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**LEARNING THROUGH REFLECTIVE PRACTICE:
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION
PROGRAM MANAGERS**

A Dissertation in

Adult Education

by

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Abstract

Reflective practice is a means towards professional development. Research has focused on various approaches toward reflective practice, emphasizing factors including overall goals of professional development, process, action which is taking place (or took place), and approaches related to thinking through problems or making decisions. In the field of adult basic education (ABE), research focusing specifically on the professional development of managers of these programs is scarce. Also, research linking reflective practice and the professional development of managers of ABE programs is practically non-existent.

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to: 1) explore ABE managers' perceptions of how they develop professionally, and 2) explore the role of reflective practice in their professional development process. Ten managers of ABE programs were interviewed through one-on-one, semi-structured questions, and data was analyzed through analysis of transcriptions. The data was further triangulated through follow-up e-mails, member-checking, and an electronic field journal. Findings of this study found that professional development of ABE program managers occurs through reflective practice.

In particular, five kinds of reflective experiences emerged as the most prevalent among all of the participants, including: 1) reflective dialogue, 2) reflection on practice, 3) reflection on self, 4) reflection on decision-making, and 5) reflection on values. These experiences led managers to develop professionally in a variety of areas of practice, including: working through difficult situations, developing relationships, discovering multiple solutions, self-management and monitoring of skills, understanding the importance of commitment, building trust in others, formulating opinions, developing an understanding of politics, reaffirming decisions, developing humility and introspection,

and taking action. Based on these findings, a discussion focusing on implications for theory and practice is presented.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Most of us have been thrown into a situation where we had to learn as we went, often because little or no professional development opportunities were provided to us. For me, this was most apparent when I made the transition from working in the human resources and training department of a corporate communications firm to a position as an instructor and developer of adult basic education (ABE) programs in a community learning center. Not only did I have limited experience working in a non-corporate environment, I had even less experience teaching adults how to read, write, and perform basic math; it seemed no one wanted to teach me how to do my job, either. Everyone was either too busy learning theirs or attempting to keep programs running, recruiting students, securing funding, and starting new programs.

So, there I was, my first day on the job, faced with a class full of students, many who did not want to be there (as they were mandated to attend to continue receiving welfare assistance), and none of whom could not read beyond a sixth grade level. I was in desperate need of basic supplies, a bigger space, and an assistant, none of which would be made available to me in the course of nine months. But, I found a way to make it work. I developed my own materials, worked with students, taught lessons, and coordinated the program all with no prior experience in the field of ABE.

Managers working in ABE settings share this experience, confronting issues such as poor physical work conditions, isolation, lack of resources, and program concerns (Lytle, Belzer, & Reumann, 1992; Smith, Hofer, & Gillespie, 2001). Despite these barriers, ABE program

managers are often required to learn their jobs on their own, rather than having access to training, mentoring, or similar types of resources to assist with their professional development.

Professional development can be described as a gradual acquisition of knowledge and skills and is critical to individual improvement and practice (Kutner, Sherman, Tibbetts, & Condelli, 1997). There is a lack of formalized professional development opportunities for managers working in the field of ABE which foster, among other things, learning the skills necessary for those working with adult student populations, sharing of knowledge among colleagues, and development of management techniques (Sabatini, Daniels, Ginsberg, Limeul, Russell, & Stites, 2000). Of the professional development programs that do exist, there is often a mismatch between the programs offered and individual goals, and limited opportunity for localized, program-specific content (Belzer, Drennon, & Smith, 2001; Wilson & Corbett, 2001).

ABE program managers manage program content as well as ensure that the program is operating in an effective and fiscally responsible manner. In addition, program managers must ensure program improvement (such as providing staff development), recruit and manage staff, and monitor and assess staff needs (Alamprese, 1999). Despite the unique job responsibilities that separate program managers from other ABE staff, the primary body of professional development research in ABE is, for the most part, limited to exploring the professional development of instructors (Belzer, 2003; Fingeret, 1994; Marceau, 2003). Yet, when compared to instructors, managers form a unique group of people who face a multitude of different job responsibilities that are particularly challenging to learn. The next section describes more fully the context of this study, with particular focus on describing the unique qualities that differentiate the manager's role within the ABE setting.

The setting for this study is adult basic education programs, with particular focus on the professional development of ABE program managers. It is important to understand the context of this study to make better sense of the findings, to elicit thoughtful discussion, as well as the reasoning behind the choice of participants. Therefore, to set the context for this study, I describe the characteristics of ABE programs more fully in the following paragraphs.

According recent statistics, in one year, over 25 million adults participated in some form of state-administered ABE program, including adult basic literacy education (for those whose reading and writing skills are below eighth grade level), secondary education (instruction for those typically above eighth grade level), and English for second language learners (U.S. Department of Education [U.S. DOE], 2006). The overall goal of these programs is the improvement of the literacy skills of educationally disadvantaged adults to levels of proficiency necessary for them to meet their needs and goals in their roles as citizens, workers, and family members (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2007).

The National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) offers suggestions for the kinds of course content ABE programs should offer. This framework is used as a model for many ABE programs across the United States, and includes four major areas, including learning opportunities for:

1. access and orientation; for example, reading and understanding maps, as well as understanding the world, helping children with schoolwork, and getting a job;
2. voice; for example, written and oral communications in order to communicate effectively within their community;
3. independent action; for example, being able to act for oneself, and make decisions without the assistance of others; and,

4. a bridge to the future; including understanding technological changes, and keeping their families progressing economically (Stein, 2000).

As programs strive to support these goals, one challenge facing program managers is to ensure that adult education principles are integrated into practice.

As a rule, ABE programming is offered at little or no cost to students who often come from lower socio-economic backgrounds in both urban and rural locations (U.S. DOE, 2006). Some of the recommendations for management and development of ABE programs includes improved program planning and implementation, development of materials based on students' lives, understanding learner experiences and their communities, and improvement of instruction through the incorporation of small group activities (Imel, 1998). Students are typically either self-referred or required to attend in tandem with welfare assistance programs. Some of these programs are designed for more specific populations, such as family literacy and ESL instruction, and reach niches of students within the broader ABE population, including individuals who do not speak English or single parents (usually mothers) who wish to increase their literacy skills while working with their children in intergenerational activities (Proliteracy America, 2007; U.S. DOE, 2006).

ABE programs rely heavily on their volunteer tutor base to maintain operations and program success. In line with what is known about adult learning, many students prefer a more personalized instruction, rather than a formal, classroom setting. To that end, programs strive to maintain a qualified tutor base to serve its students, who are often placed on waiting lists for qualified tutors (Proliteracy America, 2007). Full and part-time instructors work with volunteers to round out the educational services provided by ABE programs—providing current, relevant instruction to adults through traditional classroom materials such as texts and workbooks as well

as newer technologies to support instruction, such as computer-based, literacy programming, and distance education through television and computer media.

Considering these various elements—the staff, resources, students, technology, and the daily operation of this particular educational setting—managing an ABE program can pose a number of unique responsibilities which fall on the shoulders of the program manager. The next section describes the specific role of the ABE program manager and highlights the tasks these individuals face on a daily basis in their jobs.

Management of Adult Basic Education Programs

Managers of ABE programs are required to handle all facets of program operations, including resource acquisition, financial matters, human resources, training and development, and funding. Managers plan, organize, and evaluate programs, work with staff and outside organizations; develop and implement training programs; effectively communicate and give presentations; manage budgets; and generate funding for operations (Alamprese, 1999).

Managers of ABE programs face many challenges unique to their setting. Issues such as high attrition rates among students, low pay, poor facilities, little or no benefits, and turnover among staff confront managers on a daily basis, creating a difficult operational environment. Managers handle these ongoing struggles, maintaining daily operations despite the churn of stressful, demanding conditions.

One of the most noteworthy issues in ABE program management is the high attrition rate among students, which can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the influence of past, negative educational experiences on current student attitudes towards school. Research has shown that hostile feelings towards school, including past experiences and perceptions, have a direct impact on the drop-out rate of basic skills students (Quigley, 1992). Since the targeted

adult education population for basic skills instruction has less than 12 years of schooling, with a considerable portion having less than four years of high-school level education, ABE programs often see a significant turnover of students.

Because many of the ABE programs offered in the United States receive state funding or funding from other sources, often participants are required to attend in order to receive welfare assistance. Mandatory enrollment has shown to negatively influence the success of students attending ABE programs. Specifically, research has shown that students who are mandated to attend ABE classes are not as progressive in the classroom compared students who voluntarily enroll (Bloom, Hill, & Riccio, 2003).

High rates of student attrition may also result from dissatisfaction with the program itself, prompting managers to take a closer look at how to plan programs in order to increase attendance and persistence. According to a study which explored reasons for attrition within an urban adult literacy program, researchers found that students felt lack of tutor support, or inappropriate matching of tutors with students negatively affected their experiences within the program (Bean, Partanen, Wright, & Aaronson, 1989). To implement program improvement initiatives, additional funds for human capital and other expenses are needed, yet lack of funding poses another major challenge.

Managers of ABE programs are typically responsible for securing funding to maintain operations. In addition to funding secured from the government, resources are also received from private donors, corporations, and other organizations. The not-for-profit status of most basic education programs, coupled with continued reliance on outside donors to maintain operations, results in these organizations lacking basic resources, including office supplies, textbooks, technology, and facilities able to comfortably accommodate students.

As is the case with most issues confronting ABE programs, funding is a major issue facing these programs with respect to the use of technology (Jaffee, 2001). In a state survey of computer usage in adult literacy classrooms, lack of direct funding or other types of funding for purchase of technology was cited as one of the greatest barriers to using computers (Askov & Means, 1993). ABE programs wishing to purchase equipment for students and staff for recordkeeping and other types of administration face these same barriers, and technology is often outdated or non-existent. Along these same lines, funding for hiring staff is typically also scarce, despite the need for qualified support staff to maintain successful operations.

The instructors and staff of ABE programs are crucial to making a program run successfully. According to the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, between the years 2004 and 2005, there were over 144 thousand adult education personnel working within state funded programs, including over 51 thousand volunteers (Office of Vocational and Adult Education, 2006). According to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (Bureau of Labor and Statistics, 2007), instructors of these programs often work part-time, with little or no benefits, yet usually they must possess at least a bachelor's degree or other special skills or certifications. They often work in cramped facilities that lack modern amenities. Turnover within this profession is also prevalent, due to the part-time nature of many of the positions, and is most likely attributed to its low-wages, challenging demands, and poor working conditions. Consequently, managers of ABE programs are usually responsible for recruitment and development of staff. The high-turnover among instructors, compounded by high expectations for the job requirements and qualifications, make instructional positions difficult to fill.

Through research and work in the field, I have discovered that few educational resources exist for the professional development of managers of ABE programs. As is discussed in more

depth in Chapter 2, lack of funding forces most budgets to be shifted towards staff development, particularly of instructors of basic education. Most managers learn “on-the-job,” developing professionally through various types of learning situations. For this study, I explored how managers of ABE programs developed professionally, particularly in light of a lack of professional development opportunities. One way to examine this phenomenon more closely is through the conceptual framework of reflective practice.

Professional development often occurs through reflective practice (Condermin & Morrin, 2004). Reflective practice has been studied in relationship to management development from various perspectives (Daudelin, 1996). More specifically, individuals can reflect in various ways, including critical reflection on and questioning of daily happenings within practice (Brookfield, 1990, 1991; Mezirow, 1991). This self-assessment process leads to further understanding of how one can make better informed decisions, problem-solve, and learn through the reflective process (Boud, 1995). Since managers of ABE programs have little opportunity to obtain formalized training, reflective practice is one way to explore more closely how they develop professionally. Chapter 2 fully explores the concept of reflective practice and how it relates to the development of ABE program managers. In addition to the conceptual framework, the bodies of literature related to management development and professional development of ABE program managers, specifically, also inform this study. The next section introduces these two areas of research.

In brief, while the field of management development is rather broad, covering a variety of settings, those studies that occur within settings closely related to the field of ABE, where many of the above-mentioned management challenges might be similar, help to frame this study. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 includes two different approaches towards the

development of managers in practice: informal learning and formal training, and links these types of learning situations with reflective practice, the conceptual framework guiding this study.

The management development literature adds to this study a view of what is already known about how managers develop professionally. Specifically, the literature review presented in Chapter 2 goes into more depth concerning areas which are addressed by development strategies, such as increasing communication skills, collaborating within practice, and other similar goals.

It is evident that much is known about how managers develop in practice, but there is little focus on the development of managers within ABE settings. Therefore, it is necessary to understand more about the literature relevant to ABE program management to better merge these areas to guide this study. Studies support the fact that professional development opportunities for ABE staff are limited for various reasons such as distance, time constraints, and lack of money (Belzer, Drennon, & Smith, 2001; Wilson & Corbett, 1999). Lack of research in the area of professional development of ABE managers also reflects their limited access to formalized training. In Chapter 2, I review the conceptual literature that relates to this particular group.

Problem Statement and Guiding Research Questions

Considering the challenges of managing an adult basic education program, it requires a special skill set in order to learn how to maintain and administer operations on a daily basis. Yet, little is known about how ABE program managers develop professionally in their roles. Through this study, I explored how these individuals developed professionally, particularly in spite of the struggles they face in the field and on the job, as well as the lack of training available

to them. The field of adult education would benefit from a better understanding the role of managers of ABE programs and how they develop professionally in their roles.

This study also contributes to the body of literature related to reflective practice within an ABE program setting. The overall purpose of this study is two-fold: 1) to explore ABE managers' perceptions of how they develop professionally, and 2) to explore the role of reflective practice in their professional development process.

Guiding this study are the following questions:

1. How do managers of ABE programs experience professional development in practice?
2. What are ABE managers' perceptions on how they develop professionally?
3. How do ABE managers experience reflection on their practice?
4. How does the experience of reflection contribute to the professional development of ABE program managers?

Overview of the Conceptual Framework

Dewey describes reflection as a sequence of ideas which has a consequence (Dewey, 1910). The idea of using reflection has been studied for decades, with scholars such as Dewey (1910, 1933, 1938) capturing the essence of this concept and applying it to learning situations. Since the time of Dewey, others have developed models, applications, and ways of promoting reflective practice strategies in a variety of contexts.

Reflective practice, while defined in numerous ways, can be characterized as a method to develop professionals within practice (Condermin & Morrin, 2004; Ivanson-Jansson & Gu, 2006). As is discussed in more detail in the review of literature presented in Chapter 2, there are many facets of reflective practice that contribute to its conceptualization. From a theoretical

perspective, the framework for reflective practice is often unclear, and the research studies often fail to interrelate or build upon one another (Kreber, 2004). Furthermore, as reflective practice is explored in the context of professional development, Kreber (2004) notes that research lacks a strong cross-exploration of some of the elements of development, such as goal-setting and engagement in learning. A clearer picture of the role reflection plays in practice can provide more detailed information about participant's experiences towards professional development activity.

More popular models of reflective practice presented by scholars including Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985), Cowan (1998), Kolb (1984), and Schön (1983, 1991) offer varied ways to approach reflection, among various learning situations and contexts. As the literature review points out, the major part of research focusing on reflective practice takes place in healthcare and educational settings; however, these concepts have been dissected and discussed in the literature review to become clearly applicable to management development contexts.

For this study, I was guided by several types of reflection in practice, defined in Chapter 2. Also, as reflective practice is synthesized further, it is important to present not only the major concepts relevant to this framework, but also discuss strategies for promoting it in professional settings. Chapter 2 provides more detail surrounding empirical literature related to strategies such as journaling, coaching, technology, collaboration, and mentoring. All of these concepts have been attributed to positive, influential means towards developing reflective practice strategies.

As I explore the concept of reflective practice among ABE program managers, the methodology, discussed in the next section, plays an integral role in shaping this study.

Methodology Overview

A qualitative, phenomenological research design is used to conduct this study. This section introduces qualitative research, specifically, the characteristics of phenomenological research, as well as the participant selection and data analysis process used in this study.

Creswell (2003) defines a qualitative approach as:

One in which the inquirer often makes knowledge claims based on constructivist perspectives (for example, the multiple meanings of individual experiences, meanings socially and historically constructed, with an intent of developing theory or pattern) or advocacy/participatory perspectives (i.e. political, issue-oriented, collaborative or change oriented) or both. (p.18)

Qualitative research methods seek data through in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents, and vary by type, purpose, and quality (Patton, 2002). The role of a qualitative researcher is to study people and things in their natural settings, and attempt to make sense of, or interpret, a phenomenon in terms of the meanings people bring to it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). A qualitative research approach created an opportunity to gather detailed narratives centered on experiences that contributed to the professional development of managers of adult basic education programs. The goal of this qualitative research design was to gather descriptive data, which is reflective of the experiences of managers of ABE programs.

A phenomenological approach, in particular, guides the design of this study. A phenomenological approach relies on the descriptions of what participants experienced throughout their lives (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2003) defines a phenomenological approach as one in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in the study. More specifically, interpretive

phenomenology provides the foundation for the method used in this study. This particular type of phenomenological approach is elaborated on in Chapter 3.

Participants in this study are managers of ABE programs. To select participants, purposeful sampling was used, which is the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2002). To begin the process of purposeful sampling, I contacted those organizations and individuals who would have knowledge about the ABE managers who are currently working in the field, particularly programs which associate directly with the intended participants, such as the Pennsylvania Association of Adult and Continuing Education (PAACE). From these referrals, I selected qualified participants based on the selection criteria detailed in Chapter 3. The rationale for the process of purposeful sampling was to identify individuals who value research in the field and were willing to share their knowledge and stories with me regarding their professional development. Use of this approach, rather than a random search for participants, assisted with soliciting participation from those who fit this description, as well as the specific criteria detailed in Chapter 3.

I identified 10 viable participants for this study, who were interviewed through semi-structured interviews. The number of participants selected is aligned with the suggested number of participants for a qualitative, phenomenological study of this nature (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The actual interview process is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Content analysis as described by Patton (2002) was used to analyze data collected during the interview process. In brief, this entails grouping answers together from common questions and finding thematic similarities and differences among responses. Chapter 3 will provide more in-depth information regarding the analysis of data in this study.

Significance of the Study

ABE programs can be found throughout the world. While these programs take on varying forms depending on cultural, economic, and other influences, it is universally important to have leadership to allow these programs to thrive. Since one premise for the purpose of this study is the unique work environment encountered by those managing ABE programs, this study often refers to specific challenges within this setting. While other adult education settings may not offer a replicable context for this study (unless further research is conducted specifically in the field of ABE), it may be altered in light of other challenges unique to additional management situations in the field, which is worth further exploration.

This study contributes to the field of ABE for several reasons. First, there is a lack of literature which focuses on the development of managers of ABE programs. Therefore, this study is a fresh contribution to the body of literature surrounding ABE program management and administration. Programs will be able to use this information to identify those who may potentially be successful managers for succession planning within the organization. Specifically, defined strategies towards effective professional development of individuals entering the ABE management field emerged.

Also, educational institutions may use the findings of this study to inform their classroom agendas for those students interested in this, or similar, career paths. By engaging students in reflective practice, they may be able to align their reflections with some of the same themes which emerged as a result of this study. Through this process, students may be able to validate their choice of career path.

As a professional working in the field of adult basic education, many of my days on the job were filled with frustration and impatience. It was not uncommon for me to have a

significant lack of essential resources (for example, pencils and reading materials), or to expect a room full of students, yet show up to find an empty classroom. Yet, I found the rewards of working in ABE to outweigh these frustrations, and I persisted in my role. I found ways around daily hurdles; I brought my own pencils, I donated materials, and attempted to motivate students to attend class through personalized instruction and one-on-one counseling sessions. I thought it was important for me to continue in my position, despite these challenges, and attempt to give my students the best education possible.

Unfortunately, these daily barriers challenge most of those who enter the field. Yet, there are many individuals who choose to remain in the field, and, who successfully manage and administer these programs. As a former ABE instructor, upon reflection, I know some aspects of what allowed me, personally, to develop professionally in my role. Yet, while I can identify some of the moments in my life which contributed to my own learning, I know little about how I got to the point of knowing what I was doing.. Specifically, how did I develop professionally in my role? In this spirit, this particular study attempts to explore how managers of ABE programs developed professionally in their roles, particularly through reflection in practice.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used frequently throughout this dissertation. To assist the reader, I have clarified them in the section below.

Adult Basic Education is typically used to refer to educational programs which specifically address literacy skills, English for second language learners (ESL), and GED preparation. Other programs, however, are available which serve this same population, including instruction on basic financial management (for example, balancing a checkbook, managing a household budget) and career preparation (for example, basic computer instruction). The term Adult Basic

Education includes both ABE programs as well as other, tangential programs, which support those who lack basic skills necessary to function successfully in everyday society.

Critical Reflection focuses “on assumptions about the content of the problem, the process or procedures followed in problem solving, or the presupposition on the basis of which the problem has been posed. Reflection on presuppositions is what [what is meant] by critical reflection.”

(Mezirow, 1991, p.6)

Critical Self-Reflection means reassessing the way we have posted problems and “reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting”

(Mezirow, 1991, p. 13).

Informal Learning is defined as any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge, or skills which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria, typically outside the pre-established curricula of educational institutions (Livingstone, 2001).

Adult Basic Education Program Manager is a person responsible for managing the daily operations of an ABE program. This may include grant-writing, teaching, personnel recruitment and management, and student recruitment. For purposes of this study, managers must fit the qualification requirements outlined in the participant selection criteria to qualify.

Management Development typically refers to learning which occurs and is directly related to the role one plays within the context of the larger organization. In contrast, management education is offered as a curriculum through an educative institution (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). These two terms are not synonymous with each other (Kellie, 2004).

Phenomenology is a type of research that seeks the essence of the experience of some phenomenon. As Patton (2002) points out, a general phenomenological study, such as this one, focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is they experience what they experience.

Reflection is a sequence of ideas, with a consequence. According to Dewey (1910), it is defined as:

a consecutive ordering of ideas in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors. The successive portions of reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another; they do not come and go in a medley. (Dewey, 1910, p. 2-3)

For this study, the term reflection is used to describe any type of thought process which has a deliberate goal, such as to solve a problem, gain new insights, or elicit discussion in these areas. Also, as was seen in many cases throughout this study, reflection was not an isolated process. In rare cases, in fact, did participants actually reflect in isolation. Therefore, for this study, the reflective process can also be seen in the context of collaboration.

Reflective Dialogue refers to conversations with others which consider factors such as context and emotions of an individual as well as the thought processes which occur during discussion (Brockbank, McGill, & Beech, 2002). Participants in this study did not tend to engage in self-reflection or critical self-reflection independently; meaning that in most situations, the participant did not deliberately take time to reflect (however, this did occur at times). For this study, reflective dialogue plays an important role in the process of reflection by allowing individuals to

interact with colleagues in order to move from personal reflection towards interaction with others in the development of reflective practice.

Reflective Practice is the conceptual framework used to guide this study. Reflective practice is characterized in the research in many different forms. As Moon (2004) points out, the viewpoints of various disciplines, lack of integration of these viewpoints between contexts, and narrow overlap make this particular conceptual framework difficult to study, as well as define. The underpinning concepts of reflective practice are presented in Chapter 2 in three separate frameworks: 1) reflection and action; 2) reflection, learning, and experience; and 3) critical forms of reflection; subsequent definition and clarification to the term as it is presented in this study are further defined as well. For this study, reflective practice is defined as any type of reflection which occurs in practice and which leads to the professional development of a participant. I recognize that not all reflection leads to learning; for example, one might reflect on a decision, make that decision, and move on to another task. In this case, reflection is not necessarily linked to professional development. In the analysis of this study, I was careful to distinguish between reflection as a mode of learning towards professional development and reflection as a way to make a choice or instantaneous decision.

Limitations, Assumptions, and Strengths of the Study

The limitations and assumptions of the study are clarified below. They are based on the observation of the primary researcher and are addressed in more detail throughout the study. None of these limitations or assumptions was significantly debilitating to conducting this study, but are important to clarify.

