

**REFLECTIVE PRACTICE OF A HISPANIC CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER
AND INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT IN A PREDOMINANTLY
HISPANIC SOUTH TEXAS SCHOOL DISTRICT**

A Dissertation

by

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ABSTRACT

Reflective practice has been utilized in many fields. Education studies have recommended that reflexivity be used to enhance the practice of principals, teachers, and counselors. There has been little research in the area of reflective practice for superintendents and chief financial officers (CFOs) and the linking of Schön's reflective practice with Mezirow's transformative learning. Therefore, this study was aimed at examining my critical events and the use of reflective practice to improve professional development for superintendents and/or CFOs.

The study was a first-person account of my experiences in a predominantly Hispanic South Texas school district. My autoethnography allowed me to be the primary participant and researcher in the study, and I used three types of reflective practice (reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action) to narrate the critical events during my district tenure. Data collection included conducting a series of semi-structured interviews with my committee chair, reviewing artifacts such as video tapes and board reports, and reflections from my journal. I ensured trustworthiness through data triangulation, thick description, and reflective journaling.

My analysis included examining the data using Schön's reflective practice and Mezirow's precursors of transformative learning to identify disorienting dilemmas and examine my thinking, emotions, and reactions to the critical events and experiences. I identified five themes that were salient to my study: (a) disrespect, (b) ethical dilemmas, (c) politics, (d) bullying and oppression, and (e) change.

Three suggestions to the adult learning process that will aid educational strategies for superintendents and CFOs have been identified: (a) that a chief financial officer not consider being an interim superintendent because being in such a position might create political situations, (b) that a new reflective practice model be considered where reflection-for-action (RFA) is used as a planning tool knowing that we are always in the reflection-in-action (RIA) mode, and (c) that journaling and peer discussions be used as a way to reflect on experience. The autoethnography should be carefully examined for limitations and personal interpretations. I believe that my stories will contribute to the preparation and practice of superintendents and CFOs as well as future research, and my stories are discussed herein.

DEDICATION

To my Lord Jesus Christ who gave me the knowledge, strength, and health to undertake this study.

To my father, Anarco, who was my inspiration in deciding to write about this topic. I learned many things from him, and I have tried to carry on in his example of integrity, honesty, and trust. My father wrote many stories, and he showed me the ethics of writing and the ethics of life. He spent many times working with me one-on-one in grade school to make sure that I learned how to prepare myself. He sacrificed everything for me. I thank him for his commitment to the greatest gift he gave me, my education.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

I was standing on a hill in the midst of the evening. I was pacing back and forth like never before. With each step, I felt angrier and more anxious and hurt. The more I walked, the more furious I became. In Spanish, this kind of fury is called “enfadado de corazon,” which means very angry from the heart. I felt like an animal about to prey on anything or anyone that stood in the way. The intensity of my hurt and anger obscured my thinking. This was the most devastating moment of my professional career. I had just been placed on administrative leave by the new interim superintendent of Tejano Independent School District, whereas a few days earlier I had been a viable candidate for that same position.

The sixth of March was a normal Thursday. I was performing my daily activities as chief financial officer (CFO) of Tejano Independent School District when I received a phone call from the superintendent’s office. I was notified that I had a meeting at 4:00 p.m. that day with the new interim superintendent, Ms. Juanita Garza. I was still getting used to the idea of her being named interim superintendent, as it had only been two weeks. Prior to her appointment, I had been the administrator in charge of the district and had hoped that I would be appointed interim superintendent. Even though I was disappointed that I was not named interim superintendent, I decided to stay in the district, turning down a job as city auditor for a large neighboring city. I felt a sense of loyalty to the district and pride because, after all, this was my hometown, and I had

many neighbors and community members who had seen me grow up. Furthermore, I felt very confident that my accomplishments were notable and appreciated by both the administration and the Board of Trustees.

On that day in March, things continued normally, as I worked on various projects. However, I began to have a gnawing feeling that something might not be right when I received a call from the superintendent's office asking me to come meet with Superintendent Garza at 4:00 p.m. In the past, superintendents in this district often delivered negative news to employees about their job performance this way, but these were people who did not do their jobs. I was a good employee who was contributing a great deal to the district. In fact, that year was one of the most successful financial years for the district in terms of awards and funding. I had just secured permanent state funding under the hold harmless section of the school funding system for Tejano ISD. This was an unusual funding stream totaling over \$8 million for years previous to 2005-2006 and another \$8 million for the year 2006-2007. There were just a few districts among the more than 1,000 districts in the state that were able to capture this type of funding. The district was in excellent fiscal condition and had its construction program funded with additional funding each year. In terms of financial reporting, the district had received six awards from national organizations, such as the Government Finance Officers Association and the Association of School Business Officials. Fiscally, the district was doing well, and I was proud of the job my team and I were doing.

Furthermore, a few months earlier, on the same day that I had been named interim superintendent of Tejano ISD, I had been asked to interview in one of the largest

school districts in the state. To be considered between two possible candidates for the deputy superintendent and chief financial officer of this large school district was exceptional and a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. However, due to my loyalty to Tejano ISD and my hometown, I declined the interview.

Although I felt confident about my job performance and my ongoing contributions to Tejano ISD, I was apprehensive as I entered the “White House,” the name given to the Victorian style residence where the superintendent’s office was located. I had been in and out of this office many times, but recent memories of a troubling event from just a few months before were still on my mind. At that time, I met with the previous superintendent and the FBI. The local office of the FBI wanted me to give them documents dealing with a federal grant that was handled by Ms. Garza, when she served as the assistant superintendent for Instruction. The superintendent at that time, Ms. Morales, who was also interim superintendent, instigated this investigation.

There were concerns surrounding the use of federal funds for a reading grant administered by the assistant superintendent for instruction and allegations of impropriety such as vendors providing inappropriate personal travel. Furthermore, there were questions about the misuse of computer equipment that was provided by vendors to the district as part of the purchase of reading software. Ms. Morales had concerns about these issues as well as other complaints regarding Ms. Garza. She asked me to pursue an official inquiry into these allegations, wanting to directly confront the assistant superintendent. I felt that this inquiry was the result of professional and personal conflict between the two administrators.

Nevertheless, I scheduled a meeting with Ms. Garza and inquired about the allegations. During that meeting, she became agitated and asked that the inquiry be made in writing. She stormed out the office. Although I wrote the memo, I did not send it because the FBI took over the investigation. As of the date of this writing, there has been no update on the investigation. Shortly after my conversation with Ms. Garza, interim superintendent Morales removed her from her position as assistant superintendent for Instruction. Ms. Garza was placed in a lower administrative position. A few months later when I became administrator in charge of Tejano ISD, I was asked by the Board President to reinstate her as Assistant Superintendent for Instruction as one of the conditions for me to be appointed Superintendent of Tejano ISD. I refused, as there was an ongoing FBI investigation into allegations of impropriety. Soon after, Ms. Garza was appointed by the board as interim superintendent, and I was returned to my position of chief financial officer.

As I reflected on these past events, I headed to the “White House.” I ran into a couple of staff members who were courteous to me, but would not look into my eyes. They seemed as if they were watching a child who was in trouble walk into the principal’s office. I entered the Superintendent’s Office, and I sat in a conference chair that was facing Ms. Garza’s desk. I recalled that this was the same conference room where I had sat many times to problem solve many issues and offer solutions to the previous superintendents. Mr. Mateo, the newly promoted human resource director was also present. He was sitting in a chair facing me. As I sat down, he handed me a letter placing me on administrative leave. According to Mr. Mateo and Ms. Garza, the

rationale for the letter was that they needed to review the results of a purchasing inquiry by a state entity. I asked why they felt that they needed to place me on leave. They never answered this question. They only stated that the board asked Ms. Garza to review the results of the inquiry. I felt that being placed on leave was retaliation for not following the Board President's conditions to be placed in the superintendency, particularly the restatement of Ms. Garza as Assistant Superintendent for Instruction. I was hurt by her actions.

At this point, I believed that she wanted to get me out of her way so she would become the permanent Superintendent. I recalled saying to her, during that meeting, "I cannot believe that this is happening to me now. This year I have accomplished so much as Chief Financial Officer, securing more funds for the district and receiving accolades in terms of financial awards." I further said, "You will not find anyone who can better perform my position and duties." I was asked to sign an acknowledgment that I had received the letter. I signed it and walked away from the office. Included in the letter was a demand that I leave Tejano ISD offices immediately.

Subsequently, I filed a grievance. A hearing was held, but Ms. Garza did not show up. Her representative was present, but no response was provided. It was like a one-way street. I talked, and her representative listened. There was no feedback or response. No resolution came from this meeting. The interim superintendent, Ms. Garza, did not respond to the grievance. No wrongdoing or inappropriate action was ever identified. Ultimately, the result was I agreed to take a leave of absences to further my studies. I left Tejano ISD.

As I closed the door to the superintendent's office, I saw the risk manager who directly reported to me. He was waiting outside of the superintendent's office for a meeting with Ms. Garza. I immediately asked him to come by my office after he finished his meeting. My intent was to tell him of this surprising news so that he could communicate it to the rest of the staff. I wanted them to hear it from me first. He never made it to my office.

As I walked back to my office, I was getting angry. When I got into my office, I began closing all of the open files on my computer and arranging any documents and projects that were ongoing. I wanted to organize them in a way that the staff could follow up on pending projects. I kept getting angrier as I reflected on what just happened. Mr. Mateo came by my office to get my keys and asked me to leave the premises. I told him that I was not ready yet. However, I knew that Mr. Mateo was notorious for trying to humiliate individuals. I had witnessed how he had humiliated other administrators and demeaned them in front of their staff. I did not want this to happen to me in front of my staff. I knew how things had happened in the past. One time, the Board President had asked me bring a police officer to remove an administrator. This was a situation involving the removal of the previous interim superintendent. I did not want this to happen to me. I could not believe that I was asked to leave Tejano ISD offices. I knew that the justification that they had given me was nothing more than an excuse to move me out of their way. I had been in Tejano ISD for over 10 years, and I could not believe what was happening. I was not just hurt, I was devastated.

A great deal of emotions ran through my mind, but I tried to remain in control as I walked out of the office. I remember meeting the night security guard on duty. He walked with me to my truck that was parked in the driveway at my mother's house just two blocks away from the Tejano district offices. Each evening, this officer would customarily walk me to my truck and we would talk and reflect on the day. This time, I did not feel like talking to him because I did not want to create a loud discussion and alarm my mother. But, he was very perceptive, and he saw the stress and tension on my face and said, "Please call me tomorrow if you would like to talk about whatever is bothering you." As we reached my truck, I said farewell to him and hurriedly got in the truck. I did not want to talk to my mother and upset her. As I drove off, I saw my mother in the second floor window of her house. I waived at my mother and drove off her driveway.

I headed north toward the interstate highway as I tried to make sense of what was happening to me. I felt that my truck went into cruise control because I drifted toward the university on the east side of the city. I ended in one of the parking lots at the university, got out of my car, and walked to the top of a grassy hill.

It was getting dark as I paced back and forth on the hill. I was trying to reconstruct all of my professional steps. I searched for a justifiable reason for what was happening. While working as a central office administrator, I placed individuals on administrative leave for various reasons. During those times, I wondered about how I would deal with the situation if I were in their position. I began to question my competencies and wonder whether I was, in fact, like the people I had placed on

administrative leave. I questioned everything: my feelings, my thoughts, and my actions. There is a saying in Spanish, “*Es fácil ver y hacer lo que no te pasa ati,*” which means that it is easy to look and deal with a situation when it is not I who is dealing with it.

I was standing on this grassy hill and wondering about how I got here. I speculated on how I was going to deal with what was to come. I would not wish the way I was feeling upon anyone. I came to understand what Maya Angelou was talking about when she said, “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” (Angelou, n.d., para. 1). In my situation, I will never forget how they made me feel.

