to record, word for word, the stories of the participants, thereby eliminating the ability of the researcher to substitute or replace the original words of the participant. Rubin and Rubin (1995) confirm that notion stating, "in interviewing it is imperative to keep a record so the report you write will be based on accurate renditions of what was said. Recording interviews on audiotape helps get the material down in an accurate and retrievable form" (pp. 125-126). For purposes of this study, I recorded the interviews using 2 different tape-recording devices. I chose to use 2 devices with separate microphones in order to ensure that the participant interview was recorded clearly and without opportunity for loss of key data.

It was important that, as the researcher, I sought the permission of the participant to use the recorder to capture their thoughts and ideas in our interview. Seidman (1991) suggests that while the tape recorder could inhibit the responses of a participant, with the proper assurances interviewees are likely to forget about its presence. Nonetheless, Bogdan and Biklen (2007) gently remind us, though, that the audio recorder should appear as if it is third party member that one cannot see. To do this helped to put the participant at ease and helped them feel comfortable sharing information in an open and forthcoming manner.

Research Questions

The joys of qualitative study are only made better through the design of the research question(s) that will guide the researcher in his or her work. As Marshall and Rossman (2010) assert, "qualitative approaches to inquiry are uniquely suited to uncovering the unexpected and exploring new avenues" (p. 73). Bogdan and Biklen

(2007) support that notion by adding, "research questions are not framed by operationalizing variables; rather, they are formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context" (p. 2). Therefore, designing an effective research question that helped me to collect the information I sought took substantial time and consideration.

Ultimately, the goal was to design a research question that, according to Marshall and Rossman (2010), permits exploration but at the same time delimits the study. While not easy to do, the result of such thoughtful planning can be a research question that is both probing and insightful. Corbin and Strauss (2008) further define the role of the research question by stating, "the research question in a qualitative study is a statement that identifies the topic area to be studied and tells the reader what there is about this particular topic that is of interest to the researcher" (p. 25).

At the start of the second interview, it was important for me, as the researcher, to take time to ask the participant informational questions that allowed them to provide insight into themselves as individuals, their background experiences, and current work. This conversational partnership, as described by Rubin and Rubin (1995), helps to put the participant at ease and to build a relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. Ultimately, the information gained through these questions helped to provide me with an important frame of reference in better understanding the descriptions of their experiences. Introductory questions that began the interview process included:

1. Could you please begin by telling me about yourself and how long you have been an educator?

2. How long have you been in your current position as curriculum director?

3. Would you please describe your previous experiences that led up to this point in your career?

4. Could you please describe the school district you are working in at this time?

5. Would you please describe for me why you chose to be a curriculum director?

These five questions, while personal in nature, helped build rapport between the interviewer and the interviewee.

In addition to the introductory questions, there are three distinct types of questions that can be developed to shape the qualitative research study. The first type of question, called the grand tour question (Yin, 2010), helps the researcher focus on the key concept in the study. Spradley (1979) describes how the grand tour question allows researchers the opportunity to investigate smaller aspects of the participant's experience. Also called the central question, Creswell (2009) explains, "the central question is a broad question that asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon or concept in a study" (p. 129). The grand tour question that will be guiding my work in this study is, "How is the phenomenon of mindfulness manifested in the work of curriculum directors?" Thinking broadly in terms of this research question helps to ensure that the researcher won't limit his or her inquiry into the topic.

Creswell (2007) further recommends that researchers enhance their study of a single central question, or grand tour question (Yin, 2010), with the use of procedural subquestions (Creswell, 2007), which can help them to guide their work. He adds that procedural subquestions take the phenomenon of study and break it down into subtopics that cover the anticipated needs for information. In further describing procedural subquestions, Stake (1995) states, "issue questions or statements provide a powerful

conceptual structure for organizing the study of a case" (p. 17). These types of questions

might ask the participant to reconstruct details of a particular experience alluded to in the

interview (Seidman, 1991). Procedural subquestions (see Appendix D) were developed

around the key qualities of a mindful state of being as described by Langer (1989). The

intent was that these questions would provide insights into how curriculum directors

experience mindfulness in their work in the frame of reference of Langer's (1989) three

qualities. I accomplished this intent by dividing the topic of mindfulness into the three

subtopics of study. These subtopics of questions would also help me as I proceeded to the

coding part of the data analysis. Those three qualities of a mindful state of being (Langer,

1989) were creation of new categories, openness to new information, and awareness of

more than one perspective.

One last consideration that had to be made with regards to the research question

involved the use of pilot testing (Creswell, 2007; Kvale, 1996; Mertens, 2010; Patton,

2002; Seidman, 1991) to ensure the quality of their interview questions in soliciting the

rich kind of data that will help to answer the research question. Mertens (2010) believes

that, "researchers need to be aware of the implication of each type of data collection in

order to enhance the quality of their results" (p. 205). Ultimately, the pilot testing serves

to alert researchers to elements of their interview techniques that support the purpose of

the study as well as those elements that can detract from that same purpose (Seidman,

1991). For this study, I conducted a pilot test of the interview questions I had developed

to determine their effectiveness at eliciting the responses that would assist me in

conducting my research study and to decide if any questions needed restructuring. This

also provided me the opportunity to test my tape-recording devices as well as the time

frame for questioning. The individual selected for this pilot testing was selected on the basis of convenience and availability and was not a part of this research study data.

Data Analysis

In this section of the chapter, I described for you the data analysis process for my research study. Data analysis, as defined by Bogdan and Biklen (2007), is the systematic processing and arranging of the data you collect in order to help you with you findings. A simple definition for a very complex task. Qualitative researchers will find the task much more difficult due to the large amount of data that is likely to be collected. Patton (2002) so gently reminds researchers that, "the challenge of qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (p. 432). Yet, the process by which individuals do that can vary so greatly within qualitative research.

Prior to the start of the data analysis process, it is important that the researcher participate in the bracketing process with regards to the subject being studied. As Moustakas (1994) explains that in phenomenological research the researcher sets aside, or brackets, all preconceived notions about the phenomenon at hand to the greatest extent possible. Doing so allows the researcher to more fully understand the experience from the participant's own point of view. Through this process, I was able to put aside my own assumptions about the work of curriculum directors and expose my usual way of thinking so that I could better understand the thoughts and ideas of those I interviewed.

Fortunately, Creswell (2007) identifies three analysis strategies that researchers can use to better understand the results of their data collection. Those strategies are a) preparation and organization of the data, b) coding to identify themes, and c) representing the data in an appropriate form. While general in nature, these strategies can be helpful to

the researcher in organizing and making sense of large amounts of data. For purposes of this research study, I explain my own data analysis process using these strategies.

For qualitative researchers, the preparation and organization of large quantities of data can prove overwhelming. Hundreds of pages of interview transcripts and journal reflection data will need to be organized in efficient and helpful manner. While each researcher is different, Merriam (2009) suggests that the best data analysis occurs simultaneously with the data collection process rather than waiting to analyze until the collection process is complete. Creswell (2007) goes so far as to add, "the processes of data collection, data analysis, and report writing are not distinct steps in the process— they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (p. 150).

Once the transcripts from my participant interviews were completed, I began the process of examining the data for key details and themes that would emerge from the data. The first step of this process is called horizontalization and, as Moustakas (1994) writes, the research begins to develop clusters of meaning from these significant statements and ultimately develops them into initial themes. Through this process I was able to identify significant statements that helped me to understand the phenomenon of study. This occurred by reading through the transcripts, making notes, and initiating the coding process. Then, once the journal reflections were submitted and compiled, I began a second process of reading through the data and looking to develop new categories or compare and contrast existing ones that have been identified. This is the point where the researcher is encouraged to reflect on the large thoughts that present themselves in the data but also begin to form initial categories (Creswell, 2007).

With the preparation and organization of my notes completed, I began the coding process by which I identified themes in the data. Merriam (2009) describes the task of data analysis by writing, "the task is to compare one unit of information with the next in looking for recurring regularities in the data" (p. 177). The goal of this work is that the researcher identifies categories or dimensions of analysis that help in understanding the phenomenon that is being investigated. Corbin and Strauss (2008) further explain the purpose of the coding process when they write:

> It involves interacting with data (analysis) using techniques such as asking questions about the data, making comparisons between data, and so on, and in doing so, deriving concepts to stand for those data, then developing those concepts in terms of their properties and dimensions. (p. 66)

Perhaps the coding process can best be understood in the words of these same authors who write, "a researcher can think of coding as 'mining' the data, digging beneath the surface to discover the hidden treasures contained within data" (p. 66).

Creswell (2007) identifies three types of coding that can be used to identify the major findings of the research. The coding process consists of open, axial, and selective coding and is a critical part of the analysis process. According to Creswell (2007), "the first stage in this process is open coding, where the researcher examines and codes the data for its major categories of information" (p. 64). During this stage in the process the researcher is working to form initial categories of information and developing a conditional matrix of findings (see Appendix F). Strauss and Corbin (1990) further define the open coding process, writing, "open coding is the part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of

the data" (p. 62). Through the open coding process, I identified 39 categories, or themes, of information.

With the first iteration of the coding process, or open coding, complete, it was time to move on to the second part of the process called axial coding. "During axial coding, one begins to notice certain "patterns" (repeated relationships between properties and dimensions of categories" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 130). In the axial coding process, the researcher identifies one open coding category to focus on and goes back to the data to create categories around this phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Ultimately, the categories that are focused on become interconnected in pursuit of the final themes. For this stage of the process, I was able to take the 39 open coding themes and, through further analysis of the data, identify 16 themes that would help me begin the third, and final, iteration of the data.

With the goal of identifying the key themes that would emerge from the research data I collected, I entered the final iteration of the coding process, or the selective coding of the data. In this stage, according to Creswell (2007), the researcher takes the model and develops propositions that, in essence, help to assemble a story that describes the interrelationship of the categories identified. As a result of this process, I was able to develop a theoretical model of the focus of our study, having identified 8 major findings from the 16 categories identified during the axial coding process. This entire coding process was documented in the form of a matrix (see Appendix F) and serves to show how large amounts of data can be carefully be analyzed to identify the key findings of a study.

When all of the categories have been identified, and the data no longer reveals new or unique categories, then saturation has occurred (Creswell, 2007). This concept is further explained as when any data source begins to add little to what the researcher has already learned about the topic, then the saturation point has been reached (Rubin & Rubin, 2007). In the case of phenomenological research, it is important to carefully identify and document those individual experiences of the participants and the context in which those experiences occur (Creswell, 2007).

Having established codes for the analysis of the data, it is time to make sense of the data through a written interpretation of the results or the lessons that the researcher has learned by analyzing the data. "Phenomenology is, on one hand, description of the lived-through quality of lived experience, and on the other hand, description of meaning *of the expressions* of lived experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 25). In this research study, I worked to describe how the experience of mindfulness happens, carefully describing the setting and the context in which the participants experienced mindfulness. Ultimately, it was my hope to get at the essence of the experience of mindfulness in sustaining successful leadership.

These three strategies worked to make up the data analysis part of my research study. The hope of finding the essence behind mindfulness and its effect on improving and sustaining successful leadership was important to me. It was a challenging process, both mentally and physically, to complete this work but I now understand the true reward of qualitative research as echoed by Van Manen (1990) when he writes:

Therefore, phenomenological research, unlike any other kind of research, makes a distinction between appearance and essence, between the things of our experience

and that which grounds the things of our experience. In other words, phenomenological research consists of reflectively brining into nearness that which tends to obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life. (p. 32)

Limitations and Delimitations

According to Creswell (2009), it is important that the researcher include information regarding the delimits of the scope of participation or research sites that are utilized in the study. Delimitations are conscious choices that are made in the planning of the study that ultimately limit the scope of the study. For this study, two delimitations have been identified. The first delimitation is that, for the purposes of this study, only curriculum directors were allowed to be participants. Because of my desire to understand curriculum directors' perceived use of mindfulness, no other educational leaders or individuals were interviewed. A second delimitation to this study is that the research site was limited to a Midwest setting. No other geographic areas were considered. Ultimately, these delimitations may affect the scope of the study.

Limitations of a study are those characteristics of the design that set parameters on the interpretation of the results (Creswell, 2009). In other words, limitations are those factors that put constraints on the generalizabilty and utility of the findings. For this study, a limitation of this study is that, of the seven participants studied, six of them were females and one of them was male.

Data Validation

Qualitative researchers, by the nature of their research design, have the great fortune of being able to do an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon they are

studying. The result of their hard work is an interpretation of their experiences and their understanding of the phenomenon they studied. For as many options as there are for collecting data, there are just as many perspectives regarding validation in qualitative research methods (Creswell, 2007). For purposes of this study, validation was also referred to as verification. In describing the concept of verification, Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002) write:

> *Verification* is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain. In qualitative research, verification refers to the mechanisms used during the process of research to incrementally contribute to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus, the rigor of a study. (p. 9)

With regards to verification, it was critical that, as the researcher, I made clear to the reader how I would address this in my research study. As Anfara, Brown, and Mangione (2002) remind me through their writing, researchers must adequately make public the methods and processes we take in our research study.

Whereas readers were reminded that the best data analysis occurs when researchers were well planned and organized in advance, the same reminder comes with verification strategies and your data. According to Morse et al. (2002), "it is time to reconsider the importance of verification strategies used by the researcher in the process of inquiry so that reliability and validity are actively attained, rather than proclaimed by external reviewers on the completion of the project" (p. 9). Therefore, how researchers account for and disclose their approach to their study is key to evaluating their work substantively and methodologically (Anfara et al., 2002).

As qualitative researchers examine the issues of reliability and validity, it is important that they understand the history of the topic and how the two terms are generally viewed today. Early views of validity criteria in qualitative studies focused on the issues of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity (Anfara et al., 2002). But, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) focused their work on the naturalistic side of qualitative research, they replaced those earlier concepts with new terms that they felt best aligned with the nature of the research. Those new terms, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were developed to help better support the researcher.

With a solid understanding of the ways in which qualitative research studies are judged for quality and rigor, it is important to understand the strategies one can learn to improve their research study. Creswell (2007) advises that, "it is not enough to gain perspectives and terms; ultimately, these ideas are translated into practice as strategies or techniques" (p. 207). In his book, he identifies eight specific strategies used by researchers to ensure quality in the research, with the notion that good qualitative research addresses at least two of those strategies. The eight strategies are prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, clarifying researcher bias, member checks, thick description, and external audits (Creswell, 2007).

In preparing the study, I first addressed the concerns about credibility and dependability through the use of the triangulation of both my data methods and sources, which ultimately added great value to my study. Krefting (1991/1999) write that the idea of triangulation is based on the convergence of multiple perspectives that, as a result, serve to confirm aspects of the phenomenon that have been investigated. "Multiple

informants and multiple methods of data gathering or triangulation within a same study

are themselves recursive checks against the validity of the researchers' interpretations"

(Ambert, Adler, Adler, & Detzner, 1995/1999). Creswell (2007) writes, "typically, this

process involves corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme

or perspective" (p. 208). Through the use of participant interviews, where I interviewed

curriculum directors in a one-on-one fashion, and the use of a participant journal

reflection piece, where curriculum directors reflected upon their own understanding of

mindfulness, I was able to collect a large amount of information that was later used to

provide rich, descriptive data to my data coding process.

In addition to the triangulation of the data, a very important method for ensuring

the credibility of the study is to conduct member checks on the data that was collected

and the findings as they were presented. As Creswell (2009) describes member checking,

he writes, "the informant will serve as a check throughout the analysis process. An

ongoing dialogue regarding my interpretations of the informant's reality and meanings

will ensure the truth value of the data" (p. 199). Ultimately, the member checking process

allowed me the opportunity to share the data and my interpretations with the individuals

who so generously gave of their time and insights. For this study, each participant was

sent a copy of the findings of my research study and they were asked to read the findings

section and to share with me any questions or concerns they may have had about the way

the information was presented. Each participant completed correspondence with me,

indicated that they were each in agreement with the information as it was presented in my

study.