This study focuses on managers of adult basic education programs, but findings may not be relevant to others who work in the field, since one assumption of this study is that ABE is a

unique setting, with a distinct set of challenges. As discussed previously in Chapter 1, this study may be replicable in other settings, if the challenges unique to those other settings are identified and addressed.

Creswell (2003) cites limitations of qualitative interviews including: indirect information filtered through views of interviewees, information in a designated place rather than the natural field setting, researcher's persistence potentially biasing responses, and the lack of equality among participants' abilities to articulate and be perceptive.

An additional limitation of this study was the close-knit nature of ABE managers when viewed as a whole group. Often, when I engaged participants in certain lines of questioning, they became curious as to how their counterparts responded. Because the group was relatively small, it became difficult to refocus certain participants back to discussing their specific organization and practice.

Along these same lines, as a former employee within the field, participants became curious as to my own, personal reaction to their responses. I took caution to not discuss certain areas, as I did not want to influence responses. Also, in some situations, I believe certain participants may have been more open with me had I told them I had worked in the field before. To curb this, I made certain to inform them that I was not actively employed in the field, and reiterated the confidentiality of my study.

I made several assumptions in this study regarding the context and premise of adult basic education programming. These assumptions are clarified in the section below.

1. managers of ABE programs are reflective on their learning experiences in relationship to how they developed in their roles;

2. managers developed professionally in their jobs through a variety of means, including formalized education, informal, workplace learning, and other experiences not directly related to their career, which collectively contribute to their overall development. For purposes of this study, the process of development is considered an isolated phenomenon which extends over an unspecified period of time as a result of a series of experiences;
3. those who operate within an ABE program management role have grown over the course of their careers. I am assuming that, if a participant is in a position of authority, they have escalated to that role through either promotion or progression within the field. For example, it is possible that a program manager, having never worked in ABE specifically, moved directly into the role of ABE program manager from a different field; and
4. ABE program managers are willing and able to articulate their experiences in relation to their development.

I conducted this study with several noteworthy factors which strengthened the study. First, since my background was already in the field of ABE, I was able to conduct interviews with knowledge of the field. This strength is detailed further in Chapter 3, as I discuss my background and how it relates to conducting phenomenological research.

Secondly, my prior work in the field gave me access to participants more readily. While I did go through a fairly rigorous selection process, I was able to connect with past colleagues to develop a strong list of participants for the study. Without previous experience in ABE, this connection would not have been prevalent.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the bodies of literature which inform this study. More specifically, the first section synthesizes the literature related to reflective practice, the guiding conceptual framework. The next section explores two relevant foundational areas, management development and adult basic education program management, to set a context for the study and to more fully link them to the overall purpose of the study. Next, several subsections which synthesize empirical research relevant to reflective practice and management development are presented, including a section which focuses directly on the development of managers within adult basic education program settings. Finally, the research directly related to the purpose of this study is discussed.

The Concept of Reflection

The concept of *reflection* in relationship to learning and development can be linked back to Socrates (Daudelin, 1996); however, Dewey (1910, 1933, 1938) formalized the concept of reflection, with a particular focus on the field of education. In his earlier works, Dewey presented the idea of "thought" and training individuals how to think and reflect. According to Dewey (1910):

Reflection involves not simply a sequence of ideas, but a consequence - a consecutive ordering in such a way that each determines the next as its proper outcome, while each in turn leans back on its predecessors. The successive portions of reflective thought grow out of one another and support one another; they do not come and go in a medley. (p. 2-3)

Dewey's notion of reflective thought informed adult education theorists by placing importance on the integration of new experience with past experience through the process of reflection (Rigano & Edwards, 1998). Dewey's works remind us that reflection is a complex, rigorous, intellectual enterprise that takes time to do well (Rodgers, 2002); we can see the role of reflection in any form of learning activity (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

Since the time of Dewey's writing, the evolution of the concept of reflection has been defined through the works of many, with multiple perspectives supporting or challenging Dewey's original definition of the term. These perspectives are discussed within specific contexts including higher education, human resources development, and medical practice. The works of Habermas, Freire, and Mezirow have significantly influenced our perceptions of the role of reflection in teaching and learning settings (Redmond, 2006). Other frameworks, such as those presented by Schön, Boud, and Kolb, focus on the role of reflection within organizational and developmental contexts.

There is not one, single definition of reflective practice; in essence, reflective practice involves consideration of both "seeing" and "action" to enhance possibilities of learning through experience (Loughran, 2002). Also, "reflective practice allows one to make judgments in complex and murky situations - judgments based on experience and prior knowledge" (Merriam & Cafferella, 1999, p. 232). As briefly mentioned Chapter 1, the framework for reflective practice is unclear in the research related to development. It fails to inter-relate concepts and build upon the outcomes of empirical studies, making it difficult to espouse clear conceptualizations of reflection (Kreber, 2004). Along these lines, it is worth noting that a significant overlap exists between the areas related to experiential learning and reflective practice

since reflection on experience is typically viewed as a significant part of effective learning through the reflective process (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Kolb, 1984; Loughran, 2002).

The body of literature focusing on reflection in relationship to development in practice is quite large; there are numerous models, viewpoints, and overlapping frameworks. As a way to sift through this literature to allow a useful, guiding framework to emerge for this study, I draw primarily on the writings of theorists who most closely aligned their works within a management development context. I do not dismiss, however, those writings which contribute indirectly, or those ideas that can be transferred into this setting and offer insights into reflective practice.

The idea of reflection as a method to develop professionals within practice, referred to as "reflective practice," is prevalent in the literature, with a particular focus on the development of educators (Conderman & Morin, 2004; Ivanson-Jansson & Gu, 2006) and medical professionals (Durgahee, 1997; Kinsella, 2001; Plack & Greenberg, 2005). Other groups which have recently received a significant amount of attention with respect to reflective practice are management and executive professionals. As pointed out by Daudelin (1997):

There is an immense learning potential in the challenges managers confront and the problems they solve during their everyday working experience. Managers need support to make sense out of these developmental experiences. What is required is a way of exploring causes, developing and testing hypotheses and eventually producing new knowledge. The process of reflection plays a key part in this. (p. 282)

As a starting point, the next section presents the conceptual underpinnings of reflective practice, including: 1) reflection and action, 2) reflection, learning, and experience, and 3) critical forms of reflection.

Conceptual Underpinnings of Reflective Practice

Three major assumptions under gird the process of reflective practice (Cervero, 1988; Osertman & Kottcamp, 1993; Peters, 1991; Schön, 1983, 1987 as cited in Merriam, Cafferella, & Baumgartner, 2007), including:

1. committing those involved to both problem finding and problem solving,
2. making judgments about what actions will be taken in a particular situation, and
3. forming results into some form of action.

These assumptions serve as the underpinnings for the key frameworks of reflective practice.

Reflection and Action

It was the work of Argyris and Schön (1978) that first introduced the concept of conflict resolution through inquiry into an organizational context, and from this concept, others have introduced theory related to the idea of reflection in relationship to practice. Donald Schön was one of the first to bring reflection into the center of an understanding of what professionals do (Smith, 2005). Schön's work in this area focused on two concepts: reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983, 1987). Later, Cowan (1998), who based his works partly on Schön, added reflection-for-action as a third concept.

The concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action allow an individual to center their reflection during and after an actual event or moment has taken place in practice. The essence of reflection-in-action is hearing or seeing differently, a process Schön calls *reframing*, which is quite different from reflection-on-action. Reflection-on-action refers to the ordered, deliberate, and systematic application of logic to a problem in order to resolve it while the process is within our control (Russell & Munby, 1991). “Both ordinary people and professional practitioners often think about what they are doing, sometimes even while doing it. Stimulated

by surprise, they turn thought back on action and on the knowing which is implicit in action” (Schön, 1983, p. 50).

Studies relevant to reflection-in and reflection-on action often reference strategies used in practice which facilitate reflection on a particular event. For example, journal writing is often used as a method to reflect on a particular issue or event (Plack & Greenberg, 2005; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Research shows that journal writing not only promotes reflection, but also allows for practitioners to act as on-going researchers of their field, refining and developing their roles as they progress (Lee & Zuercher, 1993).

Schön (1991) contends reflective practice is not a staged process; as practitioners, individuals develop their own strategy towards defining and reflecting within practice, yet, researchers, when studying reflective practice, must consider certain areas, including what is being reflected on, the ways of observing and reflecting on practice, and ways of representing what practitioners already know.

Kottkamp (1990) contends that reflection-in-action is more difficult to achieve than reflection-on-action, but is more powerful in improving practice because of the call for "online" experiments which adjust or improve one's professional actions:

It is more difficult to achieve because the actor must simultaneously attend to performing the action and observe his or her action, as if from an external perspective. Further, in reflection-in-action the actor is the sole collector of data on the event. (p. 183).

Schön (1983) challenges the concepts of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, suggesting they present limitations for those who lack intuition. He also suggests that highly-specialized practitioners may approach reflection from a narrow-minded point of view, limiting

the reflective process. Other authors support this argument, stating that the works of Argyris and Schön are limited in their proposed applications towards reflective practice (Greenwood, 1993).

Cowan (1998) critiques Schön's works, suggesting that it is detached from the action, and presents a third type of reflection: reflection-for-action. Reflection-for-action describes the questions and answers about desired learning which occurs before the action in which it is expected, or hoped, that learning and development may occur.

An important part of reflective practice focuses on the role reflection plays within learning situations. Additional works shed light on the role experience plays in the learning process, and the influence reflection has on learning from experience. The next section presents the intersection of reflection, learning, and experience, and its implications for reflective practice.

Reflection, Learning, and Experience

Reflection occurs in formal, non-formal, and informal settings in a variety of different ways (Jarvis, 1987). One explanation of how reflective practice may occur is presented within the literature related to experiential learning, a theory which is particularly applicable in relationship to the developmental models. Specifically, “experiential learning theory provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop” (Kolb & Boytzais, 1999, p. 2).

Ideas and approaches towards reflection have a major impact on experiential learning by providing a framework to structure learning experiences and to provide managers with tools and practices for making sense of their experience (Cunliffe & Easterby-Smith, 2004). It offers a fundamentally different view of the learning process from which emerges different prescriptions

for the conduct of education, relationships among learning, work, and other life activities, and creation of new knowledge (Kolb, 1984).

Kolb offers a comprehensive, systematic way of viewing the adult learning process, with a focus on reflective observation on an experience and subsequent stages, which allow an individual to learn from that experience. A key concept in this model is the focus on the individual – the learning is done alone, without influence from outside contributors. Unlike Schön's (1987) conceptualization, there is less focus on the potential contribution of a coach, mentor, or client in the process (Evans, 1997).

While Kolb's work is viewed as one of the most popular models for reflection, some contend that it does not translate well to group settings, and fails to move the concept of reflective practice beyond individual activity (Sweet, 2006). However, it is this focus on individualization of the reflective process within practice that offers a tangible, applicable method of reflection; medical professionals, particularly those doing clinical rotations, often use this model as a way to promote reflective practice (Clinical Placement Support Unit, 2005) as well as students engaged in the student teaching process (McGlenn, 2003).

Boud, Keogh, and Walker (1985) offer a different perspective on reflection and its implications for learning which uses the works of Kolb and Schön to inform their process. Their main contention is that reflection is a form of *response* of the learner to experience (Boud et al, 1985) and, as a result, created a varied model of reflection and the learning process based on this viewpoint.

In this model, the learner reflects following experience, as opposed to during it. The key elements of this model focus on returning to experience, attending to feelings, and re-evaluating an experience. "Emphasis of reflection after the event attempts to provide counterbalance to

educational practice which does not leave time and opportunity for learners to process their experience before moving on” (Boud & Walker, 1990, p. 61).

Boud and Walker (1998) contend that reflection alone may not lead to learning. Simply leaving time for reflection or encouraging the use of models of reflection does not mean learning will occur. To maximize the potential of reflective practice, critical forms of reflection are presented in the literature.

Critical Reflection

The existing research focuses on the concept, purpose, use, and implementation of reflective practice; this body of literature does not necessarily present the actual *process* of reflection from a critical standpoint, with the exception of reflection-in-action. The works which address critical reflection further explore the process of how one actually reflects critically within their profession; these forms can then be applied within the models discussed previously in this review.

Reflection on prior learning may focus on assumptions about the content of the problem, the process or procedures followed in problem solving, or the presupposition on the basis of which the problem has been posed. Reflection on presuppositions is what we mean by critical reflection. (Mezirow, 1991, p.6)

Mezirow (1991) contends the central concepts of becoming a critically reflective individual include development of cognitive structures, and the developmental process of decentration, symbolization, self-awareness, perceptual consciousness, role and perspective taking, bracketing, and hypothesizing. Critical self-reflection, which focuses more on reflection of personal values and assumptions (as compared to critical reflection, which considers external factors and influences) is another facet of reflective practice.

The process of exploring personal assumptions can help shape fundamentals of practice (Brookfield, 1992). As Boud (1995) points out, to be a reflective practitioner also means that one must be able to understand the process of self-assessment and how it occurs through reflection. Assessment includes development of knowledge and an appreciation of appropriate standards and criteria for meeting those standards, as well as the capacity to make judgments.

Within management development, critical self-reflection may be seen as questioning of self in relationship to one's practice. "The most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection - reassessing the way we have posted problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting" (Mezirow, 1991, p. 13). While there are many approaches towards the critical reflection process presented within the literature, including the use of learning journals, discussion groups, and specific lines of self-questioning, there is not one specific model for critical reflection in relationship to practice.

With respect to self-reflection in practice, Brookfield (1990, 1991) offers a three-stage model of critical thinking that an individual can use to uncover and check assumptions. These three stages are:

1. discovering the assumptions that guide our decisions, actions, and choices;
2. checking the accuracy of these assumptions by exploring as many different perspectives, viewpoints, and sources as possible; and
3. taking informed decisions that are based on these researched assumptions.

Research on and the application of critical reflection is prevalent in teaching and learning settings; it has proven to be particularly useful in development of student learning as well as teaching practice. Mezirow (1990) discusses critical reflection within a teaching and learning setting, which occurs through problem posing and dialogue with other learners. While

Brookfield (1995) also focuses his writing on critical reflection in an educational context, he begins to move the idea of critically reflective practice towards non-educational contexts, providing researchers with useful concepts with which to explore critical reflection in other areas. According to Brookfield (1995), theorists of reflective practice believe practitioners must research their own work sites:

This involves their recognizing and generating their own contextually sensitive theories of practice, rather than importing them from outside. Through continuous investigation and monitoring of their own efforts, practitioners produce a corpus of valuable, though unprivileged, practical knowledge. (p. 215)

The concept of reflection in relationship to practice can be applied in a variety of work settings, and researchers and theorists allow us to further understand the phenomenon of reflective practice through numerous viewpoints and models. Reflective practice promotes learning through reflection and leads to a better understanding of how one learns from experience, situations, and relationships in the workplace.

Management Development

A broad, contextual understanding of the more common forms of management development initiatives allows one to glean a better understanding of the role reflection plays in development within this particular form of practice. The next section discusses the conceptual literature related to management development.

The field of management development is broad, with numerous definitions of the term (Cullen & Turnbull, 2005) presented throughout the literature. Very few of these definitions, particularly earlier versions, reference *reflection* as part of the developmental process of managers. Earlier perspectives on management development can be described as systematic,

procedural, and structured (Ashton, Easterby-Smith, & Levine, 1975; Molander, 1986; Temporal, 1990) while more recent viewpoints begin to acknowledge it as multi-faceted, individualized, and complex (Baldwin & Padgett, 1994; Lees, 1992).

From an organizational perspective, the most popular method of approaching the development of managers is the implementation of formalized training, typically led by internal training and development professionals or by external management development consultants (Kellie, 2004). Formalized training programs are usually specific to the job content, work situations, and organizational goals (Kellie, 2004; Keys & Wolfe, 1988). Within the context of management development, the goal of training is to develop managers in several distinct areas including interpersonal skills, knowledge management, strategic planning, and creativity (Evans, 2005).

Interpersonal skills refers to how a manager behaves when working and interacting with others, which includes creating relationships with coworkers, interacting with potential job candidates, and managing employees (Johnston, 2005). There is no doubt that, collectively, organizations, regardless of the industry or setting, typically value the interpersonal skills of their managers. In response to the on-going interest in developing this quality in management employees, numerous articles have been written which address the issue of poor interpersonal skills of managers (Robbins & Hunsaker, 2003; Roper, 2005).

Common elements of interpersonal skills development include listening, managing relationships with co-workers, presenting, assertion techniques (i.e. exercising power), written communication (American Management Association [AMA], 2006; Davidson, 2001; Hayes, 1994; Rogers, 2000; Taylor, 2000), and intercultural communication (Tuleja, 2006). The goal of training conducted for managers which focuses on these fundamental qualities may impact the

organization in a variety of ways, including building cooperation and relationships among employees, communicating more effectively, and increasing productivity and performance.

In addition to interpersonal skills, management development programs also address the management of knowledge within the organization, also known as *knowledge management*. Knowledge management refers to methods or solutions that enable an organization to capture and structure its knowledge assets (Hwang, 2003). More specifically, the goal of knowledge management is to take documents, such as reports, presentations, articles, etc. and store them in a repository where they can be easily retrieved (Davenport, DeLong, & Beers, 1997). Knowledge management does not refer, necessarily, to tangible documents; it also involves codifying what employees, partners and customers know, and sharing that information among employees, departments and other companies in an effort to devise best practices (Levinson, 2006).

The concept of knowledge management is quite complex; in order for it to be successfully cultivated within an organization, management must understand the fundamental aspects of garnering valuable information and ideas within the organization and effectively managing this repository. Training in this area typically covers the fundamental aspects of knowledge management, including assessment of intellectual capital (knowledge), development and sharing of this knowledge, and selecting knowledge for elimination or sale (for example, ending a pilot program that is no longer meeting intended goals) (Burkowitz & Williams, 1999). As managers develop in their roles, understanding the fundamentals of knowledge management, and successful implementation and promotion of its ideas, allows for growth and progression of an organization.

One important aspect of knowledge management is the strategic planning related to what to do with knowledge once it is acquired (Sanchez & Mahoney, 1996). Strategizing, in general,

is an important management skill that can be applied across many facets of a manager's role. Because of its criticality to the organization, areas related to strategizing, including strategic planning, are often included as part of a management development program.

There are many aspects of strategizing from a managerial perspective. One of the most predominant is the role of strategic planning, which determines where an organization is going over the next year or years, and the process it will go through to reach its destination. Aspects of strategic planning include strategic analysis, setting direction (i.e., goals), and action planning (McNamara, 1996). There are many models, strategies, and tactics involved in strategizing within an organization; typically, these methods change depending on the organizational goals and climate. From a management development perspective, the various factors which influence strategizing are addressed within training programs specific to these particular variables.

In addition to strategizing, organizations also look to managers to have creative approaches towards their practice. The ability to be creative can effect numerous aspects of a manager's role, including knowledge management (Henry, 2001), creation of an environment which cultivates creativity (Kao, 1996), and problem-solving (Kim, 1990). Management training programs often support the development of creativity skills in their managers in an effort to positively affect employee performance, project management, and other initiatives.

The nature of formalized training varies depending on the type of organization, as well as the role played by the manager. However, this differentiation among management roles relates to the delineation between the definitions of management development and management education. Management development typically refers to training directly related to the role one plays within the context of the larger organization; management education is offered as a

curriculum through an education institution (Porter & McKibbon, 1988) and therefore is not context specific (Kellie, 2004).

Research has shown that despite participation in formal, management development programs, most individuals learn through a mixture of accidental and unstructured experiences (Mumford, A., Robinson, G., & Stradling, D., 1987). In the literature, these unseen learning opportunities are referred to as *informal learning*.

There are many definitions of informal learning, with the research situated within various settings, including home, community, classroom, and other environments (Livingstone, 2001; Tough, 2002), such as religious (English, 1999) and healthcare (Keeping & English, 2001) education. Informal learning can be defined as any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge, or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria, typically outside the pre-established curricula of educative institutions (Livingstone, 2001). This type of learning is invisible—people are not aware it is happening (Tough, 2002); in other words, they might not recognize it as learning. Within the work setting, informal learning can be viewed as the effects of workplace practices on one's learning (Garrick, 1998).

Informal learning in the course of daily life is important, but not sufficient for the acquisition of knowledge (Svensson, Ellstrom, & Aberg, 2004). The literature related to informal learning that is rooted in human resources development often focuses on how employees learn within organizations, develop skills, and gain experiences through individual and team-based projects. As a result, we gain better understanding of how individuals learn when working in groups, and how the context of the group dynamics plays a role in informal learning (Boud & Middleton, 2003). In studies situated within human resources development,

participants are often engaged in action research which allows organizations to develop their capacities to learn how to change structures, culture, climate, and practice that stand in the way of successful implementation (Marsick & Gephart, 2003).

Within the management development literature, reflective practice provides a lens with which to reflect on both formal and informal learning experiences in an effort to glean new knowledge and understanding. A link between reflection and more formal management development programs is the use of reflective techniques within the classroom (Holmes, Cockburn-Wooten, Motion, Zorn, & Roper, 2005). In addition to formalized programs, the importance of reflection on informal learning is also recognized as a critical component to management development.

In an effort to maximize experience, training, and other learning opportunities, individuals in the field are encouraging a shift in management training, education, and practice towards becoming more inclusive of reflective strategy. To do this, Gosling and Mintzberg (2004) recommend integration of management education with practice as well as a less prescriptive classroom environment, and encouragement of reflective practice. Raelin (1993) supports this recommendation and contends:

Management as a holistic skill must blend theory and action. Theory makes sense only through practice, but practice makes sense only through reflection as enhanced by theory. Managers need both, and they need interaction between the two if they are going to prepare themselves to cope with the changing landscape of business experience. (pp. 88-89)

Management development occurs through a variety of means, including formalized programs such as formal education and training, and informal learning which occur on the job.

Reflection encourages development by providing a lens with which to better understand these opportunities for learning in relationship to self and to practice. This study focuses on management development within the context of Adult Basic Education program settings. The next section provides a conceptual overview of this setting.

Adult Basic Education Program Management

As discussed throughout Chapter 1, an Adult Basic Education (ABE) program poses challenges unique to this setting; managers are responsible for handling all facets of program operations, including resource acquisition, financials, human resources, training and development, and funding. In addition, managers of ABE programs are typically required to plan, organize, and evaluate programs, work with staff and outside organizations; develop and implement training; effectively communicate and give presentations; manage budgets; and generate funding for operations. All of these tasks must be done in spite of circumstances which are prevalent within ABE organizations, including high staff turnover, poor facilities and resources, lack of funding, and low student retention rates. Despite these challenges, many ABE managers operate successfully, and continually develop within their practice.

Formalized training plays an important part in management development, in general. Yet, we know little about how formal training, or any other type of development initiative, affects ABE managers' development in their practice. Typically, training and development for ABE managers and instructors falls second to programming offered for students and volunteer tutors. In fact, professional development opportunities for ABE instructors are limited for various reasons such as distance, time constraints, and lack of money (Belzer et al., 2001; Wilson & Corbett, 1999).

Research on professional development of ABE managers is even scarcer. Most of the training available for adult basic education managers is typically in the form of formal seminars and workshops offered through state and national programs (National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, 2007) or conferences, such as those sponsored by the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education (aaace.org).

Little is reported which explores the impacts of these programs on professional development of ABE managers. One reason for the concentration on instructional staff as opposed to management is that instructional staff usually lacks experience working with adults. While many come into the field with a teaching background, there is no evidence that indicates these skills transfer into an adult literacy setting (Belzer, 2005). Because ABE staff development is heavily focused on instructional staff, the lack of research focusing on the development of ABE managers is indicative of what is actually happening in the field with respect to available development opportunities.