My whole life had been a preparation for the superintendency. I, Jesus Juan Amezcua, was born an only child to Anarco and Lucia in Tejano Town. Although my parents worked in the United States, they lived across the border in Carrillo Town, Mexico. They were citizens of Mexico. However, they wanted me to be a U.S. citizen. My father wanted me to have the opportunities afforded a U.S. citizen. When my mother was pregnant she was under a doctor’s care in the United States. Thus, when she went into labor, they crossed the border into the United States so my mother could give birth to me at San Jose Hospital in Tejano Town, U.S.A.

Although, I was born in the United States, I attended elementary school in Mexico, where my family lived. I was a good student and earned the highest ranking in my class. In the sixth grade, the last year of elementary school, I entered into my first leadership experience of being elected class president by my fellow students. I felt that I was the best academic student in sixth grade, but being in the leadership role of class

president was not something to which I had given much thought. Later that same year, I was selected by my teachers to be in the Flag Court or the “escolta,” as it is called in Spanish. The “escolta” consisted of five highly ranked students who were charged with presenting the Mexican flag honors during the monthly “asamblea.” This was the school’s monthly parent meeting.

Another important milestone in my education was when I was selected the top student for my school. For six graders in Mexico, there was an educational competition that honored high academic achievement. This included the selection of the top student in each school who would then compete with other students to represent their district zones at the state and national level – in Mexico a school district is divided into zones. The best students in the school district’s zones participated. The selection process included the administration of a comprehensive exam covering all subjects. The student with the highest score on the exam got the honor of representing the student’s zone in the state’s delegation to meet the President of Mexico. I received the highest score in the school and the zone. I earned the honor of representing my elementary school, along with other students from other zones in a meeting with the President of Mexico. This trip was a weeklong visit to the capital of Mexico to meet with the President. The meeting was held in his residence in “Los Pinos,” Mexico City. My participation in this event was the culmination of my education in Mexico. I had just completed the sixth grade and achieved high marks, which was one of my father’s goals for me.

Shortly after finishing the sixth grade in 1977, most of my classmates were getting ready to attend middle school, the “Secundaria.” However, I did not continue in

the Mexican education system. My father brought me to Tejano Town in the United States so that I could study and learn the English language. Being an eleven-year-old, I was excited to start the 7th grade in the U.S. However, due to my limited English proficiency, I was placed in kindergarten. During that time, the school policy was to place English as a Second Language (ESL) students in kindergarten, regardless of their age. The school system expected students to learn English language on their own. Their focus was teaching ESL students only basic skills such as the alphabet and numbers. In those years, there were no bilingual programs, dual language programs or English language learner programs designed to enrich the language skills of ESL students like there are today.

Despite my placement in kindergarten, I progressed in my academic work and was promoted to the third grade by the end of the year. Although I was challenged by my English language skills, I functioned well in other courses. I had good math and science skills, which I had acquired in my previous education in Mexico. Learning the English language was difficult for me, but not impossible. I was determined to learn it.

In order to make good academic progress, my parents enrolled me in four different schools at various times during the day. This accelerated my learning of the English language during my first year in the U.S. My day began by attending my elementary school from 7:45 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. I received basic skills in this school. After 3:00 p.m., I walked about a mile to another school to attend an after-school program that focused on language acquisition through student-to-student conversations. This program also included social and language enrichment activities for all students to include games,

crafts, and arts. This program lasted from 3:15 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sometimes, this program went a little later into 5 p.m. After this program, I attended a private school. This class started from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. This class focused on vocabulary and sentence structure, translation, and reading. This was my daily schedule from Monday through Friday.

Furthermore, on Saturdays, I attended another program from 9:00 a.m. to 2 p.m. This was an extension of the after-school program. On Saturdays, there were classes focusing on English, math, science, art, and physical education. This program entailed more language acquisition through arts and crafts and physical education activities. After successfully finishing these programs, the following year I was promoted to middle school, where I earned straight A's and a place in the National Honor Society. I successfully completed the 7th and 8th grade with high honors.

As I entered high school, I wished to expand my activities beyond the classroom. I participated in sports. Although I continued to focus on my classes, my grade point average was impacted by my focus on athletics. My average grade was only a "B," which was unusual for me. My focus was directed at playing football instead of academics. My efforts earned me football honors as an All-District Offensive Player and an All-District Defensive Player. My participation in football was essential to my professional and personal preparation because I learned so much from my teammates and coaches. It is while participating in football that I learned many team concepts and experienced sharing common goals. I especially learned how to deal with difficult people (other players) who had different opinions and philosophies about winning. I

further experienced being in the field under pressure and trying to overcome adversity. In my senior year, my football teammates jointly asked the coach to appoint me as captain of the football team, which he did. In the previous three years, the team did not win many games; however, during my senior year, we were successful in making the high school playoffs.

After the season ended, I earned an athletic scholarship to further my education at Tarkio College in Tarkio, Missouri, which was approximately a thousand miles away from my Tejano Town. Tarkio was a different environment altogether from my Tejano culture. Tarkio was very rural and Anglo, while Tejano was an urban town and predominantly Hispanic. While in college, I was elected captain of the football team. I was also successful in academics and was appointed tutor for various business classes and reading classes. Being a tutor to students who had been recruited to play football was an exciting thought. It seemed ironic, though, that as a second language speaker I was tutoring students who were first English language speakers and had attended school in the U.S. their entire lives.

Nevertheless, due to my academic success, the college assigned me as a reading tutor for new athletic recruits who could not pass the College Entrance Test for Reading. I was successful both in the classroom and in the football field. I also had other responsibilities that other students did not have. I was married with a family while in college. In other areas of college life, I became the Vice-President of my college fraternity (TKE). I was part of the founding committee, which received its initial charter from the national organization. My college years were successful, and after four years, I

graduated with honors (cum laude) and a double major in accounting and business administration.

As I finished my undergraduate work in Missouri, I came back home and was hired as an accountant for the Tejano Town. In a short time, I was promoted through the ranks to internal auditor, revenue manager and interim finance director. During my tenure in city government, I completed two master's degree programs at Tejano Town University. One was in public accountancy (MPA), and the other was in business administration (MBA). While in graduate school, I also earned my certified public account (CPA) license.

Upon completion of my second masters' degree, the Dean of the School of Business at Tejano Town University asked me to teach a governmental and municipal accounting course at the university. The experience as an adjunct faculty member acquainted me with what was needed to be a good teacher, thus giving me the desire to pursue a career in education.

At this time, I had been in the business environment for my entire professional career, and I had been successful. I was a CPA with two masters' degrees, governmental experience, and now teaching experience. Although I had been successful in city government, when new opportunities in education became available, I pursued them. Two positions opened up in Tejano ISD: an internal auditor and a business manager. I knew from reading the newspapers that Tejano ISD had financial problems. They also had never had an internal auditor. Creating a new function in the school district with problems appealed to me since I had created the same function in the city. I submitted

my application and interviewed for both positions. The search committee felt that I had the skills for a business manager, and I was hired as the Business Manager/CFO for Tejano ISD.

The culture in the school district was different from the culture in city government. A nurturing environment and educational opportunities were promoted. This appealed to me. Teachers and staff felt like they were working in a family-oriented atmosphere that was different from the business environment where I had worked. Being an only child, I welcomed the idea of a family-oriented environment. This was a good fit for me. However, at 31 years of age I was considered the new kid on the block, as everyone else had been with Tejano ISD over 25 years. Longevity and tenure in the school district was very important to Tejano ISD, and my appointment was seen as a deviation from that tradition. I had not spent 25 years in the district or come up through the ranks. Nevertheless, I was unanimously appointed by the Board of Trustees.

People often say that there is more than one way to get to Rome. I took a business path to the superintendency instead of the traditional educational path. Most superintendents begin as teachers, go on into administration, and later in their careers enter the superintendency. I came up through the business ranks and came into the superintendency after spending 12 years as chief financial officer in Tejano ISD. Throughout these years, I encountered experiences that further prepared me for the superintendency.

My first experience with the superintendency came in 1995 when I had just been appointed Business Manager of Tejano ISD. I met my first superintendent, Mrs. Ayala,

who immediately became my mentor in the education industry. I experienced many good and challenging times during her three-year tenure. She inspired me and asked me to improve every facet of the business operations of the district. Not only did she want to improve the business office, she challenged me to improve educational processes through business policies and procedures. She provided me with a great deal of support in my endeavors. This was an ideal situation for me. Mrs. Ayala was a person who was known for her focus on accountability in all of her work. She expected strict accountability of the business department and provided strong support in getting things improved.

Prior to her tenure as superintendent, the district had financial problems. When she came in as superintendent, she expected these problems to be corrected in a short period. I knew that I could live up to those expectations and did. She expected accountability, and we worked well together to improve the district. I was very comfortable with our shared commitment, and I was blessed with having a supervisor who supported my department and wanted our team to succeed in everything that we did.

Superintendent Ayala had many positive characteristics as an administrator. She supported and cared for her staff, but held them accountable. She was also politically perceptive and fiscally conservative. She was sympathetic when working with teachers because she believed that teachers held the most important position in the district. However, whether it was a teacher or anyone in the district, she was firm when they had

substandard performance. Moreover, she influenced her administrative cabinet to hold their staff to the same standard.

In dealing with the Tejano ISD Board, she was wise in developing relationships. She was a very special individual who influenced my philosophy of education and management. Before coming to Tejano ISD, my philosophy as a CPA was about finite numbers. It was all about the bottom line. Superintendent Ayala was responsible for teaching me to see things beyond the bottom line. She taught me how to lead with my heart. She would say, “There is no denying the facts, but you must make decisions with your heart too.” This was a major shift in my thinking, and it has allowed me to look at things in a different matter. What I learned from her I continue to use in my decision-making process today. Unfortunately, this dream relationship did not last long.

Just three years after her appointment as superintendent, Mrs. Ayala retired from Tejano ISD. Most district staff did not expect this announcement, but things were changing in the district. The voters had passed the single-member district election process. This model required board members to be elected from his or her individual district rather than district wide. Each board member now had their own agenda, and the communication between the superintendent and the board was challenging. Superintendent Ayala had a tougher time getting things done in the district. Moreover, during this tough time, she assigned me more duties, ones beyond the usual purview of a business manager. She added operations, transportation, personnel, technology, compliance, and food services. Virtually all operations with the exception of curriculum and instruction were under my responsibility. I became a highly visible person in the

district and the community. With these added responsibilities, I not only worked alongside Superintendent Ayala, but also had a great deal of interaction with the Board of Trustees.

As Mrs. Ayala retired, the board appointed an interim superintendent, Mr. Watson. He came recommended from the state association of superintendents. He was a retired superintendent who was hired to lead the district while the board conducted a superintendent search. Dr. Watson was an experienced administrator who seemed to care for children. He would say, "If you make a decision with the children in mind, you cannot go wrong." Moreover, he was able to work with and motivate the existing cabinet from the previous superintendent's term. I was a member of this cabinet, and he relied on me for business decisions. These included developing the budget, calculating the tax rate, recommending teacher salary increases, and implementing a districtwide provision offering free breakfast and lunch program to all students, since over 82% of the students were eligible.

However, Superintendent Watson quickly learned of the board governance problems. With the move to single-member districts, board members began advancing their own agendas and publicly embarrassing administrators. Moreover, the board did not want the superintendent to sit alongside them during the board meeting. They wanted the superintendent to be seated at a lower level. It seemed the board wanted to send a clear message that they were in-charge. Soon problems began to surface between the superintendent and the board. Superintendent Watson lasted only three months at Tejano ISD, as the board moved quickly to select a new permanent superintendent.

The incoming new superintendent, Dr. Young was young, a first-time superintendent, and unlike the last two permanent superintendents, he was not an internal hire. Dr. Young came from a smaller district than Tejano ISD. He was the third superintendent in three years. Prior to this time, Tejano ISD had the same superintendent for over 20 years.