One way for me to ensure the transferability of my study was to use rich, thick descriptions (Patton, 2003) to help provide the reader with a clear understanding of setting in which this study was conducted and the nature of the participants who were chosen for study. According to Creswell (2007), researchers who use rich, thick descriptions in their work can help their readers to make decisions with regards to the transferability of the situation. But, ultimately, "good description takes the reader into the setting being described" (Patton, 2003, p. 437). By providing rich and thick descriptions, I will be able to give the reader a sense of feeling as if they were working closely with the curriculum directors I interviewed. Stake (2010) summarizes nicely the functions of both rich and thick descriptions when he writes, "A description is rich if it provides abundant, interconnected details, and possible cultural complexity, but it becomes thick description if it offers direct connection to cultural theory and scientific knowledge" (p. 49).

In qualitative research, the closeness of the relationship between the researcher and the participants can make establishing confirmability a difficult process. For the researcher, separating oneself from the thoughts and views of the participants can be tough to do. Creswell (2007) encourages researchers to comment on their past experiences, biases, and prejudices throughout the research process in so as to clarify any issues that may impact the interpretation and analysis of the data. This can be done though the use of a reflexive journal. According to Krefting (1991/1999), "one of the ways that researchers can describe and interpret their own behavior and experiences within the research context is to make use of a field journal" (p. 177). As part of the research process, I worked to keep a reflexive journal which has helped me to organize

my thoughts, identify my own thoughts about mindfulness, and direct my thinking in general.

In summary, for the qualitative researcher, the process from start to finish can seem long and challenging. The end goal, to conduct a qualitative research study that enlightens and informs is what drives me as a researcher to conduct the best work possible. For me, this meant conducting quality qualitative research. "In other words, quality qualitative research resonates with readers' and participants' life experiences. It is research that is interesting, clear, logical, and makes the reading think and want to read more" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 302). Perhaps Bogdan and Biklen (2007) say it best when they write, "qualitative researchers are concerned with making sure that they capture perspectives accurately. Although there is some controversy over such procedures, they reflect a concern with capturing the people's own way of interpreting significance as accurately as possible" (p. 8). Through my phenomenological research design, I hoped to be able to capture curriculum directors' experience with mindfulness as a way of sustaining resonant leadership over time.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

The opportunity to conduct qualitative research has been rewarding, in that it has

provided me not only the opportunity to explore the world of curriculum leadership, but it

has helped me to develop and subsequently strengthen my own skills in questioning,

listening, and reflection. To use all of these skills, in the pursuit of new understanding, is

an empowering thought. Stake (2010), in describing the value of qualitative research,

writes, "what qualitative studies are best at is examining the actual, ongoing ways that

persons or organizations are doing their thing" (p. 2). And, to truly understand what is

happening in one's world, or how individuals experience and make sense of those events,

requires a commitment of time, persistence and passion. The information in this chapter

represents months of thought, preparation and persistence in searching for meaning

within the work of curriculum directors. I present my experiences interviewing as well as

the findings of my careful analysis and coding of the data.

Today, curriculum directors face a shifting demands from a variety of

stakeholders, including local, state, and federal officials, teachers, parents, and even

students, in improving student achievement and creating school curriculums that reflect

the needs of 21st century learners (Wagner, 2008). The ability to address the demands and

lead at high levels requires curriculum directors to adapt quickly to the changes that occur

in their district. As Schlechty (2001) describes, "these shifts require school leaders to

respond with dramatic and powerful changes in the way schools go about doing their

business and perhaps even with a redefinition of the nature of the business they do" (p.

1). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the phenomenon of mindfulness (Langer, 1989) as it is manifested in the work of curriculum directors. Through my research, I examined the ways in which curriculum directors exhibited Langer's qualities of mindfulness in their thinking and in their work with other individuals in their organization.

A key skill in qualitative research is the ability to develop questions that guide the study. The overarching research question, which Creswell (2007) refers to as the grand tour question, was, "How is the phenomenon of mindfulness manifested in the work of curriculum directors?" Seven semi-structured interviews of curriculum directors were conducted, along with a subsequent journal reflection collected from each participant, in an effort to understand, through the view of the participant, how mindfulness is manifested in their work. By reflecting upon my experiences with the interview process and the subsequent findings of my data analysis, I identified eight ways in which mindfulness is manifested in the work of the curriculum directors.

Participant Interview Process

The participant interview process was a fascinating experience where I had the opportunity to learn, first hand, about the perceptions of the curriculum directors with regards to their work and leadership skills. Having only ever conducted similar interviews one time before, I was nervous and filled with anticipation. In my own way, I set a goal to be mindful, throughout the interview process, of my interactions with the participants. It would be very important that I not only listen carefully as the participants tell their stories, but pay careful attention to their feelings and emotions along the way. Not surprisingly, before I reached the interview stage, I knew it would be important that I

establish initial contact with the identified participants and work to establish a time that I could meet with them individually.

Contact with the participants was initiated when I sent recruitment letters to the seven curriculum directors I identified as possible candidates for the study. The letter indicated that I would make a second contact with them, over the telephone, approximately one week after they received the letter. Prior to that week deadline, however, I was surprised to receive a phone call at home from one of the candidates, Cheryl, who had questions about the research study and the requirements for her participation.

During the phone conversation, Cheryl asked for clarification about my research study and how the interviews would be conducted. I found this experience to be very beneficial as, through my own reflection, it occurred to me that other candidates might have similar questions. As a result, in my subsequent contact with other candidates, I was sure to add additional points of information regarding my study and to ask several times if they had any questions.

Through my phone calls, it became clear to me that getting the curriculum directors to participate would not be the difficult part, as they served as their own gatekeepers. What did prove challenging was being able to establish phone contact with them. I had not anticipated for how difficult it would be to talk with them in person on the phone. It quickly became clear to me that curriculum directors were extremely busy individuals who did not seem to be in their office much.

Of the seven candidates selected, I communicated via telephone with four of them. During the phone conversation, I introduced myself as the researcher, confirmed

whether or not they received my recruitment letter, reviewed the details of my research, and determined their interest in participating in the study. Of those participants I talked with on the phone, they all indicated their sincere interest in both the topic of mindfulness and their willingness to assist me with the study. For the three individuals that could not be reached over the phone, I utilized e-mail to establish communication with them. Much like the phone calls, I communicated the same information through the e-mails and was able to find a time to meet with each participant for an interview. Because I did my own transcribing, I purposely scheduled no more than two interviews per week to allow me time to transcribe the interview tapes immediately after it was conducted.

Throughout our conversations, whether by phone or by e-mail, the one consistent message I heard from all the participants was that their time was very limited. The first participant I talked to on the phone, Cheryl, did an excellent job of portraying just how busy curriculum directors are likely to be, and as such, asked whether the interview process could be condensed down from three steps to two in order to honor her time and I heard that same request from a second participant, Donita. The decision was made to combine the first two parts of the interview into one step. At this point, I made the decision to offer this same format to the remainder of the participants. While I knew it was important to have the opportunity to establish a relationship of trust with the participants, I believed we could accomplish this same goal in one, 90-minute session without compromising the quality or quantity of the answers I would receive. Each candidate was appreciative of the move to one meeting and dates were set to meet with each candidate.

Of the seven candidates selected to participate in this study, six were women and one was male. Participants had each been in their positions a for a different length of time, with the longest tenure covering 24 years and the shortest length of tenure being three years. The average length of tenure of all the participants was 7.8 years. With regards to the size and location of the district represented in the study, four districts would be considered suburban school districts, each having a student population over 5,000 students. Three participants represented school districts considered to be rural districts, with populations under 4,000 students.

My first interview was on Tuesday, February 15, 2011. From the moment I arrived at the interview, Cheryl welcomed me to her office and made sure I had easy access to a power outlet for my recording equipment. While I had practiced operating the tape recording device prior to my first interview, I was unable to get the recorder to work for the interview. After multiple attempts at recording without success, I moved forward with the interview, instead relying on my second, or backup, recorder. I was pleased to know that following the advice of so many interviewers before me, who warned about the importance of having a second, or backup, recorder on hand, would prove helpful in this moment. Transcribing from the backup recorder would prove extremely challenging, but it was better than having not captured the essence of my first interview.

In reflecting upon the interviews themselves, I was amazed at how comfortable the participants were in sharing with me about their positions. For all but one of the interviews, I met with the participants in their office, during the school day, which provided not only a quiet place for them to reflect, but also to share documents, artifacts, and even humorous items that serve as reminders about the importance of the work they

do. For four of the seven interviews, I waited between five and 20 minutes to meet with them due to other issues that they needed to address. This served to remind me of just how valuable their time was and how I needed to ensure that I had honored the time I requested from them.

I also believe that interviewing in their offices provided an opportunity for them to feel comfortable in their own setting. In addition to their answers, I gained a sense of understanding of how isolated they can feel in their work, being separated from the administrators and teachers with whom they so closely work. In every interview, though, the recorder was able to carefully capture their words and stories with distinct clarity, which allowed for easy translation of their thoughts. Looking back on the interviews, I am struck with the commitment of time and energy these participants gave to me. Never did any of the participants take an outside phone call or work from their computer. I had their undivided attention and, because of that, we were able to engage in a rich discussion of the questions and their thoughts.

At the conclusion of each interview, I thanked the participants for their time, energy, and their thoughts. I was surprised the every participant thanked me for the opportunity to participate in this interview. While I often heard at the beginning of the interview that the participants felt they didn't either know or understand how they might be "mindful", at the end of the interview I heard each of them express a sort of satisfaction that they were, indeed, mindful in their work to some degree and that they hadn't thought of it until the end of the interview. They each expressed their interest in, at some point, reading the dissertation and learning more about mindfulness. At the end of

some interviews, I even had the opportunity to exchange the titles of professional literature that they may have recommended in their interviews.

Before leaving, I reminded each participant that I would be sending him or her an e-mail message containing the reflective journal on mindfulness. Each participant responded that they would do their best, given their busy schedules, to return them to me. After each interview, I sent the journals to the participants work e-mail address. Unfortunately, this proved a bit more challenging, as several participants did not initially receive the document through their e-mail. I subsequently made contact with each participant from which I did not receive a response. Once responses were received, I was able to include them in my data analysis.

Surprisingly, it was clear to me that these individuals didn't seem to give themselves enough credit for their hard work (Daft, 2008). Perhaps this interview was a bit cathartic for them, having had the opportunity to share openly about a job they care so much about. But, for these individuals, they acknowledge and understand that the very people they admire most are the teachers who are working on the front lines helping students to work and learn at high levels.

Mindful Practices Among Curriculum Directors

My interviews with the curriculum directors provided me a window into the critical balance of leading and learning that is so difficult for them to achieve in their position. The struggle between the demands of leading at high levels, while learning new knowledge and skills, can be extremely challenging. In thinking about successful leadership, we are reminded that this notion is not an either or option:

Those who are the best at leading are also the best at learning. Exemplary leaders

don't rest on their laurels or rely on their natural talents. Whatever their individual

learning styles may be, they continually do more to improve themselves. (Kouzes

& Posner, 2003, p. 1)

The findings of my research of curriculum directors has revealed eight themes that

illustrate the ways in which curriculum directors perceive themselves as mindful in their

work. The complete table representing the results of my analysis and subsequent coding

can be found in Appendix F. For curriculum directors who are leaders and learners, these

themes reveal that, with purposeful attempts to be thoughtful about your words and

actions, successful curriculum leadership can happen. The eight themes that emerged

were:

1. Feedback for learning and for leading others.

2. Reflection for personal or professional growth and action.

3. Collaboration for building trusting relationship.

4. Relationships through collegial support.

5. Planning and preparing for success.

6. Awareness of self and others.

7. Dialogue and discussion as opportunities for growth.

8. Purpose in one's work.

These eight findings will now be examined in greater depth. Given the three key qualities

of mindfulness as identified by Langer (1989), which were used to guide the development

of our interview questions, it is important to think about how these findings fit within

those qualities and thus help us to better understand mindful actions by our curriculum

directors. Those qualities, creation of new categories, openness to new information, and

awareness of more than one perspective, provide a framework by which we can understand how the actions of these curriculum directors exemplifies the use of mindfulness to improve their ability to lead successfully.

In the end, by identifying multiple ways that curriculum directors perceive mindfulness in their works with individuals and their organizations, a picture of mindful leadership in the field of curriculum leadership emerges. The implications of these findings will be discussed in detail in the remainder of this, as well as the next, chapter.

Feedback For Learning and For Leading Others

Throughout all of the interviews that I conducted, perhaps no theme resonated more with me and with the curriculum directors than the notion of using the feedback of others in order to grow as learners and to be able to successfully lead at high levels. Feedback, in this sense, is about having the most information that one can from those individuals or groups that are a part of their organization. Whether professional or personal in nature, each individual stressed that, without the feedback and input of others, they simply could not be successful in their work. One participant, Cheryl, summarized it best when she said, "I think the more you open yourself to people's thoughts, feelings,…you know you're changing. So, you have to open yourself up to take it in and then act on that."

Feedback for learning. Curriculum directors hold critical leadership positions within their district. As such, it is imperative that they not only work to lead others in the work of teaching and learning, but to model the importance of their own personal learning and growth. In writing about personal mastery, Senge (1990) writes, "organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not

guarantee organizational learning. But, without it, no organizational learning occurs" (p. 171). The individuals I interviewed understood that there was a great burden on their shoulders to help sustain, through their own modeling and persistence, the importance of new learning. One participant, Mary Ann, frustrated with her building administrators' perceived lack of commitment to the new learning obtained through staff development, said, "well, they need to be part of learning. They can't be expecting teachers to be doing something and then have no idea themselves. I mean, what are the chances of implementation in a building if you don't even know what you are looking for." Her perception that a lack of interest on the administrators' part would likely stifle the successful implementation of a district initiative was critical in helping her to coach the entire leadership team in their responsibility as role models for learning.

In a similar situation, Donita described her district's efforts to stay ahead of the new trends in curriculum and instruction, saying, "you know, we are in an organization of learning. We have to be constantly learning, all the time, too! So, even our team…we do a book study. We almost always have something going on that we're learning together or reading articles together and talking about them, too!" For her, the ability to create a learning organization focused on continual improvement for all staff members, regardless of position, started at the top.

Learning leader. An additional challenge that emerged from the interviews, with regards to personal learning, was that because of the multiple curricular areas (i.e., general education curriculum, English as a Second Language (ESL), Talented and Gifted (TAG), and special education) that these individuals were in charge of administratively, it was clear that they would need to rely heavily on feedback from the individuals

supporting these programs to learn about them and to lead them successfully. The reality of curriculum leadership, given the growing size and scope of curriculum content, is that no individual can simply know everything there is to know.

While this may seem painfully obvious, the demands of the position, however, can make the job all encompassing. And, individuals who don't recognize this early on, will find themselves quickly struggling to succeed. Remaining open to new ideas through feedback, while resisting the notion of the expert leader, is critical to the success of one's leadership. One participant, Shirley, in describing how to keep the right frame of mind said, "you know, people depend on you to set a tone and they depend on you to not have all the answers, but rather to be there for them. And, you just have to bring that [thought] with you."