In summary, little is known, overall, about how adult basic education program managers actually develop within their roles. We know little about formal training outcomes, and the lack of attention to the development of this population leaves the field with even less of a foundation to derive empirical research on the specific impacts of programs in the overall learning which occurs among this population in the context of their profession. However, we do know that individuals charged with these roles do develop professionally; this study is focused on how management development occurs among this population with respect to reflective practice.

A Review of Empirical Literature

In professional development, reflective practice integrates or links thoughts and action with reflection (Imel, 1992) and is a "challenging, focused, and critical assessment of one's own

behavior as a means towards developing one's own craftsmanship" (Osterman, 1990, p. 134).

Reflective practice has shown to have many positive influences on the professional development process, leading researchers to study this phenomenon more closely in other contexts.

Reflection remains central to theories of learning which have come to inform thinking and practice in management development (Reynolds, 1998). Research supports the use of reflective techniques among management professionals, who work in settings in which their daily journeys are filled with the potential for recognizing the significance of moments of truth through reflection, allowing for more successful practice (Greenall, 2004).

Reflection has been shown to be a central strategy in learning and development, prompting numerous studies to focus on reflection within practice. As the impact of higher education programs on "real world" practice is in question, researchers are led to call for other, innovative responses towards teaching and learning in practice (Boud, Solomon, & Symes, 2001). To better understand the significant effects of reflective practice, it is important to understand the rationale supporting the need to engage in this process. Raelin (2002) presents one perspective as a rationale for promoting reflective practice in the workplace, based on the following assumptions:

1. at times, people are unaware of their behavior and its consequences;
2. there is a gap between what many say they will do, and what they actually do;
3. most individuals are biased in how information is obtained that, in turn, produces cognitive errors in perceptions of reality; and
4. new situations present themselves in different contexts.

These assumptions suggest new opportunities for learning in the workplace which do not necessarily occur within a traditional, educational context. By promoting reflective practice,

individuals and organizations are attempting to learn and develop from the situations they encounter in their work settings.

Research has shown that there is a significant impact on one's profession as a result of engaging in reflective practice methods. The next section presents a synthesis of empirical literature which focuses on reflection in relationship to professional development. Since the research on reflective practice is most commonly situated in the contexts of teacher and nurse education programs, most of what is known about reflective practice is gathered through information about its impact within these settings (Haley & Wesley-Nero, 2002). Because these particular environments have context-specific characteristics, generalization to a management development context needs to be done with care.

To select studies for this review, computer-based and manual searches were conducted during the time period between the fall of 2005 and the fall of 2007. The following computerized databases were searched using the Pennsylvania State University (PSU) library system: Proquest, ERIC, Dissertation Abstracts International, and the PSU library catalog system. In addition, manual searches were conducted in several academic journals including: *Adult Basic and Literacy Education*, *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, and the *Reflective Practice* journal. In addition, discussion with colleagues and individuals working in the field provided valuable insights into other research available for this review.

This search yielded 49 articles, 4 doctoral dissertations, 5 books, and 1 monograph that met the following criteria for inclusion in this review:

1. the term *reflective practice* was explored as holistic concept based on key theories of reflective practice;
2. a clear methodology section was present; and

3. reflective practice took place in a professional development context.

A conceptual overview of reflective practice was presented earlier in this chapter; therefore, studies which were conceptual in nature were excluded from the empirical selection of studies for this review. However, conceptual literature is used to clarify and define particular sections of this review.

Also, it is important to note that many of the empirical studies using reflective practice as a framework, while still a holistic concept based on popular concepts for reflection in or on practice, further refine it to a task-oriented concept which allows individuals to reflect towards improved professional practice. For example, Bolton's (1999) qualitative study focusing on reflective practice among health professionals is further narrowed into a sole task of engaging in reflective writing, while reflective practice as a concept remains holistic. The author cites popular definitions such as Mezirow (1991) while stating that reflection is a "creative adventure" which can "take us out of our narrow range of experiences." Again, as many of the empirical studies such Bolton (1999), Billings and Kowalski (2006), Barnett (1995) look towards ways to achieve reflective practice, further narrowing in on a specific task, such as writing, analysis, or mentoring, for example. Varying definitions of reflective practice with respect to the empirical studies reviewed for Chapter 2 are discussed throughout the relevant findings from the literature.

With regards to management development literature, an overarching, significant finding was the various, positive outcomes resulting from promotion of reflective practice among those in managerial roles. As Brookfield (1995) points out, "reflective habits are learned habits" (p.217); individuals must seek ways to develop and implement the skill of reflection into practice through a variety of methods which are presented throughout the literature. These strategies can be viewed as mechanisms which support and enhance the reflective process, providing a

manager with a means to more effectively reflect upon their practice. Aligned with the way reflective practice is studied in relation to professional development of managers, the next sections further synthesize reflective practice into more specific areas.

Reflective Writing

One popular approach towards reflective practice among managers is reflective writing, which typically occurs within a reflective journal. While the majority of the literature which explores the use of reflective writing is set within educational contexts, journaling shows to be useful for managers as well. In general, according to Shepard (2004) it provides a way to record insights into practice, leading to a better understanding of their roles.

As with Bolton (1999), eleven studies focused on reflective journaling, defining reflective practice in a broader sense, then narrowing the actual data collection to a single, task-oriented process. For example, in Hubbs and Brand (2005), the characterization of reflective journaling is based on the idea that it has been shown to allow an individual to progress through various stages of learning and reflect on them as they proceed: “reflective journals are used...to create effective learning conditions that can result in the types of meaningful or purposive learning that was first put forth by Dewey...” (Hubbs & Brand, 2005, p. 62). In the management development literature, journals are characterized as allowing for the collection of improvement ideas, and permit the harmless expression of powerful emotions (Perkin, 1982).

Because journaling has been described as being an important practice in management development, my study considered journaling as a potential aspect of the professional development of ABE managers. Specifically, the current literature describes journals as a means of allowing professionals to revisit experiences and reflect on those experiences, allowing for deeper learning and growth each time the experiences are revisited and explored (Plack &

Greenberg, 2005; Spalding & Wilson, 2002). Plack and Greenberg (2005) explore facets of reflective journaling among medical trainees. Specifically, they describe various outcomes of the writing process, including critical thinking and questioning. Further, they imply that journaling is “integral to deeper learning from experience.” Journaling has also shown to help individuals increase their ability to reflect critically on what is being learned, as well as develop wholeness as a professional (Hiemstra, 2001). More specifically, studies focused on journal writing and reflective practice have shown to promote thinking about diversity issues (Chabon & Lee-Wilkerson, 2006), empower employees (Cyboran, 2005), and engage employees in their practice (Billings & Kowalski, 2006).

Regardless of the type of journal, or the context in which it is used, individuals should proceed with caution when implementing journaling into practice; issues related to comfort levels, expectations, and ethics should be considered before using this strategy (Yonge & Myrick, 2005). Spalding and Wilson’s (2002) case study supports this idea, attempting to “demystify reflection” within the context of reflective writing as a teaching strategy for graduate students in practice. In their study, the researchers find that it is necessary to engage in and teach various methods of reflection in order for it to be more effective.

Furthermore, journaling without any structure could lessen its effect on the individual in relationship to learning and development. Less structured journals without any specific goal or purpose (other than to document reflections) may serve more as a diary rather than a learning opportunity. In her exploration of journaling with graduate students, Hogan (1995) found that other factors such as the appeal of journaling, discomfort with the journaling process, and maintenance of confidentiality issues have also influenced the overall effectiveness of reflective writing and should be considered before it is implemented in practice.

Structured journals can be used to further document goals and progress, and these writings may be used as ways to enhance development in practice. For example, in Germain's (2003) case study of counseling practice, journals are shown to serve as a record of development as well as a source of continued reflection. This type of structured journaling is often used in coaching, an additional aspect of management development that promotes reflective practice (Cyboran, 2005), presented in the next section.

Coaching

Coaching is one aspect of reflective practice that is often seen at the pre-service level in teacher education where teachers or peers can assist with examining assumptions and practices through use of journals (Ferraro, 2000). In management development, coaching takes on a slightly different form:

Coaching that serves the goals of the organization focuses on the skills needed for the current job....Alternatively, coaching can focus on the specific goals of the employee to either improve his or her current performance or prepare for future opportunities. (Hunt & Weintraub, 2004, p. 42)

Both internal and external coaches are used to help managers develop within organizations; however, the outcomes of these forms of coaching appear to be different. As one study found, organizations using external coaches for senior executives report improved alignment among the leadership team, the team's ability to execute strategy, and leadership behaviors. Use of internal coaches is associated with improved teamwork and strategy execution at management levels throughout the organization, as well as improved culture and morale (McDermott, Levenson, & Newtown, 2007).

As was found with much of the literature linking reflective practice to writing and journaling, reflective practice is never quite clearly defined in relation to coaching. The term reflective practice is typically used quite loosely, with broader definitions presented, and subsequent honing-in on a specific, task-oriented concept. With respect to reflective practice, coaching has shown to influence the development of the reflective skills of individuals in the workplace (Barnett, 1995). To achieve this, coaching may be used in tandem with other types of reflective practice strategies, such as journaling. In some professional development situations, coaching is an important aspect of the journaling process, with coaches assisting individuals with learning to reflect through writing (Driessen, van Tartwijk, Vermunt, & van der Vleutun, 2003).

Critical Incident Analysis

In critical incident analysis, a reflective practice tool used across a variety of disciplines including medicine (Minghella & Benson, 1995; Parker, 1995), teaching (Thiel, 1999; Tripp, 1993) and management and administration (Webb, 2003) professions, individuals record, analyze, and reflect on significant events (Thiel, 1999). The nature of these events differ depending on the profession; in the medical field, for example, the term “critical incident” typically refers to an occurrence that might have lead, if not discovered in time, to an undesirable outcome (Busse & Holland, 2002). In education, a critical incident is often described as a “best” or “worst” experience (Brookfield, 1995).

Given the complex nature of the roles of ABE managers, this study considers the nature of critical incident analysis as a broader means towards problem-solving and resolving of issues. As is discussed in the findings, because critical incident analysis is more of a technical term (often used in the medical profession) the term was not necessarily used in this sense for this

study. However, it did prove to be relevant when looking for certain outcomes such as making judgments, and so on.

Portfolios

“The use of portfolios for summative assessment and development of teaching and reflective practice dominates the literature” (Klenowski, Askew, & Carnell, 2006, p. 267); however, their use has shown to be applicable across a variety of contexts including higher education (Klenowski *et al.*, 2006), administration (Schwartz, 2005), and nursing (Bell, 2001). Klenowski *et al.* (2006) argue that, while there is ample literature focused on linking reflective practice to the use of portfolios in higher education, there is a lack of attention to how portfolios contribute to learning in practice. In their action research study focused on learning and professional development in higher education they concluded that portfolios led to changes in practice brought about by what is learned through portfolio use. This means that, while portfolios aid in individual, professional development, they also assist in learning as well, which, in turn, enhances professional development in practice.

Essentially, the contents of a portfolio depend on its purpose and the discipline in which it is being used. They are often used in professions where there is mandatory certification, including teacher education, for example, where portfolios may be required to include samples of student work, which may be indicative of state program requirements (Bowers, 2005). In nursing practice, “a professional portfolio is a collection of visible documentation of credentials and contributions to nursing practice - a grouping of materials and accomplishments that communicates professional development and achievements” (Jackson, 2004, p. 12). For management and administrative professionals particularly, portfolios have shown to be useful as

part of management education programs in self-assessment, activities, and other forms of evidence (Baker, 1991; Newton & Wilkinson, 1995).

Portfolios help promote reflective practice by providing a means to reflect and subsequently capture those reflections in a creative medium (Borko, Michalec, Timmons, & Siddle, 1997; Zubizarreta, 2003). As Geltner (1993) explains in his qualitative, individual case study in the field of pharmacology, portfolios influence the development of skills necessary for effective reflective practice, including exploration of problems, deepening of meaning, and creating understanding (Geltner, 1993). Furthermore, as Paschal, Jensen, and Mostrom (2002) found, in their qualitative study conducted in a physical therapy education environment, the process of building a portfolios supports the development of reflective practitioners who continually assess their own performance and plan for ongoing learning and development.

Technological Support

Technology plays an important role in moving some of the more popular reflective practice techniques into computer-based environments. Research has shown that technology provides organizations with another means of promoting reflective practice; it is used to engage individuals in the reflective process in a variety of ways. More specifically, technology allows for the documentation of experiences, either individually or among colleagues, into easily accessible, sharable information.

Many of the features of telecommunications and multimedia technology are particularly promising for overcoming some of the constraints presented in traditional methods of professional development (Grant, 1996). Journaling, in particular, is now implemented within many practices as a web-based activity (Cohen & Welch, 2002). Computer-based tools which can also be used for workplace journaling include e-mail, blogs, or word processed documents

(Cyboran, 2005). Technologies have many benefits, including allowance for instantaneous sharing of information (Hermann, 2006; Hodder & Carter, 1997), making group-based reflection via the web a useful medium (Haberstroh, Parr, Gee, & Trepal, 2006).

In addition to supporting journaling activities, technology supports critical incident analysis by allowing individuals to document incidents via a software program, a tool which can also be used to categorize incidents. Newer technology allows for real-time documentation; for example, those in the medical field are now able to capture the details of an event as they are happening within a portable technology system (Bolsin, Faunce, & Colson, 2005; Freestone, Bolsin, Colson, Patrick, & Creati, 2006) promoting better patient care.

Heath's (2005) description of the benefits to using electronic (or digital) portfolios as opposed to traditional paper versions, includes increased versatility, easy access for continual modification, and portrayal of technological competency by the author. Horton's (2004) study supports this characterization, finding that the use of digital portfolios in teacher education programs allows for a variety of means for documentation of progress. In addition, electronic portfolios are associated with more academic and professional growth (Alhammar, 2006). Development of an electronic portfolio is often easier to maintain, particularly because many of the documents which are included in a portfolio are already in digitized format in an inexpensive manner (Heath, 2005).

Technology also allows professionals to reflect on performance via digital programs, including the use of video to capture and reflect on practice (Cunningham, 2002; Steve, 2004). This and other forms of new media "can be used to create reflective practicum experiences. Carefully constructed, replicable, readily available, interactive systems can provide complex and highly involving simulations of real-world situations" (Henderson, 1995, p. 200).

Using technology to promote reflective practice does present potential issues. One overarching concern is a potential lack of computer or technology skills, which may hinder the reflective process (Heath, 2005; Hodder & Carter, 1997). Electronic portfolios, in particular, may not meet the needs of the professional, can take time, and cost money (Heath, 2005). Also, research shows that mandated portfolios may be perceived in a negative way, leading to resistance during the implementation process (Strudler & Wetzel, 2005). Before using technology to engage individuals in reflective practice, organizations should consider these potential limitations. By providing training, or alternative solutions, individuals may not feel as forced to use technology as a reflective strategy.

While technology offers individuals an opportunity to enhance reflective practice in a variety of ways, as pointed out in this review, it also allows for opportunity to share information and collaborate among peers and colleagues. Collaboration is an important part of reflective practice, and should not be overlooked. Various aspects of collaboration in relationship to reflective practice are discussed in the next section.

Collaboration

Reflective practice does not need to take place in isolation. As Bolton (2005) suggests: “Examinations of practice need to be undertaken alongside open discussions with peers on pertinent issues, an examination of texts from the larger field of work and politics, and discussions with colleagues from outside the practitioners’ own milieu.”

Bolton’s (2005) suggestion for reflective practice is aligned with critical reflection; that is, reflection on presuppositions (Mezirow, 1991) within a collaborative environment. Research has shown that interaction with others can strengthen the reflective process in a variety of ways, prompting research to explore the opportunities presented by communication with others in a

work setting. Interaction among practitioners is often linked to reflective practice, which strengthens collaboration within groups (Harada, 2001). Collaboration has been found to be an intricate and evolving process based on a foundation of trust which allows the process to grow and emerge as professional development (Albrecht, 2003).

Reflective practice among colleagues has shown to allow practitioners to explore their own points of view by comparing and discussing them with that of their colleagues (Williams, 2005). Collaboration occurs in many forms, including sharing of ideas and knowledge creation (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Melnychuk, 2001), and receiving feedback from more experienced peers (Parsons & Stephenson, 2005). However, these collaborative forms of communication do not necessarily mean reflection will occur. As Ayas and Zeniuk (2001) found in their case study, in order for a collaborative workplace of reflective practitioners to exist and be effective, alternative approaches towards learning should be implemented.

Supporting the suggestion to enhance reflection among groups, Bolton (2005) suggests strategies for maximizing collaboration towards reflective practice, including:

1. maintaining respect, confidentiality, and confidence within the group setting;
2. listening;
3. setting boundaries;
4. promoting consistency in attendance and participation; and
5. managing group activities, including allowing opportunities for evaluation, reflection, and contributions from each member.

One important aspect of collaborative approaches towards reflective practice is the use of reflective dialogue. Reflective dialogue consists of conversations with others where factors such as context and emotions of an individual, as well as the thought processes play a role

(Brockbank, McGill, & Beech, 2002). Individuals interact with colleagues in order to move from personal reflection towards interaction with others in the development of reflective practice.

Engaging in a reflective dialogue creates a different learning climate with those involved. It is unlike ordinary meetings where there may be detachment and varying degrees of involvement. If reflective dialogue is happening effectively, all are engaged. There will be an intensity of listening and contributions, while the endeavor is to create and challenge meanings and understanding, where each person is attending to the issue of the moment (Brockbank & McGill, 1998, p. 106).

Reflective dialogue, as part of the reflective practice process, has been shown to enhance the development of professionals at a supervisory level (Pearce, 1995). It has also shown to be a critical element in the process of strategic innovation (Jacobs & Heracleous, 2005), providing a framework for understanding how individuals within organizations think about strategy. Reflective dialogue is also an important aspect of the mentoring process, a second collaborative approach used to promote reflective practice (Smith, 1999).

Mezirow & Associates (2000) present another view of reflective dialogue. They contend that reflective discourse among individuals is an opportunity to challenge assumptions through discussion with colleagues. Through this process, those included in this process become more socially and contextually aware of these presuppositions when reaching conclusions and making decisions.

Mentoring Programs

The process of mentoring is different from coaching; the focus of the coaching process tends to be more job-specific or focused on a particular task. Mentoring programs typically partner experienced practitioners with novice practitioners in an effort to allow collaboration,

guidance, and shared practices while peer mentoring programs allow those at similar levels in their professions mentor each other in a similar manner. Research shows that mentoring programs are a strategy to promote reflective practice within a variety of professional settings.

As is found with coaching programs, mentoring has shown to be an important factor in learning how to reflect in practice (Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005; Walkington, 2005). Barnett (1995) suggests this be done through a staged, thoughtful process in which mentors and their mentees move through several stages, including imitation, cultivation, separation, redefinition, disillusionment, parting, and transformation.

Learning to reflect on one's practice as part of the mentoring process has resulted in significant outcomes to the individual and the organization. One important outcome of the mentoring process is the development of new, organizational knowledge through reflection among those in the mentoring relationship (Egbu, 2006). Peer mentoring situations, in particular, have shown that peer mentoring enhances reflective practice among professionals by encouraging discussion among peers (Arsenault, 2006). Problem-solving and higher-order thinking have also resulted from professional mentoring situations as well (Barnett, 1995).

Research shows that mentors can also lack effect on their mentees. As Moran and Dallat (1995) found in their qualitative study of mentoring among teachers enrolled in educational programs, a lack of preparation, time, and a conducive setting for the mentoring to occur have all had adverse effects on mentoring relationships. Also, lack of program structure could result in a failed mentoring situation; research suggests a structured mentoring program be set in place to attend to the needs of the employees and the organization (Barnett, 1995; Knowles *et al.*, 2005).

Reflective Practice and ABE Program Managers

The focus of this study is the exploration of reflective practice among ABE program managers; specifically, the types of reflective practice strategies, if any, that are being used in practice, and how they have affected career development. As a starting point, a search for literature linking ABE with reflective practice yielded few results. Narrowing to the focal point of this study, ABE program managers, as discovered through this review, very little research exists which focuses on the professional development of ABE program managers. In fact, a scan of the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), one of the primary institutions which support development of ABE programs and staff, website directed me to a link for Program Directors. Included was a listing of documents such as: “Integrating Health Across the Curriculum: A Guide for Program Directors”, and “Planning for Program Improvement: A Manual for ABE Programs.” There was no evidence of documents which supported reflective practice among this group; most were instructional manuals and guidelines for practice.

A search for literature linking literacy and reflective practice points primarily to literacy education in elementary and secondary education teaching contexts. While there is some correlation between these two areas, as some argue that literacy acquisition is much the same for children as it is for adult learners (Jenkins, 1995), the majority of this literature is conceptual and relates to development of teaching strategies (Angelillo & Reduce, 2000), relationships with students (Walsh, 2000), and collaboration with parents (King, 2000) in these settings. The literature focusing on reflective practice within ABE settings explores the teaching that occurs in these programs, and how instructors of adult literacy programs can bring reflection into their practice (Florez, 2001; Marceau, 2003). Very few empirical studies link the two areas.

The National Center on Adult Literacy (NCAL) at the University of Pennsylvania provides some of the most promising, on-going research focused on the development of managers within ABE programs. The focus of NCAL's studies is the building of a professional inquiry model into practice to support development. Inquiry-based staff development prompts practitioners to pose questions for consideration and conduct field-based inquiry into daily practice (Lytle *et al.*, 1992). As one study concludes (Lytle, Belzer, & Reumann, 1993):

Traditional staff development models do not provide the social and organizational structures supportive of learning for practitioners across the professional life span. In inquiry-based or inquiry-centered staff development, learning is integrated with practice and occurs over time. The processes build on each person's distinctive experiences of practice, and the experiences of inquiry, in turn, feed back into practice. (p.36)

Much of the suggested professional development model presented is in line with reflective practice. The idea of collaboration, support, and learning integrated with practice is all indicative of reflective practice strategy. It is apparent that reflective practice is an integral part of professional development in many professions; yet, little has been done in relation to ABE management. The next section discusses this, and other gaps in the literature, in more detail.

Research Gaps

Empirical research shows various effects of reflective practice while cutting across multiple fields within various work settings (Densten & Gray, 2001; Levina, 2005; Redmond, 2006). Findings from eight of the empirical studies reviewed reveal reflective practice methods have positive effects on specific qualities of practice, including innovation and creativity (Berg & Hallberg, 1999; Cowan, 1998), teaching strategy (Hewson, 1991; MacKinnon, 1986; Patterson, 1993), and problem-solving (Duke, 1984; Stuessy & Naizer, 1996; Yerushalmi &

Eylon, 2004). Relevant literature linking reflective practice to management development, specifically, shows the positive effects of reflection on areas such as producing innovative leadership approaches (Collins, 2005) and effective problem solving (van Woekom, 2004).

The field of management development has not been given as much attention in terms of critical reflection and its effects on practice as the field of teaching. Discussion of critical reflection in management development typically falls within management education literature, with focus on critical reflection within classroom settings. Studies are particularly concerned with critical reflection and its implication for power dynamics (Morley, 2004; Reynolds, 1998), as well as examination of critical perspectives within management education (Gillberg, Holgersoon, Hvenmark, Hook, & Lindgren, 2005).

As discussed in this review, reflective practice plays an important role in professional development. It is seen as an additional learning tool to support other forms of professional development, a supplement to the formalized training which typically occurs in a workplace setting. Reflective practice serves as another means for an individual to learn from reflecting upon various aspects of their job. It allows for effective problem-solving, team-building, analysis, and, as discussed in this review, has a positive effect on both self and practice in a professional setting.

Much of what is known about reflective practice has emerged from the teacher and nurse education literature. Because reflective practice is widely used within these settings, these particular contexts are ideal to explore this concept further. Yet, the frameworks and models of reflective practice are not solely focused on these environments; popular concepts such as reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and critical reflection can be engaged in other professional settings.