Superintendent Young had been hired specifically to improve the academic performance of Tejano ISD children. His strengths were curriculum design and instructional delivery whereas mine were finance and management. We complemented each other, and we both shared a commitment to improve student success. However, we were considered by the board and community to be “young” administrators. During Dr. Young’s tenure, he dealt mainly with student underperformance and criticism from the board focused on his youth and inexperience as a superintendent. Moreover, the board meetings were challenging, and at times, it seemed like an inquisition. Administrators were drilled at the podium, and morale suffered as a result. Working in this Tejano ISD culture became extremely challenging. The relationship between the board and Superintendent Young deteriorated. It took its toll on Dr. Young, and he left the district.

More of this political instability was still to come. After Dr. Young left the district, a number of interim superintendents followed. The first interim superintendent, Dr. White, was a retired individual who had been superintendent at various districts, including the other school district in Tejano. Dr. White was well respected and the board gave him the flexibility and authority to make personnel changes, including hiring central office administrators from outside of Tejano ISD. This created conflict as the

veteran administrator and the newly hired administrators did not always get along. These personnel conflicts, along with continuing governance problems, contributed to the retirement of Superintendent White. As problems continued, the board changed strategies and recruited the next three interim superintendents from the Tejano ISD administrative team.

The next interim superintendent was Ms. Morales. She was a long time educator in the district. Although she was an internal hire, part of her 30+ years of experience also included working with the neighboring district and the local university. Furthermore, she was a local leader who had played an active role in the development of many city programs. Superintendent Morales' most significant action was the demotion of Mrs. Garza, the executive director over curriculum and instruction and longtime colleague. This was different from other reassignments; traditionally in Tejano ISD, insiders did not reassign other Tejano ISD insiders. This time, the demotion came from a superintendent who had worked alongside the person being reassigned. This administrative move intensified the internal politic conflicts, and the organization continued to deteriorate. Moreover, this move brought about problems between the board and Superintendent Garza. The board governance problems intensified to the point where Superintendent Garza walked out of a board meeting. Shortly after this incident, Superintendent Garza was reassigned to her previous position, and another interim superintendent was hired.

This time the board did not use an external recruitment organization for the search, nor did they seek letters of interest from internal candidates. Instead, the board asked me to become the fourth interim superintendent. I was concerned about the

political and board governance problems, but I felt a sense of loyalty to serve as superintendent because of the years I had spent in Tejano ISD. As interim superintendent, I tried to organize the district by filling several needed positions, continuing the campus improvement planning process, and finalizing the district budget. Nevertheless, the competing agendas among the board members continued, and at times, it was difficult to navigate through the board politics. However, I tried to work in the best interest of the district. When the board began the search for a permanent superintendent, I applied; I felt that the board was pleased with my work. However, they decided to seek an outside candidate for the position.

Eight months after I was placed in the position of interim superintendent, the board hired Dr. Gongora. He was an experienced administrator in the area of curriculum and instruction. However, Dr. Gongora had never been a superintendent, and he was not familiar with the Tejano ISD governance problems. Therefore, given his lack of experience at the superintendency, the board governance and micromanagement problems continued. Throughout his tenure, Dr. Gongora tried to work with the board and focus on the district; however, he seemed always to be in survival mode. He lasted only eight months, and again the board began searching for another interim superintendent.

Two other interim superintendents served over a period of less than six months. I was one of these. However, the board did not want to use the title interim superintendent and labeled my position as administrator in charge. I held this position for two months. The next interim superintendent was Ms. Garza, the administrator who had been

previously reassigned by Superintendent Morales. It was shortly after Ms. Garza became interim superintendent that she placed me on leave. This situation leads me to the hill at the university. I was angry, frustrated, and wanted answers. I did not understand why I was placed on leave and what went wrong with my career at Tejano ISD. Ms. Garza was not forthcoming with an explanation for four months. During this period, I had a hearing that only served as a means to express my disgust with the situation. The only reason that Ms. Garza gave me was that there were four board members who did not wish for me to return to Tejano ISD. Given this information from Ms. Garza and that I had a one year at-will contract; I did not have much legal standing. I did not have legal protection under Chapter 21 of the Texas Education Code that deals with educators and school district employees and volunteers. Chapter 21 does not apply to business managers since they are not required to have a teacher certificate. The board was not required to take any action on my contract. This was similar to being non-renewed. I felt that this would be detrimental to my career; thus, I negotiated with Ms. Garza. The agreement was that I resign from the district in exchange for a positive recommendation letter from the interim superintendent, Ms. Garza.

I promptly received the recommendation letter, and I left Tejano ISD at the end of my contract to seek a faculty position with Tejano University and begin a career as an education consultant. Shortly thereafter, I was hired as Assistant Superintendent for Business Services at Harris County Department of Education. Still, I remained with many unanswered questions and conflicting thoughts. Each day, I contemplated theories and rationale for Ms. Garza's and the board action. I thought about my actions and

possible shortcomings. I tried to make sense of something that made no sense to me. However, I did not have any tools for reflection. Reflection was not something I did, at least not in the focused ways that Schön (1983) and Cowan (2006) discussed reflection. Thus, I have designed this study to examine my reflections of the critical events during my tenure at Tejano ISD utilizing the reflective tools that Schön (1983), Argyris (1976), and Cowan (2006) suggested.

Statement of the Problem

Reflective practice has been utilized in many fields. Education studies have recommended that reflective practice be used to enhance the practice of (a) principals (Barnett & Lee, 1994; Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Contich, 2006; Fendler, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; McCotter, 2009; Wright, 2008); (b) teachers (Artzt & Armour-Thomas, 2002; Attard, 2008; Climent & Carrillo, 2001; Cobb, Boufi, McClain, & Whitenack, 1997; Ellison, 2008; Goodell, 2006; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Hellison & Templin, 1991; Krainer, 1998; Loughran, 2002; Margolis, 2002; Mayes, 2001a, 2001b; Moore, 2002; Rock & Levin, 2002; Rosaen, Lundeberg, Cooper, Fritzen, & Terpstra, 2008; Sebren, 1994; Sparks-Langer, Simmons, Pasch, Colton, & Starko, 1990; Steinbring, 2002; Swain, 1998; Ticha, & Hospesova, 2006; Ward & McCotter, 2004; Zeichner & Liston, 1996); and (c) counselors (Griffith & Frieden, 2000).

However, according to Short and Rinehart (1993), there has been little in the literature to support the use of reflective practice for superintendents and chief financial officers. Therefore, in this study I will examine my reflections on the critical incidents

and my experiences as a Hispanic chief financial officer and interim superintendent in a predominantly Hispanic South Texas school district.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to add to the literature about the use of reflective practice to improve professional development for superintendents and/or chief financial officers. Reflective practice includes three periods: (a) reflection-in-action – in the midst of action (Schön, 1987); (b) reflection-on-action – where one thinks back on the action (Schön, 1987); and (c) reflection-for-action – thinking forward to action (Cowan, 2006).

Research Question

This study was designed to address the following research question: As a Hispanic district leader, what are my reflections-in-action, reflections-on-action, and reflections-for-action from selective critical incidents during my 12-year term as chief financial officer and interim superintendent in a predominantly Hispanic community during the period of September 1995 to March 2006?

Methodology

The methodology used for my study was an autoethnography as defined by Ellis (1999). Wall (2008) said that an autoethnography starts with a story, and my study began with a story, and a number of other stories were identified in the critical events (Moss, 2008). For the study, I conducted interviews with my dissertation chair. Part of my study also included analyzing artifacts (Given, 2008), journaling (Janesick, 1999), and developing a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the critical events. I ensured trustworthiness in my study through reflective journaling (Janesick, 1999), data

triangulation (Kuzel & Like (1991), and thick description (Geertz, 1973). My positionality and context in my study were significant in this study, and also utilized reflective practice to identify the critical events during my tenure at Tejano ISD.

Analysis

As I looked back on my experiences, I used Mezirow's (2000b) critical reflection and the three types of reflective practice to include reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983), reflection-on-action (Schön, 1987), and reflection-for-action (Cowan, 2006) to analyze the critical events. I also identified disorienting dilemmas (Mezirow, 2000b) and other precursors to transformative learning. In addition, it was significant to my study to identify the critical discourse in order to identify and develop new frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000b) for my experiences at Tejano ISD.

Significance of the Study

My study will add to the research on reflection at the superintendency and the CFO level to the already existing literature on teacher and principal literature. It will further have implications for reflective practice as a course of study in the superintendent and the higher administration preparation courses at the university. It will also provide interim superintendents and administrators in charge with strategies to use for improvement in their job performance. The next chapter will outline the literature for this study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Auto-ethnographic writing begins with a descriptive narrative of events and activities that unfold within a particular culture and then develops into a reflective analysis of these events and activities to generate new insights and to enhance the researcher's sensitivity towards the knowledge gained in the process. (Duarte, 2007, p. 2)

I designed my story as a highly reflective and personal research. My autoethnography is a type of study that places me as researcher in the center of the narrative. I have used "I" as the sole participant in the study. I was the focus of my story, and this allowed me to reflect and engage in self-observation as part of the autoethnographic genre of research. As an autoethnographer, I took into account ethical and legal considerations, thus I created fictitious names for characters at Tejano ISD in order to protect the identities of the individuals participating in the study. In this chapter, I will define autoethnography and the connection to the literature.

The Autoethnography

According to Wall (2008), "autoethnography begins with a story," (p. 39) and in my case, my story is about the critical events I experienced as a chief financial officer and superintendent at Tejano ISD. Autoethnography is "an autobiographical genre of writing and research that has been described as a blend of ethnography and autobiographical writing that incorporates elements of one's own life experience when writing about others (Scott-Hoy, 2002, p. 276); a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context" (Reed-Danahay, as cited in Etherington, 2004, p. 139). Sparkes (2000) further stated: "Autoethnographies are highly personalized accounts that

draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (p. 21). Ellis and Bochner (as cited in Etherington, 2004) described the process of how researchers create an autoethnography:

As they zoom backward and forward, inward and outward, distinctions between the personal and the cultural become blurred, sometimes beyond distinct recognition. Usually written in the first-person voice, auto-ethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, personal essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. In these texts, concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness are featured, appearing as relational and institutional stories affected by our history, social structure, and culture, which themselves are dialectically revealed *through action, feeling, thought, and language*. (p. 140)

Moreover, Etherington (2004) stated that “autoethnography does not merely require us to explore the interface between culture and self; it requires us to *write* about ourselves” (p. 140). My autoethnography is a first person story of many critical events occurring during my time as a chief financial officer and interim superintendent. While my personal accounts of my experience happened over a 12-year period, my critical events were arranged by topic and not in chronological order with personal proverbs used in each of them. Thus, my autoethnography writing involved a kind of “recollection,” which is more than remembering. It is “remembering from the viewpoint of a fresh perspective....It is an opportunity to rewrite the family history by giving a different outcome, to recapture the original self (the acorn) and to reinvent the mature self and its culture” (Zohar & Marshall, as cited in Etherington, 2004, p. 146). My reflections were more than just remembering the events and/or providing an account of events. They were personal narratives linked to my culture and social context in Tejano ISD. They were reflective accounts that Richardson (2000) called:

Highly personalized revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their lived experience, relating the personal to the cultural...in telling the story, the writer calls upon...fiction writing techniques. Through, these techniques, the writing constructs a sequence of events...holding back on interpretation, asking the reader to emotionally “relive” the events with the writer. (p. 11)

My personal involvement in each of the critical events allowed me to tell my story from my perspective, a strength that Ellis (1999) identified. Wall (2006) further said that autoethnography allows the researcher to be in the best position to describe the situation, thus giving him a more accurate voice and representation. Ellis (1999) also added “that sociologists generate interpretive materials about the lived experience of emotions by studying their own self-dialogue in process” (p. 29); therefore, introspection can be used as a data source (Wall, 2006). During my tenure at Tejano ISD, I created multiple data sources in the form of reports, attending monthly board meetings, and living through many memorable events (Moss, 2008).