Through the interviews, it was clear to me that perhaps the best approach for personal learning is not to have all of the right answers but, instead, to ask all of the right questions. Jim Collins (2001), in describing this type of leadership, writes:

> Leading from good to great does not mean coming up with the answers and then motivating everyone to follow your messianic vision. It means having the humility to grasp the fact that you do not yet understand enough to have the answers and then to ask the questions that will lead to the best possible insights. (p. 75)

This is not a skill that is easy to learn, however. My sense, in listening carefully to the participants, is that this belief develops the longer one does this position. In one interview, a participant named Chris confirmed this same thought when he said, "…I am not sure my role is necessarily to see all of the solutions. I think part of my role is to ask a

lot of questions to push everybody's thinking. But, truly, I think part of my role is to keep being a questioner…a critical questioner. And, I believe that it is through that questioning that the curriculum directors gain important information that help them to lead others in a positive direction."

Leaders who perceive that they know everything about a subject, without seeking new or contradictory information, in reality are actually ignoring the very signs around them that are so critical to their success. Within the lens of mindfulness, it could be said that these leaders "don't know what they don't know." Senge (1990) explains this phenomenon when he writes about openness, "nothing undermines openness more surely than certainty. Once we feel as if we have "the answer," all motivation to question our thinking disappears" (p. 281). In these cases, leaders are not able to attend to themselves and step back from their own thinking so they can satisfactorily attend to the thoughts of the individuals around them. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) write, "…in order to wake up and do something counter to the numbing effects of the Sacrifice Syndrome, you have to become aware that you are not aware" (p. 65).

Feedback for leading others. While the feedback of others is important in helping curriculum directors to learn more about their work, this same feedback is just as important in helping them to successfully lead others in their organization. Working under the caveat that, while they will never please everyone they work with, all of the individuals I interviewed perceived those around them to be critical partners in providing real time, accurate feedback. One interviewee in particular, Mary Ann, summarized this by saying, "so, bringing some key people to the table and having those discussions was

very beneficial." But the ability to do this, to use feedback to guide one's decisions and actions, is not easy.

While each person I interviewed agreed with the importance of seeking out and incorporating the feedback of others, I sensed that achieving that state of being is more of a journey than an event. To have the maturity and insight to know and understand, and be able to accept, the power of feedback takes time to grow. To be able to take feedback that may be contrary to your own beliefs or feelings, and react in a way that honors the person that is sharing, takes self-awareness and self-control. Remember what can happen to those that think they must have the right answers? Those fixed mindset individuals, as described by Dweck (2006), are closed to new information and to using that knowledge to learn and subsequently lead others. They stand in judgment of the information they already have, but fail to collect more. For those individuals, the "sacrifice syndrome" (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005) is not far away.

But Shirley seemed to explain best the power of a growth mindset in regards to feedback and learning when she said:

> It really stretched me professionally and I found I could do a lot more, which is part of one of the things I am learning. I've learned about people and growth. We often think certain things limit people. But, really, if they're in a growth-oriented mode, they will learn and they will adapt.

Growth mindset individuals (Dweck, 2006) know that judging others and refusing to seek out the most information possible won't work. They're open to all information and must work to make sense of it for themselves. In describing the effect of a growth mindset, Dweck (2006) writes:

People with a growth mindset are also constantly monitoring what's going on, but

their internal monologue is not about judging themselves and others in this way.

Certainly they're sensitive to positive and negative information, but they're

attuned to its implications for learning and constructive action: What can I learn

from this? How can I improve? (p. 209)

One candidate, in talking about the value of multiple perspectives, said, "well, you're

sure you got a full view of what the picture is. I mean, if you don't look at the issues from

all perspectives, you might not consider all the viable options." So, using feedback to

learn and improve one's own actions and behaviors is critical to a sense of continual

improvement.

Those individuals working as curriculum directors know better than anyone else

that successful leadership of others means realizing your own limits and boundaries with

regards to best practice in any area but also the importance of sharing in the work of

curriculum development and implementation. They key to this is to create an

environment where all stakeholders are safe to share their thoughts and ideas without fear

of blame or retaliation. Blankstein (2004) reminds us that:

The pursuit of quality requires that all individuals within an organization—

administrators, teachers, staff members, parents, and students—work

cooperatively for the benefit of everyone. In the long run, monopolizing power

inhibits individuals in these groups from viewing themselves as contributing to

the overall success of the larger system. (p. 41)

Shared leadership for curriculum development can result in a sense of ownership among

all stakeholders. Schlechty (2001) reminds us that, "employing this pattern of leadership

requires careful attention to the development of shared commitments, beliefs, and values"
(p. 179). Donita alluded to this, saying, "I can't be at the top of the hill and look back and
there is nobody there. I mean, and that's dangerous, and so, as you keep moving up you
always have to go and say, "OK, so how did that go?" That feedback is so critical for
positive growth. "Those in authority, whether they are leading or following, consistently
must seek to operate, and expect others to operate, in ways that are consistent with these
commitments, beliefs, and values" (Schlechty, 2001, p. 179).

Curriculum directors simply cannot do the work alone. Those who are mindful
see the feedback of others as opportunities for their own improvement and for being able
to lead at high levels. The challenge for them remains the constant effort required to lead
through a shared experience and to resist the desire to simply becoming a leader who
remains closed to the information that will likely make us better in our own learning and
our leadership.

Reflection For Personal or Professional Growth and Action

As I approached the interview process, it was with great excitement that I looked
forward to the opportunity to talk, at lengths, with the participants about the topic of
mindfulness in their work. Having read about and experienced the power of mindfulness
as an educational leader, I was anxious to explore the world of curriculum leadership. I
knew their stories would serve to confirm what I believed was important but also to open
up to discovery new aspects I had not yet considered.

Throughout the interview process, I was enamored by the various stories the
participants told about their experiences in education, whether as a classroom teacher or
as an administrator. There were also stories as well about the experiences in their

personal lives that shaped who they are as leaders today. Every person took ample time to share with me personal examples of the things they learned that have helped them to be successful in their position. The ease of which they shared their insights led me to believe that they saw the value of reflection as a tool for personal or professional growth and action.

As I analyzed the data carefully, there emerged information about both professional and personal reflection. Given the busy and demanding nature of their positions, it appears that professional reflection, or reflection on feedback and information received about their work, is far more prevalent than their own personal reflection.

I believe Costa and Kallick (2000) best describe this distinction between these two types of reflection when they write about the internal and external voices of reflection. The authors describe the internal voice of reflection as the sort of self-talk that one does that involves the "what" and the "how" of your thinking. It has been likened to the little voice in your head that you might hear when you are thinking. They describe the external voice of reflection as the way in which we share about the experiences we have had in hopes of enriching our own internal conversations. Where as the internal voice of reflection is a solitary act, the external voice of reflection involves working with one or more individuals to develop the capacity for sharing reflections about our experiences. By examining the responses of the participants within this lens, it is clear to see how reflection can be critical for curriculum directors in their own growth and their work.

External voice of reflection. As mentioned previously, the nature of the curriculum director position leaves individuals constantly working to address the needs of

individuals and programs over a PK-Grade 12 span. In each interview, participants were asked, "To what extent is reflection helpful to your work?" And, in each interview, the respondents came alive as they answered the question enthusiastically. Through their responses it was clear that, by working closely with the individuals closest to the students, they were able to learn key information that would otherwise not be available to them had they not spent time with the staff.

In one clear example of the power of external reflection, Donita described the importance of gaining clarity in her thinking by spending time shadowing literacy support teachers in the buildings. The impetus for the visits came from the need to make key budget decisions with regards to staffing. By spending time with the literacy support staff, this individual was able to gather key information about their jobs and the critical work they were doing to support teaching and learning at the building level. This understanding came through discussions with each of the teachers, personal observations of their jobs, and her own reflection. For Donita, this knowledge was something she needed. "I want to know what life is for these individuals. That was a great opportunity for me to gather more information as we make decisions when the budget comes up as to how much impact they truly have." Reeves (2006) acknowledges this sort of reflective leadership by writing, "reflection, in brief, forces leaders to climb down from the mythological perch, admit our human foibles, and get real" (p. 51). And that is just what our interviewee, Donita, did in her search for understanding.

Another theme that emerged was the use of external reflection as a verification tool to ensure the actions taken by the curriculum office are implemented with fidelity in the buildings. For Donita, her district used the building leadership team structure to

verify, through feedback, how implementation of district initiatives was happening in the building. Another participant, Mary Ann, described the use of instructional rounds, or weekly visits to the classrooms by administrative staff, as a way of ensuring programs are being implemented. About the visits she said, "we make the rounds and, depending on what our professional development is at the time, and make sure that is being transferred to the classroom." The goal of this method is, for her, to ensure that the goals for implementation are being met and to see how teachers and doing with that implementation. Given the tendency of schools and of teachers to resist the sustained efforts at improvement, this external voice of reflection can help provide leaders with critical information needed for growth and action.

Reflection as a mode of verification is achieved by involving as many stakeholders as you can. As Mary Ann further elaborated, "the more people you have involved in the decision, the better off you are going to be on being successful implementing whatever change it is. Because, if it comes from one person, I've found that not to be the best thing possible."

The curriculum directors I interviewed talked with passion about seeing their ideas and vision to fruition. In their reflections, both personal and professional, you could hear the motivation they had for moving themselves, and more importantly those in their organization, forward. But, as was clear from the interviews, the individuals realized that others in their organization may not move at the same speed they do, nor do they believe in the same message. In reminding us about the power of reflection in addressing this situation, Senge (1990) writes, "skills of reflection concern slowing down our own

thinking processes so that we can become more aware of how we form our mental models and the ways they influence our actions" (p. 191).

While not referred to as mental models, participants alluded to the need to slow down their own thinking in order to successfully decide how to move forward in a way that was most effective for everyone involved. In a lively exchange, Chris described his own caution to be careful in pushing forward too quickly with a district initiative. "We can keep ramming ahead, full steam ahead. But sometimes ramming ahead you are not going to get there faster by hitting your head on the block wall. Sometimes you've got to stop, find an alternative course around it. It might take you a year longer to get there." He warned cautiously that his own, or others' drive to achieve a goal, without consideration for our own and others mental models, will simply result in the collapse of the goal and likely parts of the system as well. Senge (1990), calling this a leap of abstraction, writes, "leaps of abstraction occur when we move from direct observations (concrete "data") to generalization without testing" (p. 193). He warns that acting on generalizations can cause us difficulty.

In the end, the individuals I interviewed knew the importance of slowing down their thinking. To this extent, Donita said, "I try not to ever, like, make a decision immediately when I've heard something. That is hard for me, though. I am not a processor. I am like 'let's do it!'" And, another adhering to a similar type of thought, said, "I know that it is law that I must discuss with others before I implement anything. I cannot move forward until I have thought it through with at least three other individuals."

Internal voice of reflection. While the external voice of reflection can help the curriculum director to understand how their goals and actions impact the greater system,

the internal voice of reflection stands ready to help them grow as an individual and as a leader. The ability to stand back from the work one has been doing and to ask the questions that get at the heart of our beliefs and actions is critical. But, making time for that reflection can be much tougher than it appears.

For our participants, they know the key to achieving this is to set aside time for reflection or to take advantage of small opportunities in their day when they have the opportunity for quiet. For four of the interviewees, they have utilized their daily commutes as opportunity for personal reflection. Two of them shared the importance of making a block of time, within their day, for reflection. And, for others, their ability to walk away from a task, for whatever length of time, helped them to get the time and space they needed to gather and organize their thoughts. What is consistent among the interviewees is that this type of reflection can really happen anytime or anywhere, given the opportunity to bring forth those issues that are likely always in the back of their minds.

What they think about during this reflection time is just as important as making the time for reflection. "Reflective leaders take time to think about the lessons learned, record their small wins and setbacks, document conflicts between values and practice, identify the difference between idiosyncratic behavior and long-term pathologies and notice trends that emerge over time" (Reeves, 2006, p. 49). It is not always easy to look back at your work and to reflect with the honesty needed to identify themes and trends. In his interview, Chris shared, "I went back [through my notes] to see if there was a common theme. Because, if there is a common theme, then you know you have to address it. I am a data type person. Plus, you learn from those and you don't make the

same mistake twice. But, at the time I made the mistake, I was hurried. I didn't step back.
I didn't think about it. I didn't reflect on it."

Ultimately, educational leaders, not just curriculum directors, understand that we
can learn many lessons from carefully reflecting upon our experiences in previous
situations. The opportunity for personal reflection allows us to look back at our past
actions and to have a sense of calm that helps us to avoid uncomfortable situations or
recognize the clear path to take in the future. As Shirley said so eloquently with regards
to our past actions, "we can learn from them. Fixes that are successful and fixes that fail.
And, all of those kind of things that we all kind of step into as well. But, then when you
are able to understand that there are these models of pitfalls out there and, if you
understand them, you can probably avoid some of the pitfalls."

Having had the chance to hear this same message so many times has served as a
great reminder to me that all leaders should draw vigilantly on their reflections, both
internal and external, to improve themselves and their leadership capacity. In fact, as
leaders, it should be our duty to encourage others in our system to harness the power of
reflection. After all, as Costa and Kallick (2000) remind us:

> In reflective schools, there is no such thing as failure—only the production of
> personal insights from one's experiences. To be reflective means to mentally
> wander through where you have been and to try to make some sense of it. (p. 61)

Ultimately, we should not fear reflection itself, but should instead fear what will happen
if we do not reflect at all.

Ultimately, one especially memorable quote about the power of reflection, that
will stick with me from this point forward, came from one of the participants for whom

she herself in the power and gift of reflection. When asked about that power of reflection, Shirley said, "it's tremendous. It's just tremendous. It's where I can forgive myself. It's where I can extend myself. It's where I can…you know…it has helped me to face the fact that I make mistakes…that it's OK to make mistakes. That I'll learn from my mistakes. That I'll push through because once you've started looking back over reflections, you realize, 'I've been through that before!' I've made it better because of it. It hurt…I didn't want to have to face it. And, so, reflection has helped."

Collaboration For Building Trusting Relationships

As I sat listening intently to each of the curriculum directors share their insights, it was clear to me that feedback and reflection were critical elements to their success in this position. Despite all of the demands and challenges these individuals faced each day, they were upbeat, humorous, and animated. In fact, two of the individuals I interviewed, Cheryl and Shirley, cited their sense of humor as a tool for building and encouraging relationships, especially during difficult times.

But most of all, they were thankful. They were thankful for the individuals they worked with each day and the support they received from them in creating the best atmosphere for teaching and learning that they could. And that is when it occurred to me that, no matter how great one's skill in seeking feedback or being reflective, it would not matter if that same person did not have meaningful relationships with those individuals they work with each day.

One message heard consistently throughout the interviews was their awareness that they were part of a larger system, called to help all children in the district to learn at high levels. In addition, the participants also saw themselves as having the opportunity to

provide each individual they work with a chance to improve their own skills and abilities. Blankstein (2004) writes, "relationships serve to weave them together into a unified whole. Relationships support a leader in taking the risk to act from his or her core to create organizational meaning" (p. 28). The building of meaningful relationships, therefore, lies at the heart of school improvement. Until those meaningful relationships can be built between the curriculum directors and those they work with, their efforts at school improvement, the true meaning of their work, are likely to stall. After all, according to Schlechty (2001), "what the leader does has significance only to the extent that others follow" (p. 181).

As Blankstein (2004) reminds us, "building meaningful and productive relationships with people is much more complex than creating a new system or structure" (p. 59). With this thought in mind, it occurred to me that one way of thinking about the importance of developing relationships came to me in the words of one of the participants. In describing her approach to building relationships, Shirley described a sort of "field leadership." In that term, she saw her self as a gardener of sorts, planting people and ideas in ways that encouraged collaborative relationships between and among herself and teachers in the buildings. She said, "I did try to set a field for people so that they are collaborative—so that there is a collaborative atmosphere, so that there is trust, so that there is curiosity and growth and learning. So that we don't stay fixed. And, I don't want people to feel like we are fixed." But, thinking like a gardener, it is about planting your field for shared leadership and putting forth the care and attention the relationships need to grow.