Also, there is a lack of attention in the empirical literature to the definition of reflective practice. While many definitions exist, a clear, blended exploration is absent. In addition, the majority of empirical studies rely on presenting several reviews of reflective practice and then selecting one as a foundation for a study. This gap is one reason why the idea of reflective practice is presented as a concept rather than a defined, theoretical framework.

A major gap in the literature is the lack of empirical research relevant to the development of ABE program managers. It appears that this particular group participates in more traditional development opportunities (for example, workshops), due to the training promoted by organizations such as Regional Professional Development Centers, SABES or ProLiteracy America. However, we know little about the outcomes of these programs, and even less about the other types of learning which occur within ABE Management.

It is apparent that reflective practice can have many positive influences on those who engage in it in the workplace. This study sought to link the idea of reflective practice with ABE program management, an area which has not been extensively studied in the past. Specifically, this study sought to find out how managers of ABE programs engaged in reflective practice, and how these strategies influenced their professional development within their work settings.

Chapter 3, which follows, presents the methodology used for this study. Specifically, it describes the qualitative, phenomenological approach used for this study. Also, a brief description of the background of the researcher is provided. Finally, the participant selection process, data collection and analysis procedures, including verification techniques, are reviewed in detail.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned in chapter 1, the purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore how administrators of Adult Basic Education programs developed in their roles through reflective practice. Reflective practice is the conceptual framework for this study. Guiding this study are the following research questions:

1. How do managers of ABE programs experience professional development in practice?
2. What are ABE managers' perceptions on how they develop professionally?
3. How do ABE managers experience reflection on their practice?
4. How does the experience of reflection contribute to the professional development of ABE program managers?

The next sections introduce the key characteristics of qualitative research, specifically the phenomenological approach, which was used in this study. Since there are separate, detailed literatures that fall under the category of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000); the next sections of this paper are only meant to provide an overview of qualitative research, as well as an introduction to the phenomenological approach.

Qualitative Research

The overall purpose of qualitative research is to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, to delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and to describe how people interpret their experience (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). Qualitative data are comprised of detailed descriptions of people and events in natural

settings; depth and understanding emerge from recording what people say in their own words and capturing their modifiers or qualifiers with carefully worded probe questions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000):

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make this world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p. 3)

According to Merriam and Associates (2002), several key characteristics cut across the various interpretive qualitative research designs, including:

1. researchers strive to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences,
2. the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and
3. qualitative inquiry is richly descriptive.

In qualitative research, the researcher assumes the role of someone who uses multiple methods to interpret data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The researcher is also the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and interpretations of reality are accessed directly through observations and interviews (Merriam & Associates, 2002). A qualitative design is most appropriate for those who want to understand a phenomenon, uncover the meaning of a situation has for those involved, or delineate process (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). To reveal this

meaning, a qualitative researcher may use interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2002).

This study uses interviews as the primary method for gathering data. Since I used semi-structured interviews, questions were in the form of open-ended questions. Open-ended questions, in particular, enabled me to understand and capture the points of view of participants without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories (Patton, 2002). More detail about the data collection process is discussed later in this chapter.

Qualitative research was most appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, this study is not based on specific, statistical information; rather, I sought descriptive narrative from participants in order to glean insight into their personal reflections and learning experiences. The most appropriate method to collect this data is through interviewing in order to collect participant meanings within the context of ABE administration and to subsequently interpret the data. According to Creswell (2003), the process of interviewing, collecting participant meanings, and interpretation of this data are all part of a qualitative approach towards research.

In addition to choosing a qualitative approach, I am specifically used phenomenology as the type of research to frame this study. More specific detail about phenomenological research, as well as a clearer understanding of why this type of research is appropriate for this study is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Phenomenology

The type of qualitative research used in a study is dependent on the design; for this study phenomenology is ideal because it focuses on the essence or structure of an experience (Creswell, 2003; Merriam & Associates, 2002) as described by participants in a study (Creswell,

2003). With respect to adult education, in particular, Willis (2001) describes the nature of this type of research:

Phenomenological approaches, within the field of adult education aim to make the phenomenon of adult education a meaningful, named reality. Meaningful refers to the person who experienced it, but then, through that person's portrayal, vivid it should be pointed out, initially to the eyes of the person experiencing it – to generate some echoes in others, particularly those with similar experiences. (p. 2)

The interpretation of these reflective practice strategies and methods, as well as the similarities and differences between them, are aligned with the self-reflective, interpretive nature of phenomenological research. Merriam and Simpson (2000) state that: “phenomenologists are interested in showing how complex meanings are built out of simple units of direct experience. This form of inquiry is an attempt to deal with inner experiences unprobed in everyday life.”

Supporting Merriam and Simpson's (2002) definition, Patton (2002) describes the foundational question of phenomenological research as seeking the meaning, structure, and essence of lived experience for a person or group of people. Creswell (2003) offers examples of purposes of phenomenological studies, citing lived experiences and meaning as phrases which are indicative of this type of research approach. This study, in particular, is guided by these same phrases, and is aligned with other existing research approaches which use phenomenology to frame their study.

There are several kinds of phenomenological research, which include transcendental, existential, and hermeneutic phenomenology, all which offer different foci (Schwandt as cited in Patton, 2002). Phenomenological research is often aligned with the orientation within the research method. For example, more objectivist orientations (such as transcendental

phenomenology) and subjectivist (such as hermeneutic) exist (Cohen & Omery, 1994; Van Manen, 1990)

Patton (2002) contends that, despite the different orientations and forms of phenomenological research, a general approach can be used to ascertain the overarching goals of this kind of research, including similarities and differences of experiences among the group of participants. This study implements a descriptive approach towards phenomenology, an approach towards inquiry which is aligned with the overarching focus of this particular study.

Researchers typically approach phenomenological research in three distinct ways:

1. describing a type of experience just as we find it in our own (past) experience; thus, Husserl and Merleau-Ponty spoke of pure description of lived experience;
2. interpreting a type of experience by relating it to relevant features of context. In this vein, Heidegger and his followers spoke of hermeneutics, the art of interpretation in context, especially social and linguistic context; and
3. analyzing the form of a type of experience; in the end, all the classical phenomenologists practiced analysis of experience, factoring out notable features for further elaboration. (Woodruff-Smith, 2003).

Interpretative, descriptive phenomenology, in context, helps guide this study. The tools of data analysis used to support this type of phenomenology are described in Chapter 3.

Background of Researcher

My experience educating others in a formalized setting began within a corporate training environment, delivering content related to human resources-related topics, such as employee benefits information or management development sessions. While I enjoyed delivering information to people in a classroom setting, it did not give me a feeling of fulfillment – I felt as

though I was providing information, which could be delivered just as easily through printed materials. In a sense, much of the information I was delivering felt unimportant to me, therefore, it was difficult to convince others that it should be important to them.

Later in my career, I had an opportunity to work within a vastly different environment, as an instructor within a career re-entry program, which was developed for those individuals who were lacking the skills, confidence, and resources needed to get back into the workforce. After the 9-week session was over, I saw individuals who lacked confidence and career entry skills when they entered the program, transform into confident, viable job-seekers, many of whom obtained employment as a result. Through conversations with students, I uncovered that, for many of these individuals, my class was the first opportunity they had to formally assess their skills, recognize they possessed transferable talents, and could be viable to a potential employer.

By teaching in this program, my thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes towards being an educator changed. I no longer wished to work in a corporate training environment, and I felt my skills were much more useful in a basic skills education setting, where I would be helping those who lacked basic skills, sought employment, or, were simply in need of someone to help them update their skills to make them viable for employment. Since teaching for the career re-entry program, I have worked in similar programs, educating in the areas of literacy, basic mathematics, career development, introductory computers, and English for speakers of other languages. I often encountered colleagues who chose the field of adult basic skills education as a permanent vocation in spite of the many obstacles they encountered. What was especially remarkable to me was the success these individuals achieved despite a lack of professional development opportunities related to teaching and managing ABE programs.

The field of adult basic skills education is challenging for those who work in it. Daily issues include lack of resources, poor student attendance, and programs driven by funding requirements, which make for a difficult environment to work in. Turnover is high, and, according to the Bureau of Labor and Statistics (2006), can be attributed to low-pay (with high demands for college-educated employees), and the part-time nature of many of the positions available. Because of this lack of resources, many individuals who enter this field are faced with learning on the job, and developing their own careers.

I admire those who succeed in the field of ABE, particularly those who manage these programs, and was curious to explore the ways ABE program managers developed in their roles. In light of the lack of professional development opportunities available to managers of ABE programs, through this study, I wanted to better understand what professional development has occurred through reflective practice.

In addition to my practical experience in the field of ABE, I also bring several years of research experience to this study. Throughout my academic career, I have served as a researcher for several qualitative research projects, and worked for one academic year as a research assistant with American Educational Services. Also, I have taken several research courses (both qualitative and quantitative) which enhanced my skills in the field of adult education research.

My background allowed me to conduct this study with some advantages. First, I already had an understanding of the context of this study. From my experiences working in adult basic education settings, I understood the characteristics of the setting, and was able to identify with the terminology used in the interviews. Also, I had a clear understanding of some of the overarching goals of these programs, such as student recruitment and funding issues, and was

able to process the interview information from a more understanding perspective with regards to these issues.

For a phenomenological study, in particular, the researcher's past experiences influence the interview process and data analysis (Woodruff-Smith, 2003). For this study, I found this to be true; however, my background was an important asset to conducting this study. As a researcher approaching a descriptive, phenomenological study, my own interpretations, insights, and experiences allowed me to gain a richer, more vivid understanding of the participants' responses in a variety of ways. For example, participants were aware of my experiences in the field of ABE, and this gave me an advantage because they could use certain terms and concepts relevant to this field without having to clarify. In some cases, it allowed participants to have more free-flowing thoughts when answering questions, rather than having to focus on defining or clarifying information.

Overall, my experience in ABE benefitted me when I was conducting this study. However, as a researcher, I was aware of the biases a participant might have towards me based on where I previously worked. Since the field is quite small, most individuals know each other; my past work with others in the field, certain grant opportunities and programs, or specific individuals at a state level could have influenced participant responses. Therefore, I was careful to not mention previous places of employment, only my experiences in the field.

Given my background in the field, I found it helpful to approach the interviews as a question and answer session; however, I was careful to not interject my own, personal opinions towards certain topics or responses in an effort to elicit unguarded responses from participants. There were some situations where participants asked me my opinion on certain topics, and in

these few cases, I attempted to wait until the interview process was over, or redirected the discussion back to the subject at-hand.

Participant Selection

To select participants for this study, purposeful sampling was used. Purposeful sampling is the selection of information-rich cases for study in depth, from which one can learn about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Patton, 2002). Since this study examined the experiences of managers of ABE programs, a critical part of the sample selection was the qualification of potential participants for the study. To identify participants for this study, I followed specific steps to ensure those who were most qualified to participate were chosen during the purposeful sampling selection process.

The first step in the participant selection process was sourcing for managers of ABE programs in Pennsylvania. In order to obtain a qualified participant pool, I looked for participants through professional organizations that had first-hand knowledge of managers working in the field of ABE. These organizations typically work directly with ABE organizations in terms of professional development, referrals, and funding. I contacted the Southeast Professional Development Center, personal contacts who were leaders working in the field, and the Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE).

The referring organizations were asked to contact potential participants, and those individuals who were interested in participating identified themselves to me. A critical part of the sample selection process was the initial phone conversation or e-mail dialogue to ensure the individual met the following criteria:

1. Individuals must have been currently responsible for managing an adult basic education program. This may or may not have included responsibilities for

- instructing adults, however, over 90% of their time on the job during the week must have been dedicated to managing the program;
2. Individuals must have been referred by one of the agencies listed above, or from other participants in the study; and
 3. Individuals must have been in the role of ABE program manager for a minimum of 5 years at the time the interview was conducted (either in their present position, or a position with another organization).

During this initial contact, if the participant continued to show interest and met the above criteria, I arranged a time to meet with them in person, preferably at their work location. Every attempt was made to meet with participants in person. Out of the 10 interviews conducted, 7 were in-person, and 3 were via telephone.

After initial contact and interview arrangements were agreed upon, I sent them a follow-up email, confirming our conversation, the purpose of the study, and confirming a time and day to conduct the interview. After following through on the participant selection process, I identified a total of ten participants for this study. Of these ten participants, six were women, four were men; all were white, with the exception of one Cuban-American male. They had between 5 and 33 years of experience as ABE managers. One of participants never earned additional educational credentials beyond the high school level. Five participants earned bachelor's degrees, three earned master's degrees, and one a doctoral degree.

Data Collection Procedures

As mentioned previously, the purpose of this study was to explore how managers of Adult Basic Education programs develop professionally through reflective practice. Since a phenomenological approach was used as the primary approach in this study, interviews were the

primary data collection method. The next section briefly discusses rationale for the use of interviews.

The data for this study was collected through one-on-one, semi-structured taped interviews with each participant. The interviews ranged in length from one to two hours. Qualitative interviewing allowed me to guide the line of questioning to glean data relevant to the overall guiding questions of this study (Creswell, 2003). Semi-structured interviews, in particular, were useful because the open-ended nature of the questions enabled me to understand and capture the points of view of participants without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories (Patton, 2002). It also allowed for the participant to help guide the interview, leading to exploration of areas which were brought up during the discussion. Structured interviews do not allow for the open discussion which was needed for the study. Thus, the themes of the lines of questioning were more important than the specific questions being asked during the process, and were carefully considered before entering discussion with participants.

Since semi-structured interviews were used, lines of questioning were altered based on individual responses. However, since I was concerned with fostering reflection during the interview process, the questions which were initially asked during this process were:

1. Tell me about your career path – specifically, how did you begin working in the field of Adult Basic Education?
2. Have there been any non-work related influences (for example, people, or life experiences) that you feel helped you to develop professionally in your career?
3. Who do you interact with most in your work setting? How do these individual(s) influence how you develop professionally in your position?

4. Tell me about your “typical day”.
5. What would you describe as being the most challenging aspect of your job? How did you learn to handle this challenge?
6. If is anything that hinders your learning and developing professionally in your position, what would it be?
7. Tell me about a time when you had to learn something new on the job – how did you go about learning the new task given to you?
8. What has been one of the most challenging situations you’ve faced in your position in the past 5 years? How did you handle it?
9. Is there anyone else involved in your problem-solving processes on a daily basis? What is that person’s job, and what is their involvement in problem-solving?
10. How do you make decisions in your job? Are there certain steps you follow? Provide me with an example.
11. Have you ever been discouraged in your job? What did you do to overcome that discouragement?
12. What traits do you possess which you feel allowed you to learn to successfully overcome discouraging times in your job?
13. Are there any coping strategies you use to assist you with times of discouragement?

Questions were designed to prompt discussion in several areas, including the role of participants in their work setting, and what learning strategies they use to develop in their jobs; how participants cope with problems and decision-making processes, and the methods used to handle moments of discouragement. Semi-structured interviews related to these topics generated

discussion of reflective practice and its role in the professional development of participants in this study.

Interviews were conducted during the months of January and February 2008. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Oliver, Serovich, and Mason (2005) state:

Transcription is a powerful act of representation. This representation can affect how data are conceptualized. Instead of being viewed as a behind-the-scenes task, [we argue that] the transcription process be incorporated more intimately into qualitative research designs and methodologies. Periods of reflection at crucial design and implementation points may provide a valuable exercise in honoring both the research process and participant's voice. (p. 1287)

To ensure due diligence to the transcription process for qualitative research during this study, I used denaturalized transcription. Denaturalized transcription eliminates non-verbal noises, as well as side vocalizations (i.e. "umm") from transcription (MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004). Cameron (2001 as cited in Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005) suggests this type of transcription when meanings and perceptions which construct reality are sought. This type of transcription is necessary because the purpose of this study is concerned with the overall discussion, not necessarily the innuendos which arise during the process. Naturalized transcription is more appropriate for conversation analysis, or analysis of conversation between two individuals (Oliver *et al.*, 2005).

After the interview transcriptions were complete, I reviewed transcripts. In particular, I listened for clarity of descriptions, thoroughness of responses, and missed opportunity for follow-up questioning during the interview process. I did not find it necessary to conduct second

interviews with any of the participants. However, in several instances, I did contact participants via e-mail to clarify comments that were made during the interview.

In addition to first interviews and follow-up questioning via e-mail, other sources of data were used to inform this study. In an effort to open discussion and glean insights into the participant's responses, prior to the first interview, I asked each participant to provide me with a symbol (such as an object, document, piece of art, etc.) which they felt represented their career.

Also, I took detailed field notes when interviewing participants. Field notes are notes I wrote during the interview and data collection process (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). They reviewed and used during final analysis of this study. Field notes included personal observation (such as working conditions, context, etc.) and allowed me to develop further insights into each participant's background and career development with respect to their own reflection.

Prior to conducting any research for this study, approval was obtained through the Pennsylvania State University Office for Research Protections (ORP). An application for the use of human participants was completed, and, upon approval, the research process began. The ORP at Penn State is committed to: endorsing a model for conducting outstanding research; promoting trust and respect among researchers, compliance committees and the community; and facilitating a partnership of shared responsibility (Office of Research Protection, 2006).

By obtaining approval through the University's ORP, and complying with the guidelines for human participant use, the protection of research participants is ensured through confidentiality and fully informed consent. A requirement of the ORP is to create an informed consent form which must be compliant with the parameters of the University, and be signed by each participant before the study begins.

Data Analysis

The data analysis section describes how qualitative data was analyzed during this study. More specifically, this section provides detail about the method of data interpretation, and the reasons for choosing this method for this particular study. Data analysis occurred after the completion of the interview process. Since semi-structured interviewing was used, the lines of questioning were altered during each interview process depending on the responses from participants.

Creswell (2003) offers a generic approach towards analysis of qualitative data, including organization and preparation of the data for analysis, reading through all the data, beginning detailed analysis and coding, which refers to the process of organizing the materials into chunks before bringing meaning to those chunks (Rossman & Rallis, 1998 as cited in Creswell, 2003) and using the coding process to generate a description of the setting of people as well as the categories or themes for analysis.

More specifically, for qualitative, phenomenological research studies, Davies (2007) offers several important guidelines for content analysis which were used during the analysis phase of this study:

1. Remembering the goal is to explore individual or situational perspectives,
2. Reminding yourself of the research questions and continually coming back to them,
3. Maintaining a dynamic and circular relationship between data analysis and data collection,
4. Working with scripts which are functional for my specific readability preferences,
5. Coming up with a coding method, either through colors or highlights, which will allow me to cross-compare interviews, and

6. Considering all responses and not dismissing any “throwaway” remarks.

The analysis phase of this study relied on bracketing, as described by Husserl (1931).

The concept of bracketing, according to Husserl, relies heavily on our perceptions of experiences and separating those experiences from outside influences.

An important component of Husserlian phenomenology is the belief that it is essential for the researcher to shed all prior personal knowledge to grasp the essential lived experiences of those being studied. This means that the researcher must actively strip his or her consciousness of all prior expert knowledge as well as personal biases. (Natanson, 1973 as cited in Lopez & Willis, 2004)

Along these lines, as a researcher, I attempted to bracket my preconceptions and knowledge of the field to ascertain the actual, lived experience by the participant. This process allowed me to approach the data analysis through a purer lens, rather than be influenced by preconceptions. However, I do acknowledge that bracketing preconceptions was difficult in all situations; for example, if a participant discussed a certain grant program which I had prior knowledge of, it was challenging for me to not use my own ideas during the data analysis. An overall awareness and subsequent notations of this during the analysis phase assisted with the bracketing process.

For this study, I also used several aspects of Creswell (2003) and Davies’ (2007) general, qualitative data analysis methods. First, after gathering all transcripts, I reviewed each several times and noted major areas which were relevant to the purpose of this study. I specifically looked for details, stories, and moments throughout each interview which led to the engagement of reflective practice and the furthering of the professional development of the individual.

In addition to Creswell (2003) and Davies' (2007) general qualitative data analysis methods, specific forms of phenomenological analysis were employed. For example, I used a similar investigative analysis as was demonstrated in Worthen and McNeill's (1996, as cited in Merriam & Associates, 2002) phenomenological investigation of supervision practice. This included several approaches to analysis, such as:

1. obtaining a sense of all of the interviews by reviewing them several times,
2. marking any potential areas where patterns of experiences were found,
3. integrating these patterns of experiences under several categories,
4. extracting the relevant essences of these experiences into more refined terms.

To extract the "essence of the experience" I used an interpretive approach similar to Worthen and McNeill's (1996, as cited in Merriam & Associates, 2002) study, in which the researchers asked specific questions relevant to the essence of the experience in order to refine their analysis. For my study, after identifying and integrating patterns of experiences, I questioned: "What professional development occurred as a result of the experience of this particular reflective activity in practice?"

Reflective practice was identified in this study as a holistic approach which was informed by the varying definitions in the literature. However, from this perspective, reflection was always related to practice, and relevant to the professional development process. In the analysis of this study, I was careful to distinguish between reflection as a mode of learning in relation to professional development and reflection as a way to make a choice or instantaneous decision.

For this study, critical reflection was viewed in a similar, holistic way. I focused "on assumptions about the content of the problem, the process or procedures followed in problem solving, or the presupposition on the basis of which the problem has been posed (Mezirow,

1991), but did not limit this study to a sole definition. Definitions such as those from Mezirow (1990) and Brookfield (1995) also guided this study .

After noting these definitions and areas for consideration, I compared each interview to look for similarities. As a result, I discovered three major themes running through the data which are detailed in Chapter 4: 1) Professional Development through Collaborative Relationships and Reflections, 2) Professional Development through Reflection on Practice and Self, and 3) Influences on Creating a Reflective Practice.

When reviewing themes and supporting topics, I used color-coding to separate relevant quotes and additional statements which support the findings of this study. This entailed choosing separate colored highlighters for each theme, and using that color to highlight any relevant dialogue in the transcripts. This color-coding method allowed me to differentiate among topics, and organize information efficiently and effectively. Specifically, it allowed me to organize topics and potential areas for discussion, as well as bring attention to any potential, quotable statements.

Once the topics and potentials areas for discussion were identified, I conducted an additional comparison of them to ensure analysis of the data was exhausted. As a result, additional themes emerged which are presented in the findings.

Verification

As fieldwork draws to a close, the researcher is increasingly concerned with verification of already collected data and less concerned with generating new inquiry leads (Patton, 2002). Verification, also referred to as trustworthiness, was critical to this study. In particular, I ensured the components of the verification process were adequately met through a series of steps which

were followed throughout the research process which checked for confirmability, credibility, dependability, and transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability is an important aspect of the data analysis process in qualitative research. It refers to the degree to which the results could be confirmed or corroborated by others (Trochim, 2006). To enhance confirmability, I used the procedures detailed by Trochim (2006) as a guiding framework to ensure confirmability. First, I documented the procedures I used for checking and rechecking the data throughout the study. These procedures were kept in an e-journal (discussed later in this section) throughout the data collection process. Also, I continually questioned my interpretations of the interview data, which included a data audit that examined my collection and analysis procedures. The audit trail, which provides documentation and a running account of the research process, lead to dependability and confirmability by allowing an auditor to determine the trustworthiness of the study (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). During this study, to ensure confirmability, each interview was audio taped and transcribed to ensure each spoken word of the participant is captured for analysis. Once transcriptions were complete, I reviewed each tape in tandem with the written transcript to ensure all words were captured adequately. I also noted where any unordinary verbal communications took place – such as pauses, breaks in conversation, etc. – to trigger me to go back, during the data analysis process, to listen for, and interpret, what these moments meant in the context of the questioning. In relationship to phenomenological research, in particular, my interpretation of the dialogue needs to be discussed with participants to ensure accurate interpretation of meaning. This process, called member checking (discussed later in this section), further confirmed the research findings.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the adequate representation of the constructions of the social world under study and can be assessed both in terms of process used in eliciting those representations and in terms of those representations of the community under study (Bradley, 1993). Credibility needs to be established with the individuals and groups who have supplied data for the inquiry (Erlandson *et al.*, 1993). To establish credibility for this study, the processes of triangulation and member checking were used during this study. In addition, my personal history relevant to Adult Basic Education programs and the field of Adult Education contributed to the credibility of this study.