History and Development of the Autoethnography

According to Ellis and Bochner (2000), the term autoethnography research was first introduced by Hayano in 1979. He wrote about how to conduct and write ethnographies of their “own” people and the related methodology (Hayano, as cited in Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 99). According to Reed-Danahay (1997), autoethnographies “vary in their emphasis on the writing and research process (graphy) culture (ethos, and self (auto)” (p. 2). Many other researchers have categorized autoethnographies into two types: (a) analytical and (b) evocative. Anderson (2006) defined analytical autoethnography as that “ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher’s

published texts, and (3) committed” (p. 375). Some of the criteria outlined by Anderson (2006) included (a) that the researcher be a member of the social world being studied, (b) analytic reflexivity be conducted, (c) that there is narrative visibility of the researcher’s self, (d) that there is dialogue with informants beyond the self, and (e) that there is commitment to theoretical analysis. This type of autoethnography is closer linked to quantitative measures and positivism because of the analytical aspect and criteria for evaluation. This type of autoethnography is not the type of study that I conducted. Instead, I developed what Ellis (as cited in Anderson, 2006) called an “evocative or emotional autoethnography” (p. 374). In Ellis’ 1999 article, *Heartful Autoethnography*, she described autoethnography as

An autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Back and forth auto-ethnographers gaze, first through an ethnographic wide angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (Deck, 1990; Neumann, 1996; Reed-Danahay, 1997). (p. 673)

My study was an emotional autoethnography, and Richardson and Adams St. Pierre (2005) have identified criteria to evaluate this type of research. Some of the criteria identified include:

- Substantive contribution: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life?
- Aesthetic merit: Does the work have aesthetic merit?
- Reflexivity: How has the author’s subjectivity been both as a producer and a product of this text?
- Impact: Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to write? Does it move me to try new research practices or move me to action? (p. 964)

Primary Research/Participant in Autoethnography

Autoethnography is one of the ethnographic methods that rely on the researcher as a source of gathering data (Chang, 2005). For me, I was the primary source of data gathering. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (2008), ethnography is a social research that includes investigation, analysis, and interpretation. Furthermore, Hammersley and Atkinson (2008) stated that “all social research is a form of participant observation because we cannot study the world without being part of it” (p. 249). As the main participant on my study, I relied on my positionality in Tejano ISD to gather data and develop my autoethnography. According to Chang (2005), the “autoethnography pursues the ultimate goal of cultural understanding underlying autobiographical experiences” (p. 4). Dewalt and Dewalt (2011) added that the level of participation and observation is dependent on the role and the emotional involvement of the researcher. In this study, my role was that of the participant/researcher. “At the end of a thorough self-examination within its cultural context, autoethnographers hope to gain a cultural understanding of self and others” (Chang, 2005, p. 5). Doing an autoethnography is hard work, and it is an interaction of the self and the culture. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011) stated that “when researchers do *autoethnography*, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity” (p. 1). Moreover, “autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 1). In my study as the primary researcher-participant, I

looked back analytically at my epiphanies in the form of critical events. Through autoethnography, I used reflexivity to look back and forth on my experiences as chief financial officer and interim superintendent.

Reflexivity (Reflective Practice)

Reflexivity, like participant observation, is an important part of autoethnography. I used reflection-on-action, as identified by Schön (1983), to recount and write about critical events. In this phase of reflective practice, I looked back on my experiences and discovered that my knowing in action that I gained through experience and formal education, contributed to the outcomes and actions made as an administrator during this time. Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stated that an

autoethnography is setting a scene, telling a story, weaving intricate connections among life and art, experience and theory, evocation and explanation...and then letting go, hoping for readers who will bring the same careful attention to your words in the context of their lives. (p. 208)

Utilizing reflection-on-action, I was able to set this study's context and write about my stories at Tejano ISD. While there are many identifications and uses of reflection and reflective practice, Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) have stated, "Reflective practice is viewed as a means by which practitioners can develop a greater level of self-awareness about the nature and impact of their performance, an awareness that creates opportunities for professional growth and development" (p. 19). York-Barr, Sommers, Ghere, and Montie (2006) added that "reflective practice is an active process and...that it serves as the foundation for continuous learning and more effective action in educational practice...and it requires high levels of conscious thought and commitments to change practice based on new understandings" (p. 11).

Adding to the conversation, Boud (as cited in Plack & Greenberg, 2005) defined reflection as “The cognitive and affective behaviors in which individuals engage that result in new insights and deeper understandings of their experiences” (p. 1546). After my experiences, I used reflexivity to better understand my experience and used it as an element of learning as suggested by Kolb (1984). Brookfield (1998) also suggested that reflection is important to being a critical, reflective practitioner. Reflection allowed me to critically review my decisions and actions. Moon (2004) added that “reflection lies somewhere involved with the notion of learning and thinking. We reflect in order to learn something, or we learn as a result of reflecting” (p. 186). While at Tejano ISD, I was able to not only learn about the day-to-day duties, but about myself, and my feelings and actions during my tenure. In short, every day was a learning and reflective opportunity. Moreover, Mezirow (as cited in Plack & Greenberg, 2005) stated that

reflection is not simply stopping to think and problem solve or plan for future action based on what you already know; rather, it is critically questioning the content, process, and premise underlying the experience in an attempt to make meaning or better understand the experience. (p. 1547)

Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) said that “reflective practice is improved performance” (p. 37).

Reflection-in-Action

In this study, I used reflective practice in the form of reflexivity and reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983). Specifically, I utilized two types of reflection identified in Schön’s *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*: (a) reflection-on-action and (b) reflection-in-action. Schön (1983) compared reflection-in-action to a big league pitcher trying to find his groove. He further said that this action happens

when we think about what we are doing in the mist of doing it (Schön, 1983). I used this type of reflective practice during my interviews with my dissertation chair. Schön (1983) added, “A practitioner’s reflection-in-action may not be very rapid. It is bounded by the ‘action present,’ the zone of time in which the action can still make a difference to the situation” (p. 62).

Explaining reflection-in-action when building a gate out of wooden pickets, Schön (1987) referred to this process as a “sequence of moments” (p. 27). My study and tenure at Tejano ISD were a sequence of moments. I reflected both in-action and on-action during the interview. Schön (1987) defined reflection-on-action as “thinking back on what we have done in order to discover how our knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome” (p. 26). Reflection-on-action occurred when I looked back to my tenure as chief financial officer and interim superintendent.

Reflection-on-Action

Schön (1987) looked at other practices such as architecture, medicine, music, arts, and counseling to make a point that these professions should engage in active reflective practice to enhance their traditional method of learning. He emphasized learning by doing. Schön (1987) described reflection-on-action as the process of looking back at a situation and determining how to deal with it. Schön (1987) stated that often we “pause in the midst of an action” (p. 26) similar to what Arendt (as cited in Schön, 1987) used to call a “stop and think” situation (p. 26). Schön (1987) pointed out the difference between knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action as the surprise or unexpected outcome that results from the routine response that arises from knowing-in-

action. That is, when we come to a situation that we have never encountered, it is something that we have not known or experienced; therefore, as we experience it, we update our knowing-in-action and are better equipped to deal with similar situations in the future. Schön (1987) called reflection-in-action a critical function that questions what we know and allows for experimenting about responses and solutions. According to Schön (1987), reflection-in-action is a process that can be delivered without being able to say what one is doing. He went on to say “the difference between reflection-in-action and other kinds of reflection is its immediate significance of the action” (Schön, 1987, p. 29). Schön (1987) further provided the example of a skilled performer such as a baseball pitcher who adjusts to variations upon surprises. Overall, the process of reflection-on-action is about looking back over an event after it has occurred (Schön, 1987).

This critical function was important to my study because as superintendents deal with the daily operations, political pressures, and leadership of a school system; they must question their knowledge and explore solutions, often in the midst of present controversy. In this study, I used both knowing-in-action and reflection-on-action to reflect on my critical events as a chief financial officer and interim superintendent and identify data to analyze the actions taken while reflecting in and on action.

Reflection-for-Action

Reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action were used during the interview portion of data collection to gather data for my autoethnography. Moving forward from these reflective practices, I used what Cowan (1998) called reflection-for-action; he called it anticipatory and a “reflection which establishes priorities for subsequent

learning by identifying the needs, aspirations and objectives which will subsequently be kept prominently in the learner's mind" (p. 37). Farrell (2004) suggested that this type of reflection is proactive. Killon and Todnew (1991), along with Yost, Sentner, and Forlenza-Bailey (2000) argued that reflection-for-action is the desired outcome of both reflection in, and on, action. Wilson (2008) further named reflection-for-action as reflection-for-the-future and defined it as "the act or process of reflecting on desirable and possible futures with the purpose of evaluating them as well as considering strategies intended to achieve the objective(s)" (p. 180). Reflection-for-action is a must do for superintendents because it is a way to forecast and plan ahead. While not formally used as such, I used reflection-for-action to predict my future action.

Wilson (2008) noted:

reflecting on what might be is one of the most powerful mental tools we have at our disposal. Without this ability to speculate about what might be, we would be constrained within the present or the past. If we lack the ability to reflect on the future there could be no plans, no hopes, no aspirations, no wants, no dreams and no desires. (p. 180)

Hatton and Smith (as cited in Yost et al., 2000) suggested that "all three types of reflections may occur for one event or incident" (p. 40). According to Hughes (2009), reflective practice is more than a process for capturing professional knowledge; it is about learning and change. During my study, all three types of reflective practice were used to recall critical events, to react and reflect during the interview, and to assess my future action. My study, according to McAlpine and Weston (as cited in Moon, 2004), involved "linking existing knowledge to an analysis of the relationship between current experience and future action" (p. 81).

Moon (2004) further suggested that the following outcomes could result from reflective processes:

- Learning, knowledge, and understanding;
- Some form of action;
- A process of critical review;
- Personal and continuing professional development;
- Reflection on the process of learning or personal functioning (meta-cognition);
- The building of theory from observations in practice situations;
- The making of decisions/resolution of uncertainty, the solving of problems;
- Empowerment and emancipation;
- Unexpected outcomes (e.g., images, ideas that could be solutions to dilemmas or seen as creative activity);
- Emotion (that can be an outcome or can be part of the process);
- Clarification and the recognition that there is a need for further reflection. (p. 84)

In my study, reflection-for-action was the process and action that contributed to possible future change in behavior. As an active researcher-participant, the reflective process was central to the development of this autoethnographic study, and its use in the study contributed to learning, critical review, understanding, action, and unexpected outcomes. Furthermore, Wade Davis (as cited in Chadwick, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) said that “auto-ethnography is storytelling that can change the world” (p. 765). For me, my world was changed as CFO and interim superintendent.

Oppressed as the Oppressor

Freire (1970) defined an oppressive situation as any “in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person” (p. 55). Breault (2003) suggested that “even the freest of societies must revise its list of oppressed people to include all those who are kept from reaching their potential by the attitudes or institutions of another group” (p. 2). An oppressed group can be found in almost any situation, and a way out of such situations is to employ change. Breault (2003) stated that for “meaningful change to occur, members of the dominant group need to recognize their institutions and attitudes as oppressive and learn to see themselves as potential oppressors rather than as beneficiaries of a preexisting, inevitable system” (p. 2). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970) stated:

The oppressed are not marginals...living “outside” society. They have always been inside - inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become beings for themselves. (p. 74)

During my 12-year tenure at Tejano ISD, many of the administrators were marginalized in a world of oppression. Breault (2003) added that “in order to be comfortable in the world that they created, oppressors learn to see the oppressed in a variety of ways, depending on the level of comfort their moral character will allow” (p. 2). The oppressive behaviors were the result of the political culture created by the new single member district, and the participants had achieved a level of comfort with that world because they had been a part of it in another governmental entity, the city of Tejano. “The oppressors further do not perceive their monopoly on having more as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves” (Freire, 1970, p. 59). Freire (1970)

pointed out that “oppressors...see others as competent and lazy...ungrateful and envious...the oppressed are regarded as potential enemies who must be watched” (p. 59). Breault (2003) argued that oppressors have a basis for their behavior and almost try to justify their actions by stating that this behavior comes from the past and that over time, it will be selected by choice. Part of the new philosophy from the board was that they saw their actions as justified and that the current staff would have to adapt. They saw themselves as a dominant, new board that created a new political culture. They often do not see their position as unjust and believe that what is different to them is morally or intellectually inferior, assuming a superior position for themselves (Dewey, as cited in Breault, 2003).