Field of relationships. I have chosen the analogy of the gardener, as shared by this participant**,** Shirley, to better understand the importance of developing collaborative relationships for effective curriculum leadership. As has been clear from the previous findings so far, and much like a gardener is in his or her work, curriculum directors not only use their common sense and past experiences to guide and shape their thinking, but they also know the importance of observation and asking the right questions with regards to their planting and growing. Curriculum directors today must have a solid understanding of their organization, as developed through their own observation, feelings, and questions, and use that understanding to carefully establish relationships and a sense of team building.

The first step of building those important relationships that foster a sense of team building and collegiality is to view relationships in a positive light and to realize that the first step may start with you. Donita, in talking about how she viewed relationships, said, "oh, I think they are really important because they get to the root—beyond what the numbers say." As Mary Ann believes, "you have to go in and you have to be willing to listen." When viewed as an opportunity to get to know someone better, leaders know that this interest in others will pay dividends down the road. Like the gardener seeks to learn about better gardening from others that share the same hobby, the curriculum director should seek to learn as well. They can do this by maintaining a two-way conversation, focused on both the personal and the professional lives of individuals. As one participant, Betsy, said, "you've got to build it on a personal level, too. You can't just always be talking about curriculum…and you can't just always be talking about, you know, the kids

in the school." She further goes on to support this idea by saying, "in relationships what I really try to do is to let that person talk about what is important to them."

Just as a gardener knows which plants or flowers grow best in what conditions, the curriculum director also has a keen understanding of the working relationships that exist or are needed in the district. They gain this understanding by observing others closely, listening to their story, and asking the right questions. For Chris, the ability to participate in building level team meetings helps him to understand the direction they are headed and he also helps to clarify their thinking. He writes, "we rotate through building leadership teams as a cabinet. One of us rotates through every two or three months and we take a new set of buildings. So, my role there is to provide them with feedback from central office and to listen." Another example comes from Mary Ann who said, "I find it better for me to be the person behind the scenes being passionate and put my leaders out in front and have them be the one to carry the message. Because, then it's not just always that it is coming from me." These two examples illustrate that, with observation of the needs of others, and a purposeful quest to ask others the right questions, an individual can begin to build collaborative relationships focused on the same goal.

In the end, the gardener hopes to establish a beautiful flowerbed or a delicious garden where the flowers and plants have flourished given what they need to grow. For the curriculum leader, thinking carefully about the relationship building process can yield the same result. Leaders in education know that the reason relationship and team building is so important is that it taps into the teachers existing capabilities and potential, allowing them to grow and bloom as leaders in curriculum and instruction (Schmoker, 2006). And,

with strong relationships firmly in place, curriculum directors are able to let teachers and administrators lead the way.

Shared leadership. With relationships built between individuals at each level of the district, the curriculum directors I interviewed described how they were able to move forward toward achievement of their key goals and vision. Keeping in mind the notion that no one leader can know it all and that, in order to make the best decision possible one needs to have the most information possible, it is clear that sharing the leadership of curriculum development is critical to the long term success of the work of the district. Reeves (2006) further supports this idea and clearly summarizes the work curriculum directors must do when he writes:

> The challenge of educational organizations is not to make these leaders into perfectly complete beings by filling in their deficiencies, but rather to create complementary teams. Although no single leader will possess every dimension of effective leadership, the team will surely do so. (p. 29)

Now, it is certainly not to say that the curriculum directors I interviewed did not possess extensive knowledge in the area of curriculum and instruction. Quite the opposite. Each of the individuals I interviewed was bright and articulate, with impressive backgrounds in curriculum. It was clear, however, from their interviews that they knew the strength that could come from shared leadership.

In one interview, the power of the leadership team to lead the district was apparent. Mary Ann said, "I find it better for me to be the person behind the scenes being passionate and put my leaders out in front and have them be the one to carry the message." She went on further to explain, "so, the best way I think for me to [develop

shared leadership] is to build that passion within my administrators, to build that passion within my district leadership team members, and sometimes I need to do that on a one-to-one basis where I just seek them out, go to their building, talk to them about it, and ask, 'what do you think?'"

"Team learning is the process of aligning and developing the capacity of a team to create the results its members truly desire" (Senge, 1990, p. 236). With that definition in mind, it is clear to see that the curriculum directors have experienced the power that is teacher or administrative leadership. As Donita simply put it with regards to letting others lead, "I let the experts put it in place and it has gone wonderfully." Another curriculum director, Mary Ann, writes, "I usually always try and get a team to go to their peers or a team of administrators to go to the teachers or whatever. I don't try to be that person always in the front because I am overbearing and I know that." Giving teachers the time and opportunity to meet and work to improve the curriculum is crucial. Shirley, when asked about teacher leadership, enthusiastically shared, "I have teachers in constantly, here, and that is my best way to affect working with them. They are teaching it and they are the ones who compile it and see if it is working or not. But, then you have to give them to opportunity to create or why else have them here?"

Ultimately, the benefit of having and cultivating meaningful relationships with colleagues, and allowing for teacher leadership to the greatest extent possible, is an organization that functions at high levels. "There is widespread agreement that collegiality among teachers is an important ingredient of promoting better working conditions, improving teaching practice, and getting better results" (Sergiovanni, 1992, p. 86). But, the power of this practice, more simply put, can be seen in the thoughts of

Jackie, one of the interviewees who said, "I put a lot of responsibility back on my teachers. I involve them in a lot of the decision-making and so, therefore, I don't have to be the expert. They are the expert in either their grade level or their content area, so I rely on their expertise and I have found that to be extremely beneficial. I think it has been very empowering for the teachers to give them that authority to be involved in the curriculum decision making."

Relationships Through Collegial Support

One of the major ways that curriculum directors work to ensure teaching and learning at high levels is to seek feedback and input from all of the stakeholders in the school organization. With a variety of means for collecting the feedback (i.e., surveys, roundtable discussions, written feedback, etc…) and reflection as a tool for making sense of it, the curriculum director carefully uses this information to guide their work each and every day. Add to that their strong ability to ask questions to further their own and others' thinking, and a desire to work collaboratively, and you have a recipe for mindful leadership. However, it was clear that the loneliness and isolation of the position itself often left curriculum directors striving for the support they needed to take risks and feel success in their work.

Indeed, throughout the interviews with the seven curriculum directors, it became very clear to me that a strong factor in their success was their relationship both with the administrative team and with a friend who provided critical support through feedback, mentoring, and a listening ear. As Mary Ann agreed, "you have to have someone in your life who can help you with those things, I think, when you're in education." And never has that been more true.

Today in education, it is important to have an individual or a group of individuals who will listen to you, push your thinking to new depths, answer you honestly, and offer their full support regardless of the situation. As Costa and Kallick (1993), in using an "eyeglasses" analogy to represent the views of the leader, explain, "furthermore, you need another person to continually change your focus, pushing you to look through multiple lenses in order to find that "just right fit for you, the ultimate owner of the glasses" (p. 49). By looking closely at the thoughts of the interviewees, the importance of a close relationship with both the administrative team and a critical friend can be seen.

Administrative team support. In every interview I conducted, the importance of having a supportive administrative team surfaced as an important part of curriculum leadership. The power to lead with confidence, the kind that comes from knowing that you have the support of those closest to you, is clear in the comments of one interviewee. In talking about her administrative colleagues, Donita said, "I think I have a really good team here and I also have a really good cabinet. I think just knowing that we…can support each other really is the most important thing." With this structure in place, the individuals establish a sort of unspoken trust that allows them to know that, no matter what happens, they will always have their collective support.

For four of the seven participants, the large nature of their district meant working with multiple administrative teams. From the cabinet teams, which included those with superintendent or assistant superintendent titles, to curriculum department administrators, to the building administrators, these participants acknowledged the ability to work with and learn from each of these administrative groups. In talking with one participant, she acknowledged that without them and the work they do, she would not be successful.

Giving them the credit, she said, "and I totally trust them. I mean, if I'm having this conversation without talking about these people, then I'm nuts because they do it. And, I totally trust them implicitly. Completely."

For the curriculum directors in small districts, where the administrative team is made up of three or four individuals, the feelings of trust are the same. "Our administrative team within our district is very strong," Jackie said. But, it appears that the need to seek outside individuals to help support in other areas is more prevalent. Whereas large district have more individuals who can specialize in any given curricular area, small districts must rely on outside individuals to help provide external support that is needed. Whether from the local education agency or from other districts, the curriculum leaders in the smaller districts were able to seek outside help to support their work. One curriculum director spoke of a very close relationship she had with the education agency staff that were there to serve as a liaison to her district. Of this relationship Mary Ann said, "the consultant is amazing! When things aren't going where I need them to go, we map it out. We go in the board room, we draw over the walls and stuff." For the curriculum director that must set the tone and lead by example, having an administrative team that is there to support the is critical. While the way in which they provide that support my differ, these leaders know that they are surrounded by individuals who care for their success.

Interdependence and teams. An important part of understanding how supportive administrative teams can work to collectively improve an individual's or an organization's performance is to understand the concepts of dependence, independence and interdependence. These three terms are often used to describe the level of interactions that individuals in any group might have. Seen as a continuum, it could be said that an

ideal goal for organizations would be to move along the continuum from dependence to interdependence in hopes of meeting not only individual needs but, more importantly, those of the organization. For the individuals I interviewed, it seemed that each of them had an administrative team that allowed them the opportunity to share thoughts and decisions all the while gaining important feedback and input that only made them better.

In writing about this concept, Covey (2004) reminds us that life, by its own nature, is highly interdependent. As human beings, we rely on others in many different situations to make each other better. While it happens all the time that individuals work in isolation, removed from the thoughts and views of others, it is only through interdependence that two or more individuals can strengthen their own achievement by working together. While not all teams are functioning at the level of interdependence, for these administrators the support they receive would indicate that they are at that level. Covey (2004) reminds us to think that, "as an interdependent person, I have the opportunity to share myself deeply, meaningfully, with others, and I have access to the vast resources and potential of other human beings" (p. 51). I believe the individuals I interviewed understand, and have experienced that power of interdependence in their administrative teams. The value the opportunity to share their thinking and decision making with others as much as they do the feedback they need to grow and learn from others.

In one district, the level of interdependence among administrators can be evidenced in their use of Brown Bag Lunch and Learn sessions coordinated by the curriculum director. Started in response to helping to build capacity as an administrative team for initiatives they were undertaking, Mary Ann writes, "so, we have now a brown

bag every month. And, so, we go over not only what we're going to talk about with the district leadership team, but also make sure that they [administrators] completely understand not only what their job is during the leadership team meeting, but what their job is for that month's professional development. So, then, making sure that they completely and clearly understand what their job role and their responsibility is that day. We also discuss what group they should be with and what they should be expecting and what they need to see from the staff. It is also a chance for me to hear what they've been seeing." Having the brown bag lunches provided this curriculum director the opportunity to work interdependently with her administrative team. While the meetings offered her a chance to share the information she feels is important to the direction of the district, the open exchange of ideas through the subsequent discussion serves to strengthen everyone's understanding and effectiveness.

Having an administrative team that can support and encourage your work is critical in the area of curriculum. To be able to ask questions that lead to a greater understanding both individually and collectively is powerful. As Mary Ann explains, "we have our meetings where we ask each other where we are headed and whether or not we should be doing it. We set our goals and meet on them three times a month." The support of an administrative team, operating at the interdependent level, results in the confidence of curriculum directors to lead mindfully. As Donita further explained, "and, I think one of the things that intrigued me the most was the fact that I felt like I had someone who would be very supportive and would help carry the vision of 'this is truly what we are all about.'"

Critical Friendships. A second and very critical aspect of collegial support is having a critical friend who can help you reflect upon your work and provide you with honest feedback. Perhaps because of the loneliness of the position, or the emotions that can be tied to our relationships with our closest friends, the curriculum directors I interviewed spoke with the deepest of affection and reverence for those they considered their critical friends. According to Shirley, "For me, it's having someone to talk to when you're stressed. I mean, they say friends are so important to health, emotional and physical, and so having friends and family that we can turn to, or my husband, too, helps!" For these individuals, having that critical friend is important not only to their work, but to their emotional and physical health and well-being, too.

In describing the nature of the critical friend, Costa and Kallick (1993) write, "a critical friend, as the name suggests, is a trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers a critique of a person's work as a friend" (p. 50). Based on the interviews with the curriculum directors, this description clearly aligns with the traits they enjoyed so much about their critical friends. In one vibrant description of a critical friend, Shirley said, "I do have a buddy here that I've gone through a lot of systems thinking training together and a lot of growth training together. We've learned a lot from each other in those respects and now she's in the central office, but we have kind of a similar quest, I think, in life. I can go to her and she is a great listener. She knows how to listen and she knows how to help you think about it."

Another curriculum director highlights the importance of a critical friend in helping him to reflect, thus discovering answers to questions he may not have had when

his mind wasn't clear. For example, Chris writes, "your looking to them to ask you reflective questions because they are not emotionally tied to the issue. You've got to have a colleague that is trusted enough you can go in, sit down, and say, 'OK, here is what I am dealing with. Go ahead and ask me some questions.'" It is clear that this kind of conversation could not succeed, or likely even take place for that matter, if there hasn't been an establishment of trust between the two individuals.

"A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work" (Costa & Kallick, 1993, p. 50). As the interviewees indicated, whether that friend is their superintendent, another curriculum colleague, or the person in the office next to them, there are certain conditions that likely should exist for the relationship to bloom. Those conditions of trust, honesty, a listening ear, and a willingness to share openly, are the very things that, throughout the career of the curriculum director, help them to lead and learn at high levels. More importantly, having the opportunity to practice these skills one-on-one helps the curriculum directors to apply these skills in the larger groups they work with, bringing additional value to the critical friendship.

Planning and Preparing for Success

The real task for curriculum directors today seems to be to successfully balance all of the responsibilities that come with the job. With administrative oversight of numerous special programs (i.e., English as a Second Language, Talented and Gifted, Special Education), in addition to their curriculum work, curriculum directors must prepare for and lead stakeholders in the work of improving student learning. Add to that

the management of staff assigned to the curriculum department and the task becomes

only more difficult. It is clear that to accomplish this sense of balance, individuals in

these positions must have a clear sense of how to organize and proactively plan for their

work.

Summarizing nicely the rationale for being planful, Mary Ann said, "so, I think

that my job is as the organizer of what information these people need to make good

decisions. Putting that information together, putting those meetings together, being very

planful on agendas and topics, or whatever, allows us to get the most work done with the

time we have and so we can see where we are going." And, for many curriculum

directors, time is the enemy of their work. Thinking proactively about the work they are

doing, and planning carefully, helps them to stay see time not as a fixed quantity, but as a

variable that can be used to their advantage.

But, one cannot likely begin to plan very well if he or she does not have the

maximum amount of information they can have about the organization and how it

operates. With a variety of means for collecting data, and the ability to organize and

make sense of that information, curriculum directors can be mindful in their planning and

preparation for the direction they want to move. Schmoker (2011) stresses the need for

organizations to obtain clarity within themselves in order to best understand the long-

term goals they want to pursue. One way to achieve this sense of clarity is for the

individuals within the organization to function in a disciplined way, thus increasing the

capacity of the organization to reach its desired goals.

Being proactive with regards to planning and preparation means that curriculum

directors must purposefully develop a system for how they will manage the copious

amounts of notes and details they come across in their work. A strong organizational system will allow these individuals to keep track of their notes for easy reference at another time. Secondly, individuals who are purposeful in their planning and preparation, who use all of their information to set goals and action steps, will find they have the ability to move forward with confidence in their work.