As a practitioner and scholar in the field of Adult Basic Education, I have held positions within the field relevant to program planning, instruction, and program management among several institutions. In addition to working within a program in tandem with a community college, I also worked in ABE programs within an area predominantly comprised of individuals from lower socio-economic status, and other marginalized populations (i.e. single mothers, minorities, etc.). Considering the target populations of most ABE programs, I feel my experience with diverse populations of students in these various situations allowed me to have insight into the daily operations of these types of organizations.

Triangulation involves the careful review of data collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative methods of a particular construct (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006). According to Talburt (2004), triangulation acknowledges the potential for variability in a participant's narratives across interviews, in the relationship between and across multiple words and actions. In this study, triangulation was used

to further ensure credibility. Within the context of this study, the three pronged-approach towards review of data included:

1. Follow-up discussion through e-mails with participants of any potential missed interpretations or areas for further probing;
2. The member checking process to ensure interpretation of data is accurate, and
3. An electronic field journal to ensure the data collection process is accurate and thorough.

Member checking took place throughout the interview process. As participants were asked questions, I took notes, noting areas for clarification of data. If something said was unclear, I stated my understanding and interpretation of what was said back to the participant. If it was not accurate, or it was misinterpreted, I asked for additional description or information.

Dependability

Dependability, within the context of qualitative research, refers to the reliability of the study (Erlandson, *et al.*, 1993). To ensure dependability of this study, several methods were used, including triangulation (discussed previously), and an audit trail. An audit trail requires careful collection, storage, and documentation of data throughout the entire research process. This process requires the researcher to ensure any changes to the research process are reported, and issues are documented for future reference. For this study, I kept an electronic journal of field notes, which I used to capture relevant happenings throughout the research process which were secondary to the data itself. To further ensure the dependability of this study, I included in the electronic field journal detailed procedures used to check the data. I documented the times and days where data was reviewed and interpreted, as well as any notes which may be useful to another researcher who wishes to replicate this study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings of a study into other contexts, specifically, the degree of congruence between these two contexts (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 as cited in Patton, 2002). The concept of transferability is also referred to as “generalizability.” Merriam and Associates (2002) suggest that, if one thinks of what can be learned from an in-depth analysis of a particular situation or incident and how that knowledge can be transferred to another situation, generalizability within qualitative research becomes possible. Multiple factors such as the purposeful sampling process, the context and findings of the study, and the data collection process all contribute to the transferability of this particular study. These factors are discussed in further detail in the next section.

The idea of using a purposeful sampling of participants aides in the transferability of this study for several reasons. Because of the foundation of transferability is reliance on an adequate description of the context, the search for data must be guided by a process that provides rich detail (Erlandson et al, 1993). First, the participant selection section clearly defines the criteria used to select individuals to participate in this study. These guidelines support the selection process by providing bounded parameters which could be followed in order to obtain a purposeful sample for future studies.

The context of this study is clear – a purposeful sampling of participants was selected within the setting of ABE programs. Since the context of this study was fairly specific, and built on the premise that ABE program managers work within a unique situation, this study would transfer best to other ABE settings.

Through a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this study used open-ended interviews, as well as member checks to ensure the data collected during this study was rich,

thick, and descriptive in nature (Patton, 2002). This ensured that all facets of the experiences which described how an ABE program manager develops through reflective practice were discussed and consequently examined and interpreted. My own, personal field notes contributed to this process by providing me with a resource to reflect back on my observations and ideas which arose during the interview process.

This study treated reflective practice as an on-going phenomenon which takes place over an unspecified period of time. The goal of this study was to explore this phenomenon, within the context of an ABE program setting. To achieve this, I interviewed ten managers of ABE programs through open-ended, semi-structured interviews. During the participant selection process, careful attention was paid to the criteria for inclusion, as well as adherence to Penn State University's ORP procedures. Each interview was transcribed, and this qualitative, phenomenological study used a three-pronged analysis approach to triangulate and verify the data gathered.

Chapter 4 is a detailed description of the research results.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to explore how ABE managers experienced reflection on their practice, and how this experience contributed to their professional development. This chapter introduces the themes that emerged as a result of the data analysis, presented in three major sections: 1) Professional Development through Collaborative Relationships and Reflections, 2) Professional Development through Reflection on Practice and Self, and 3) Influences on Creating a Reflective Practice.

Before presenting these sections, I begin with a brief summary of each participant to help frame the results of the data analysis.

Profiles of the Participants

This section begins with a brief profile of each participant of this study. Any information that could potentially lead to identification of a participant was omitted, given that it is a community where many people know each other.

Bob

Bob is a white male with earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English. He is the executive director of a literacy program in an urban area in western PA. Bob entered the field of adult education in 1980, when he took a position running a program through the public library system. He was recruited to come to his organization in 1984, when his role was made a paid position.

Prior to joining the field of ABE, Bob was employed by the public library system in a rural part of Pennsylvania (PA). Growing up in the city, Bob said his experiences in the more

rural parts of PA were enjoyable; it gave him an understanding of what non-urban areas were like in the state.

Bob always wanted to be in education; he served in the Peace Corps where he taught ESL classes. Bob attributes his Peace Corp experience as influential towards wanting to work with disadvantaged and low income individuals. He also says his strong religious motive (which he states he doesn't "talk about very much") also influenced his career choices throughout the years.

Deb

Deb, a white female, is the director of a literacy program, and. at the time of the interview, she had been in her role for over 20 years. Her background was teaching high school Spanish, which she did for one year after graduating from college. She said that teaching high school students who were "really tough" taught her that it was not the right population of learners to work with. She said working with adults is a "match made in Heaven" because they want to learn and like to learn, unlike her high school students in the past.

After watching an episode of the television show Quincy, which focused on literacy issues and adults, Deb called the volunteer number the network displayed after the show. After several months, she received a call from an agency asking her to volunteer. She said that "because I brought cookies and I had a station wagon" they put her in charge; before she knew it, she was working 60-70 hours a week. With help from state funding, her role as a volunteer turned into a paid position, and she's never left since.

Eric

Eric, a Cuban-American male, works for a community education center in an eastern PA, urban area. His role has evolved from program manager to director of operations; he oversees a large grant, which is a partnership between the Department of Welfare and Adult Basic

Education Bureau. After realizing in college that he felt too constrained by traditional, public education programs, he secured a position working with a large inner-city school in a computer technology education program. That program evolved into various other programs and grants, eventually into the position he currently holds.

Eric started college as an environmental science major and, eventually, started a teacher certification program. After some health problems and a realization that he did not want to be part of the public school system – it put too many constraints on him as he wanted to develop and deliver public education – he started working at a community education program in New Jersey. From there, he secured other jobs within the same field, which eventually led him to his current organization.

Lorraine

Lorraine, a white female, is the executive director of a literacy center located in an urban area in the east-central region of PA. She was the only participant who did not have a degree beyond a high school diploma. However, she attests her work ethic and personality was a strong factor in her success in the field. She brought with her a background in volunteer work, and performed many roles within the church and community. At one point, she worked at a crisis center, helping women who were in abusive or other negative situations as a support volunteer.

Lorraine's entire career has been with her organization; she started working there over 15 years ago after being laid-off from a steel company after 17 years of employment. After a brief job as an investment firm, she soon realized her extroverted personality did not match her work environment; so, after a phone call from a career placement agency, she interviewed for an administrative assistant role at the literacy center where she now works. After a short period of

time, the former executive director of that program soon left, and she was tapped to take over her role.

Kara

Kara, a white female, is the director of adult education and training for a Behavioral Health Center in northwest PA, and also has responsibilities for coordinating regionalized professional development within her region for ABE professionals. At the time of the interview, Kara had been in the field approximately 17 years. Kara's educational background is in special education, and, when she moved to the northwest region of PA, she got a job in adult education because of her background in educational assessment.

Ken

Ken, a white male, manages adult educational programs through an Intermediate Unit (IU) in south central PA. Out of all of the participants, Ken seemed to be involved in the most diverse types of programs, from special education to programs within the prison.

Ken graduated from college in the mid-70's with a degree in elementary education. He said he did interview right out of college for several teacher positions, but just never "went that route." Instead, he found a job coaching, and then transitioned to a program affiliated with the Workforce Investment Act. In that role, he worked in various rural areas of the state, until he left for a role with a University in a migrant education program. Eventually, he worked his way to the IU, where he has been for 28 years.

Layla

Layla, a white female, was the only participant affiliated with an ABE program linked to a community college. In her position as director, she oversees all of the literacy activities and affiliated programs. Layla has her Bachelor's degree in English, and worked from home doing

various editing jobs and freelance work in the field. She applied at her current organization because she knew the then-Director, who got her a job doing office work.

After about five months, the person running the program left, and Layla was tapped for the job. While she did say it was “hard to adjust to the schedule” she really enjoys the work she does, and loves the people she works with. She attributes her tenure to these positive aspects of her role.

Lisa

Lisa, a white female, is the director of an adult evening school affiliated with a high school outside of Philadelphia. She was the only participant to oversee a program affiliated with a high school. Her background was in library sciences; she served as the school librarian for 33 years, a position she held simultaneously while directing the evening school (she retired from her library position in 2006). In her position, she oversees all aspects of the adult evening school, which serves the community with various programs related to ABE.

Lisa holds a Bachelor’s degree in library science and Master’s in integrative education. She did start her doctorate, but found that it just did not fit the route she wanted to take in her career; educational administration was just not something she was particularly interested in. Despite the fact that she retired from her position as librarian, she says that she could run the adult evening school all her life. She truly “loves” her work.

Sarah

Sarah, a white female, is currently director of a regional professional development center for ABE programs, had a progressive, long-term career in the field. Her background, elementary English education, allowed her to segway her career into ABE when she moved to Central PA. After she “fell” into ABE through a position as a travelling adult reading teacher, she developed

into roles with more responsibility. She worked in all aspects of ABE, particularly with her current organization, which, at the time of the interview, she had been with for 19 years.

Steve

Steve, a white male, worked in a variety of educational-related positions in the US and abroad. He is the only participant to hold a doctoral degree. After many years working in South America in educational administration and teaching, he came back to the United States because of a down-turn in the economy. Soon thereafter, he and his family settled in a rural area in eastern PA which is heavily populated with Spanish-speaking workers. Because of his bilingual abilities (in Spanish and English) and his educational background, he took the role at the community organization where he serves now as educational program director.

Steve certainly had a varied background. He worked in various fields, and seemed to never quite settle on one career field. Despite his tenure in the field of adult education, he also did volunteer work for the Peace Corp, ran medical labs abroad, and worked in technology. His Bachelor's degree is in Art Education, but his initial work in education was in the sciences.

Professional Development through Collaborative Relationships and Reflections

This section describes the role of professional colleagues in ABE managers' reflection on their practice. One of the most commonly valued learning opportunities available to ABE managers in this study was collaboration with individuals both within and outside of the organization.

Our conversations with others which consider factors such as context, emotions, and thought processes can be called reflective dialogue (Brockbank, McGill, & Beech, 2002). Reflective dialogue plays an important role in the process of reflective practice by allowing

individuals to interact with colleagues in order to move from personal reflection towards interaction with others in the development of reflective practice. For ABE managers, the Board of Directors (Board), co-workers, and other colleagues in the field provided opportunity for the majority of these conversations.

Reflective Dialogue with the Board

Managers experiences of reflective dialogue with their respective Boards is a key factor in their professional development. In brief, a Board is often essential to the governance of a non-profit organization such as an ABE program. In the case of the organizations involved in this study, Board members were typically executives of large organizations, educators from outside the ABE organization itself, and directors of businesses involved in literacy initiatives as philanthropy.

Through this study, it was discovered that Board members were often responsible for collaborating with ABE managers to reflect upon specific, critical incidents which occurred in the organization, providing opportunity to work through and learn from difficult situations. Such reflection-in-action, which could be described as a form of critical incident analysis (Thiel, 1999), offers opportunity to learn from mistakes, review actions taken, and make determinations on how to proceed if the same situation arises.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, discussions with colleagues does not necessarily mean reflection will occur; in many situations, a conversation or exchange of ideas between two or more people is not indicative of reflective practice nor does it lead to professional development. However, in the practice of several of the participants of this study, dialogue with colleagues was brought to a level which elicited reflective discussion.

To review, engaging in a reflective dialogue creates a different learning climate with those involved. If reflective dialogue is happening effectively, all are engaged, and there will be an intensity of listening and contributions, while the endeavor is to create and challenge meanings and understanding, where each person is attending to the issue of the moment (Brockbank & McGill, 1998, p. 106).

In one case, Deb, the manager of an ABE program in the northeast-PA region, handled a difficult personnel situation, and went to one of the Board members for further discussion:

We talked for about a half hour. I explained [the situation] and he gave me some really great ideas on how to handle it because, of course, a lot of issues these days have legal implications and you can't just go running off at the mouth.

When Deb speaks about her relationships with the Board, exchanges such as this one are viewed as more than an advice-seeking session. Deb proclaims that, through discussions such as these, she has learned from the Board. Evolvement of their working relationship, development of an understanding of accountability, and experiencing development of good habits in practice, such as how to stay calm in crises, how to be a more courteous person, and how to learn from past mistakes for betterment of future practice all stemmed from interactions with the Board on a continual basis.

Not all situations which presented opportunity for interactive dialogue with the Board had positive outcomes. As Deb points out, there was often a lot of “head-butting” with the Board; however, she believed these situations also offered opportunity to learn as well. For example, she described one Board member as her “nemesis” but also a good instructor. Interactions with that particular individual provided an opportunity to reflect on what not to do in the future. From the

perspective of reflection, this form of reflection on practice, or, reflection on certain situations led to professional development through improved decision-making.

Managers experienced more or less involvement with the Board depending on the relationships built between themselves and the Board members. In Deb and Bob's cases, they forged positive relationships with the Board, which became important in the overall, reflective dialogue process. Bob, director of a literacy center in an urban area in western PA, described the relationship as a "we" rather than an "us versus them." In these situations, the Board was more active, approached more often, and seen as a resource for thinking through situations and developing reflective dialogue. When asked to describe an object which represented his career path in the field, Bob showed me a picture of the past Board presidents who came to celebrate the 25th year anniversary of the organization. He attested that his job is "all about the relationships," crediting the connection he has with these individuals for much of the success he has had.

In Steve's case, he saw the educational unit of his organization as coming second to the medical clinic unit, suppressing his access to and the interest of the Board:

I find that the Board of Directors is much more interested in our health clinic because it has so many ramifications. It makes education look simple compared to all the situations they could have. Many people on the Board, like past president and current president, are health field professionals [...] it almost seems like if you're talking about the Board of Directors is just let the education do what it's doing, and if we're growing a little bit, they seem happy.

In Sarah's situation, she made a point to keep the Board aware of what is happening with the adult education unit of the organization she worked for, allowing her to foster a productive,

reflective dialogue with them when necessary. To do this, she believed that it was critical to continually prepare the Board so they knew what is going on with her particular department:

I'm always involved in the Board prep so that they know what's going on with us. I think it's dangerous if you don't have your adult ed. program positioned in that way. I talk to other [programs] and they'll have their adult ed. sort of an ancillary program. There's advantages. The advantage is people don't know what you're doing. The disadvantage is that people don't know what you're doing. It can come back to haunt you.

Sarah chose to use the Board to her advantage in developing her practice through reflective dialogue. They were active in her decision-making, and she participated in the Board meetings, and she went to them for support in a variety of situations. She perceived that the reflective dialogue she maintained with them assisted her in all of these areas.

Reflective Dialogue with Co-workers

In addition to the Board, coworkers within an organization are also perceived as playing an important role in the development of reflective practice. This collaboration with co-workers was the case for many of the individuals interviewed for this study. In many situations, managers' experiences in the development of a reflective dialogue with coworkers, and reflection within group settings were necessary for the overall success of the manager, as well as the organization.

In Deb's case, reflective dialogue in collaboration with co-workers was critical before coming up with solutions to problems:

I always get input and then I make a decision on what is going to happen [...] I'm not adverse to getting advice. That doesn't mean I'll take it; it means I'll try to come up with the best answer to that question from everything I've heard and seen.

A good example of a collaborative relationship which fostered reflective dialogue within practice occurred when a turnover in the position of the overall program director at a center in Philadelphia forced the remaining managers to develop what was labeled a “learning circle” with each other. Eric, the director of educational programs at the center says that the lack of overall leadership lead the group to form an informal leadership team (the “learning circle”), which consulted regularly to help steer operations.

Sarah, an educational program director for a larger, Intermediate Unit, found that the supervisors who worked for her had been one of the most influential relationships she’d forged in her 19-year tenure with the organization, offering opportunity for reflective dialogue through an experience she called the “collaborative leadership approach”. This approach provided opportunities to learn that there was “no one way” to do something right.

In some situations, however, reflective dialogue with coworkers was relatively non-existent, hindering the role reflection had in areas such as decision-making, learning new tasks, and problem-solving. The absence of interaction among coworkers seemed to follow from a perceived lack of internal resources, management style, and the replacement of internal relationships with ones external to the organization.

Some managers experienced the lack of internal resources, including small numbers of staff, as prohibiting them from finding individuals to dialogue with in an effort to learn with or from. When Layla started her job with a community education program, there was no one she could learn her job from:

...there was nobody here to tell me anything [...]. It was September, and classes started in October. So, I really had no clue. I had never heard of the GED before. I didn't know there was such a thing until I came here. [...] I relied on one person who was still with

the program, and we just ran with it as best we could. I really didn't know what I was doing.

Lisa, the director of an adult evening school outside of the Philadelphia area, worked for a program that was smaller in size and, therefore, did not provide her with much interaction with co-workers. The majority of her other staff are part-time instructors, limiting her in many ways. While she did term her relationship with her staff as team-oriented, her interactions with them were typically to troubleshoot smaller issues, such as lack of heat in a classroom or course materials. There was a lack of dialogue on problem-solving larger issues and decision-making. This was left to Lisa, and if she could not find a solution, it was brought to the attention of those working in the school district to resolve.

In situations such as Layla's and Lisa's, where not much reflective dialogue was experienced among those working in tandem to the organization is taking place, managers often sought outside influence from others working in the ABE field. Managers who did collaborate internally also relied on their external relationships as well to assist them in their professional development process.

Relationships External to the Organization

In addition to relationships with internal staff and Board members, ABE managers tended to rely on Managers of other programs or professionals in the field to work through difficult situations, discuss ideas, or collaborate on projects. The majority of these relationships were valuable to many of the participants in this study for experiencing reflection in practice.

The Pennsylvania Association of Adult and Continuing Education conference (PAACE) as well as other conferences and meetings, were mentioned by several participants as a valuable opportunity to experience engagement with other members of the ABE field outside their own,

respective organizations. For many, these conferences allowed for discussion of current events in the field as well as overall support and feedback for how one handles certain situations in practice.

Eric's organization, in particular, promoted professional development through conferences such as PAACE and provides funding for staff to attend such events. While these types of events offered more formalized training and workshops for professional development, Eric believed having staff commit to the conference is a priceless opportunity to experience socialization within the field, allowing opportunity to learn from those external to his organization. For others, lack of time and financial resources hindered opportunity to attend such programs.

Lisa, for example, realized the importance of PAACE and other types of meetings and conferences, but she did not have the money to attend. When speaking about the importance of attending conferences, she became almost angry:

It's not that I don't think I need to be with my colleagues and brainstorm and network and whatever else, but you know what? I don't have the money and I'm not going to go. It's stupid. It's more important to me to have a class than spend money on PAACE or anyplace else.

Ken, on the other hand, took full advantage of the PAACE conference, allowing him to experience various opportunities to sit down with fellow administrators and just talk about what is going on in their organizations. He says this not only offered opportunity to informally touch-base, but to also be open and honest with each other with respect to what is happening in the field.

In addition to PAACE and other professional development conferences, many ABE Managers participated in external groups formed under the Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) Bureau through the State Department of Education (DOE) or community-based programs. These groups also offered similar opportunity to experience collaboration with individuals external to their own organization.

In many situations, managers perceived lack of time as prohibiting them from participating in as many external functions as they would have liked to, yet many described there benefit towards professional development. Managers experienced most of the relationships which were fostered externally from the organization, such as Chamber of Commerce meetings, area foundations, workforce investment boards, and nonprofit partnerships as helpful in reflective dialogue, decision-making, and long-term organizational planning. In Deb's case, a meeting with an area foundation group set into motion the change from an advisory board to a regular Board at her organization. Bob stated that he has so much opportunity for external involvement that he really needed to be decisive in what he attended versus what was delegated or ignored. Steve agreed, stating that he is so busy that he is not quite sure how he could fit in all of the external events relevant to his own professional development, but made a point to attend a town agency called Bridging the Community which he believed was important to collaboration with community members and other non-profits.

Because Eric's organization was supported by a larger, nation-wide non-profit, and the fact that he worked for a United Way agency, he had the benefit of using resources from multiple, external resources. His opportunities for professional development were greater than they would be in an organization with less resources or affiliations. However, Eric stated that he got calls from other managers all of the time asking for advice on how to deal with certain issues,

and believed that extended partnerships are a constant source for experiencing learning opportunities.

For Kara, the director of a non-profit ABE program in northwest PA, an interaction with an individual on a program evaluation team led her to reflect more about her own participation in national and local list-serves as well as her own professional activity. Kara's experience of interacting with this particular individual through the evaluation process made her want to think about ABE on a more national level; thus, she changed her overall participation in some of the professional development opportunities available to her.

Experiences in practice which led to professional development often occurred through the reflective, collaborative nature of the relationships Managers forged with those internal and external to the organization. These benefits to professional development were also perceived as opportunity for improved decision-making, problem-solving, and individual betterment within one's role.

In addition to these experiences with others, managers also reflected on various aspects of practice which was seen to have an influence on professional development. The next section describes these experiences in more depth.

Professional Development through Reflection on Practice and Self

In many situations, managers experienced isolated moments or events in practice which led them to develop professionally. Reflection on practice can include reflection on action, which is the approach towards application of logic to a certain problem (Russell & Munby, 1991). However, the term reflection on practice is not limited to problem-solving situations. In many cases, reflection on an event or experience also led to a professional development opportunity as well.

For example, Lorraine, the director of an ABE center in the Reading area, said that when reflecting on the experience of collaboration with individuals and groups on a particular fund-raising program that proved to be successful, she learned the importance of commitment from all involved to make a project worthwhile. Going forward, she used this experience as an opportunity to put more faith in others when coordinating similar programs.

Similar to Lorraine, Eric reflected on an experience he had when he was approached by several students and teachers who wanted to put together a Thanksgiving event at the center. He said that, within two weeks, the group developed curriculum, arranged a pot-luck luncheon, sent invitations to funders, and planned educational activities; the event was incredibly successful.

About this particular event, Eric said:

When you're in the moment, you're not quite sure what you're getting from that experience. You know it's something special...I know I learned a lot but I don't know how to exactly define that. The biggest thing you learn every day is that people are capable of amazing things that you wouldn't normally give them credit for.

Eric's perceptions of the capability of others changed because of his experiences related to this particular event. Going forward, Eric stated that he learned that he could trust people to be creative and run with a project if there was enough enthusiasm and dedication involved.

Sarah's reflection on an encounter with a student allowed her to reformulate her perceptions of adults with low literacy skills. When she was faced with car problems, one of her students who had low level math and reading skills diagnosed her issue, and told her exactly why her car was broken. She attributed this encounter to her current perspective: *"It doesn't seem to me that having literacy issues in reading and math says much about people. It just says something about what they can and can't do."*

Not all reflection on practice need be related to a positive event. Bob's reflections on negative moments still offered him a learning opportunity which contributed to his professional development. After a frustrating project redesigning the program's website, Bob perceived many of the challenges in completing the project to be a result of the need for a staff member to give him the feedback that he or she felt he "wanted to hear" rather than a thoughtful, right answer. Going forward, Bob learned that some individuals' inability to work within an upward relationship can hinder progress.