In my experience, I, like other administrators at Tejano ISD, was the victim of oppression as a result of what is referred to as the patron system. There were many notorious situations in South Texas that have seen many political machines or boss rule. Political machines or boss rule are described by Texas State Historical Association (2012) as “a clique of politicians” (p. 1) who had dominance over the political life of a town by influencing many votes of immigrants. This was important to my study because I had firsthand knowledge of a system of oppression that had long been in existence. The boss rule or the patron system was prevalent for many years in the border town of Tejano ISD. According to Anders (2009), boss rule was a structure that gained popularity in the second half of the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth century. “The patron system was a semi-feudal arrangement derived from Hispanic colonial roots” (Jordan, Bean, & Holmes, as cited in Nostrand & Estaville, 2001, p. 112). “The

patron was a political overlord who controlled ranch peones (peons) through social and economic patronage” (Nostrand & Estaville, 2001, p. 112). Pollinard, Wrinkle, Longoria, and Binder (1994) stated that the “patron system had lasting consequences for Anglo-Mexican American political relationships” (p. 50). In the early twentieth century, the patron system was part of South Texas where Anglo American and Mexican American bosses like Jim Wells, Archie Parr, and Manuel Guerra built county-based political machines on the foundations of the older Hispanic ranching system (Anders; Shelton; McCleskey & Merrill; as cited in Nostrand & Estaville, 2001).

Adding to the use of this system during the Wells Machine in South Texas, Anders (1982) stated:

Rather than offering an open society with abundant opportunity for improved living standards and upward mobility, the Wells Machine won Mexican American support by embracing the survivors of the Mexican elite and sustaining a social system to which most of the population was accustomed. That system was exploitative with the relegation of most Mexican Americans to low paying manual labor. Still the continuation of a familiar culture, the low level of overt racial discrimination, and the availability of paternalistic aid offered some compensations. Without proposing alternative benefits, later reformers would attack even these concessions to the hard presses populace. (p. 16)

According to Pollinard et al. (1994), “the peonage tradition helped shape the rise of political leaders as ‘bosses’ who maintained power with the support of the Mexican American community” (p. 51). The patron system influenced the South Texas leadership and political structure, and it was a structure in which many people in South Texas lived. It had an impact on the way organizations were run. This was important to my study because many people today feel that the patron system is used to guide managers and modern organizations in making decisions in South Texas today.

Moreover, *Peones to Politicos* was a study that examined class and ethnicity in a South Texas town from 1900 to 1987 (Foley, 1988). There are many parallels that were identified in this study that are applicable to my study of reflective practice for the superintendency in a South Texas town. Similar to the town described in *Peones to Politicos* (Foley, 1988), the majority of the population in the school district in my study was Hispanic and of Mexican descent. Furthermore, in Foley's (1988) study, the government was influenced by the cultural exchanges that came about due to race, the proximity to Mexico, and the economic conditions of the area. Foley (1988) discussed that the town was run by prominent ranchers and farmers who were Anglo Americans since 1900, and they were very oppressive toward Hispanics (Mexicanos as described then). Many of the norms and social activities were controlled by Anglos, and the Mexicanos were not allowed to practice or join the local clubs or chambers of commerce (Foley, 1988). The Anglos were oppressive, and many viewed themselves as a superior race and thought of Mexicanos as inferior, servitude people (Foley, 1988). The town described by Foley had the same feel and culture element as that of Tejano ISD, and there were many family and community connections to other South Texas towns over the same period.

The environment in that South Texas town, as described by Foley (1988), was that people respected people who had struggled and made it through the hard times. It was not enough to get along, you had to prove yourself and make it through the rough times. This was certainly the same situation at Tejano ISD because everyone in the Tejano ISD had to prove themselves to the political machine presiding over the town.

Foley (1988) narrated that Anglos felt privileged that they had overcome adversity and the Mexicanos had not. This was also important to my study because Anglos in Tejano ISD were privileged and had inherited the land and businesses. According to Foley (1988), Anglos generally viewed Mexicanos as dirty, lazy people who could not be trusted to do a job. Foley (1988) further said that Anglos also thought of Mexicanos as wasters of money because they were irresponsible with their money, and were not as intelligent as they were. This depiction of the Anglo sentiment was very important to my study because it suggests that Mexicanos have to be good enough to satisfy the Anglo establishment, better than the Mexican counterparts and other Mexicanos in the community. The Anglo sentiment has been established for more than 100 years now. It is still in existence, but more subtle today. Unfortunately, it is what the Mexicano and Anglo youth have learned through the example given by the leaders in the community. Having this perspective in mind, one can frame the application to the context of the superintendency as we review how this perspective is prevalent in politics and the manner in which decisions were first made by the Anglos in charge and later by Mexicanos in charge who became the oppressor for their own kind.

Foley (1988) also made a distinction between the perceptions of Mexicanos by Anglos and by Mexicanos. Some of the Anglos classified Mexicanos as either peones or their perceived better class. Peones were working class Mexicanos who worked the land. The other Mexicanos were the more educated “Spanish Mestizo,” often from the elite class, who were in the border town (Foley, 1988, p. 47). The peones were more oppressed by the Anglos who were seen as the patrones feared for their power. This is

important to my study because I felt this power and intimidation while living in Tejano and later on while working at Tejano ISD. Many older Mexicanos accepted this fact of life and respected the patrones who would exploit them to gain control, power, and money (Foley, 1988). This type of feelings was experienced by my parents while working for members of the Tejano political machine. The views of the older established community members were that “Mexicanos could not run the city and schools as well as Anglos” (Foley, 1988, p.49). They further felt that “Mexicanos lacked the know-how. They also agreed with a notion that many Anglos have – that Mexicanos cannot be leaders because they do not allow their own people to succeed and rise” (Foley, 1988, p. 49). Foley’s sentiment is applicable to my study because I experienced these comments growing up and going to school in Tejano ISD.

A quote from older Mexicanos was:

Mexicanos don’t make good leaders. They are too envious of each other. They will never follow one of their own kind. They will criticize him and refuse to support him because they do not like another Mexicano to be higher. (Foley, 1988, p. 49)

This sentiment has prevailed for the last 100 years by first-generation Mexicanos leading to a tendency of setting lower expectations for the Mexicanos. This was important to my study because Tejano ISD was very much like the town described by Foley (1988); and while growing up, similar comments were told to me by parents, family, teachers, and often community leaders.

According to Foley (1988), inferiority was accepted by the Mexicanos in the economic and political areas, but they did not see themselves as inferior in terms of culture. Many of the Mexicanos expressed their pride in the stories, music, ballads, and

other popular activities in the town and would create safe havens of colonias (neighborhoods) of which they were very proud (Foley, 1988). The Anglos would see this as an opposition to their wish to Americanize their way of living. According to Foley (1988), “to Americanize in a cultural sense is to accept the idea that a Mexicano and his ways were inferior” (p. 51). Mexicanos could not take advantage of the economic conditions; neither could they accept inferiority (Foley, 1988).

Two important events in the Foley Study pointed out that in the rancho area; many Mexicanos became sembradores (land workers) or contractors (contratistas) in the early day (Foley, 1988, p. 86). These people were the links between the Anglos and the Mexicanos and often used their influence to try and become rich on the sweat of the Mexicanos, or La Raza as often they were called. In this town, in the early years of the century, there were political leaders of Mexican descent, as was common across South Texas. In the 50s and 60s, the town started to allow Mexicanos to have positions other than sweepers and janitors. It was not until the early 70s that Anglos sought to allow educated Mexicanos to enter the political arena for school boards and city councils (Foley, 1988). This initiative was propelled by two major events in the 60s: the Education Act of 1965 and the poverty programs (Foley, 1988). A number of political movements began in this decade, and groups were formed to oppose the Anglo establishment as well other groups that formed political alliances (Foley, 1988).

Although these alliances tried to recruit Mexicanos who, according to Anglos, were capable of leadership positions, there was tension among them. Some of the Anglos believed that the power had gone to the Mexicanos’ heads and they could not handle the

newfound power (Foley, 1988). Many of the Mexicanos who became leaders in the community experienced conflict with subordinate Mexicanos because the subordinate Mexicanos viewed the leader Mexicanos as vendidos (sellouts) (Foley, 1988). Moreover, they were viewed as “token” Mexicanos who carried out the will of the Anglos (Foley, 1988). They were in a tough situation because the Anglos did not fully trust them and the Mexicanos thought that they were not being well represented (Foley, 1988).

Nevertheless, Foley (1988) said that there was “a sentiment...that whether it was the Anglos or the Mexicanos, they were not representing the interest and they thought that things would not change in the school system until they had a Mexicano Superintendent” (p. 171). A number of problems existed, and the community and board members felt that they needed a Mexicano superintendent: this was the proposed solution to their problems. Foley (1988) stated that by the late 80s, boards began hiring Mexicanos as superintendents and problems arose due to the lack of trust among them. Furthermore, the trends and conflicts among the Anglos and the Mexicanos, and the various alliances in the community were not confined to the school board (Foley, 1988). Similar conflicts were prevalent at the city council, made up of all Mexicanos, and the county government, where the county judge and a commissioner were at odds over social services and juvenile courts (Foley, 1988). The oppressive behavior, the boss rule, the rise of Mexicanos to the local school board, and political influence at Tejano ISD, were connectors to both Tejano ISD and my study.

Politics in the Superintendency

Politics is an element that has continued to be part of the superintendency.

According to Blasé and Blasé (2002), “Politics refers to decisions related to the allocation of values for a given society or social organization; that is who gets what, when, and how, among other things” (p. 7). Iannaccone (1991) further stated that

politics are the process by which a society’s persistent social values are translated into policy...The translation of conflicting social values into policies requires a set of arrangements by which a particular society governs itself – its constitution, especially its processes for policy-making. (p. 467)

The decisions made at Tejano ISD were marked by political change. The board imposed macropolitics while the district staff enacted micropolitics.

Moreover, Blasé and Blasé (2002) identified the differences between macropolitics and micropolitics of education. Macropolitics refers to the “external relations and environments at the local, state and national levels” (Willower, 1991, p. 442), and micropolitics (Blasé, as cited in Blasé & Blasé, 2002) refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve the goals in organizations. Iannaccone (1975) coined the phrase micropolitics of education and said that it was “the politics that takes places around schools” (p. 347). In my study, Tejano ISD was surrounded by political pressures and influences. There were many interest groups that tried to influence the superintendent and the board. These groups had different logics of action and are part of the micropolitics identified by Bacharach and Mundell (1995). Blasé (as cited in Blasé and Blasé, 2002) further stated that organizational power and politics are the “drive train” of the organization (p. 10). Tejano ISD was driven by politics over many years, and in my study, it was the force that

brought about many critical events. Marshall and Scribner (1991) have identified a three-part equation around politics: management, people, and actions. These three parts include concepts such as power relationships, conflict, and policy processes. These three elements were present at Tejano ISD and were part of the change in leadership and governance for the district. In my study, some of the same concepts that Marshall and Scribner (1991) identified to make a distinction between studying bureaucratic management and micropolitics of education were

- Ideologies and values of subsystems of teachers and administrators in schools
- Boundaries and turf
- Maintenance of bureaucratic myths
- Policy remaking site level implementation
- Mobilization of bias in organizational life
- Reality creation in organization as a study of power
- Privatization of conflict. (p. 350)

Tejano ISD experienced the “strategies by which individuals and groups seek to use their resources of authority and influence to further their interest” (Hoyle, 1986, p. 256), which is important to my study because these strategies were used to influence the superintendency and the district. These strategies, referred to by Ball (1987) as the “arenas of struggle” (p. 19) were used to establish board policy and directives to the superintendent. Blasé and Blasé (2002) added that “micropolitics are defined by its nature; it typically refers to the immediate, ongoing, dynamic interaction between and among individuals and groups, and such interaction occurs at all levels of public

education—the national, state, and local levels” (p. 9). Pfeffer (as cited in Blasé & Blasé, 2002) proffered that a combination of the formal policies and informal structure and processes make up the development of the formal organization. In Tejano ISD, the formal organization was affected by the approved policies that were influenced by the political structure. Also, during the time of change in governance, the district experienced a disconnection of political preferences and formal policies that is similar to gaps in value preferences between the community and the local school board as identified by Le Doux and Burlingame (1973).