Organizational strategies. In the book *Good To Great*, Collins (2001) points out that much of the book addresses creating a culture of discipline by which many of the individuals and companies moved from good performance to outstanding, or great, performance by approaching their work in a disciplined manner. Collins (2001) explained the concept of disciplined individuals as those who would go to extreme lengths to fulfill their responsibilities and who build a work environment where they are able to work at high levels or creatively within a framework. The key is that they are able to focus on doing what they do best and to share in the leadership.

For our interviewees, it was important that they used their strong organizational skills to free them up to think creatively and see solutions in their curriculum work. In acknowledging the distractions each of them likely faces in their day, one interviewee, Cheryl, said, "what I may have thought were priorities on Monday of this week, and I intended to do one, get interrupted by calls from principals, by parents, wanting to storm in here." By being well organized, these individuals can continue the curriculum work they are doing without being sidelined by the smaller interruptions they may encounter. Not allowing your mind to be cluttered with even the smallest of interruptions in the day allows them to focus clearly on the real work they have to do. As Chris added, "you've got to be thoughtful when you have all of these priorities and you've got to think about

the possibilities of what might happen if I put this on the back burner, is it going to

simmer? Or is the heat so high on this one that it's going to be splattering on the walls?

You've got to have you finger on the pulse so to speak. You've got to have a sense of

whether or not this rises to the where if I don't take care of this now, it's going to create

five fold the amount of work down the road." This quote is a really strong example of the

disciplined thought that curriculum directors need in order to work towards achievement

of their goals. "You need to have discipline to confront the brutal facts of reality, while

retaining resolute faith that you can and will create a path to greatness" (Collins, 2001, p.

126).

Information gathering. Curriculum directors who are mindful have the most

information possible to help them guide their decision-making. They seek out

information that will help them in doing their job better, work to make sense of that

information, and then step back to think clearly through their next steps. This level of

thoughtfulness, or planning, is important in helping to set the organization as a whole in

the right direction. Cheryl, in describing the benefit of being planful, said, "if you want to

get to where you need to be, sometimes you just have to restructure or redesign to get

there." Senge (1990) calls this role 'leader as designer' and writes, "in essence, the

leaders' task is designing the learning processes whereby people throughout the

organization can deal productively with the critical issues they face, and develop their

mastery in the learning disciplines" (p. 345).

Thinking like a designer was a clear message heard in the research. One

curriculum director, Donita, in talking about the benefit of planning thoughtfully, said,

"so, there was a lot of planning that went into how we were going to move people

forward and, um, who would be the best points of leverage to get that done. And, then, the really big thing for us is just putting together a plan and communicating it. This is huge." No mention was ever made of any sort of elaborate plans with complex action steps. Instead, the curriculum directors saw the opportunity to plan carefully with those around them.

Much like this example, Gardner (2007) writes eloquently of the synthesizing mind, "the manager must consider the job to be done, the various workers on hand, their current assignments and skills, and how best to execute the current priority and move on to the next one" (p. 6). Disciplined people using disciplined thought to create an organization focused on moving forward. The curriculum director who contemplates their work carefully and plans not for themselves, but for the organization and those who work there, will find themselves successful. "But disciplined action without discipline people is impossible to sustain, and disciplined action without disciplined thought is a recipe for disaster" (Collins, 2001, p. 126).

Awareness of Self and Others

Curriculum directors understand very well the need to work collaboratively to achieve important goals for their school organization. This collaboration, as previously explained, is based on trust and a willingness to share in the responsibility of improving the organization. Goleman (1995) reminds us that, "leadership is not domination, but the art of persuading people to work toward a common goal" (p. 149). But, no matter how great the relationship, we must keep in mind that, as human beings, relationships are part of a dynamic system that changes over time. Knowing that, it is important for curriculum

directors to develop a strong awareness for and appreciation of the feelings and needs of others, as well as their own self.

Bolman and Deal (2003) confirm this notion of the dynamic world of relationships when they write:

> Interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence are vital, because,…personal relations are a central element of daily life in organizations. Many change efforts fail not because managers' intentions are incorrect or insincere but because they are unable to handle the social challenges of implementation. (p. 168)

Curriculum leaders who want to see their school improvement efforts succeed must develop the awareness skills that help them to understand not only their own feelings, but those of individuals they work with.

There are two types of awareness that help the curriculum director to succeed in their work. The first type, self-awareness, is the recognition of one's own emotions as they are happening (Goleman, 1995). This is the ability to monitor, minute to minute, your feelings and emotions as they are happening and to understand what they mean to you. The second type, empathy, means awareness of the social signals that indicate what other people need or want. Empathy, by its own nature, builds off of self-awareness. When you can recognize the feelings you are experiencing in your own self, you will likely be able to recognize that same feeling in others. Both skills are important for leaders who want to succeed in their work, because both allow them to work closely with the people who they count on to help them reach their organization's goals.

Emotional self-awareness. Making an individual connection with colleagues you interact with will make you a better school leader. But making that connection means one

must have the emotional intelligence to be able to read others, but more importantly to read and understand their own self first. More specifically, McKee et al. (2008) define self-awareness, writing, "emotional self-awareness is the ability to process emotional information quickly and accurately, to recognize one's own emotions as they happen, and to immediately understand their effects on oneself and on others" (p. 26).

For those individuals who want to be change leaders, who want to lead effectively, they must understand who they are, not only within themselves, but to others as well (Schlechty, 2001). This notion of knowing yourself first and knowing yourself best can be heard in the Shirley's voice when she said, "you have to be true to yourself all of the time or, you know, everybody figures that out if you're not." And, given all of the people these leaders interact with on a daily basis, having a strong sense of self is important so as not to lose the direction you want to head.

In fact, to be emotionally self-aware does not mean that you have to remain emotionless as a leader. As Chris acknowledges, "it's OK to have emotions. The key is that those emotions have to be professional in nature." To go a step farther, several of the individuals I interviewed were very clear that they were passionate about their work. Cheryl said, "I love my work! I am very passionate about it. I can be pretty intense about it." Another curriculum director, Mary Ann, echoed that same statement by saying, "well, you know, I am very passionate about what I do. And, there are times where I may be too passionate. Every once in a while I have to get reeled in." This candid example of self-awareness shows that this leader has the ability to monitor her own thoughts and feelings.

Based on my interviews with the various curriculum directors, it was clear that they understood the value of seeking feedback from those around them. Feedback, whether complimentary in nature or critical, can open up a window for the leader that shines in the light of what they should know to work at their highest capacity. Goleman et al. (2002) explain that leaders, however, need to be able to break through the quarantine of information that typically surround them to get to the most valuable type of feedback. This quarantine, as they describe, is the tendency for individuals to share only the things that leaders want to hear, not what they need to hear.

Self-awareness is the way in which leaders can identify the very beliefs or thoughts that are preventing them from hearing the true message or taking action that is consistent with their leadership beliefs. Cheryl illustrated this perfectly when she wrote, "I think you have to watch for people who are confident and not afraid to say what they think. You have to make sure that you do not allow yourself to become intimidated by them, because often they can be the key to your understanding of who to listen to and not listen to." Shirley echoed this same feeling as well when they said, "you don't want to get to where you don't say anything because then you're being backed down. So, keep your sense of self intact and say what you believe, but not do it in a way that is going to cause problems." Self-awareness provides the self-confidence that leaders need to lead with conviction (McKee et al., 2008). And, when your convictions are strong enough to drive your work, you can confidently seek information and feedback that only strengthens your work.

Acknowledging your own feelings and beliefs, in hopes of better understanding the feelings of others, can seem artificial and challenging. As Cheryl so clearly explained,

"it is one of the hardest lessons for us to learn that people have different perceptions than you and, to them, their perception is their truth." Another participant, Chris, said, "then you realize that we're all tied by our own filters and our own emotions." Goleman et al. (2002) alert us to the fact that, "because routine creates such gradual changes that take hold over time, the reality of our lives often can be hard to grasp. It's like looking in a clouded mirror: It becomes difficult to see who we really are" (p. 129). In the end, the journey to self-awareness is not an easy one, but indeed one worth taking.

Empathy. For most every individual, empathy starts at a young age when we express curiosity and care towards others. The desire to know about and understand the feelings of others is really strong. But, as adults, that empathy tends to diminish as our mirror of understanding, as mentioned above, becomes clouded with our own experiences and thoughts. Instead, we fill our heads with information that is not always true, causing us to think and act in familiar ways, or from our mental models (Senge, 1990). This idea is confirmed by Chris who writes, "Then we realize that we're all tied by our own filters and our own emotions." The resulting mindlessness causes us to take action and make decisions that may not reflect our best interests.

One way that curriculum leaders act mindful in their work is through the use of empathy. Empathy helps to build the bonds in relationships between individuals and sustain that successful relationship over time. According to Goleman et al. (2002), "rather, empathy means taking employees' feelings into thoughtful consideration and then making intelligent decisions that work those feelings into the response" (p. 50). This notion of empathy and its value in curriculum leadership could be heard throughout the interviews. In describing her awareness of others' emotions, Jackie said, "I think, for the

most part, I'm very intuitive about that. I notice details about people. I am not a detail person in life, but I notice details about people. How they hold themselves, their eye contact, if they fidget. You know, just things like that. So, I try to be very aware of how that might be reflecting emotions that they might be having. Because, often, people can say way more with their reactions than they can with their words."

The implication for empathy and curriculum leadership is that individuals must think about both one's personal feeling and those related to their work—and how they affect one another. Donita put it so simply, saying, "we really try to make sure that we understand where people are coming from and what their current state of affairs are." And, for one administrator, the best way to do that is to incorporate time into each of her meetings to find out how everyone is doing. Cheryl writes, "often in our meetings we'll start off taking temperatures. So, we'll just go around and say, 'What's your temperature today? How are you doing? What's going on?' And people get it out on the table and then you know they will come and say, 'Here's what's going on with me today.' So, they share." The result, when that sharing occurs, is that everyone ends us contributing to a shared pool of understanding (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2002). And, from that spot curriculum directors can focus on leading in the best direction.

With a role in central office leadership, curriculum directors feel the constant strain of the distance between them and the buildings. It would be easy to utilize that distance to buffer themselves from their critics who they perceive to be critical of their work. By doing this, the curriculum directors could easily ignore the fact and, instead, tell themselves the story the want to hear. As Boyatzis and McKee (2005) write:

However, effective leaders are able to suspend automatic judgment, and can work

to understand other people without filters. Effective leaders care enough to want

to learn about other people, to see what they feel and see the world the way they

do. And then they do something with what they've learned. (p. 179)

For the individuals I interviewed, their stories clearly illustrated their purposeful efforts

to act with empathy and lead in the right direction. Or, as Chris warned:

For others, personal perceptions become their reality and if you don't as an

administrator realize that person's reality, and you try to argue with them about

what their reality is, you're not going to win. Now, you may never agree with that

perception, but if you don't at least try and walk in their shoes, so to speak, and

step back and try to look at it from somebody else's perception, you end up

making a decision that is not going to be supported or that is not a good decision.

When we think about the idea of emotional awareness, both for one's self and for others,

it is easy to think of the very surface level interactions we have with our co-workers each

day. But, these interactions do nothing to build the kind of relationships that are needed

for curriculum directors to lead others, and their organization, successfully. As is

evidenced by the responses of the curriculum directors themselves, they are passionate

about what they do and have strong beliefs and ideals. They tell us that they are cognizant

of the strength and degree of their emotions. But, as we now know, it also means that

they are able to be empathetic towards others.

Two thoughts that the interviewers shared with me have stuck with me since the

moment I heard them. They speak to the drive of the curriculum directors to lead from

the heart and to remain compassionate and empathetic towards others. When asked if

emotions have a place in their work, Cheryl said, "absolutely! Would they rather we be lacking in passion?" But, even more poignantly, as Shirley put it, "oh, yeah, of course! How could you separate the dancer from the dance?"

In the end, Schwartz (2010) reminds us, "to build competitive advantage, organizations must help employees to cultivate qualities that have never before been critical—among them authenticity, empathy, self-awareness,…an internal sense of purpose, and, perhaps above all, resilience in the face of relentless change" (p. 21). To find ways to lead individuals and organizations with compassion and confidence is truly the charge of the curriculum director in finding success in their position.

Dialogue and Discussion as Opportunities For Growth.

As mentioned previously, one result of the ability to be empathetic towards others is the development of a shared pool of understanding among individuals. This shared understanding is important especially if leaders are to have the most information possible to help them make a solid decision or to take action in the right direction. For curriculum directors, it is also important for them to have the opportunity to learn from others through the dialogue and discussion that happens in teams large or small. This means being able to work closely with both their administrative and teacher teams, and solicit input, regardless of the opinion, to ultimately make the best decisions possible.

In describing the qualities of an effective leadership team, Donita said, "I really believe in the leadership adage that you really build a team with people that have different kinds of strengths and skills than you do. And, so, having had the opportunity to have built that, if you look at our team, you will see they were hired for very specific things they would bring to our team." Growth mindset individuals, like this curriculum

director, believe that they can only be made better, or work at high levels, when they

cultivate a leadership team around them that will challenge their own learning (Dweck,

2006). To do so means you have to start as early as the hiring process, thinking carefully

to hire individuals who will be honest, yet constructive in their approach.

Even for those individuals who do not get to hire their teams, it is important that

they understand the strengths and weaknesses each person brings to the table. As Bolman

and Deal (2003) explain, "both individual satisfaction and organizational effectiveness

depend heavily on the quality of interpersonal relationship. An individual's social skills

or competencies are a critical element in the effectiveness of relationships at work" (p.

179).

Groups, by their nature, possess different skills, resources, and talents. These

differences should not be avoided by leaders, but instead should be capitalized upon. "A

group that sees diversity as an asset and a source of learning has a good chance for a

productive discussion of differences" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 178). And, that

discussion of differences is just what the organization, and the people working there,

needs to work to their fullest potential. All of the curriculum directors I interviewed, in

some form or another, alluded to the importance of group learning for improving their

own thinking and the work of the organization.

Several of the curriculum directors even cautioned of the dangers of convergent

thinking, which can lead to a mindless approach where all of the necessary information is

not gathered prior to making decisions. One participant, Shirley, told me of a

conversation with her superintendent about convergent thinking among the administrative

team. She said, "he told me that if we all agree on everything, then we don't need all of

us here." The conflict that often arises from these meetings is never pleasant, but individuals must remind themselves that it is needed for growth.

The power of dialogue and discussion. Curriculum directors looking to act in mindful ways must carefully ensure that, when working collaboratively with others, it is not done solely at the surface level. While it is easier to create a façade where input from colleagues is collected but rarely every used, true leadership requires individuals to create and maintain a climate where such true dialogue can take place, regardless of what is said. After all, as Collins (2001) explains, "leadership is equally about creating a climate where the truth is heard and the brutal facts confronted. There's a huge difference between the opportunity to 'have your say' and the opportunity to be *heard*" (p. 74).

To best understand how this can be accomplished, it is important to understand the qualities of effective dialogue. As Senge (1990) notes, "in dialogue, there is the free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues, a deep 'listening' to one another and suspending of one's own views" (p. 237). For the curriculum director, these dialogues most often occur at the administrative level, where they can work closely with their colleagues who will work to use their own strengths to push and extend the thinking of the curriculum leader. This is the opportunity for the type of divergent thinking that can result in a deeper and more meaningful understanding of the value of your work.

One curriculum director in particular, Donita, described the opportunity for dialogue with her administrative colleagues saying, "we've had some knock-down drag-outs because we've had different philosophies on things. And, there's never been a day that I've left angry with them, but there has been a day I've been frustrated. Then we'll come right back in the next day after we've had time to think about all the stuff and say,

'OK, let's really look at it from a perspective that will put everything in line.'" This candid insight into this type of conversation, and the delight with which she shared this story, illustrate the power that can be found in these types of discussion.