For Lorraine, reflection on a certification process with a PA non-profit association was an experience which provided an opportunity for her own professional development. Reflecting back, during the process, the non-profit association seemed to be "picking" on the way Lorraine's organization handled certain situations, yet two other ABE programs involved in the process were receiving positive publicity and accolades in the media. After the process was over, Lorraine perceived the situation as being driven by politics and learned that dishonesty is a trait she does not tolerate as a professional. Going forward, Lorraine stated she was more aware of politics involved in other areas.

In addition to experiencing these events, which enhanced professional development going-forward, managers of ABE programs tended to be self-reflective, developing their own opportunities for learning in a variety of self-managed ways. The next section contains the results regarding the role of self-reflection in professional development.

Self-reflection on skills and knowledge was an important aspect of reflective practice towards professional development. Through the data gathering process, I found that Managers of ABE programs are quite self-reflective, and developed professionally from this self-reflection in a variety of ways. This section describes self-reflection on participants' skills and knowledge

with regards to their professional development in their practice; that is, through reflection, they became aware of areas where they felt they needed new knowledge or skills and they then went about acquiring this knowledge through reading, workshops, seminars, or more formal educational programs.

Through the interview process, I discovered that often managers of ABE programs took time to reflect on their own skills and knowledge. This reflective experience led them to pursue professional development opportunities to gain or enhance skills in practice. For some, reflection on skills and knowledge led participants to read books relevant to a topic with which they felt they are unfamiliar, or wished to remain current in, such as hiring practices or leadership. For Bob, keeping current in these areas was vital to his own, as well as his staff's growth. At the time of our interview, he was reading a book titled *Leadership on the Line*, which came to his attention at a nonprofit meeting the prior year. Prior to that, he read *Keep the Opposition Close*, which taught him about relationships within and outside an organization. Bob continually reflected on his own skills and areas for development and used books as a way to build his knowledge in a particular area.

Kara says she tended to address her professional development based on reflection on her own interests in particular topics related to her own practice. For example, Kara had a strong interest in assessment, and was reading about learning differences and the Americans with Disabilities Act to see how accommodations for the GED might fit in. Similarly, Sarah had experienced situations which drove her strong interest in linking elementary and secondary education practice with adult education, and addressed this interest through reading as well; at the time of our interview, she was reading works relevant to the quality of teaching.

In many situations, self-reflection on skills and knowledge led people to participate in continued, higher education, seminars, or training workshops. For example, Sarah pursued and completed her Master's degree in Training and Development at the time that she was managing a professional development center. The degree helped her focus on what she perceived she needed to develop her practice. Similarly, Sarah attended a leadership seminar which lead her to develop the way she impacted those she lead in her organization.

Some participants had yet to take action on their reflection, but still had plans to engage in professional development activities. Eric, for instance, often reflected on what his ideal job would be, running a non-profit organization, and matched the requirements of that profession with his current experience and skills. Eric planned to one day return to school to build his skills and further his career. Similarly, Steve hoped to one day receive his English as a Second Language certification based on his perceived need to obtain this particular credential to better himself professionally.

Participants' reflection on their own skills led to self-management of professional development through various educational venues. In addition to reflecting on one's skills or knowledge and choosing more a formalized outlet for professional development, managers often reflected in practice on their decision-making process. The next section describes this type of reflection and how it relates to professional development.

Managers were often prompted to reflect when faced with making an important decision in practice. For participants in this study, this reflection occurred in a variety of ways, including reflection prior to and after the decision-making process. With respect to professional development, reflective decision-making was an on-going, developmental process, with each choice informing the next decision. That is, when one decision is made, and it influences

practice, the next decision is based on that outcome, leading to a continual on-going process of reflection and professional development to be made in practice based on the outcome or consequences of the decision that was made.

Deb reflected prior to a decision, and then developed her course of action based on her perception of what the outcome might be:

You take a look at [the] course of action. How would that affect students? How would that affect other workers? Is it going to cost money? Is it not going to cost money? [...] Is this going to help or hinder, and how do I make it help in the best way? There's lots of things you think about.

Deb considered a variety of factors which influenced the decisions she made. Using past experiences and her knowledge of her practice, she attempted to make informed decisions based on potential positive or negative outcomes.

Similar to Deb, Bob tended to be deliberate in his thinking, making decisions with careful analysis:

Unlike a lot of managers, I'm a person who likes a lot of solitude. Some of these managers, they just spend their entire day in meetings and with other people and they never stop. I need time to pull back and think things through. To some people, that comes across as being a little bit slow moving or too deliberate.

While Bob characterized his reflective approach in relationship to decision-making as slower and more cautious, he still sought the same type of information as Deb through his reflective process to reach an informed decision. Deb tended to make decisions quickly, despite going through a series of questions in her mind, and Bob stated that he may take several days to think things through.

Ken reflected heavily on past data, such as numbers relevant to assessment and program outcomes, to inform his decisions. He perceived his long tenure with the organization as contributing to his success when relying on numbers to guide his decisions. Out of all of the participants I interviewed, Ken seemed the most reliant on numbers analysis in his role. He tracked benchmarks, performance standards, and other useful data to show staff to support his decisions.

Similarly, Kara attributed the assessment process to her own professional development with respect to her decision-making. She perceived her understanding of the diagnostic testing process and personal observation of students as allowing her to approach different ways of learning, giving meaning to her decisions on a daily basis. When asked how she approaches decision-making, Kara said that she likes “trying things” and is more “action oriented.” She said she does not spend a lot of time thinking about a decision before it is made.

Unlike Deb, Bob and Ken, Lorraine tended to experience less reflection when making most decisions in practice, but admitted that really big decisions that she felt uncomfortable with do cause her to reflect more heavily on her past knowledge surrounding a particular situation. Other opportunities for quick decisions typically require only a minute or so of reflection on how to move forward and did not present as much opportunity for professional development.

Reflective decision-making was practiced by several of the participants interviewed for this study. Even though they may engage in it in different ways, reflective decision-making provided an opportunity for managers of ABE programs to develop their decision-making abilities through conscious, deliberate approaches towards making decisions within practice. In addition to reflective decision-making, ABE managers also attributed reflection on mistakes as a key factor in decision-making within practice.

When faced with making decisions within practice, prior mistakes often informed managers' decision-making. Several of these poor decisions were related to areas such as hiring practices, program planning, and interactions with students.

Bob stated that the majority of his development in practice was related to building a comfort level with being a manager. One of the major ways Bob developed in this area was through learning from mistakes related to the hiring and selection process of new employees. Early on in his career, Bob hired an accountant for the organization based on the person's skills, but did not consider other factors, such as the ability to interact with others in the work setting. This particular individual brought morale down, kept people from doing their jobs, and lacked focus. Bob said that the experience of making a poor hiring decision influenced his approach to hiring, and he is much more aware of the importance of choosing a new employee who is not only qualified, but can also fit with the organization. Better decisions such as these lead him to becoming a better manager.

On several occasions, Layla made poor hiring decisions out of "desperation," despite what she calls a "strange vibe" she has gotten from applicants. Regarding these experiences, she says she learned that it is better to go with "gut" instinct, rather than disappoint students and staff. She attributed this mentality towards hiring to the betterment of her relationship with others in the organization.

Deb's perceived her mistakes as part of the learning process as well in her own professional development. Deb stated that, on several occasions, particularly early in her career, she made mistakes that caused "*head-butting and crying*" between herself and members of the Board. In another situation, she made a mistake with employees' insurance benefits and her integrity and honesty were questioned. She said that, over the years in her career, she finally got

to a point where she did not feel as though she needed to prove herself any longer, so her mistakes are now more forgiven by others and she is now recognized as knowing and understanding her job. Also, as a response to making these mistakes, particularly at the time in her career when she was accused of being dishonest, Deb experienced a learning opportunity and now tends to over-inform her Board and staff of what is happening within the organization:

After all of those years working for nothing or next to nothing, to be accused of [dishonesty] – I mean, please. That just pushed every button and I went wild. Bury the Board in information, then no one can ever come back and say you didn't tell them [...] I overload them with 'this is what I am doing' where everybody knows what's going on, and that's okay. So that was a very, very, very valuable lesson.

While Deb's comment may have implied a negative attitude toward the situation, she saw herself as having learned something with respect to her own professional development. To avoid any possible misinterpretations of her actions, going forward from that experience, Deb tended to over-inform others (including staff and the Board) of what was occurring in practice.

Ken relied on factual information to support and confirm mistakes he has made in his job and thus verified his perceptions of what went wrong in a particular process. For example, when his organization moved GED courses to the Career Link program (a job readiness and training program affiliated with the PA Department of Education), they lost large numbers of ESL students. According to Ken, staff had a difficult time convincing him that the reasoning behind this drop in numbers was due to the fact that Career Link was housed in a government building (implicating a deterring factor to students who were illegally residing in the United States). Once Ken was convinced, through six months of statistical data, he moved the ESL classes back into the communities. On making mistakes in practice, Ken states: "*It's some of the things that*

you learn as you look at yourself and you look at your programs. Sometimes you get those ‘a-ha’ moments. You go ‘oh-wow.’”

A mistake Lisa made on the job actual led her to experience what she characterized as one of the most difficult situations in her job. After giving a student a chance in the GED preparation course (despite her initial instinct to place her in a lower-level class based on her poor English skills), the student, her spouse, and a teacher had a confrontation based on the students’ misperception of something the teacher said in class. After a long, involved process, the situation came to a resolution. However, Lisa said she learned to never put a student in a class when they are not ready for a particular level of coursework. Also, this experience led Lisa to perceive people, in general, differently in her practice. Lisa said she learned:

There are really some strange people and that you cannot assume that because a teacher is doing a good job that students like the teacher, or, if they can, they will try to pull the teacher down, or pull you down.

While it may seem Lisa now holds negative skepticisms towards students as a reaction to this experience, from that experience, she tended to be more cautious when making decisions about student decisions and when dealing with difficult student relationships.

Experiencing mistakes in practice, in these situations, led to some form of professional development with respect to decision-making. Whether it was an “a-ha moment” as in Ken’s case, or a lesson-learned going forward, reflection on mistakes turned out to be a developmental opportunity for several of the participants in this study.

Influences on Creating a Reflective Practice

Some individuals interviewed in this were more deliberate in creating a reflective practice; others tended to use reflection as an afterthought, or were reflecting but not labeling it

as such. Through this study, I discovered several characteristics which were related to how participants experienced the development of their practice through reflection and reflective methods. These three major areas were the personality of the manager, their beliefs and values, and interactions with others. This section elaborates on each of these areas.

Personality

For this study, I interviewed ten participants, each with his or her own, unique personality. Certain personality traits tended to influence how the participants experienced creating a reflective practice. Understandably, those who were more solitary, reflective individuals use reflection as a deliberate way to develop professionally in their roles. Bob was one of these individuals.

A self-described “person of solitude” Bob tended to be more introspective during our discussion, taking time to pause, think, and fully describe his answers. He also was one of the more prepared individuals for the interview; he had gathered some information he felt would be useful to me (as a researcher) and made suggestions to me regarding my study. Bob readily read, took charge of his own professional development, and carefully thought through problems before making a decision. Regarding this approach, Bob said:

I need time to pull back and think things through. To some people, that comes across as being a little bit slow moving or too deliberate. Others, I think, have come to respect that what that means really is actions are not taken without some background and careful analysis. There's a certain stability in that, otherwise, we wouldn't have grown 10 percent per year for 20 years.

Similar to Bob, Layla took a more deliberate approach towards reflection on her role. She described herself as being “patient,” a “good listener,” and someone who liked to “keep

things to herself.” Yet, while Bob tended to reflect individually, Layla relied heavily on group dialogue and reflection in a variety of areas of practice when faced with making decisions. She said she worked with and really liked to listen to people discuss things. However, Layla preferred to hear others talking about an issue, not necessarily engaged in the dialogue herself. This reflective listening is a deliberate practice on Layla’s part; she makes a point to learn from others through the dialogue they have on certain issues. Regarding her colleagues:

I really admire the expertise and the insights that they bring. I feel more like an outsider. I don’t have anything beyond a Bachelor’s degree, and so the people that have master’s degrees, I really admire that. Just a give and take of ideas. I really like to listen to other people discuss things. I don’t have to be in it necessarily, but I like to hear them go back and forth and talk about what they do, and then I just take notes. So the exchange of ideas...any kind of in-service, and then we talk about what we’ve learned there. Intellectually, it just feels really good to keep doing that.

Lisa, the manager of an adult evening school, and a former librarian, described herself as enthusiastic about her role, yet tended to be cautious in practice, taking time to reflect on situations as they arise:

I work very hard. Even when I have failures, I examine – it’s kind of like a ship. A ship makes a turn, but if it knows an iceberg is there, it’s going to stop, pull back, go around, do something – and that’s what I do. If I know there’s little treacherous shoals coming towards me, I am going to stop and I’m going to pull back, I’m going to see what else I can do.

Lisa's cautiousness affected her decision-making as well as her approach to overcoming difficult situations. Lisa engaged in reflective practice in a very deliberate and methodical way with respect to these areas.

Unlike Bob, Layla, and Lisa, Deb and Eric described themselves as more outgoing, outspoken, and engaging. These personality traits influenced their experience of creating a reflective practice in different ways; overall, those with more outgoing personalities tended to be less deliberate in their reflection. For these individuals, reflection on practice was either an afterthought, or not thought of at all, depending on the situation. These more outgoing individuals tended to look engage in reflection through some form of dialogue with others, or they reflected on prior experiences to help guide future experiences.

Deb did not take as much time to reflect on decisions. She tended to be less conservative than Lisa or Bob, who were cautious and thought through potential issues and outcomes with money expenditure, for example. Deb's decision dealing with money expenditure tended to entail little reflection. In fact, unlike Bob's views towards management approaches, Deb says a deliberate approach can hinder an organizations progress:

... you go to trainings and they always tell you that you should be less [outgoing] personality, but I think that's how you run an organization. If you're going to be stymied by making decisions, then your organization isn't going anywhere.

Eric also described himself in a similar way. During his interview, Eric was openly candid, descriptive, and admitted to being wordy in his responses. Like Deb, he did not spend a lot of time reflecting on practice prior to making decisions, including money expenditure. For example, when he described spending money on a professional development conference, his

main concern was the social experience it would provide for employees, not necessarily the learning or enrichment opportunities that took place in regards to ABE practice.

We just took almost the entire staff out to PAACE [conference]. It was a commitment. It cost us a few thousand dollars for as many staff members as we did, but the feelings coming back of that staff that went and did that experience together is priceless. It really is. They got paid for three days in a hotel in Hershey where all they had to do was go out and work out, they just had to go hang out, do some trainings, meet people, socialize....it was worth every penny.

Personality was not the only influence with regards to reflection on practice. As presented in the next section, reflection on similar, core values and beliefs with regards to practice also influenced reflection in practice.

The Role of Values

I found that many of the participants engaged in reflection on their values related to their practice. Values included personal beliefs about their responsibilities to the field, to staff, or to students. For some, it was a broader need to help humanity, in general, through practice. Regardless of the value, reflection on their values drove their professional development over a long period of time, or in certain, specific situations.

For some, the importance of life-long learning is a key value and played a role in professional development. While it is probably assumed that most adult educators value lifelong learning, some of the participants in this study heavily emphasized the role continual reflection on this particular value played in their own professional development. As described in a previous section, several participants reflected on their own skills and knowledge and took action based on perceived need for development. Similarly, managers also tended to reflect on the

value of life-long learning, in general, and responded through various means. Bob was one of those individuals.

Bob valued life-long learning and saw endless opportunities as an ABE Manager which kept him fascinated with the field. Bob not only valued his own personal learning but also his reflection on the value of the learning opportunities provided to his staff; this, he felt, contributed to his own professional development in his role as a leader. Bob stated:

There are many values to staff development. One is that people will actually stay longer when you give them opportunities for growth. It's sad, but I've heard people express the idea that they don't want their staff to get trained in new areas because that might lead them to leave. That's very narrow-minded. That's treating your staff like some kind of personal slaves or something. I don't know what it is, but it doesn't work for me.

Lorraine continuously reflected on her desire to learn, which influenced her own behavior in many situations within her practice. Lorraine's views towards the importance of life-long learning particularly influenced her career development early-on.

Lorraine worked for 17 years at a steel company and was suddenly laid-off. She was given opportunity to take a career-transition course by an outplacement firm in Philadelphia, where she was able to get a general feel about what she wanted to do with her career. For Lorraine, this experience was an eye-opening event. Through the class, she learned more about her personality type (she labels herself as an extrovert) and she was pushed to do more with her career beyond the type of work she had been doing.

Reflection on her own values towards learning were heightened due to the experience of a career transition, and allowed Lorraine to engage in learning opportunities to become successful in the field of ABE, particularly when she first entered the field:

...what I had done throughout my life is just pay attention to what was going on around me and just try to learn things constantly. And when I got into this field, I went to as many meetings as I could, got as many trainings as I possibly could at the time...

Kara, who had a strong interest in student and teacher assessment, reflected on the value of her own lifelong learning and how this related to her continual desire to build and utilize those particular assessment skills in her professional career. Kara had, therefore, built much of her career on her continual use of her skills in this area. During her career, one of her key opportunities for learning was her involvement with establishing and training people in the use of adult teacher competencies; reflection on this project allowed Kara to learn in her own practice:

I think that the assessment process was [important in my own professional development]...My background [...] was a lot of assessment. You were taught to observe and look for clues, think about different ways that the person was attacking learning. I think that this whole emphasis that I had on training, with diagnostic assessment was key. If you can't sit and really understand what a person needs and not just look at a grade level, which is next to meaningless, how do you really know how to teach the person? So that was really an important thing to me.

Sarah, a manager who was very aware of her own skills and knowledge and need to pursue professional development opportunities, held the same approach towards lifelong learning. In addition to receiving a Master's degree, reading, and pursuing other educational opportunities, Sarah's reflection on the value of lifelong learning influenced her dedication to making her own career path throughout her years in adult education. She stated:

...if you want a career path in adult basic ed., you have to make it, and I see lots of folks come through our program. We have a staff of about 80 people in our adult ed. program,

and I've seen lots of good teachers that just can't hang in there, and lots of marginal folks who did hang in there and got better. So it is that determination and wanting to make a career path that makes a difference.

Reflection on the value of life-long learning influenced the professional development of several of the participants in this study. In addition to lifelong learning, many individuals interviewed for this study also valued the importance of making a difference through their chosen profession; reflection on this value drove their professional development. While it may be assumed that most managers in the field of ABE want to make a difference in the lives of their students, reflection on this particular value was pronounced in several of the individuals I spoke with.

For some, the desire to make a positive difference in the lives of students through practice was another key value which played a role in professional development. In some cases, this desire was a broader need to make a positive difference in humanity, in general. Regardless, these particular values stemmed from a variety of experiences either in or outside of practice, including specific interactions with students or staff, or an event which occurred in one's upbringing which continues to influence practice.

Of all of the participants, this desire to make a difference seemed most prevalent in Eric. Eric described his character as stemming from his upbringing, his parents both being active social workers in the early 1960's. He, like many others, "fell" into adult education; his experiences with traditional, educational structures seemed too limiting to him, constraining his ability to "teach the world."

Eric's reflections on personal experiences in practice also reaffirmed his desire to make a difference in the lives of his students. He recalled:

There was this boy who had [...] just lost a brother to drug abuse. He had already lost both parents I think to AIDS. He had lost another sibling to violence years earlier. He was living with an older sister who had kids who were slightly younger than him. As a 14 year old, he was a father figure for 11 and 12 year olds. He came to us because he needed to figure out a way to start making money. He thought his only choice was the same as everybody else in his family, which was to deal drugs, which was a real viable option for him.

I still don't know why he chose me that day, but he basically said 'look, I don't want to die.' So we figured out a way to get him into some computer training classes because he was really smart. We got him a job working as a tech assistant for somebody. I had this kid in school from that point when he was like an eighth or ninth grader, and my last year with the school was his senior year, so he graduated from high school. His sister, who had survived cancer, comes up to me and I don't think I had ever met her before this day, and she's like 'Are you Eric?' I'm like, 'yeah' She just starts crying. [...] 'You saved my brother's life.' And I think that, knowing that in this job, you do have the ability to change peoples' lives.

Reflection on situations such as these drove Eric's desire to develop professionally in practice. In addition, his personal family situation contributed as well. When asked for a symbol which exemplifies his professional career development, Eric said:

I have to admit that everything really comes back to my son, my kid. When I started the job in 2000, I was engaged and got married the first year, and had Josh when I was here about a year; then I got divorced and separated. It was really tough because in this

profession as a single dad, you don't have a lot of money. I didn't have much of anything for a couple years. It was tough. I used to hear it all the time from my ex-wife, 'Oh, you need to make more money; you and Josh are living in a crappy apartment.'

[...] I had to find a suitable apartment for an 18month old, which is pretty expensive. So that point was I had to think about the example I was for Josh in terms of what I was modeling as what a good adult or good person is. That really drives me all the time, to be able to say to Josh, 'Hey, Josh, Daddy was helping these people today' or 'Daddy got asked to go speak at a conference because he's helping to teach people how to help other people.'

Bob had an overarching interest in education, in general, yet a combination of his religious motive and upbringing also influenced his professional development in the field of ABE. Bob attributed his background in the Peace Corp as a strong influence in first getting him involved with helping disadvantaged people. He also attributed his father:

There's a theory that children are more influenced by the thing that their parent chooses to do in their leisure time than they are by the career of their parent, because the thing that the parent does in his or her leisure time shows their true values. It's not something that they're paid to do. It's something that they choose to do.

My dad's most significant influence on me was his work with nonprofits. Every Sunday, as a kid, a gentleman named [...] would come to our house and my dad and he would shut themselves up in a room and shuffle papers and do some kind of thing which I didn't understand. Afterwards, I learned that they were running a nonprofit organization which

had no staff. Mr. [...] was the voluntary executive director, and my dad was the board president. They were signing checks and making plans for this organization. It was basically being run out of their houses. So there was that whole community service thing from the start.

Similarly, Steve was also a member of the Peace Corp; however, his experiences working with the Spanish-speaking population were originally driven from his own discomfort towards people from Spanish-speaking countries. Steve responded to his need to overcome this discomfort by immersing himself in different cultures, one of his original reasons for joining the Peace Corp. As a result of these experiences, Steve became semi-fluent in Spanish, and ended up marrying a woman he befriended on one of his overseas trips to Ecuador. This culmination of experiences allowed Steve to reflect on his own views and become an educational administrator in South America:

[My wife] speaks Spanish, and I had to change my attitude about not liking Spanish from my high school days to when I got married. That's been my motive for being in this environment. Really, I was prejudiced to start out with – negative, prejudiced negatively toward Hispanics because I thought – [...] my background is German, I grew up in a family that's very punctual, and the South American style is this postponing things to 'manana.' I thought I would never be able to function in that kind of a society, or feel comfortable with those kind of people. However, it didn't turn out that way.

After a decline in the Ecuadorian economy, Steve and his family moved back to the United States, eventually transitioning to his current position, working primarily with ESL students. He credited his experience in the Peace Corp for allowing him to develop his own understanding towards people of different cultures; yet, it was his initial ambition out of college

to put himself into the situation of experiencing these different cultures which initially prompted him to join the Corp.

Sarah partially attributed her ability to look inward to understand students as a driving factor in her career development. Raised primarily by her grandmother, who only went through eighth grade, she says adult literacy students always felt like the people she knew. Her sister, in particular, has a reading problem, but is a surgical technician, a career Sarah said she, personally, would never be able to do (she “can’t stand the sight of blood”). Sarah said, while she could not be a surgical technician, and her sister could never do her (Sarah’s) job, they are both successful in life. “If I’d been born 200 years ago, my skills wouldn’t matter” she said.