Such change in preferences, as outlined in the Iannacocone’s Lutz Model (Le Doux & Burlingame, 1973), leads to a series of activity patterns such as:

- 1) A long period of stability
- 2) A noticeable change occurs in the socio-economic makeup
- 3) Different values among community and board
- 4) Resistant to change by board and superintendent
- 5) Action to elect new representatives
- 6) Political conflict
- 7) Superintendent may be removed. (p. 49)

This gap leads to changes manifested in politics and conflict between the informal and formal relationship between the superintendent and the board. As structures, policies, and processes form the organization, there are interested groups that often try to influence the superintendency. For my study, there was a difference in values between the board and the district leadership that lead to changes in the superintendency.

Moreover, there was a long period of instability as seven superintendents were hired in a 12-year period, and political conflict persisted in Tejano ISD. Such conflict also brought about conflict among different interest groups.

In a Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000) study of the superintendency, it was found that over half of the superintendents reported that pressure groups that tried to influence board decisions existed in their communities. Moreover, Glass et al. (2000) stated that over 51% of the superintendents responded that they felt considerable stress in the position, and 62% of the superintendents reported spending three or fewer hours communicating with the board. In a similar study, Sutton (2008) found that over 59% of the superintendents responding were in considerable or great stress, and over 38% said that local politics was a disincentive to staying in the position.

Education, politics, and interest groups have crossed paths in the past. “There is a clear delineation between policy and practice,” says Paul Houston, executive director of the American Association of School Administrators and a former school superintendent (Pascopella, 2001, p. 40). According to Burlingame (1988), there is a competition in the power distribution between professionals over community wishes and the preservation of public good through the maintenance of community order (Burlingame; Tucker & Ziegler; as cited in Björk & Lindle, 2001). According to Pascopella (2001), “the board’s job is to talk about the whats...and the administration’s job is to talk about the hows” (p. 40). In addition, the focus of recent changes in the educational world suggests that there is a push for more accountability measures, while many current educators want things to remain the same (Cibulka; Ogawa, Crowson, & Goldring; as cited in Björk & Lindle,

2001). At Tejano ISD, there were many interest groups that sought to influence the whats, which were the policies of the district, but also the hows, which were the methods of achieving the policies.

A study by McCarty and Ramsey (as cited in Björk & Lindle, 2001) showed that boards are factional and the superintendent must work as a political strategist among the competing interests. This study further found that superintendents might be decision makers as long as they respect the status quo (Björk & Lindle, 2001). Furthermore, the American Association of School Administrators revealed that 90% of the superintendents in large urban districts identify interest groups exerting political pressure on board policy and operations (Glass, Björk & Brunner, as cited in Björk & Lindle, 2001). In addition, 57% or better of all superintendents reported the presence of active pressure groups (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, as cited in Björk & Lindle, 2001). In a study by McCarty and Ramsey (1971), it was found that 37% of superintendents were viewed as political strategists. In another study of four superintendents, Tallerico, Poole, and Burstyn (1994) found that the superintendent exited the position because the relationship of the superintendent and board continued to deteriorate between the whole and individual board members due to the “the intensity and perceived problematic nature of conflicting demands and influences, coupled with a non-so-subtle distaste of unreadiness for the pervasiveness of the political aspects of the superintendency” (p. 444).

In Tejano ISD, over a 12-year period, there were seven superintendents who vacated their positions, and their superintendencies were each marked by intra-board conflicts and politics as was identified in a superintendent study by Tallerico et al. in

1994. Many of these superintendents entered the superintendency to make a difference but ultimately morphed into what Blumberg (1985) described as, “a person who entered his profession because of a genuine interest in being an educator finds himself forced more as a politician than as a teacher” (p. 211). This was significant to my study because at Tejano ISD, the superintendent was not only viewed as CEO of the district; he/she was viewed as a political strategist. Tejano ISD had been a long-standing political machine or boss rule (Texas State Historical Association, 2012, p. 1).

According to Björk and Lindle (2001), the data suggested that superintendents have persisted in adopting apolitical strategies, which grow tensions with boards. Björk and Lindle (2001) further suggested that these actions can be explained by the nature of the professional culture, the inadequate preparation, and the limitation on methods used to ascertain superintendent’s roles in their work with boards. While superintendents and board interactions are often impacted by many variables, politics is a major source of stress and influence on the superintendency, as it was at Tejano ISD.

According to Petersen and Short (2001), one major relationship in a school district is that of the superintendent and the board president. This was the case at Tejano ISD because this relationship influenced the direction of the district. Tallerico (1989) has identified various relationship types between the superintendent and the board members, of which all were present at Tejano ISD. These are behavioral indications of board members as they related to the district and the support or lack of support for the superintendent. In a study of six district superintendents and 26 board members, it was found that there were a number of cluster categories identified (Tallerico, 1989, p. 218).

Some of these board-member clusters and inclinations toward superintendents can be categorized into three areas:

- Passive acquiescence – This type of cluster identified board members as those who relied on the superintendent. They also got their information through meetings, but they had low participation in the district. These board members limited their participation to regular board meetings, ceremonial events and referred any constituent inquiries to the superintendent and deferred to the judgment and recommendation of the superintendent.
- Proactive supportiveness – This cluster identified board members that supported the superintendent, but they had a high participation in the district. Their focus was to support and advocate for the district and the superintendent.
- Restive vigilance – This cluster identified board members as active in the schools, and they watched the superintendent operations closely. This type of board member personally visited the schools and the central office. They participated in external activities and also suggested ways of handling matters for constituent concerns. They also served as a control point for the superintendent's actions. (Tallerico, 1989, p. 218)

Tallerico (1989) identified additional patterns of their behavioral inclinations.

Passive acquiescent and proactive, supportive type of board members were found to be associated with a less controlling type of superintendent. This was the situation with most of the superintendents at Tejano ISD. The restive vigilant behavior was not associated with a less controlling superintendent, which Tejano ISD had not had. For many years, the district had a strong leader who controlled every aspect of the district. In my study, we saw a lack of this type of leadership; thus, the other type of behavior was more prevalent.

In addition, female board members were found to exhibit more restive behavior than male board members, and retired board members also showed proactive and restive behavior (Tallerico, 1989). Prior to my study, Tejano ISD did not have many female

board members, and during the change in governance, more female board members were elected. Retired board members were also elected during this time and exhibited this type of behavior. Passive behavior was not identified with retirees (Tallerico, 1989).

The Tallerico (1989) study also looked at three explanations for their actions. According to Tallerico (1989), there were three views of democratic concepts: (a) the board members theory, which viewed governance as grassroots democracy and representation through the legal authority; (b) democratic governance, which focuses on technological interpretation to get to the truth about educational issues by relying on the assumption that educators have the right to answer to the educational issues; and (c) an interpretation somewhere between the two assuming that there is a balance of control between the various constituents, legislative and executive levels. In Tejano ISD, board members were elected to gain representation and participation in educational issues and allow for more constituent involvement.

Tallerico's (1989) study additionally discussed interpretations of roles of superintendents and board members. Tallerico (1989) found that passive acquiescent and proactive board members believed in the technological interpretation by relying on superintendent expertise. Less controlling superintendents believed in a shared interpretation by accepting the notion of accountability to the elected board members, and restive board members believed that they needed to be in control of policies. In Tejano ISD, the board had previously been more passive acquiescent; however, during this study, a change in the political climate and governance yielded a more restive vigilant board.

Moreover, Tallerico (1989) identified the value premises that explained their behavioral inclinations and interpretations. Issues of character and trust were also issues among the superintendents and board members, and the “restiveness of vigilant board members came from their lack of trust of the superintendent” (p. 222). There was an apparent trust issue at Tejano ISD that was primarily due to the instability, the political involvement, interest groups, and the history of the city of Tejano being a political machine. Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) said that “perceptual differences often create difficulties between boards and superintendents...and that neither intends to act in bad faith, but each may believe that the other is less than honest and fair” (p. 140). This was the situation at Tejano ISD. There were misconceptions and perceptions about each other that fostered the communication gap and trust differences. Board members in general have personal values and often do not trust the superintendent; this was the situation at Tejano ISD. On the other hand, proactive, supportive board members were found to support the superintendent’s integrity (Tallerico, 1989). This element was missing at Tejano ISD.

Lastly, Tallerico, (1989) outlined that the explanatory powers of the organization are derived from two general interpretative models: (a) the agenda building paradigm and (b) the negotiation and exchange process. The agenda building paradigm is the main explanation for the behavioral inclinations outlined by Tallerico (1989), and it was true at Tejano ISD. This concept of agenda building identified the decision-making process at Tejano ISD because it defined the direction of the district, the policies (the what), and the methods of accomplishing things (the how).

The other interpretative model is negotiation and exchange, which relates to identifying the social process of agenda building and the negotiation taking place between the two. Influence, control, and political bargaining takes place in the development of the agenda. In Tejano ISD, a negotiation and exchange of ideas and direction took place each month prior to setting the agenda. This exchange took an extraordinary amount of time and effort to accomplish it. Tallerico (1989) added that

there is considerable variability in the quantity and quality of time, energy, knowledge, self-confidence, ego-need, and allies that each brings to the social exchange and that superintendents and board members command bargaining resources that may be employed as currency in social exchange. (pp. 225-226)

Tallerico (1989) wrote that “the rules of the game...vary widely...and seem to be related to the interpretations of the role, democratic theory, and trust...and that political bargaining unpredictability, ambiguity, fluidity, and non-rationality are significant aspects of the negotiated-system metaphor” (p. 226). The game at Tejano ISD was influenced by its history of the political machine, its change in governance, and influences from internal micropolitics and interest groups: concepts often found missing from preparation programs.

Preparation Programs

Superintendent preparation programs are an important element in the success of the superintendency. According to Kowalski (2005), by the 1980s, “82% of the states had promulgated laws or policies that required officeholders to complete a prescribed program of graduate study and subsequently obtain a state-issued license (or certificate) to practice” (p. 1). According to a 2007 study by the American Association of School Administrators, “public education faces a crisis unless the recruitment, development, and

retention of the school superintendent is addressed” (Sutton, 2008, p. 13). Eighty-five percent of superintendents surveyed in the same study found an inadequate supply of education leaders to meet the demands of the future (Sutton, 2008).

According to Hoyle, Björk, Collier, and Glass (2005), there have not been many studies focusing on superintendent preparation, and often these programs are merely extensions of principal preparation programs. In a study about the superintendency, Glass et al. (2000) reported that 8% of superintendents had earned a master’s degree, 24% had earned a master’s degree plus additional coursework, and 45% had earned a doctorate degree. Moreover, they found that of the superintendents surveyed, 74% of superintendents rated their experience as excellent or good, 24% as fair, and fewer than 4% as poor. Despite the participation in graduate programs and surveys, over the period of 1977 to 2003, many have criticized preparation programs; and, according to Thompson (1989) and Achilles (1988), the educational administration programs are “seriously deficient” (p. 7).