When a group or organization can use dialogue to improve its practices, they subsequently create an environment where individuals are able to openly share their ideas and encourage a stronger shared understanding. As such, the leaders are able to help keep one another on track more easily, because they can redirect another individual's thinking in a positive manner. "At a more personal level, leaders must assure others that the abandoning of valued habits and the embracing of new approaches that reorganize and reorient work are not things to fear" (Schlechty, 2001, p. 165).

Several participants shared that the possibility of open dialogue has allowed the team to work effectively to keep each other focused on the goals and vision for the work they are doing. In talking about her relationship with her superintendent, Mary Ann said, "we work well together because there have been times where I have said to him, 'No! I refuse to back down on this one. You need to get moving on this one and I am not moving backwards. I will move backwards on a lot of things, but this one, absolutely not! I am drawing the line here!' And, he knows I am serious and so, therefore, he is willing to compromise and I am willing to compromise." Another individual, Donita, said of her efforts to keep the group moving the same direction, "one of the things that I just have to keep reminding our superintendent, is that while he is very supportive of what we're doing, sometimes he veers off, too. So, you know, I think we all just agree that we're going to, when we feel like we're kind of getting off path, we'll be able to have that conversation."

Senge (1990) goes on to explain that, "by contrast, in discussion different views are presented and defended and there is a search for the best view to support decisions that must be made at this time" (p. 237). By the nature of the curriculum director's position, discussion offers these leaders the chance to address curricular decisions they need to make and to hear the open and honest thoughts of their colleagues.

One individual I interviewed, Shirley, talked at length about her discussions with administrative colleagues about best practices in the use of homework. Noting their lack of agreement, sometimes heated at times, she saw the administrative team meeting as a safe and effective opportunity for them to discuss the concept further. In describing her approach, Shirley said, "let's find out what we agree on and where we disagree. Then, let's take the things we disagree on. I think one of them is grading homework. Where do we come down with that? Now, let's really talk about that. And, let's dig deep and learn about it. Let's talk about it and we'll set the other things we agree on over there." In her interview she so vividly described how discussion was used to air their differences and to begin to reach a common understanding in order to move forward.

The best part of dialogue and discussion is that, when practiced and used on a regular basis, it can become a model for learning throughout all levels of the organization. It is critical that curriculum leaders stay vigilant in creating, sustaining, and utilizing these models of learning. Because, for many, "It had never come to the collective realization that open discussion and disagreements about ideas—as opposed to attacks on people who hold disparate views—sharpen decision making" (Goleman et al., 2002, p. 172).

The difficult conversation. Administratively, curriculum directors use dialogue and discussion to strengthen their work and achieve clarity. Unfortunately, there are times when they must also use discussion as means for having difficult conversations with administrators or teachers who don't share the same vision. The struggle of the administrator to choose between listening openly, and being more directive with the staff member who appears to not care, is difficult. As Donita said, "I must balance between wanting to listen, wanting to understand, and wanting to push. And, I want to say, 'I hear what you're saying but it doesn't align with our mission or it doesn't align with where we are going.'"

For many of us, it is by our own human nature that we avoid conflict. In writing about those difficult conversations we sometimes need to have with individuals, (Patterson et al., 2002) remind us:

> When it comes to risky, controversial, and emotional conversations, skilled people find a way to get all relevant information (from themselves and others) out into the open. That's it! At the core of every successful conversation lies the free flow of relevant information. (p. 20)

Therefore, that is why I think it is easier for the curriculum directors to understand the importance of these conversations. They understand how to use information to adequately convey their message. One interviewee, Cheryl, echoed this statement exactly when she said, "I think that there are a lot of people in curriculum land that have gotten pretty good at being direct without being unkind."

Curriculum leaders understand what is at stake in these conversations. By focusing on student learning, and directing their focus on this area, the conversation

becomes less personal and more professional. In addition to the difficult conversation, Donita describes providing support to them as well, saying, "if your data is working, great! If you data is improving, we're going to step aside and let you continue your work. But, if your students' data is not showing growth, then that's when we are going to go in and have that 'care-frontation' and, you know, kind of help you better understand the importance of your work."

Ultimately, knowing who you are talking to, and ascertaining their needs and emotions, will help you to be more successful. As one curriculum director, Mary Ann, said, "you do have to tailor your message to the different people you talk to in different ways. With teachers, I think you have to be brutally honest with what is happening with kids and you have to look at the data." Chris agrees, adding, "now, you can still do that in a professional and respectful manner, but sometimes that needs to be clearly addressed. Just like as a principal, you need to be clearly direct." The important thing to remember is to tailor your message carefully, being sure to include all the information from both sides of the conversation.

Having the difficult conversation can be both intimidating and unnerving. Again, because the human element of organizations is dynamic, one truly can never predict what the outcome of a conversation like this will be. However, careful consideration needs to be given by the curriculum director in thinking through how to approach the individual in order to have success. After all, they have likely had the most practice and skill in leading this conversation. Blankstein (2004) reminds us of this when he writes, "they recognize their crucial role in the educational process and know that they can meet the challenges

confronting them only by solving problems in concert with their professional colleagues" (p. 130).

Purpose In One's Work

One message that I heard consistently throughout the interviews was that of the need for the curriculum directors to focus on the "big picture" aspect of curriculum leadership, while at the same time working to ensure they understood the needs and feelings of the teachers and staff who were working on the front lines with students. By their own acknowledgment, this balance is tough to obtain, thus leading to frustration among these individuals.

One curriculum director, Mary Ann, explained the difficult trade-off that occurs when they go into the buildings to work with teachers or students—their time and ability to focus on the goal of their work, back at their office, disappears. While they love being back with the students and connecting with teachers, this simply means that they are not back in their office focusing on their work. And, if thought of in the opposite way, curriculum directors who only spend time in their office, never to spend time working with staff at the building level, often get lost in the real meaning and value of their work. But, despite this challenge, Chris noted that the children are the real reason for his work. He said, "I don't know if you can see it from there, but you see that '6300 + 1' sign [referring to a small Post-It Note taped to his desk organizer]? I keep that in front of me so that, you know, there are 6300 reasons why I am doing this." And, all the other curriculum directors indicated that as well. While they missed seeing the children on a regular basis, they knew the importance of their work and the impact it would have on the children in the district.

Attaining the big picture perspective takes time, reflection, and an understanding

of the climate and culture of the organization you are working within. In their book on

leadership Heifitz and Linsky (2002) encourage leaders to think about this big picture

view of leadership like that of a dance floor. By moving up to the dance floor, leaders are

better able to see all of the dynamics that exist in their organization than if they are on the

dance floor engaged in the work the others are doing. They further explain:

> Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your
>
> mind, even if only for a moment. The only way you can gain both a clearer view
>
> of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself
>
> from the from fray. (p. 53)

In my research, two of the curriculum directors, Donita and Chris, addressed this directly,

sharing about the value of this type of perspective. Donita said, "I just really have to force

myself to fly at the 50,000 feet instead of getting down in the weeds. Because, really, if I

get down in the weeds, then I don't let people do what they're hired to do." Chris

confirmed this notion saying, "you know that balcony view? I don't know if you have

read some of Heifitz' research or not, but you've got to consciously try to step back and

step up in a way." But, perhaps another curriculum director, Shirley, summarized the

power of the big picture perspective best when she said, "the big picture is what I always

try to focus on. You know, how is this going to impact our students kindergarten through

12th grade? The power of the big picture perspective allows you to see clearly the

dynamics of the organization and those you work with.

Developing a clear sense of purpose not only requires a big picture perspective,

but also means establishing a mission and vision that guide your work. As has been

previously mentioned, there are many individuals and events that can positively or

negatively impact one's leadership, and knowing how to stay true to yourself, in pursuit

of your goals, is important. In addition, based on the interviews, it appears that the

curriculum directors also need a solid understanding of their role within a system focused

on continual improvement for everyone. As the learning leader for the district, the

curriculum director can use the system to maximize personal learning for those in the

organization.

Clear mission and vision. Establishing a clear mission and vision for any

organization is important in inspiring others to joint the work that lies ahead. As Reeves

(2006) explains, "the first obligations of leadership are articulating a compelling vision

and linking clear standards of action that will accomplish the vision" (p. 34). For the

curriculum directors, establishing the mission and vision means laying the foundation

upon which all other things are built. For example, one curriculum director described

how she used the district's core mission to redirect and guide those who seemed to be

veering off of track. Donita said, "and, I just go right back to what is our core mission,

what are our values, and how does that fit in with what our intentions are by the year

2014."

Had she not clearly understood the mission, and how they needed to achieve their

goals, they could have ended up mindlessly moving in an aimless direction. As Shirley

shared, "if I feel as though I am working for the wrong things, I have to keep focused on

our vision and on deep learning. That helps you with your confidence that, you know

you're just going to keep focused on the big things." But, this ability to refer back to the

mission, and to maintain a focus on the true work of schools, is what helps to ensure high levels of learning and keeps us mindful of those around us!

For many of the curriculum directors, it was evident that having a clearly identified mission and vision was almost a way of keeping them grounded in the work they had to do. Reeves (2006) adds to this notion by writing, "effective visions help individuals understand that they are part of a larger world and also reassure them of their individual importance to the organization" (p. 36). This idea of a vision helping to shape one's understanding of their role within a system can be seen in this quote by one participant, Chris. He said, "I work for the school district and my job is to make sure that 6300 kids have the best possible experience they can." Another passionately reminded me, "in your role, it's not your community. It's not your school. It's *their* school. It's *their* kids."

Perhaps Schlechty (2001) says it best in describing the complexities of having a clear mission and vision. He writes:

> Effective change leaders seem to understand intuitively that in the midst of change, definite information is limited, and they use whatever guideposts they can create to give themselves and others a clear sense of where the organization is as well as how it is doing in getting where it is going. (p. 171)

I believe that, for these curriculum directors, that understanding is intuitive, but that doesn't make it any easier to put into action. As Mary Ann said, "and, so, that's a challenge always to think of ways that you can make that vision as clear as you possibly can and make sure people have the tools they need and the background information they need." In the end, their ultimate desire, to put vision into action, is summarized so well

by one of the participants, Betsy, who said, "I have a vision…but I like to work here [motioning to the ground level, where the teachers are at]. I have some visions of where we want to go. But, what I want to be able to do then is to take that vision and make it real."

Work in a systems approach. As was mentioned early in the findings section, the curriculum directors I interviewed spoke emphatically about the need to lead their organization as models for continual improvement. Bringing together individuals with different strengths, insights, and personalities to work together towards a common goal can be quite difficult. All of the curriculum directors, however, realize that there is no other option. They must work to bring together others in learning and lead the way for them as a group. In writing about leaders and the heart of the work they face, Senge (1990) said, "they [leaders] are responsible for *building organizations* where people continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models—that is, they are responsible for learning" (p. 340).

From the interviews, it was clear that these individuals bear the weight of responsibility for fostering the learning of the organization. While working hard to ensure this happens, they also know that the task is bigger than each of them. They acknowledge that they work within a system, and as such, must learn how to operate successfully within that system. One participant, Donita, in describing their planning process for the year, said, "in this position, it [our planning] influences an entire system instead of just a building, so you have to think of things longer. So, there was a lot of planning that went into how we were going to move people and who would be the best points of leverage to get that done." Cheryl spoke of the same thing, only describing the decisions of a

curriculum director as a ripple effect across the district. "The ripples of your decisions go so much wider. The ripples of the decisions they make, or the errors in the work they do, are so much wider."

An obvious benefit of systems thinking is the ability to make better decisions for yourself and your organization. Any time individuals can slow down their thinking in order to get the most information possible, the likelihood is that they will make decisions that best reflect the need of those involved. One interviewee, Jackie, put it so succinctly as to say, "I think it allows you to make a better decision. Especially when you are making decisions that affect such a large number of people." Donita added, "but when we look at the system as a whole, it may appear that we can't go that way and we explain why." And, making better decisions means avoiding those assumptions that can keep us from the most accurate information.

In solving a district curriculum issue by viewing their work as a system, one curriculum director tells how they averted destroying one of their very own initiatives. In his story, Chris said:

> We had some issues going on several years ago with benchmarking and reading. I truly think it was the best for kids that we were doing it. But, we had pushed the system far enough that in Senge's term, you know, the old rubber band analogy, we were getting a lot of pull back. And, my sense at that time was, as I told the elementary principals, 'If we don't step in and relieve some of this tension, it's going to snap.

This awareness of the limits of the system, and the devastating effects ignoring those limits could have on the organization, is evidence of his understanding of systems on his work.

In curriculum leadership, knowledge of the system and a focus on continual improvement go hand-in-hand. To have ample time and information in thinking through our decisions, we can improve our work. In an school system, though, it is not enough for the administrators in the district, such as the curriculum director or superintendent, to focus only themselves on continual improvement. They must encourage all staff members to constantly pursue new learning and understanding, if not for themselves, but more importantly for their students. "Effective leaders create conditions in which all personnel develop the capacity to think anew in responsive and responsible ways" (Schlechty, 2001, p. 200). This charge is not new to the curriculum directors I interviewed. For many of them, I sensed a growing persistence in reminding their colleagues that, in a continuous learning model, learning never stops.

As Donita gently reminded staff, "we will always be in this continual improvement cycle. You've never arrived and for some people that is really hard. I think they'd like to say, 'I'm going to work, work, work, work, work, and work, and now I'm here and now I can coast.' And, that's not what we can do anymore." Betsy said, "I just tell them that it will never be done. I'm like, 'Our work will never be done because the amount of knowledge that is available for our students is going to continue to grow.'" Given the change and pace at which change occurs in education today, slowing down to think and reflect is critical. This research study clearly shows that curriculum directors who are mindful already have a lot of tools that make their systemic thinking more

effective. In the end, though, it is up to these individuals, functioning as learning leaders to impact others and their organization for the better. "Learning organizations can be built only by individuals who put their life spirit into the task. It is our choices that focus that spirit" (Senge, 1990, p. 360).

Throughout the interview process, I listened carefully to the curriculum directors answer the questions and share their thoughts and insights about their critical leadership role. As the end of the interview process approached, and I reflected upon what I had heard over the previous interviews, it was clear to me that saturation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) was beginning to occur. According to the authors, this is the point in the interview process when you are not learning any new material from the interviews.

Saturation was also achieved in the data analysis process as well. According to Creswell (2007), saturation occurs in the analysis stage when, in looking for instances that represent the categories that have been identified, the researcher no longer finds information that provides insight into the specific category. This happened for all of the categories I found in my research. By carefully analyzing the transcripts from my participant interviews, I was able to saturate the data and be confident in the findings.

Mindful Actions

If one examines the eight findings from this research study in the frame of the three qualities of mindfulness, as identified by Langer (1989), it is clear that curriculum directors act mindfully to navigate the choppy waters of curriculum leadership. The three key qualities of a mindful state of being are:

1. Creation of new categories.

2. Openness to new information.

3. Awareness of more than one perspective.

As we look at each one individually, we can see the connections to the findings of this study.

Creation of new categories. As human beings, the mindsets we make when we first encounter something tend to stick with us for the remainder of our lives. According to Langer (1989), the formation of premature cognitive commitments throughout our early life often limit us by not allowing us to see possibilities in the very same things in new settings. When we are mindful, however, we pay attention to the situation and the context we are in and work hard to see new potential in experiences we have had before. In other words, we work to re-categorize our thinking in our mind. For curriculum directors, the use of reflection as a tool for personal or professional growth and action, proactive planning and preparation, and a clear sense of purpose all help them to see new categories in mindful ways. "In…the workplace…mindful new distinctions and differentiated categories can smooth the way we get along" (Langer, 1989, p. 66).