Sarah’s reflection on her upbringing, particularly her relationships with family, continues to influence her professional development. The experiences she had growing up, and even in present-day, with her family allowed her to better understand her students and her own role as an ABE manager. Sarah believed a love for education and a genuine “like” for students in the field were keys to success in her career, as well as a comfort level with the students, an important aspect of working in the field.

Relationships and Viewpoints towards other ABE Managers and Programs

The relationships some participants held with others in the field (at their peer-level or above) within other agencies were perceived as influencing the creation of a reflective practice. Through my interviews with participants, I found that those individuals who were more guarded and skeptical (that is, less trusting) of others tended to involve others less in reflective collaboration within practice outside their own agencies and rely more on others within their own practice. Lorraine was one of those individuals.

Lorraine's agency, a literacy center in an urban area outside of Philadelphia, tended to "compete" with the local community college for various grant monies and programs. Reflections on the experiences she has had with these particular relationships led to her feeling discouraged about her job, particularly, the "politics" she deals with in her region. Collaboration with certain agencies also made Lorraine skeptical; past experiences led her to be less trusting of others in the field. Regarding a meeting between her agency, the local community college, and state-run career center (Career Link), she said:

[The community college and us] we'll sit there and try to sell ourselves. We tell them what we do and how well we're doing what and so forth and so on, and they sit there and take in all this and they say, 'Oh, that's really good, ' and they'll mark it up, you know, the guy who's the moderator with all this, and then what happens is the [community college] gets all the stuff anyway...So, I'm kind of afraid to tell them what we do, because they pick our brains and they use what we do, and then that makes them better, and it makes them better to the eyes of other people 'cause, 'Oh look – that's a great idea that they're doing,' when it actually came from us.

Bob spoke a lot about his interactions with other agencies, particularly when he first started in his job. Like Lorraine, Bob's experiences with trust between himself and others were perceived as highly valuable attributes which were emulated by his staff. In practice, he perceived his integrity (and that of his organization) as an asset which sets his agency apart from others. He said: *"There are a lot of non-profits who have a good mission, but they're just incredibly competitive and it seems to be more about grabbing resources rather than actual service."*

For Bob, reflection on this difference was visible in a situation early on in his career with the agency. The state decided to block-grant his county, meaning that 17 agencies would now receive their funding through one, funneled grant, and those agencies would have to work together on the project. Early on, it was clear that there was no trust among any of the providers. As a response, Bob led his organization to raise a one million dollar endowment, freeing them from having to rely on the state funding. During this process, it was clear to Bob that others wanted to infringe on his own fund-raising efforts:

The laughable thing was when one of those people in that consortium who was getting 100 percent of their grants from the state turns to me and says, 'Well, you're raising all this private money, I think it should be divided equally among all the providers' – and they have absolutely no idea the amounts of work that went into that. They have no expertise in private fund raising. They think that foundations just open their coffers when you ask, but it's not that simple.

Similar to Lorraine, the way Bob experienced his role relies heavily on the trust and integrity he built between himself and his staff. To that end, like Lorraine, he does not see value in taking advantage of many different projects without careful thought and consideration of its long-term effects and outcomes.

We really try to think for the long term around here. Grant opportunities will come up and I'll say something like, 'What happens after two years of the pilot project, or two years after the pilot phase? Why start something up and raise a lot of expectations among clients, and two years later say 'oops, sorry, grant's over.' Things we start here generally become permanent. So, we don't have this wild roller coaster ride that a lot of nonprofits go through where we grab this one the next year, and different skills are

needed for different projects, and we don't do any of them very well because we're constantly bopping from one to the next. That's not a way to operate, I think.

Ken's viewpoints towards other programs were vented more towards state-wide programs and leadership, particularly relationships with political representatives. He spoke openly about his frustrations towards certain political administrations and what he perceived as a direct impact on the field. One example is directed towards the administration responsible for establishing PA Career Link:

...the Career Link systems [were]put into place, and what they did is the Department of Labor and Industry, Education, Welfare, Economic Development, they had the Career Link structure, but they didn't know how to pay for it, to be quite frank....We were being told 'look, you need to cooperate and work with the Career Links' which is a good idea...The downfall to it, again, I repeat, nobody figured out how to pay for the darn thing.

Ken saw his experiences of frustration towards political agendas and leadership as influencing his practice. Not only is he, like others, required to oblige to state mandated policies, but he also became personally frustrated, particularly when it came to spending agency money:

So my spending money in the Career Links and doing something in the Career Links is an old Sylvester – you remember Sylvester the Cat? Did you see his poster?...It said something like 'Working here is like taking a leak in a dark suit. You get a nice warm feeling, but nobody notices...you get a nice warm feeling, but my money's driven over here. I want to pay attention to what drives my money.

It is clear that funding issues were not prevalent areas of frustration for those who received funding more readily. Layla, for example, who worked in a Center connected to the

Community College didn't "even have to worry about paying bills." Layla, therefore, did not have to deal with as many issues related to funding or worry about her relationships with external agencies with regards to collaborative, funding agendas. This partially provided her the freedom to maintain patience and ability to maintain an open environment contributed to her own success in practice.

Summary

In summary, this chapter described various themes relevant to the overall purpose of this study which were discovered through the interview and analysis processes. Participants experienced reflective practice in many ways relevant to their own professional development; several themes emerged as a result of the data collection process.

The first theme focused on the role of colleagues in reflective dialogue, a key part to developing a reflective practice. The relationships developed both internally within and externally to the organization allowed ABE managers to experience reflection on a variety of areas which are important to their professional development.

Various reflections on practice lead many ABE managers to experience professional development opportunities. Reflection on practice included isolated learning opportunities which influenced future action. In addition, ABE managers tended to reflect on their own skills and knowledge, acting on their perceived needs for improvement through self-initiated professional development.

Reflection frequently occurred when important decisions in practice needed to be made; this reflection on practice influenced the decision-making process, which was typically an on-going and developmental. Often, decision-making involved reflection on skills and knowledge, and reflection on past mistakes towards a betterment of choices going forward.

Finally, it is important to point out the role that managers take in actually creating a reflective practice to lead to professional development. The most pronounced is the influence one's personality has on reflection on practice and engaging in reflective dialogue. Along these lines, factors such as values on lifelong learning and relationships with colleagues outside of a manager's own program often allow individuals to experience reflective practice in different ways.

For the reader, further descriptions of these experiences provide a context for the discussion and conclusions presented in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this chapter is to present the reader with a discussion of the findings of the study. Patton (2002) describes the foundational question of phenomenological research as seeking the meaning, structure, and essence of lived experience for a person or group of people. Therefore, the discussion of the findings extracts the essence of the experiences common to the participants of this study. Then, I draw conclusions based on these findings, linking them to theory, practice, and adult education research.

Discussion of the Findings

The questions which guided this study were:

1. How do managers of ABE programs experience professional development in practice?
2. What are ABE managers' perceptions on how they develop professionally?
3. How do ABE managers experience reflection on their practice?
4. How does the experience of reflection contribute to the professional development of ABE program managers?

To address these questions, in the discussion of the findings, I begin by extracting the essences of the experience of reflective practice, the overarching goal of phenomenological research. To do this, I present four themes which emerged as a result of the interview and data collection process. These themes capture the essence of the reflection, as experienced by ABE program managers in practice.

In this level of analysis, I focus on the major areas which emerged as having a pronounced impact the professional development of ABE program managers within the context of reflective practice.

The Essence of the Experience

Phenomenological research deals with inner experiences of everyday practice (Merriam & Associates, 2002). To do this, I draw upon the essence of the lived experience (Patton, 1990) of each participant, looking to draw parallels between reflective practice and professional development of ABE program managers. The next section describes four separate areas related to the essence of the experience of reflective practice within this context.

Reflective dialogue. Reflective dialogue can be defined as conversations with others that include factors such as context and emotions of an individual along with the thought processes that occur during discussion (Brockbank, McGill, & Beech, 2002). The findings of this study support that reflective dialogue created an opportunity for professional development in practice for many of the participants.

The literature relevant to reflective dialogue in professional management development, in general, shows that collaboration among colleagues, such as coaching from a more senior level for less experienced individuals (McDermott, Levenson, & Newtown, 2007; Hunt & Weintraub, 2004), group collaboration (Harada, 2001), and sharing ideas (Ayas & Zeniuk, 2001; Melnychuk, 2001) often leads to professional development. For ABE managers, this collaboration typically took the form of sharing of ideas and group discussion; more formalized coaching scenarios were scarce. Notably, the essence of participants' experiences with reflective dialogue has five main facets: working through difficult situations (including learning from

mistakes), developing relationships (both internal and external to the organization), discovering multiple solutions, and keeping current in the field.

First, for ABE managers, professional development often took the form of developing the ability to work through difficult situations through the experience of reflective dialogue. Those who had more developed relationships outside the field sought out colleagues or Board members; those who were more comfortable with internal staff, or newer to their roles relied more heavily on internal resources. Regardless, the impact of having a support system was crucial to the development of the ability of working through difficult situations in practice. This supports previous findings which indicate collaborative relationships as being an important part of the professional development process with respect to reflection (Albrecht, 2003; Harada, 2001; & Williams, 2005).

The findings of this study, however, indicate that managers chose to spend more time building relationships based on the amount of collaborative reflection that occurred with certain colleagues or groups. In general, if a manager preferred relating to Board members, they spent more time building those relationships; if they relied more on internal staff, they made a point to be more inclusive of them. This was not the case in every situation, but it was a trend which undergirded the relationship building process. What is not explored in the existing literature is the relationships of group members outside the group dynamics. That is, if ABE managers “prefer” to collaborate with certain individuals and not others, we know little about the dynamics that remain among those who are “left out” of the collaborative process and the manager themselves.

Also, participants’ reflection on their past or future actions with others often sought reaffirmation of a decision which was already made or about to be made; that is, collaboration

with others in the field gave confidence to those in the decision-making role. While it might appear that the latter (reflection on future action) falls into the realm of reflection-for-action, in most situations, consideration was on the decision or problem at hand, not necessarily the learning that would occur. Therefore, we must look to reflection-on a future action in a broader sense, considering a more holistic picture of the term “reflection-on-action.” Certainly, in these particular situations, reflective practice is taking place. As Merriam and Cafferella (1999) state, "reflective practice allows one to make judgments in complex and murky situations - judgments based on experience and prior knowledge" (p. 232). In some situations, when managers did not know how to handle a problem, outside assistance was necessary to decide on a probable, ideal solution. That said, trust and confidentiality among colleagues, whether internal or external, showed to be an incredibly important element in collaboration.

This study supports the current literature which already points to the need for trust in collaborative relationships (Albrecht, 2003). Looking back to the importance of relationship-building, those relationships built on trust were more open; managers who trusted their staff and vice-versa felt more comfortable communicating with them. Conversely, if there was a sense of mistrust or poor communication, the reflective process did not have as great an impact on the professional development process. Therefore, it was in the best interest of each manager to build a trustworthy support system in order to benefit from it professionally.

It is noteworthy to mention that collaborative relationships were often developed with an awareness of the need to negotiate power. In particular, managers interacted frequently with their Boards, who held power over the manager of the program. Current literature does suggest that adult education cannot occur without consideration of an underlying power struggle (Cervero & Wilson, 2001). Yet, there is a lack of current research which explores power

dynamics and negotiation of relationship and their role in the collaborative process with respect to professional development of ABE managers, or reflective practice for that matter.

Noteworthy is that ABE managers are not necessarily reluctant to seek help from individuals in lower-ranking positions when making difficult decisions. Students often played key roles in guiding major changes in programming and policy. A humbleness which seemed to exist in many of the participants (that is, they did not show any feelings of “superiority” based on the fact that they were in management roles) allowed them to interact with individuals at all levels in decision-making, progressing their own development in practice through learning from these varied viewpoints. In addition to working through difficult situations, managers developed their decision-making abilities by learning from their mistakes through the experience of reflective dialogue.

The process of reflecting on practice led to improved decision-making. Learning from mistakes, an essence of the experience of reflective dialogue typically arose out of conversations with individuals in higher levels either within or outside the organization. These types of mentoring situations, in general, have shown to be an important factor in learning how to reflect in practice (Knowles, Borrie, & Telfer, 2005; Walkington, 2005). For the participants in my study, formal mentoring situations often provided opportunity to collaboratively reflect on mistakes, consider other options, or provide alternative solutions.

A common thread among many of the participants which allowed for managers to learn from their mistakes through dialogue was the respect they held for those who had worked in the field for long periods of time; often, they sought conversations from those who they (or others) held in high regard. Just as important is the approachability of these outside mentors to assist less-experienced managers with mistakes. This openness allowed participants to be less

inhibited when approaching these individuals, allowing a friendly, productive relationship to be developed.

Reflection on practice through reflective dialogue did not always occur through the experience of a mentor-mentee situation. As was the case with general decision-making, in some situations, it was common for a manager to look towards internal staff (regardless of rank within the organization) to navigate through mistakes or situations which had gone awry. More importantly, these situations required the manager to admit fault and, for the goal of improved practice, seek advice from those who reported to them. Trusting, professional relationships between staff members were of the utmost importance in order for the experience of reflective dialogue to lead to development in practice.

As already mentioned, for reflective dialogue to be effective, all must be engaged. There are differences in intensity of listening and contributions, with the common goal of creating and challenging meanings and understanding, where each person is attending to the issue of the moment (Brockbank & McGill, 1998, p. 106). For reflective dialogue to be a more effective learning experience for managers, therefore, it was essential for those involved to have a respected, developed relationship, where every person is aware of the common goals of the practice. This supports Liimatainen, Poskiparta, Karhila, and Sjogren's (2001) findings from a study in the development of reflection among nursing students, which showed that higher stages of reflection (and awareness of reflection) do, in fact, influence professional development. Important to this process is the relationship development which occurs as an additional facet of the essence of reflective dialogue.

Development of strong, trusting, understanding relationships was a key to effective reflective dialogue among colleagues. Therefore, it was common for ABE managers to strive to

achieve respect from staff and their peers in the field. Not surprisingly, those who forged strong relationships seemed to benefit more from experiencing reflective dialogue; they had a strong network of “go-to” people for support and collaboration. Also important to note is that of the few participants who seemed less inclined to seek support through reflective dialogue, these individuals lacked development opportunities in practice from conversations with colleagues. They often sought support internally or from other areas.

Relationship development often led to discovering and experiencing multiple approaches towards various areas of practice, another facet of the essence of reflective dialogue. Strong relationships and the development of multiple solutions often went hand-in-hand; with more individuals involved in decision-making, working on projects, and discussing new ideas, multiple approaches to these tasks emerged.

Discovery of multiple approaches develops practice in a variety of ways. As Kreber (2004) suggests, a multi-faceted, educational development initiative towards reflective practice should include promotion of meaning, recording of experiences, addressing learning goals, and self-regulated learning. In my study, most notably, the experience of reflective dialogue which is inclusive of multiple individuals within the organization led to a more collaborative working environment, where each individual felt as though they were contributing. More importantly, particularly within an ABE setting where there are varying backgrounds and viewpoints among individuals involved, inclusion of many individuals in reflective dialogue leads to a more critical approach towards elements of practice. This is particularly aligned with Mezirow and Associates’ (2000) view which sees reflective dialogue as an opportunity to challenge assumptions through discussion with colleagues. Through this process, those included in this

process become more socially and contextually aware of these presuppositions when reaching conclusions and making decisions.

Along those lines, it was common among several managers to come to different conclusions about areas of practice once reflective dialogue occurred. Where there may have been one, well-defined solution or idea towards a specific situation, reflective dialogue allowed managers to see the situation from viewpoints of others, creating opportunity to change practice to accommodate what was truly happening from multiple points of view.

A final finding, which describes an additional facet of the essence of reflective dialogue, is that discussion with others was often sought in order to keep relevant in the field. Specifically, instead of attending formal training sessions, the discourse regarding political influences, student requirements, state mandates, curriculum, program development, and other areas was developed further primarily through discussion with others.

The field of ABE seems to be forward-thinking in its involvement in fostering of reflective dialogue among practitioners. Professional organizations (such as PAACE), state-run councils, list-serves, and professional publications were present and many participants remained active in them in some way. Many individuals suggested time-management as being the most prevalent factor hindering their own development, and that opportunities for reading and involvement in councils are scarce. Many, however, tried and made the effort to block some time for these resources, as they were seen as invaluable to keeping current in the field.

The essence of reflective dialogue takes on many forms in the field. However, one point is certain: the experience of reflective dialogue leads to many developmental opportunities in practice. Without it, ABE managers are limiting their own opportunities for professional

development. Therefore, it is incredibly important for managers to develop relationships, seek multiple viewpoints, and respect the values that others hold in their profession.

Reflection on practice and self. In addition to reflective dialogue, managers developed professionally through their experience of reflection on practice. Looking to the literature relevant to reflective practice in professional development, this type of learning follows Kolb's (1984) model of adult learning which supports the essence of the experience of reflection on practice. Managers had a concrete experience (or, a "moment") and reflect on this experience, providing them with ideas that could subsequently be used in similar experiences. This cycle of adult learning facilitates opportunities to learn from experience in practice. Ultimately, research supports the use of reflective techniques among management professionals, who work in settings in which their daily practice is filled with the potential for recognizing the significance of moments of truth through reflection, allowing for more successful practice (Greenall, 2004). For participants in this study, their journeys led to learning relevant to: 1) understanding the importance of commitment, 2) building trust in the capability of others, 3) formulating opinions, and 4) developing an awareness of politics. The next section describes these areas in more detail.

Learning about the importance of commitment was one facet of the essence of reflection on practice. Current research yields little when linking these areas. However, in my study I found that commitment can be described in many ways; for managers participating in my study, it relates to the overall time, attention, concern, and drive that an individual (or group of individuals) has towards projects and tasks, regardless of the perceived importance of that task. Without commitment from all involved, managers were less trusting that a project would be done appropriately, or with the same amount of vigor and attention that they, themselves, might have.

Learning the importance of commitment relies heavily on learning to trust other staff members and understanding their capabilities. Managers, because of their overwhelming work schedules, or lack of time and resources, must delegate work and projects to others in order to get projects accomplished on time. Not surprisingly, the few participants who were less trusting of others did not, in turn, delegate as much to others and, as a result, seemed more overwhelmed and buried in paperwork

Commitment is also a quality which is important for the managers themselves to have. There almost seems to be a defining line between those who are fully committed and those who are not; it was common for most of the participants to engage fully in projects and see them to completion. These individuals often spoke negatively about those who did not take this same approach, as they saw it as a critical requirement of being an ABE program manager. Those who participate in grants in order to boost incoming funding without giving time and attention towards the project are silently shunned from the rest of the management field. Commitment is almost like a badge of honor which only those who abide by it as a rule are seen as a positive example in the field.

Another facet of the essence of reflection on practice was the improvement of projects and programs from year to year. Certainly, this is already a known benefit of using reflective practice approaches in the workplace. The existing conceptual literature (much more prominent than empirical) which focuses on these areas is often related to educational settings (Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; York-Barr, Sommers, Ghore, Montie, & Costa, 2006) and describes suggested approaches towards improvement. For ABE program managers, specifically, the opinions or ideas which formed as a result of reflection on practice were related to specific processes or procedures in engaging in a project to see it to successful completion. Therefore,

developmentally, each year a manager oversaw a specific project, they became more informed than compared to the previous year. Learning what to do (or what not to do in many situations) allowed managers to more effectively manage important, ongoing aspects of their roles, thus improving specific aspects of their practice as well.

Along these lines, reflection on practice often allowed managers to learn more about the politics influencing their field. During our conversations, managers would refer to (mostly) external relationships held with the ABE bureau, or other individuals within the field, and the impact those relationships had on practice. Often, when managers co-sponsored a program with another agency or interacted with other managers in a committee, a new understanding of how inter-agency relationships, governance by the ABE bureau, or dissemination of funding emerged. New opportunities for understanding the relationships between all of these factors allowed managers to make better decisions pertinent to their own practice.

Specifically, these experiences influenced choices managers made going forward with respect to who they chose to work with, inform, or trust with confidential information. The more learning which occurred with respect to these decisions, the circle of individuals who were part of the group which influenced a participant's practice grew closer-knit.

Another finding of this study was that ABE managers engaged in self-reflection quite often. Some of the more recognized literature available in the field of adult education emphasizes critical self-reflection. First, managers often engaged in self-reflection in response to a certain situation or event where their own professional qualifications as a manager were challenged. They tended to be self-critical; they analyzed and found their own areas for professional improvement, self-monitoring their skills on a regular basis. This self-monitoring often arose from situations when they did not know the answer to a specific question, could not find a ready

solution to a problem, or uncovered an interest in a particular topic by chance. Regardless, the common response to self-monitoring was to seek some type of professional development opportunity to learn more.

As is already known, certain reflective practice strategies towards self-reflection allow for deeper learning and growth (Plack & Greenberg, 2005; Spalding & Wilson, 2002) and increased self-monitoring and development of professional judgments (Tripp, 1993). My study supports these findings; as participants engaged in self-reflection, they did experience these types of learning opportunities with respect to practice. Building on what was supported in the literature, self-monitoring became an important aspect of professional development for ABE managers as well, an area which has not been explored fully in existing literature.

One facet of the experience of self-reflection towards self-management in practice was the development of stronger skills and knowledge in certain areas of practice. This was often the result of taking courses, reading books, or discussing topics with colleagues; all led to increased knowledge and awareness in these areas. In some situations, self-reflection occurred prior to an event happening, and the manager took it upon themselves to seek development opportunities surrounding a certain topic in order to take-on a project more successfully.

Also important to note is that managers tended to take advantage of more formalized, professional development opportunities outside the field (such as at a college or university). At the time of this study, a new leadership program was being implemented by the state professional development centers (PDC), managers continued to look externally to other, non-ABE affiliated organizations for support. While the PDCs were utilized in other areas of practice, it was typically for other staff members or a team-building program, not specifically for the manager themselves. This finding is aligned with what is already known from the review of literature

relevant to professional development within ABE, in general. As it exists currently, most of the training available for adult basic education managers is typically in the form of formal seminars and workshops offered through state and national programs (National Adult Education Professional Development Consortium, 2007). Of the programs that were available, managers often did not participate due to lack of time and money, also supportive of what is already known in the literature (Belzer et al., 2001; Wilson & Corrbett, 1999).

While the experience of self-reflection often led to professional development of specific tasks or skills, critical self-reflection led more to awareness and understanding of certain groups or issues which arose in practice. To review, critical self-reflection, as described by Mezirow (1991), is “reassessing the way we have posted problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting.” The experience of critical self-reflection for ABE managers did not necessarily align with this definition in all cases, but I did find some notable findings worthy of further discussion.

When critical self-reflection occurred, it was typically intertwined with a manager’s assessment of their own feelings about a particular situation and how it related to his or her perceptions based on past experiences outside of practice. Many managers’ critically self-reflected when thinking about their overall career choice and desire to develop in certain areas of practice. This type of critical self-reflection often arose from experiences in childhood or their upbringing which provided opportunity to experience other cultures, people, or situations. In fact, critical self-reflection even prior to entering the field of ABE often led individuals to choose this particular field due to the types of students it serves.

Critical self-reflection also provided opportunity for managers to make choices in self-management in different ways. For example, often resources were put ahead of individual needs

in order to serve student or program needs. Programs or grants were chosen based on the overall effect they would have rather from a self-serving standpoint. Critical self-reflection also allowed development of humility and giving that was so prevalent in the personalities of participants in this study.