Therefore, according to Hoyle et al. (2005), there are three main weaknesses that superintendents have identified as problems with preparation programs and these include “lack of hands on supplication, inadequate access to technology, and a failure to link content to practice” (p. 7). Over the years, these three weaknesses existed at Tejano ISD despite its close proximity to a local university and their development of leadership programs. As a result, a number of universities and organizations have joined forces to improve preparation programs by revising course and curriculum content to reflect

superintendency demands, reconnect university programs to the field, and align strategies to university programs and school districts (Hoyle et al., 2005).

Superintendent preparation programs are also influenced by the professional standards and licensures by the states. According to the American Association of School Administrators (1994), there are eight overarching professional standards for the superintendency that include a framework for addressing preparation over strategic leadership and district culture, policy and governance, communications and community relations, leadership and organizational management and school finance, curriculum planning and development, staff evaluation and personnel management, and values and ethics of leadership. Having knowledge of these concepts while at Tejano ISD was critical to carrying out the duties of the superintendency.

Also, according to the Texas Administrative Code (TAC, 2013), there are eight professional standards that must be met to acquire the Texas Superintendent Certificate.

The eight standards are:

- “Learner-Centered Values and Ethics of Leadership. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.” (para. 2)
- “Learner-Centered Leadership and School District Culture. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students and shapes school district culture by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community.” (para. 9)
- “Learner-Centered Human Resources Leadership and Management. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by implementing a staff evaluation and development system to improve the performance of all staff members, selects and implements appropriate models for supervision and staff development, and applies the legal requirements for personnel management.” (para. 20)

- “Learner-Centered Policy and Governance. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context and by working with the board of trustees to define mutual expectations, policies, and standards.” (para. 30)
- “Learner-Centered Communications and Community Relations. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by collaborating with families and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.” (para. 39)
- “Learner-Centered Organizational Leadership and Management. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by leadership and management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.” (para. 51)
- “Learner-Centered Curriculum Planning and Development. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the design and implementation of curricula and strategic plans that enhance teaching and learning; alignment of curriculum, curriculum resources, and assessment; and the use of various forms of assessment to measure student performance.” (para. 62)
- “Learner-Centered Instructional Leadership and Management. A superintendent is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school district culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.” (para. 71)

These standards were also vital to the successful leadership of Tejano ISD. Some of these standards were used more than others; however, during this study, the policy and governance element was utilized the most.

Moreover, Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, and Kowalski (2005) stated that there are two dichotic types of professional and standard-based licensures that include changes to the preparation and licensing rules. They are, (a) make them more practice based and rigorous (Cooper, Fusarelli, Jackson, & Poster 2002, Murphy, 1994), and (b) allow

executives outside the education world to enter the industry (Broad Foundation & Fordham Institute; Hess; as cited in Björk et al. 2005). Tejano ISD was a district that hired superintendents from within its educational ranks, which was the typical praxis for other traditional districts, and Tejano ISD had not made changes to its recruitment practices in some time.

According to *The Manifesto* (Broad & Fordham, 2003), a publication by the Broad Foundation, the superintendency faces a leadership crisis and there are too many bureaucratic requirements that prevent qualified executives from entering the superintendency. It also criticized the current state of school leadership and the source of executive preparation and recruitment (p. 13). The Broad Foundation (Broad & Fordham, 2003) identified specific recommendations to improve the state of the superintendency to include:

- Conventional certification requirements for public-school principals and superintendents should be radically reduced, and replaced by criteria that stress leadership qualities rather than simply an education background.
- Candidates for school-leadership positions should be recruited from inside and outside the education field, trained as necessary, and evaluated according to the results they achieve.
- School districts should play a major role in shaping the training of their school leaders—and obtaining that training from many providers, not just colleges of education.
- Principals and superintendents should be well compensated—at levels that encourage able people to assume and retain such posts.
- Superintendents and principals need sweeping authority over the personnel and operations of the schools for which they are responsible.

- Principals and superintendents who fail to produce the needed results after a reasonable period of time should not be retained. (p. 13)

Such recommendations followed a change in the knowledge and skills required to meet licensure standards. Hoyle et al. (2005) claimed that various organizations like the American Association of School Administrators (Hoyle, 1993) and the Task Force on Developing Research on Educational Leadership (NCAELP) (Young, 2002), have developed the framework for redesigning leadership programs. Furthermore, Björk et al. (2005) have identified the roles of the superintendent as being a teacher, scholar, manager, democratic leader, applied social scientist, communicator, and serving multiple functions. In Tejano ISD, the superintendent possessed all of these roles as well as the role of political strategist.

The ever-changing roles of the superintendency require specific skills. According to a study by the Council of Great City Schools (Broad & Fordham, 2003), districts that had improved their performance also experienced a clear vision, strong leadership, relentless focus, political acuity, personal accountability, effective management, and fortitude. For my study, this was important because these skills were required to navigate through the political instability.

Harris (2009), in the book *Learning From the Best* stated that superintendents participating in various interviews identified three main overarching best practices for the superintendency as setting the direction of the district, redesigning the organization, and developing people. Tejano ISD superintendents hired during the 12-year period wanted to change the status quo and shared these same sentiments. In addition, Harris (2009) stated “there is so much expected from the superintendent...and that the job has

become more complex, and so has the world...thus superintendents must remain focused on the needs of students” (p. 151). Most of the superintendents at Tejano ISD faced challenges that often distracted them from focusing on students; yet, they did their best to negotiate and direct the district’s emphasis on student improvement.

In summary, Harris (2009) stated that “superintendents are not mythical heroes; instead they are flesh and blood examples of heroes” (p. 4). Harris (2009) added that superintendents are the poster child for integrity and that as one superintendent excels, that superintendent should share ideas so that others can be improved and advanced. Tejano ISD was a district where there was political conflict and challenges in the superintendency, and this study will allow other researchers to compare and advance future studies dealing with such issues. The methodology and methods used in this study will be outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The stories we write put us into conversation with ourselves as well as with our readers. In conversation with ourselves, we expose our vulnerabilities, conflicts, choices, and values. We take measure of our uncertainties, our mixed emotions, and the multiple layers of our experience....The text is used, then, as an agent of self-understanding. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 748)

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain the methodology used to conduct this autoethnography study, which is an interpretive, qualitative research study. According to Merriam and Associates (2002), "Learning how individuals experience and interact with their social world, the meaning it has for them, is considered an interpretive qualitative approach" (p. 4). Therefore, I attempted to understand my lived experiences as a Hispanic male chief financial officer and interim superintendent in a predominantly Hispanic school district in the southwestern region of the United States. There is little research that describes the use of reflective practice at the upper administrative levels, specifically the superintendency (Short & Rinehart, 1993). There is, however, research that supports the use of reflective practice for (a) principals (Barnett & Lee, 1994; Blasé & Blasé, 2001; Contich, 2006; Fendler, 2003; Lambert, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004; McCotter, 2009; Wright, 2008); (b) teachers (Artzt & Armour-Thomas, 2002; Attard, 2008; Climent & Carrillo, 2001; Cobb et al., 1997; Ellison, 2008; Goodell, 2006; Hatton & Smith, 1995; Hellison & Templin, 1991; Krainer, 1998; Loughran, 2002; Margolis, 2002; Mayes, 2001a, 2001b, Moore, 2002; Rock & Levin, 2002; Rosaen et al., 2008; Sebren, 1994; Sparks-Langer et al., 1990; Steinbring, 2002; Swain, 1998; Ticha, &

Hospesova, 2006; Ward & McCotter, 2004; Zeichner & Liston 1996); (c) counselors (Griffith & Frieden, 2000); (d) nurses (Dunfee, Rindflesch, Driscoll, Hollman, & Plack, 2008; Keatinge 2002; and (e) dentists (Fitzgerald, Dent, Seale, Kerins, & McElvaney, 2008; Modifi, Strauss, Pitner, & Sandler, 2003).

Reflection is important for any professional to be successful. Concerning education, “Becoming more reflective about their practice is an important way for educational leaders to reveal their assumptions and to make better informed decisions” (Barnett & O’Mahony, 2006, p. 499). Thus, my study adds to the literature on reflective practice in education and is important to superintendents and other high-level district officers who need to employ reflective practice as a means to make better-informed decisions, leading to school improvement. Therefore, one of the two theoretical frames for the study is reflective practice as defined by Schön (1983). The other theoretical frame, Mezirow’s (as cited in Brock, 2010) transformative learning, will be discussed later in Chapter V.

There are three types of reflections: (a) reflection-in-action, (b) reflection-on-action (Schön, 1983), and (c) reflection-for-action (Cowan, 2006). These processes are independent of each other, and they do not happen simultaneously. Rather, they have a time element that separates them and makes each of them stand on their own. In describing reflection-in-action, Schön (1983) states that “both ordinary people and professional practitioners often think about what they are doing, sometimes even while doing it” (p. 50). Opposed to reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action “refers to the process of making sense of an action after it has occurred and possibly learning

something from the experience which extends one's knowledge base" (Eraut, 1994, p. 146). Extending from these two previous reflection practices, Cowan (1998) developed the concept of reflection-for-action. Killion and Todnem (1991) used "the term reflection-for-action to describe how professionals (i.e., clinicians) can anticipate problems and strive to continually improve their practices by asking: How can I do it better next time?" (p. 61).

As a district leader, it is important to utilize reflection in the daily practice of administration. However, although studies have been conducted on the ways teachers, counselors, and principals have utilized reflective practice in their education settings to improve their practice, there have not been studies of the use of reflective practice by central office administrators such as chief financial officers and superintendents.

Therefore, my specific question for this study is: "As a Hispanic district leader, what are my reflections-in-action, reflections-on-action, and reflections-for-action from selective critical events during my 12-year term as chief financial officer and interim superintendent in a predominantly Hispanic community during the period of September 1995 to March 2006?"

Methodology

In addressing this research question, the methodology used was autoethnography. Autoethnography is a methodology that focuses on "highly personalized revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their lived experience, relating the personal to the cultural" (Richardson, 2000). I used this setting by immersing in reflection to develop my personal interpretation and stories regarding my experiences.

My study, however, focused on *my* reflections-in-action, reflections-on-action, and reflections-for-action, focusing on memorable (Moss, 2008) as well as critical events (Brookfield, 1988) during my tenure as a district leader. Furthermore, interpretations of my reflections were situated in the related literature that was discussed in Chapter II.

Data Collection

Consistent with interpretive studies, my data collection included (a) interviews, (b) artifact reviews, and (c) reflective journaling.

Interviews

According to Fontana and Frey (2000):

Interviewing is inextricably and unavoidably historically, politically, and contextually bound. As many have argued convincingly (Atkinson & Silverman, 1997; Fontana, 2002; Hertz, 1997b; Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; Scheurich, 1995) interviewing is not merely the neutral exchange of asking questions and getting answer. Two (or more) people are involved in this process, and their exchanges lead to the creation of a collaborative effort called the interview. (pp. 695-696)

The type of interviewing used in this study was not conventional in that I was interviewed by my dissertation advisor, similar to a study conducted by Boys (C. Clark, personal communication, 2010) in which Clark, the dissertation advisor, interviewed the student, Boys, about memorable moments (Moss, 2008) and critical incidents (Brookfield, 1988) as a means to engage in reflective practice. In discussing interviewing, Patton (2002) described three types of interviews: “the informal conversational interview, the general interview guide approach, and the standardized open-ended interview” (p. 342).

Informal conversational interview. Patton (2002) stated, “The informal conversational interview relies entirely on the spontaneous generation of questions in the

natural flow of interaction, often as part of ongoing participant observation fieldwork” (p. 342). This type of interview is also called an “unstructured interview” (Fontana & Frey, as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 342). Furthermore, according to Burgess (1984), “an unstructured interview is similar in character to a conversation” (p. 314).