Openness to new information. Given the fast pace that information is doubling in our world, it is no surprise that curriculum directors must support their organizations in making sense of that growth in a manageable way. Langer (1989) relates the idea of openness to information to being like the radar system on the most modern of aircraft. Curriculum directors who are open to new information constantly look for it by mindfully increasing their knowledge base. In this study, it appears that the relationship building efforts of these individuals provides them the best way to learn more about the world around them. Through these dynamic relationships, and the actions that go with maintaining them, curriculum directors can get the most information to help them

succeed in their work. Collaborative relationships built on trust, collegial support and

relationships, and awareness for and appreciation of others and own self provide the

leaders the opportunity to maintain an culture that is open to an active exchange of

information. And, Langer (1989) supports this notion when she writes, "in the strongest

relationships, this sets up a continuous feedback loop that keeps the partnership,

marriage, or team in balance, like an aircraft" (p. 68).

Awareness of more than one perspective. In the education field, there is no

shortage of both fans and critics alike when it comes to curricular work. Leaders

acknowledge that they must develop a thick skin when it comes to seeking and making

sense of the feedback of others. But, they know, it's what you make of the feedback that

really matters. As Langer (1989) asserts, "once we become aware of views other than our

own, we start to realize that there are as many different views as there are different

observers" (p. 68). It can be easy for curriculum directors to ignore the thoughts and

feeling of others, but to lead significant change, they must find ways to gather that

information. Based on this research study, mindful curriculum directors gain awareness

of the perspectives of others by using feedback to learn and lead others and by seeing

dialogue and discussion as opportunities for growth.

In the end, curriculum directors need to be able to look back on their career and

their work with a sense of pride and satisfaction. Leading a learning organization in the

21st century requires mindful individuals who believe in the power that comes from the

positive exchange of thoughts and ideas. As one curriculum director reflected on this

notion during our interview, "I've started thinking about something. I think our world is

full of dualistic ideas, yet we keep thinking one has to be right and one has to be wrong.

And, that is not how the world is made. Can these two views hold together and both co-exist with completely different ideas? I hope they can." Mindful leadership in curriculum involves bringing two or more sides together in the discovery of the best path to take at that current moment in time.

Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

Overview of the Study

Given the rapidly changing face of education, and the pace in which educational

organizations must operate today, it is no surprise that curriculum directors face many

challenges in leading themselves and others through the work of curriculum leadership.

As leaders, they must be able to respond rapidly to the changes and demands they face

each day, while staying true to themselves and their organization. With improved student

achievement at the core of their work, they must remain mindful in order to successfully

handle the challenges of their position.

But, it is simply not that easy. For a long time, educators who have given little

thought to their actions and who have operated from their own perspective have

"tampered" with school improvement efforts that have, in effect, had a zero or negative

impact on the field. In addition, the field of education is wrought with tradition that often

limits us in making the changes that, with careful thought and planning, could improve

our work and practices. And, add in the political implications tied to education today and

the work of these leaders suddenly seems even daunting. Yet, their desire to create an

educational system that supports each and every student in their learning is what keeps

them going. So, it only seems natural to want to understand how these leaders work so

mindfully.

Building off of an aspect of the work of Boyatzis and McKee (2005) in their book

Resonant Leadership, the purpose of this phenomenological study has been to explore the

phenomenon of mindfulness (Langer, 1989) as it related to curriculum directors and their

work. It was through this study that I hoped to understand the many ways curriculum directors are mindful in their thinking and in their work with other individuals in their organization.

I believed that, in understanding the ways in which curriculum directors utilized mindful approaches in their work, readers could begin to understand ways in which they, as leaders, might be able to sustain their own resonant, or successful, leadership over time and implement quality practices that lead to continual improvement. The field of education is changing more and more rapidly every year, with calls for greater accountability and improved student learning. Leaders today, and more so in the future, must be able to sustain the type of leadership that brings individuals with diverse backgrounds together in a shared effort to accomplish the organization's goal(s) without fear of what happens when they share their insights.

Therefore, the grand tour question (Yin, 2010) guiding this study was, "How is the phenomenon of mindfulness manifested in the work of curriculum directors?" Through the identification of the key qualities of a mindful state of being, as developed by Langer (1989), I was able to develop additional procedural subquestions (Creswell, 2007) that, when asked, would yield more specific answers to help address my grand tour question. The findings came from one-on-one interviews with seven curriculum directors from a Midwest state. With the interview transcripts and the information from the participant journals, I began to analyze the data using an open, axial, and selective coding procedures. Through three iterations of the coding process, I was able to identify eight findings that address the ways that mindfulness impacts the work of the curriculum directors.

Discussion

Given that the purpose of the study was to understand the many ways that curriculum directors were mindful in their work with individuals and organizations, it only seemed natural to ask questions within the framework of the three key qualities of a mindful state of being as defined by Langer (1989). The information shared by the curriculum directors was so helpful and rich in detail that I could not help but feel a part of their work myself. The challenge, for me, was to carefully analyze their responses. As Boyatzis and McKee (2005) write, "good advice should be verifiable" (p. 11).

By looking at those three key qualities of mindfulness, as described by Langer (1989), one can clearly see how the eight findings of this study connect within a framework of mindfulness.

Mindfulness Quality: Creation of New Categories

- Finding: Reflection for personal or professional growth and action.

- Finding: Planning and preparing for success.

- Finding: Purpose in one's work.

Mindfulness Quality: Openness to New Information

- Finding: Collaboration for building trusting relationships.

- Finding: Relationships through collegial support.

- Finding: Awareness of self and others.

Mindfulness Quality: Awareness of More Than One Perspective

- Finding: Feedback for learning and for leading others.

- Finding: Dialogue and discussion as opportunities for growth.

The first key quality of a mindful state of being (Langer, 1989) is the creation of new categories. Through this study, it became clear that curriculum directors sought to see the work they were doing in novel ways. They achieved this by paying close attention to the situation and the context in which they worked. Through their own personal and/or professional reflection, the curriculum directors were able to develop a new understanding of the feelings and thoughts surrounding their work. Using this information, they were able to establish both growth and action goals that helped them to feel successful. In addition, through proactive planning and preparation, the curriculum directors were able to use the feedback of others, and their own perceptions, to carefully plan for their work. Coupled with a clear sense of purpose, the curriculum directors interviewed were able to move their organizations, and the individuals within them, confidently in the direction they felt was best.

The second key quality of a mindful state of being (Langer, 1989) is openness to new information. Successful leaders operate from their personal beliefs and previous experiences. They use these frameworks to help them make critical decisions in their work. These frameworks, however, can also limit our thinking and cause us to act in ways that ultimately shut down our ability to remain open to new information that could improve our work. It was clear from the participant interviews that these individuals understood the power of relationships with others in getting all of the information they need to be successful. Whether working closely with a best friend or colleague, or working with a large group of teachers and administrators, these curriculum directors remained mindful by attending to the context in which they were working and sought out new information that could help them to make the best decision possible.

The third, and final, key quality of a mindful state of being (Langer, 1989) is an awareness of more than one perspective. Whereas curriculum directors who are open to new information attend carefully to the context in which they are working, individuals who are aware of more than one perspective work diligently to make sure that all stakeholders they are working with have the opportunity to share. They collect and view feedback in a positive light, realizing the power that comes from allowing everyone in the room a voice in the work that is being done. In this study, the participants were clear that, without the feedback of others, they simply could not lead their organization in a successful manner. Even more striking was their willingness to engage in dialogue and discussion with those around them, even when there was disagreement, so that together the two individuals or groups could work at their best.

It is clear from this study that mindfulness is manifested in the work of curriculum directors in many different ways. There exists multiple ways by which curriculum directors think, act, and feel mindful in their work. Boyatzis and McKee (2005) illustrate this notion well when they write, "Mindfulness means using all the clues available—our emotions, thoughts, physical sensations, in-the-moment reactions, and sense of right, wrong, justice, and injustice" (p. 113). For many, the challenge remains knowing when our actions are mindful and learning to operate in and from that frame of mind throughout our work and our lives.

Conclusions

The move from the classroom, to the principalship, and finally to central office each take a leap of faith on the part of the individual leader. That leap of faith, getting outside of one's own comfort zone, takes skill and understanding. At the heart of those

successful transitions is the ability to stop and reflect upon what has been learned and what one still needs in order to grow. For some the journey to reflection takes longer. Reflection can seem unnatural for some and unrewarding at first. But those who stick with it, who acknowledge that they need to have the most information possible to lead at high levels, will never go back.

Learning to seek the feedback and thoughts of others does not have to be intimidating. To the person whose mindset demonstrates a need to know all the answers, he or she will never reach the level where they can learn and grow from others. For the person who understands that their work will be enhanced or made stronger through the feedback he or she will learn how to engage others in the learning process. Regardless of their mindset, the one constant is that curriculum directors lead dynamic learning organizations that face an ever-changing social and political landscape. Those that choose to operate from a limited, or fixed, mindset, who ignore the feedback and ideas of others, likely will not be able to sustain their success for long. In their attempt to guide so narrowly that they are not open to information, they will likely be unable to inspire others to work effectively.

The effective curriculum director listens more than they talk. They inquire more than they direct. And, they inspire more than they demand. They quietly lead others in a way the individuals don't even know they are being led. The mindful curriculum director seamlessly balances reflection, feedback, planning, relationships, and dialogue in pursuit of continual improvement for everyone. They remain unwavering in their commitment to excellence in learning and they are constantly aware of the various groups they serve and the needs of those groups.

Recommendations

Curriculum leadership demands, in and of itself, individuals who will work tirelessly to improve the overall learning and performance of the school organization. With student improvement at the core of these efforts, they must also understand how to foster improvement for themselves and the individuals they work with in the school organization. But no curriculum director starts out ready to do this work on the first day. Instead, they must take painstaking time and effort to create a culture where trust, openness, and collaboration reign.

Throughout the interviews with the seven curriculum directors chosen for this study, it was clear that their thoughts could serve as a sort of advice to those who are interested in one day serving as curriculum directors. Their advice came from multiple years of practice and of learning the hard way through experience. As wisdom holds, experience is the best teacher. Using the experiences from the curriculum directors, I have established three recommendations for those who are interested in the topic of mindfulness in curriculum leadership.

The first recommendation I have as a result of this study is that, no matter what the individual's background or experiences prior to their role as a curriculum director, it is imperative that curriculum leaders who want to act in mindful ways have ample opportunities to practice and develop their ability to use these traits to improve their performance. In writing about the power of practice in mastering a skill, Patterson et al. (2002) write:

While we agree that *thinking* is an essential part of the process, we'd like to

emphasize the greater importance of *doing.* Evidence suggests that mental

preparation can make some difference in execution, but thinking isn't enough. If

you really want to improve your ability, practice. Step up to problems and given

the materials a try. (p. 222)

The reality is that practice can help leaders to test their skills and make improvements for

future use. As I know when I have learned a foreign language or practiced a sport, the

longer I go without using these skills the harder it is to be fluent in using them on a

consistent basis. For the curriculum leader, he or she must practice and try out these skills

on a regular basis in order to be able to act mindfully in all aspects of their work.

The second recommendation based on the findings of this study is that finding

time for purposeful reflection is often a real challenge for all educational leaders, not just

curriculum directors. While practice is necessary for individuals to grow their skills,

without setting aside a block of time in their day designated for their own purposeful

reflection, they will not likely be able to grow their skills in mindfulness. Given all that

we know about the demands faced by curriculum directors today, it should be no surprise

that many of them have a difficult time working in that reflection.

One suggestion for how to secure that time is to make the most of the support of

others in helping individuals to block that time out of their schedule. For example, the use

of an administrative assistant or colleague who will encourage to those individuals to

close their door, leave the building, and/or take their calls will increase the likelihood of

finding the necessary time to reflect. Or, as several participants explained, the travel time

to and from work, depending on the length, could also serve as time for reflection. And, it

will be important to see the value in reserving this time. Because experiences with self-

reflection let us practice the habit of continual growth and improvement, the time away is worth the benefit. Furthermore, by continued self-reflection, leaders can create the potential for sustained effectiveness over time.

A third recommendation, based upon this research study, encourages educational leaders at all levels of administration to consider adopting the findings of this research study into their positions. Whether one's role is as superintendent, assistant superintendent, curriculum director, building principal or assistant principal, the findings established in this study can be implemented into one's own growth plan in hopes of improving the way that these leaders gather input and assess the culture of the building.

The fourth, and final, recommendation based upon the results of this study suggests that individuals serving in leadership roles, especially in the area of curriculum leadership, seek to continuously work from a mindful state of awareness. As has been described in this study, educational leaders must constantly assess their own state of awareness and whether or not their thoughts and actions exemplify a mindful approach. This assessment of one's mindfulness can be done through quiet cognitive reflection, the use of a reflection journal, or small verbal cues that help us to slow down our thinking as we are working with others. Leaders who are honest with themselves, in their pursuit of mindfulness, will find success in the way the view and understand the work environment around them.

Implications To Future Study

Because of the nature of this study, the results represent the thoughts and beliefs of myself as the researcher, looking through the lens of the curriculum director. While there is no argument that the field of education needs strong leaders who understand the

power of mindfulness in improving their work, these individuals cannot do the job alone. In their position, they interact with and have a direct effect upon hundreds of people who are responsible for student learning. Because humans provide for a dynamic and complex working environment, individuals looking to utilize mindful approaches should remain resolute and be persistent in their efforts to be mindful.

As I listened ever so intently to each of the participants share their insights, I could not help but notice their frustration as they talked about the individuals who believed that continual improvement or improved student achievement were not important. Every curriculum director spoke, albeit briefly, about doing their best to support these individuals but when it became evident that they no longer cared about doing their best, the curriculum directors returned their focus to those teachers doing their best work. If schools are going to continue to meet the demands of accountability for increased student performance in the future, educational leaders are going to have to address the issue of the teacher who is either unwilling or unable to work at those high levels.

Curriculum directors must also think carefully and critically about how they can use their position to strengthen and support every teacher in the same way that teachers must do that with the students in their classroom. As Schlechty (2001) cautions, "There will indeed always be some need for supervision and expert advice, but the greater need is for people with authority who know how to inspire others closer to the center of the action to invent solutions to problems" (p. 213). The future of education stands to benefit from understanding a model where all teachers can be successful in supporting all students.

Given that the participant sample for this study resulted in interviews with and reflections of six female curriculum directors and only one male curriculum director, another area for future research would include studying a population of all male curriculum directors and how they view mindfulness in their work. Future research focusing on a male curriculum director participant sample would help readers to understand how male participants view mindfulness and their roles as curriculum leaders. This research would provide additional data about whether or not they view mindfulness within the same lens as their female counterparts.

Because the participant sample focused on curriculum directors and the leadership they provide, it is important to note that this is also a limitation of this study. While it is my belief, and also a recommendation, that other educational leaders seek to work from a mindful state of awareness, a future research recommendation would be to study how leaders at other levels in education (i.e., superintendent, building principal, assistant principal, etc…) perceive mindfulness in their particular position and how it shapes their work.

Final Thoughts. Without the willingness to participate and the thoughtful responses of these seven curriculum leaders, I do not think I would understand quite as well as I do, the power of mindfulness in improving the work of educational leaders. It is absolutely exciting to think that these seven individuals understand the notion that bringing together individuals of various backgrounds and experiences can make our work better versus tearing us apart. By their own admission, this is not easy to do, but rather it is the right thing to do.

To honor the true work of curriculum directors is to operate knowing that there likely will not ever be one right answer or solution to an issue, but that collectively, we can agree on what we think is best for ourselves and our organization at the time. To do the right thing is to be mindful of the context in which we are working and sensitive to those around us and what they have to contribute. This is the real work of the educational leaders of tomorrow.