Reflection on values. The values held by an individual were often experienced as the core influence on the choices they made, their perceptions of practice, and their guiding principles towards development and learning in practice. Three significant facets of the experience of reflection on values emerged during this study. These facets include: introspection, taking action, and re-affirmation. Thomas (2005) describes a similar correlation between reflective practice and development. In her study exploring components of reflective practice pertinent to an educational group which utilized principles based on the Samurai educational system, participants explored beliefs, self-perceptions, and their roles with respect to practice. As a result, Thomas (2005) calls for more attention to addressing values before engaging in reflective practice processes. Within ABE, these same sort of processes take place; however, unlike the participant's in Thomas' (2005) study, ABE managers seem more certain of their own values and introspective processes when exploring them. Before describing these facets more fully, I first provide a broader description of what I mean when writing about the values of participants.

One thing seems certain – participants in this study are in the field of ABE to educate adults and they clearly care about the importance of the work they do, despite its many challenges. When I asked participants to describe an object which they felt captured the essence of their profession, I heard a myriad of answers, including the Rock of Gibraltar, a shining star, a buoy floating in water, and a ship in the ocean. All of these objects represent resiliency and strength. The values participants developed during childhood were often a result of parental

influence and their values, childhood exposure to diverse groups, and educational experiences. Often, it was these values which brought participants to the field of ABE rather than another profession. Sensitivity towards groups who face barriers (such as individuals who live in poverty or single mothers) often emerged from reflection on the value of helping others who are in less fortunate situations.

The experience of reflection on values influenced participants' choices in practice. Often, an overwhelming desire to help individuals achieve goals and succeed acted as an underlying premise for decisions, activities, and programs in practice. In many situations, when a manager was faced with a difficult situation, he or she relied on core values for guidance. Core values were, in many cases, a catalyst for taking action in a situation despite challenges and adversity.

From my own past experience in the field of ABE, it was no surprise that managers often faced difficult dilemmas in practice. These challenges were typically related to issues of relationships with students and staff, and difficult choices that needed to be made which often influenced these groups. In many situations, lack of time, money, and resources hindered the progress of programs, and, as a result, the experience of reflecting on one's underlying values often uplifted and drove managers to take action in the face of adversity.

Common to many of the managers interviewed for my study was their need to maintain effective, student-centered programs. To do this was a challenge, particularly when turnover among staff, or dried-up resources hindered this goal. However, reflection on core values and beliefs – the need to take action for the betterment of the student – led managers to take action quickly. This meant reaching out to atypical resources, finding unconventional means for funding, or relying on others for help.

The experience of reflection on values also influenced the action a manager took in his or her own professional development. In many situations, managers needed to continually learn and remained attuned to the field as an underlying key to self-betterment. As a result, managers sought additional professional development opportunities towards this particular goal. In addition to its influence on taking action on certain situations which arose in practice, another facet of the experience of reflection on values is the re-affirmation it provided to managers in their views on their practice.

The core values of a manager (beyond their philosophies towards education) in an ABE setting was often the underlying “spark” that kept them in the field. Of the managers I interviewed for this study, most had been in the field for a significant number of years. Core values not only led them to enter the field, but also allowed them to remain in the field. They often served as a re-affirmation, particularly when times were difficult and challenging.

Most of the individuals I interviewed had been in other related professions prior to entering the field of ABE, and most discussed common challenges, perceptions of their roles, and frustrations with the field. However, it was the core values – the need to do something with their lives for the greater good of humanity – that kept them there. Without this particular kind of reflection, many would have left the field long ago, gone back into teaching or some other form of educational administration. But, as many shared with me during our conversations, it was important for them to feel as though they were making a difference and a contribution to society through practice.

Key Elements to the Experience of Reflection

Thus far, I have explored several kinds of reflective practice in which managers of ABE programs engage as a part of their professional development. These include the experiences of

reflective dialogue, reflection on practice, critical reflection (including self-reflection), and reflection on values. From each of these findings emerged certain, more specific areas of professional development which were described in the prior section. To summarize the findings of Chapter 5 in Table 5.1, I extracted the areas of professional development which emerged from each type of reflective experience.

Table 5.1

Areas of Professional Development which Emerged from Reflection on Practice

Type of Reflective Experience	Area of Professional Development
Reflective Dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Working through difficult situations - Developing relationships - Discovering multiple solutions
Critical Reflection; Self-Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-management - Self-monitoring of skills
Reflection on Practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the importance of commitment - Building trust and capability in others - Formulating opinions - Developing an awareness of politics
Reflection on Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Development of humility and introspection - Taking action - Reaffirmation of decisions

Looking at these facets from a closer lens, one finding becomes clear: the relationships a manager develops with others, and the self-management and self-monitoring of a manager's skill-set are vital to professional development with respect to the experience and essence of reflective practice. The remaining facets all intermingle with these two common factors during

the professional development process with respect to reflection in practice. The next section describes these areas more fully.

It was not uncommon for managers to rely on opinions, discussion, and conversations with others to make decisions in their jobs. Without strong, developed relationships with others in the field, the network of individuals who could assist them with making decisions would also be affected. Key to this relationship development is the trust-building which occurs among managers and other individuals. Without trust (from either party), the experience of reflective dialogue and collaboration would be less productive. This interdependency of strong working relationships and decision-making was a major factor in the experience of reflection in practice and the development of these skills.

In addition to decision-making, relationship development was also an important part of developing multiple solutions and finding creative answers to problems. It was not common for managers to act alone on a project; often, they relied on others, including students, staff, and outsiders, for input, ideas, and other avenues they, themselves, may not have thought of. Without the experience of collaboration, managers attested that they might become stifled and stale in their approaches.

Along these same lines, creative collaboration often was a welcome reprieve when managers were faced with many similar situations or when they became overwhelmed with too many decisions which needed to be made. The experience of collaborating with others for input allowed managers to remain less stagnant in their roles, either re-affirming decisions they already had made, or coming up with new solutions to old problems and issues.

Notably, because development of strong relationships is so influential to many aspects of professional development among ABE managers, several factors related to the actual

development of these relationships emerged during this study. These included building trust and confidence in others and understanding the politics of the field to better navigate the relationships they develop. Also, careful consideration of decisions, particularly their effect on others, remained a key to building confidence among staff. Without this confidence, a manager's ability to develop in their role would be limited.

The practice of self-management was also common to many of the experiences of reflective practice and professional development of ABE managers. Self-management includes an awareness of skills (or skill deficiencies), the ability to seek out and initiate professional development opportunities, and active involvement in opportunities which enhance practice. Reflection plays an important role in self-management; it allows an individual to assess, understand, and respond to their own professional development in a personalized way.

Managers tended to self-manage their development in various ways. Reflection on their own learning styles and interests provided a basis for the opportunities they chose. For some, self-management led to reading. For others, it resulted in attendance at outside, more formalized training opportunities. Regardless, like the development of relationships with others, self-management was common to many of the facets which emerged as a result of this study. Self-management is a necessary process to the development of an ABE manager. One must be aware of their skills, areas to improve, and their role in the "bigger picture" of their practice. Along these lines, the development of a sense of humility and introspection becomes a key to the success of self-management. Without an on-going assessment of one's role, as well as the desire to continue learning, a manager would be less likely to pay attention to his or her own development. Particularly, in light of the on-going political influences on the field, a manager must understand some of the political influences on practice. Such areas are mostly self-taught;

understanding “hidden” issues, intermingling of agencies, and chain-of-command in the field are typically areas of informal learning. Only through self-management can an individual learn some of these areas and better understand how they affect their practice.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Reflection is important to the professional development of ABE program managers in many areas of practice. Also, as research continues to explore the relationship between reflective practice and professional development, this study furthers the understanding of reflective practice as a framework in management development. The next sections describe the implications this study has for reflective practice (as a framework) and then, more specifically, the field of ABE management development.

Reflective practice was the underlying conceptual framework which guided this study. It is already known that professional development often occurs through reflective practice (Condermin & Morrin, 2004). Reflective practice has been studied in relationship to management development from various perspectives pertaining to how one makes sense out of development opportunities in practice (Daudelin, 1996). More specifically, individuals can reflect in various ways, including the critical reflection and questioning of daily happenings within practice (Brookfield, 1990, 1991; Mezirow, 1991). This self-assessment process leads to further understanding of how one can make better, informed decisions, solve problems, and learn through the reflective process (Boud, 1995).

Reflective practice as a conceptual framework offers a wide variety of viewpoints into reflection as a mode of developing. As described in the literature review, it can be framed as reflection-on-action, in-action, for-action, and a multitude of other ways. In this study, the experience of reflective practice was more of an organic or holistic process. Experiences of

reflective practice never seem to be “staged.” In this study; therefore, it is difficult to categorize reflection as is done in the literature. The idea of reflective practice as a conceptual framework rather than a theory, *per se*, is more befitting for this particular study and should be considered as such for similar studies. I found it to be impossible to apply only one model or theory of reflective practice.

As Kreber (2004) and Moon (1999; 2004) both note, reflective practice is an unclear term; this study expands our knowledge of this framework in various ways. Most importantly, the exploration of reflective practice took place within a specific educational context; however, the participants were not teachers or students, as is typical in the research in this area. Also, since this study explored management professionals in an adult education setting, the study was able to extract the essence of certain experiences which are typical of this specific population, allowing us to see beyond some of the experiences of the participants normally studied in this setting. Therefore, as Kreber (2004) calls for further involvement in the actual process of reflective practice (rather than a more solitary activity), the reflective practices among ABE managers may begin to touch the surface of the broader questions regarding what reflective practice essentially is, and how it is effective.

Another implication for the concept of reflective practice is its general applicability to management development, particularly as organizations look at new, innovative ways of managing programs. Several of the participants in this study described a more informal, less top-down, hierarchical approach towards managing their organizations. Often, organizations look to implement more formalized training programs to encourage management development. As most participants said this training was helpful for more administrative tasks, it did not emphasize some of the other relevant areas management development that emerged review of literature.

Development of decision-making, problem-solving, and collaborative working relationships, all common areas of more formal management development programs such as interpersonal skills, knowledge management, strategic planning, and creativity (Evans, 2005) are also important.

To address the need for innovation in programming, organizations should look towards first fostering reflective practice, as it plays an integral role in professional development. Gosling and Mintzberg (2004) support this suggestion, recommending integration of management education with practice as well as a less prescriptive classroom environment, and encouragement of reflective practice. While the managers who participated in this study all seemed to develop reflection in their practice over time, more awareness of it, and its contribution to professional development would allow learning to occur more readily.

Along these lines, some of the more studied, proven techniques of working towards reflective practice might allow for it to occur more readily in practice as well. As Liimatainen *et al.* (2001) concluded in their study of the development of reflection among nursing students, various approaches and methods toward reflection are needed to support learning from practice. Along these lines, for ABE managers, maximizing reflection through deliberate strategies could enhance their professional development by choosing the techniques that work for them. For example, none of the participants in this study actively engaged in reflective writing, critical incident analysis, or technology tools. This was, most likely, not because the individual consciously chose not to use these particular tools, but rather that their awareness of such strategies was limited. Increased awareness would provide a means for professional development and enhanced learning through reflection.

Reflective practice proved to be an important part of each participant's development in this study, regardless of his or her personality type or values. Literature linking reflection to an

individual's values or personality type to professional development in practice is scarce.

Wellington and Austin (1996) discuss a multifaceted approach towards orienting reflective practice in education which considers values, but, fails to look beyond one's values towards education. Further research is certainly needed in this area. My study shows that these particular factors do, in fact, have some influence on reflective practice and professional development; further research focused specifically on these areas would be beneficial.

While there were obvious differences among individuals' management approaches, one element remained common: reflection in practice allowed for a various aspects of professional development to occur. Knowing this, I can make the assumption that reflective practice does not occur among only one specific type of management style or individual personality type. Therefore, the generalizability of reflective practice as a mode of learning should be explored further within organizations, particularly in light of the fact that it promotes learning among individuals with varied styles, values, and personalities.

Specifically, organizations should not dismiss reflective practice as a management development tool. In professional development programs, various approaches towards reflective practice (such as writing, analysis, collaboration, self-reflection, etc.) should be presented as potential opportunities for learning. The wide-range of techniques allowing for promotion of reflective practice can then be sifted through by the individual manager; and choices can then be made based on personal preference and learning style.

This study confirms that ABE managers do, in fact, develop professionally through the experience of reflection. In fact, because of a lack of more formalized training, particularly that which focuses on some of the foundational skills necessary to job development, reflective practice becomes an important method of professional development for this particular group.

Without it, many of the skills necessary for successful management practice might be acquired differently, or not at all.

First, in the field of ABE, specifically, while the regionalized Professional Development Centers (PCD) offer opportunity for customized training programs, awareness of some of the factors important to professional development will allow for more tailored, appropriate instruction. To further support to the development of skills and knowledge acquired through reflection in practice, PDCs and other professional development programs may need to revise training to incorporate these additional areas.

For example, when conducting a needs assessment of the goals of more formal, professional development programs, some of the necessary skills which emerged from this study should be taken into consideration as potential training outcomes. As current research links reflection and more formal management development programs through the use of reflective techniques within the management education classroom (Holmes *et al.*, 2005), my study identified fostering skills such as collaboration, self-reflection, and self-management as areas of focus as well.

Secondly, another interesting implication is that ABE managers do not necessarily engage in some of the more formalized reflective practice development tools which were described in the review of literature. This may be partly indicative of the context of this study; for instance, critical incident analysis is typically used among medical and teaching professionals (Minghella & Benson, 1995; Parker, 1995; Thiel, 1999; Tripp, 1993); portfolios are common to teacher education programs (Klenowski, Askew, & Carnell, 2006). Therefore, in addition to setting specific training program goals, PDCs and other professional development programs working with ABE managers should look to developing these skills in order to enhance the

reflective practice experience. As managers build their skills in these areas, they will be able to approach their own learning in different ways.

In a broader sense, the adult education institutions which prepare ABE managers to work in the field of adult education should consider development of educational opportunities along these lines as well. As the need for ABE and similar programs continues to rise, development of those working in this field will continue to be critical. This may include promotion of collaborative reflection, awareness of self-reflection, and other, relevant topics which are not typically offered through formalized coursework.

Third, as collaboration within practice was a key finding which contributed to the development of ABE managers, the implication is that more opportunity for this to occur should be considered. Currently, the majority of the collaboration which occurs within ABE is through professional development networks and conferences. While there is ample opportunity for group gathering, the majority of these are for specific purposes (such as discussing reporting, students, etc.). Organizations should look to promoting more deliberate, collaborative opportunities with the sole purpose of allowing managers to work together to discuss, problem-solve, generate ideas, and resolve issues. Also, interpersonal skills, group dynamics, and communication skills are also important, so that managers can effectively engage in collaboration.

Looking back, like many of the managers in this study, I, too, used many self-management and reflective methods to learn my job. Had I been better prepared with a collaborative support system for making decisions, reaching goals, and developing programs, I most likely would have developed differently, perhaps more effectively, in my role. Not only was traditional training absent in my situation, but lack of different approaches, necessary to promote my on-going job development were not there as well. If programs are aware of this

when hiring new staff, integration of awareness towards reflective practice may reduce the isolated feeling one feels when starting a job in the field. As studies in other fields point out, a sense of being overwhelmed, underprepared, and lacking support and socialization contribute to various forms of frustration on the job (Cawyer, 2002; Sorcinelli, 1994).

Also, as this study has shown that reflective practice produces viable learning opportunities for managers of ABE programs, it should be kept in mind for future hiring and promotion of potential managers. The level of reflection that occurred among participants varied, however, it was clear that those who were reflective benefitted from it professionally. Knowing this, during the process hiring and succession planning for future managers, ABE programs should seek individuals who are reflective or have shown to achieve certain levels of self-management, collaboration, self-reflection, and other reflection in practice.

Looking deeper into the implications for reflective practice and the field of ABE, some recommendations for future research can be made as well, and these are described in detail in the next section.

Recommendations for Future Research

The field of ABE lacks research which focuses specifically on the development of its managers. As a researcher in the field, I can draw upon general management development research; however, the unique nature of the field of ABE requires more specific detail and attention to research in this particular area. This study provides insights into the future research that should be conducted in the field of ABE management development, reflective practice, and the field of management development, in general.

One goal of this study was to contribute to the literature specifically focusing on ABE program managers and their professional development. While this study has produced new

insights into this group, research is still lacking in this area. As ABE programs grow, and the development of managers becomes more critical, the field needs to remain attuned to how leaders of such programs are developing in their roles. Future research can contribute greatly to practice in this area.

Specifically, as more formalized institutions of higher education offer programming focusing specifically on the field of ABE, they, too, would benefit greatly from more studies in this area to better develop curriculum. Currently, ABE programming is often a voluntary or less mainstreamed course of study. However, with rising numbers of second-language learners, higher demands from employers, and increases in the need to use technology, ABE as a major area of study will become increasingly more predominant. As this occurs, educational institutions need to better understand the needs of the learners and the leaders in this field, and how to most effectively serve these needs. It will be up to researchers to provide the information needed by educational institutions.

Along these lines, as researchers look to ABE management more closely, more specific areas of program management must be considered. Currently, the various offerings of ABE programs (such as basic literacy, GED, and ESL) are often combined under one, general title. While research on students in these areas is often separated into various program categories (such as ESL, GED, etc.), literature focusing on the managers of ABE programs does not reflect these separate program areas. However, as demands increase in each of these areas, the field must better understand if each program offering requires different approaches towards the development of managers.

Third, it is already known that reflective practice has significant implications for management development. As Raelin (1993) points out:

Management as a holistic skill must blend theory and action. Theory makes sense only through practice, but practice makes sense only through reflection as enhanced by theory. Managers need both, and they need interaction between the two if they are going to prepare themselves to cope with the changing landscape of business experience. (p. 88-89)

Raelin's views have a profound implication for future ABE management research. As was notable in this study, reflection was a holistic, less prescriptive process. Researchers need address this viewpoint more fully to better understand how more holistic views of reflection impact learning in practice. Most current studies focus on one "type" of reflective practice, rather than a conceptual, less structured point of view. As research goes forward, consideration of this viewpoint will impact practice in the field of ABE management development, and other fields as well.

Next, there is a definite link between personality type and reflection in practice. Yet, this study can only make general assumptions based on the data collected. Research needs to explore this area more fully, addressing questions pertaining to how certain personalities and values are related to how reflection occurs in practice. By doing this, fields of practice can better understand how to address the learning of certain personality types or make changes and revisions to existing programs to better serve the needs of employees.

Also, as noted in the discussion, little is known about the role negotiation of power dynamics has with respect to the professional development process. This study found significant link between the development of relationships, collaboration, and professional development. However, not much is known about the influence of power within this particular process.

Finally, this study serves as a starting point for future, replicable studies to confirm or challenge any findings. For the field of adult education, in general, application of this study into other settings, such as higher education administration, healthcare management, and corporate businesses, will shed light into other, potential facets of reflective practice as a method of job development.

With respect to replication of this study into other settings, it is worth noting the positive influence my prior background in ABE had in conducting this study. While others who are not familiar with the field would most likely be able to replicate this study, an understanding of the terminology, context, and overall roles of those working in the field allowed this to be a much richer study, particularly during the interview process. The same may most likely hold true for other settings; that is, application of this study in other settings may benefit from a researcher who has had prior experience in the context being studied.

This study is transferrable to other fields as well; comparisons and contrasts between various settings and the field of ABE will help understand different perspectives on the findings of this study, shedding additional light into the concept of reflective practice.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore reflective practice in the professional development of adult basic education program managers. Specifically, this study was focusing on reflective practice as a professional development approach, particularly the kinds of reflection that occur in practice which influence areas of learning one's job. This study identifies several specific areas of learning relevant to professional development which emerged as a result of participation in some form of reflection.

This was a qualitative, phenomenological study which used an interpretive approach towards data analysis. One of the most important aspects of this method was the rich, descriptive data gathered during the interview process; participants were questioned openly, and additional discussion or questioning provided opportunity for me to clarify responses or areas where further detail was necessary.

Each of the participants in this study brought a distinct, personal point-of-view, providing me with different perspectives to compare during the data analysis. While some of the participants were more open in their answers than others, I found that each brought a relevant perspective to the questions they were asked. Through these discussions, several conclusions were made with respect to: 1) the type of reflection which occurs in practice and 2) what type of learning, if any, resulted from each identified form of reflection. The results of this study inform the field of adult education, especially the field of ABE. A better insight into reflective practice as an approach towards learning from a holistic perspective emerged. This is significant because reflective practice often is researched in a more scripted way (such as, the “types” of ways to reflect) rather than a multifaceted approach. Better insights and research related to this holistic approach towards reflected practice may open new doors to better understanding new facets of professional development.

In conclusion, this study is important to current ABE practice as well as future research conducted in this area. A better understanding of reflective practice as a method of professional development influences approaches towards management development, in general, which is currently lacking in the field.

Final Thoughts

When I finalized the purpose of my study, I was partially hoping to make more sense out of how the field of ABE operates with so little professional development opportunities available to its managers. It seems a bit ironic that, as educators in a field that promotes lifelong learning, ABE programs do not have more formalized opportunities for managers available which influence their professional development. Just as I experienced when I first began my job as an instructor in the field, all ABE managers are faced with struggles, frustrations, difficult decisions, student and employee issues, and other hurdles to overcome on a daily basis. So how could I (and they) possibly learn to do what they do without professional development opportunities? This study found an answer to this question.

During my interviews, I found managers of ABE programs often do what they do because they simply want to educate others who need the help. They, in turn, are resourceful and find ways to educate themselves along the way. In spite of a lack of resources and time, they often look for other means to challenge themselves, find solutions to problems, determine the best approaches, and, in general, continue to develop in their roles. This process often emerges as some form of reflection in practice.

So, maybe my initial experience in the field was not how I originally perceived it. Because I was an educator in ABE, and primarily hired to help others learn to read or obtain their GED, perhaps my manager assumed I would be resourceful and educate myself along the way. Maybe she expected me to learn through my experiences, develop my own relationships, and find my own answers because that is exactly how she, in fact, learned her job.

Reflecting back to the findings of this study, knowing what I know now about reflective practice, I realize that I engaged in many of the approaches towards reflection that some of the

participants in this study did. I was able to work through many difficult situations, understand my students' needs, and collaborate with others on the job, among a vast variety of other tasks. To do this, I was resourceful, I did self-manage, and I took the time to identify and learn what I needed to in order to develop in my role. And, in fact, I did have a resource available to me to learn, it just did not come in the form of an out-of-the box training program or formalized mentoring situation. It was reflective practice, and it was just as, if not more, effective in my professional development.

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Curriculum Vita of Karen Lorraine Milheim

Education

The Pennsylvania State University

Doctoral Candidate (ABD), Adult Education (final defense date: 9/30/2008)

Master's of Education, Instructional Systems (Training and Development focus) (5/2003)

Bachelor of Arts, Communications (12/1995)

Teaching Experience

Instructed courses for various academic institutions in content areas related to writing, communications, sociology, and business communications, both online and traditional environments (2004 – present)

Publications

Milheim, K. L. (accepted for publication 2009). *Finding Common Ground: Understanding the Roles of Women Students to Foster Success in the Literacy Classroom (working title)*. In M. Miller & K. King (Eds.) *Empowering Women through Literacy*.

Milheim, K. L. (2007). Influence of technology on informal learning among adult literacy students. *Adult Basic Education and Literacy Journal*, 1(1), 21-26.

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Conference Presentations

Milheim, K. L. & Mont, M. A. (March 2008). Addressing the needs of adult learners through creative teaching practice. *Colloquium on Adult Learners in the Traditional University Classroom*. Penn State Harrisburg, Middletown, PA.

Milheim, K. L. (November 2005). Tapping into teaching and learning resources in the urban community. *Annual meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education*. Pittsburgh, PA.

Milheim, K. L. (February 2005). Integration of technology into adult literacy curriculum. *Annual meeting of the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education*. Hershey, PA.

Milheim, K. L. (November 2004). Teaching adults in a grant-funded career development program: Expectation versus reality. *Annual meeting of the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education*. Louisville, KY.