I conclude this study hopeful for the future of education and for educational leaders who work to bring the collective voice to the world of curriculum. For me, the challenge remains seeking to work from a mindful state where I can grow in my awareness of the world around me. I do not anticipate this will be an easy or a pleasant journey, but one that is worth taking. The challenge will be to recognize and use opportunities for mindfulness in hopes that it becomes habit. For I leave inspired by a quote by Daniel Goleman (1985) who writes:

> *The range of what we think and do*
>
> *is limited by what we fail to notice.*
>
> *And because we fail to notice*
>
> *that we fail to notice*
>
> *there is little we can do*
>
> *to change*
>
> *until we notice*
>
> *how failing to notice*
>
> *shapes our thoughts and deeds. (p. 24)*

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APPENDIX A. RECRUITMENT LETTER FOR STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Appendix A

Recruitment Letter for Study Participants

[Date]

[Participant Name]
[Participant Street Address]
[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear [Name]:

My name is Greg Carenza and I am currently a graduate student at Drake University pursuing a doctoral degree in educational leadership. The research I have chosen to conduct, on the topic of mindfulness, serves to extend the work of both Langer (1989) and Boyatzis and McKee (2005) and to help me better understand the many ways curriculum directors are mindful in their thinking and in their work.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the phenomenon of mindfulness as it is manifested in the work of curriculum directors. Langer (1989) refers to mindfulness as, "attunement to today's demands to avoid tomorrow's difficulties" (p. 152). She poses three key qualities of a mindful state of being. According to Langer (1989) those three qualities are 1) creation of new categories, 2) openness to new information and 3) awareness of more than one perspective.

For my study, I will be utilizing data collected through a three-step, one-on-one interview process. The first step of the interview process will take approximately 30 minutes and will consist of introductions and completion of an informed consent document. The second step of the process, the one-on-one interview, will take between 60 and 90 minutes. The third, and final, interview step involves asking participants to reflect in a journal format upon their understanding of the research topic and should involve between 30-60 minutes of your time.

You have been identified as the curriculum director for your district. Thus, the intent of this letter is to seek your consent to participate in this research study. Your participation in and responses to the interview and the subsequent journal reflection will help me to gain an insight into curriculum directors' perceptions of mindfulness as it relates to their thinking and their work. Should you choose to participate, you will not be compensated in any manner or at any time during the study.

There will be minimal risk for those choosing to participate in this research study, however, it is important to make note of any potential risks. Those risks could include accidental public exposure of research subjects' identities, misuse of information, misunderstanding on the part of the researcher, misquoting in summary, and incorrect and/or unfitting analysis of the data. Potential benefits include the opportunity for you to

reflect upon your own leadership as a curriculum director and to contribute to a study focused on the phenomenon of mindfulness in your leadership.

Information regarding this research study has been filed with the Drake University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact the Drake University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (515) 271-3472 or by e-mail at irb@drake.edu.

Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary. If you should choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and any data collected from your interview will not be included in the study. For purposes of this study and the possibility of future publication, the names and identities of all study participants will remain confidential with pseudonyms being used at all times.

Should you have any questions regarding this letter or the information contained in it, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone at (515) 252-7417 or by e-mail at gregory.carenza@drake.edu.

Thank you so very much for your consideration to participate in this study. I will be in contact with you within a week of your receipt of this letter to verify your interest in participating in this research study. I look forward to talking with you at that time.

Sincerely,

Greg Carenza, Ed. S.   Dr. Sally Beisser, Ph. D.
Doctoral Candidate   Dissertation Chairperson
Drake University   Drake University

APPENDIX B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Dear [Participant Name]:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview and subsequent journal response as part of my research work through the Drake Doctoral Program. The purpose of this research-based study is to examine the phenomenon of mindfulness as it is manifested in the work of curriculum directors. You have been selected for this study for the specific information you can provide as a curriculum director for your school district.

As a participant in this interview and journal response, you will be asked as series of questions related to mindfulness and your leadership and work as a curriculum director. The procedures for this three-step interview process are:

Step 1: **Introduction and Informed Consent Document Review (approx. 30 minutes)**

The researcher will meet with the participant to introduce them to the study and to obtain Informed Consent signatures to begin the interview process. The researcher will present the participant with potential research questions and allow time to answer any questions from the participant with regards to the study.

Step 2: **Formal Participant Interview (approx. 60-90 minutes)**

The researcher will interview the participant, using the previously presented potential questions, with regards to the purpose and topic of the study. The interview will be recorded using a tape-recording device.

Step 3: **Journal Reflection and Response (approx. 30 minutes)**

The researchers will return to visit with the participant and ask them to complete a journal reflection about the study topic of mindfulness. Participants will be asked to journal and return their writing to the researcher.

The information gained from the three-step interview process will be used to report the findings of my study. The total duration of this project should be approximately 150 minutes over the course of three visits. If you should need to contact me at any point during the research study, please do not hesitate to contact me at (515) 252-7417 or via e-mail at gregory.carenza@drake.edu.

In addition, information and documentation regarding this research study has been filed with the Drake University Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you have any concerns about the conduct of this study, please contact the Drake University Institutional Review Board (IRB) at (515) 271-3472 or by e-mail at irb@drake.edu.

The following are the terms of participating in the interview and journal response:

- The information obtained during this project will be used to report the findings of my study, which will be done through an extensive analysis of the data. Study data will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's house throughout the study and will not be accessible by anyone except for the researcher himself.

- For purposes of this study and the possibility of future publication, the names and identities of all study participants will remain confidential with pseudonyms being used at all times.

- Risks that could occur as a result of your participation include mild discomfort as you reflect upon your perceived level of mindfulness in your leadership and/or frustration in the amount of time needed to complete the journal reflection piece due to formatting (hand written or electronic) issues.

o A potential participant benefit includes the opportunity for you to reflect upon your own leadership as a curriculum director. Your contribution as participant in this study will also benefit other individuals who seek to understand the phenomenon of mindfulness in curriculum leadership.

- Please note that your participation in this study is voluntary. If you should choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty and any data collected from your interview will not be included in the study. It will be returned to the respondent upon request.

- Should you choose to participate, you will not be compensated in any manner or at any time during the study.

If you agree to participate in this interview and journal response according to the above terms, please check the appropriate box and sign and date.

<div align="center">Consent to Participate</div>

☐   I give my consent to participate in an interview and journal response for this study.

☐   I do not consent to participate in an interview and journal response for this study.

_____   _____
         Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
         Signature of Researcher   Date

APPENDIX C. INTERVIEW PROCESS SCRIPT: STEPS ONE AND TWO

Appendix C

Interview Process Script: Steps One and Two

The following script has been developed to assist the researcher in conducting the first step of the interview process. This step of the process includes general introductions, an introduction to the purpose of the study, presentation of the Informed Consent Form, and introductory questions.

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today to discuss the research study that you have expressed interest participating in at this time. Today's meeting should take approximately 30 minutes to complete and it will be very important that I honor your time as I know you are an extremely busy professional.

Participant: You're welcome!

Interviewer: As you were made aware in the document titled "Recruitment Letter for Participants" that you received several weeks ago, I am a graduate student in the doctoral program for educational leadership at Drake University. The topic I have chosen for my dissertation research is mindfulness. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study is to examine the phenomenon of mindfulness as it is manifested in the work of curriculum directors. Through my research, I hope to understand the many ways curriculum directors are mindful in their thinking and in their work with other individuals in their organization. I have specifically chosen to study mindfulness in curriculum directors and, as your district's curriculum director, you have been selected for possible participation in this study. Do you have any questions for me about the purpose of this study?

Participant: *Answers may vary, but the interviewer will answer all questions.*

Interviewer: Then, before I proceed any further, I need to review with you the Informed Consent Form. The purpose of this form is to provide you with all of the necessary information regarding your role as a participant in this study. Ultimately, I am seeking your consent to participate, however, it is important that you read this document carefully to understand the participant's role in this study. Would you please take a few minutes and read through the form carefully, and then I will be glad to answer any questions you may have about the document.

Participant: *Reads and reviews the Informed Consent Form. Answers questions if necessary.*

Interviewer: If you should decide to give your consent to participate in this research study, please indicate so in the box at the bottom and sign your name.

Given the information provided, if you should decline to consent to participate, and that is certainly an acceptable choice, please indicate so in the box at the bottom and sign your name and I will conclude this interview.

Interviewer: *(Assuming they sign giving consent)*. Thank you for agreeing to participate. I will now collect this form and retain it for the remainder of the research process.

I would like to use the remaining time that we have today to review some introductory questions that will help me to learn a little bit more about you personally and your work as an educator. For the interview part, I will need to use a tape recorder to record your words. Please give as much detail as you can in your answers.

Interviewer: *Sets up the tape recorder so that it begins recording.*

Interviewer: All right, let's begin with our introductory questions. *(Using the questions provided in Appendix D, the researcher begins with the introductory questions.)*

---Interview Questions Here-------------------------------------

Interviewer: With that, I would like to thank you for your time and thoughts today! You have provided me with a lot of information that will help me now and as my research study continues.

Before I go, I would like to take this time to provide you with a copy of the potential interview questions that I will ask during our second interview time together, which is scheduled for ___(enter date here)___. During this 60-90 minute time, I will be asking you a series of questions about the topic of mindfulness as it relates to your work as a curriculum director. I look forward to the opportunity to meet again.

Do you have any questions that I can answer before I leave?

Participant: *Answers will vary…although any questions will be answered.*

Interviewer: Thank you for your time today and we'll see you soon!

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS GUIDE

Appendix D

Interview Questions Guide

At this time I would like to thank you for taking the time to participate in this research study examining how the phenomenon of mindfulness is manifested in the work of curriculum directors. These are the questions that I will be asking during our interview time, with the hope that you will elaborate in depth on each of these questions. At the start of the interview, I will be asking you a few introductory questions so that I might be able to gain important background information about yourself.

Introductory Questions

1. Could you please begin by telling me about yourself and how long you have been an educator?

2. How long have you been in your current position as curriculum director?

3. Would you please describe your previous experiences that led up to this point in your career?

4. Could you please describe the school district you are working in at this time?

5. Would you please describe for me why you chose to be a curriculum director?

Questions by Qualities of Mindfulness

Mindfulness Quality: Creation of New Categories

1. How do you approach your work as a curriculum director?

2. To what extent is reflection helpful to your work?

3. How do you tailor your approach for the different stakeholders you work with each day?

4. How skilled are you at perceiving your feelings and emotions in your work?

5. When faced with a challenge, how do you go about meeting it?

6. What are the ways you handle the stress of this position?

7. What impacts your decision-making skills?

Mindfulness Quality: Openness to New Information

1. What kinds of information do you use to guide/inform your work?

2. Can you describe how you stay focused on your work?

3. How have you recognized change in yourself and others?

4. Do you think feedback is important to your position? Why?

5. How do you use your past experiences to guide your work?

6. What are the factors that can prevent you from giving you full attention to a task at hand?

7. In what ways are you attune to the feelings of others?

8. In the light of an ever-changing political landscape, how do you know who to listen to in your work?

Mindfulness Quality: Awareness of More Than 1 Perspective

1. How have you sought the opinions and thoughts of others?

2. How do others know when you are listening and/or interested?

3. What is/are the major advantage(s) to multiple perspectives?

4. What is/are the major advantage(s) to multiple perspectives?

5. What characteristics do you think lead to a culture where multiple perspectives can safely be shared?

6. When, in your position as curriculum director, is it important to consider the perspectives of others?

7. Do you think your vision for curriculum leadership is or can be compromised when you consider the perspectives of others?

8.	What skills do you need to possess to be successful in gathering input?

APPENDIX E. PARTICIPANT JOURNAL RESPONSE DIRECTIONS

Appendix E

Participant Journal Response Directions

As part of the research study, I am asking you to complete a journal reflection of any additional thoughts or feelings you may have about mindfulness and your work as a curriculum director. The purpose of this journal reflection is to allow you to reflect upon the focus of this study, mindfulness, and what it means to you. Please take this opportunity to expand upon something you shared during the interview, raise new points, or share some new thinking that has come about as a result of the interview.

APPENDIX F. OPEN, AXIAL, AND SELECTIVE CODING TABLE

Appendix F

Open, Axial, and Selective Coding Table: Participant Interviews

DATA	DATA	DATA	DATA	DATA	DATA

First Iteration: Open Coding Results

1a. Feedback from Stakeholders
1b. Seeks New Information
1c. Sees Opportunities to Create
1d. Don't Need To Be An Expert
1e. Model Role as a Learning Organization

2a. Reflective Thinking (Professional)
2b. Reflective Thinking (Personal)
2c. Take Out Obstacles to Success
2d. Eclectic Background Experiences
2e. Sense of Hope

3a. Importance of Relationships
3b. Trust Building
3c. Visibility and Getting Out
3d. Sense of Humor
3e. Letting Teachers and Administrators
    Lead the Way

4a. Support of Administrative Team
4b. Support of Critical Friends
4c. Mentor / Mentee Support
4d. Regular Meetings with
    Administrative Team

5a. Organizational Strategies
5b. Strategic Planning/Preparation
5c. Seeks Change/New Challenges
5d. Provide/Realign Resources
5e. Clear Communication with
    Communication Plan

6a. Aware Of Self/Others Emotion
6b. Empathetic and Understanding
6c. Prior Teach./Admin. Experiences
6d. Celebrating Success/Goals Met
6e. Apply Teaching Experience To
    Adults

7a. Hiring Those with Different Beliefs
7b. Have Heated Discussions/Resolution
7c. Ability to Have Crucial Conversations
7d. Challenges Related to Growth
7e. Ability to Leave/Start Fresh

8a. Clear Mission and Values
8b. Big Picture Perspective
8c. Setting Clear, High Expectations
8d. Awareness of Systems Thinking
8e. Quality/Continual Improvement

Second Iteration: Open Coding Results

1a. The Give and Take of Feedback
1b. Shared Responsibility for Learning

2a. The Power of Reflective Thinking
2b. Because We Know Better, We Do
    Better

3a. Planting The Field of Shared Leadership
3b. Building Meaningful Relationships

4a. Collegial Trust and Support
4b. Learning Through Sharing

5a. Strategic Planning and Preparation
5b. Clear and Concise Communication

6a. Understanding Others By Caring
    For Yourself First
6b. Thinking About You, Thinking
    About Me

7a. Seek First To Listen, Then To Be
    Understood
7b. Saying What You Mean, Meaning
    What You Say

8a. A Clear Purpose
8b. Understanding Your Impact On
    Learning

Third Iteration: Selective Coding Results

1a. Feedback for Learning and For
    Leading Others

2a. Reflection for Personal or
    Professional Growth and Action.

3a. Collaboration for Building
    Trusting Relationships

4a. Relationships Through Collegial
    Support

5a. Planning and Preparing For Success

6a. Awareness of Self and Others

7a. Dialogue and Discussion as
    Opportunities for Growth

8a. Purpose In One's Work

APPENDIX G. MATRIX OF FINDINGS AND SOURCES FOR DATA TRIANGULATION

Appendix G

Matrix of Findings and Sources For Data Triangulation

Major Finding	Participant Interview	Participant Journal	Researcher Journal
	Source of Data		

Mindfulness Quality:

Creation of New Categories

▪ Reflection for Personal or Professional Growth and Action	X	X	X
▪ Planning and Preparing For Success	X	X	X
▪ Purpose In One's Work	X	X	X

Mindfulness Quality:

Openness To New Information

▪ Collaboration For Building Trusting Relationships	X	X	X
▪ Relationships Through Collegial Support	X	X	X
▪ Awareness of Self and Others	X	X	X

Mindfulness Quality:

Awareness of More Than One Perspective

▪ Feedback for Learning and For Leading Others	X	X	X
▪ Dialogue and Discussion as Opportunities For Growth	X	X	X