General guide approach. “The general guide approach involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before the interview begins” (Patton, 2002, p. 342). This is also often called a semi-structured interview. According to Fontana and Frey (2000), “an unstructured interview can provide greater breadth than other types of interviews” (p. 652). “The conversational interview offers maximum flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate, depending on what emerges from observing a particular setting or from talking with one or more individuals in the setting” (Patton, 2002, p. 342). This is often called a semi-structured interview. Patton (2002), referring to Fontana and Frey, explained that although you can use an interview guide in an informal conversation, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation and guide the interview.

Standardized open-ended interview. Patton (2002) stated that, “The standardized open ended interview consists of a set of questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence and asking each respondent the same questions with essentially the same words” (p. 342). This is primarily used in formal program evaluations and not in conversation types of interviews.

With respect to my study, I utilized a semi-structured interview technique for all of the interviews. A semi-structured interview is one that includes an interview guide as part of the interviewing process. According to Patton (2002):

An interview guide lists the questions or issues that are to be explored during the course of an interview. The interview guide provides topics or subject areas within which the interviewer is able to explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate on a particular subject. Thus, the interviewer remains free to build a conversation within a particular subject area to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversation style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined. (p. 343)

Using an interview guide allowed flexibility for my study in that the interviewer could follow a list of questions and alter the order of the interview as needed. The important part of the semi-structured interview for my study was that it allowed the interviewer and me to focus on a predetermined subject matter, while maintaining the flexibility to explore areas that were brought out during the interviews. This guide included the use of a series of questions to advance the reflection practice interviews. The guide included a series of questions, some of which were adapted from Pultorak's (1993) reflective questioning. These questions addressed reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The reflection-for-action occurred during data analysis.

Although Schön (1983) identified these reflective practices to be independent of each other, I often went back and forth among the types of reflective practice. Reflection-in- action occurred in the moment of the interview, allowing me to reflect as Schön (1983) stated "in the midst" (p. 62). This is similar to the example that Schön (1983) explained in his work regarding a baseball pitcher who reflected and acted in the moment while delivering each pitch. Furthermore, reflection-on- action also occurred

during the interview. Part of this process allowed me to reflect on actions during the critical incidents that occurred while I was a chief financial officer and interim superintendent. This is what Schön (1987) explained as looking back on what we have done in order to discover how knowing-in-action may have contributed to an unexpected outcome. In this moment, I reflected on my previous thinking and actions.

The interview began with biographical information as well as contextual information about the district, the community, and my positions in the district. The next phase of the interview included questions regarding reflection-on-action, which allowed me to reflect on my actions as interim superintendent and chief financial officer. Although the interview began with reflection-on-action, there was a recursive process between reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. That is, the interview began with my reflections on my actions while an administrator at Tejano ISD.

My advisor guided the interview through reflection-on-action questions (as adapted from Pultorak, 1993). These questions focused on bringing about reflections on my past administrative experiences. However, to address reflection-in-action, my advisor also asked reflection-in-action questions. This allowed me to reflect in the moment of the interview about the questions and began what Schön (1987) and Hughes (2009) called capturing professional knowledge to learn and change. For example, a reflection-in-action question might be: “How do you feel now about the ethical dilemmas of a situation?” This allowed me to think about the situation in the present moment and begin to move into reflection-for-action that would allow me to consider alternative approaches in addressing a similar situation in the future. These reflection-in-

action questions were repeated at random by my advisor. The third component of reflective practice, reflection-for-action questions occurred during data analysis and these included questions about future behavior.

These following possible interview questions focused on reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action.

Reflection-on-action. The following questions focused on reflection-on-action:

1. What are some of the critical incidents that you experienced as interim superintendent and chief financial officer?
2. What were essential issues of these critical incidents?
3. What, if anything, would you change about how you dealt with the critical incidents?
4. Was the way that you handled the critical incidents successful? Why?
5. Which conditions were important to the outcome?
6. What, if any, unanticipated outcomes resulted from the critical incidents?
7. Do you think the issues in the critical incidents were important to participants in the critical incidents? Why?
8. Can you think of other alternative approaches in addressing the critical incidents that might have improved the outcome? What might these be and how might they have improved the outcome?

Reflection-in-action. These questions followed-up questions to the reflection-on-action questions:

1. How do you feel now about this critical incident?

2. How do you feel now about your actions now?
3. How do you feel now talking about these issues now?

Reflection-for-action. These were follow-up questions to the reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action questions:

1. So, what have you learned from your experience?
2. Can you think of other alternative approaches to dealing with the critical incidents that might improve the outcome? Why?
3. What behaviors would you change if you were to relive this situation?

The interviews consisted of three two-hour sessions. Moreover, the interviews were tape recorded, videotaped, and transcribed. Videotaping, along with audiotaping, allowed me to engage in reflection including: (a) reflection of what is said, (b) how it is said, and (c) the body language used during the interviews. An important piece of the interview is for both my advisor and me to be able to view my expressions and body movements during the interviews. Patton (2002) contended that “it is important to attend to both verbal and non-verbal communication” (p. 290). In other words, “It is not just what you say; it’s how you say it” (Washburn & Hakel, 1973, p. 140).

Artifact Review

In addition to interviewing, artifacts (i.e., board agendas, minutes of board meetings, etc.) were reviewed. According to Given (2008):

Artifacts are created in a context and, thus, they must be studied within such context. Artifacts provide a rich source of data. They are a source of information not available from interview or observational data. Artifacts can be used to support or challenge other data sources and literature, to generate or confirm hunches, and to help provide for thick description of people and/or settings. Artifacts are things that societies and cultures make for their own use. They

provide material evidence of the past by documenting and recording the past. Artifacts can provide historical, demographic, and (sometimes) personal information about a culture, society, or people. Insights into how people lived, what they valued, and believed their ideas and assumptions, and their knowledge and opinions are revealed in artifacts. Artifacts include any items that are produced by a culture in their settings. They may include public documents, tapes, reports, films, journals, meeting minutes, and others. Artifacts can also be researcher generated. They shed light on important aspects of a person, society or culture, therefore enriching any study. (pp. 24-25)

The specific artifacts reviewed included recorded video tapes from board meetings at Tejano ISD, any accompanying reports related to the board agenda items, and the related board minutes during the time I served as interim superintendent between 2005 and 2006. This allowed me to reflect-on-action and reflect-in-action (Schön, 1987) on the critical incidents (Brookfield, 1988; Moss, 2008) while reviewing the artifacts. It should be noted that each Board of Trustees meeting is videotaped for the public, and they are available on the Internet for public view. The video tapes of Tejano ISD board meetings and files such as board meeting agendas, minutes, and staff reports for each meeting were accessed via Tejano ISD's Internet website.

Journals

Journals were also used in the collection of data. After the interviews, I recorded my reflections of the interviews and reflections of the artifacts reviewed, including board agenda, board reports, and board minutes. Janesick (1999) contended that journal writing is a "powerful heuristic tool and research technique" (p. 506). Moreover, she stated:

The notion of a comprehensive reflective journal to address the researcher's Self is critical in qualitative work due to the fact that the researcher is the research instrument....It is a data set that contains the researcher's reflection on the role of the researcher, for example. It is a great vehicle for coming to terms with exactly what one is doing as the qualitative researcher....Journal writing personalizes representation in a way that forces the researcher to confront issues of how a

story from a person's life becomes a public text, which in turn tells a story. In other words, how do the researcher and the participant or participants in the project move from a blank page to sentence after sentence of description of a given experience, the basis of qualitative work? (Janesick, 1999, pp. 506-507)

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important in naturalistic study. Lincoln and Guba (1985)

explained the importance of trustworthiness by asking the following questions:

How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of? What arguments can be mounted, what criteria invoked, what questions asked, that would be persuasive on this issue? Conventionally inquirers have found it useful to pose four questions to themselves:

1) "*Truth value*": How can one establish confidence in truth of the findings of particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?

2) "*Applicability*": How can one determine the extent to which the findings of a particular inquiry have applicability in other contexts or with other subjects (respondents)?

3) "*Consistency*": How can one determine whether the finding of an inquiry would be repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?

4) "*Neutrality*": How can one establish the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are determined by the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not by the biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives of the inquirer? (p. 290)

Trustworthiness in my study was ensured through reflective journaling, data triangulation, and thick description (Kuzel & Like, 1991).

Reflective Journaling

Another of way of achieving trustworthiness is journaling. According to Janesick (1999):

The art of journal writing and subsequent interpretations of journal writing produce meaning and understanding that are shaped by genre, the narrative form used, and personal cultural and paradigmatic conventions of the writer who is either the researcher, participant, and/or co researcher. (p. 507)

I utilized journaling after each interview to document reflections about the interviews. This trustworthiness measure allowed me to produce meaning about my reflections.

Data Triangulation

Another form of trustworthiness is data triangulation. Kuzel and Like (1991) stated that:

Triangulation is an approach that utilizes multiple data sources (e.g., archival, interview, video), multiple informants (e.g., various key informants), and multiple methods (e.g., participant observation, focus groups), in order to confirm or validate research findings. A primary goal of triangulation is to gather multiple perspectives so as to gain a more complete understanding of phenomena. (p. 2)

To gain a more complex understanding of my actions as an interim superintendent and chief financial officer, I used multiple sources of data including, interviews, artifacts, and journals.

Thick Description

Another technique used for trustworthiness is thick description. In explaining thick description, Geertz (1973), drawing from Ryle stated:

From the point of view, that of the textbook, doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary and so on. But it is not these things, techniques, and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, “thick description.” (p. 6)

Furthermore, Ponderotto (2006) has pointed out that there are other researchers such as Denzin (1989), Holloway (1997), and Schwandt (2001) who have advanced and/or expanded the term “thick description.” For my study, I used Denzin’s (1989) definition of thick description:

Description is the art of giving an account of something in words. In interpretative studies, thick descriptions and inscriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts or problematic experiences. These accounts often state the intentions and meanings that organize actions....A full description or complete thick description is biographical, historical, situational, relational and interactional. But not every thick description is full or complete. Some thick descriptions focus on relationships, others on individuals, some on situations, and so on. (pp. 98-107)

Therefore, I utilized thick description that focused on biographical, historical, situational, relational, and interactional data. In specific, I focused on providing an account for my reflections during my reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and reflection-for-action.

Context and Positionality

Tejano Independent School District

My study took place in a South Texas town, which I have called Tejano. It borders with Mexico and is approximately 200 miles away from any other major border town or metropolitan area. The 236,000 plus population in this town is 98% Hispanic, deriving its culture from both the United States and Mexico (U.S. Census, 2010). This cultural influence extends to all aspects of the city, including schools, businesses, and the overall community. As Vasquez (2006) asserted, “The border between the U.S. and Mexico does not always allow one to develop their own identity...[There is an]

overwhelming blanket of two cultures that one cannot run from: American and Mexican” (p. 12). This is the “border culture” as defined by Paredes (1993).

In the town of Tejano, people interact with each other and are mutually influenced by both this American and the Mexican culture, this border culture. Moreover, this culture influences the daily routines of the two local school districts. Tejano Independent School District, the focus of this study, is the oldest school system in Texas. The population of the school district is representative of its city. The school district has approximately 25,000 students in average daily attendance as defined by the Texas Education Code (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2007a); 99.5% of the students are Hispanic and over 96.5% economically disadvantaged, according to the Texas Education Agency (2007b). Additionally, Tejano ISD has 30 schools in the district: six high schools, four middle schools, and 20 elementary schools (TEA, 2007b). This makes Tejano ISD one of the largest employers in the town, employing over 3,900 employees, which includes custodians, clerks, teachers, cafeteria aides, principals, and administrators (TEA, 2007b). Moreover, Tejano ISD is an inner city school district. It is one of the densest districts in the state of Texas with 25,000 students within a 13-square mile radius (TEA, 2007b). Most of Tejano ISD students live in a relatively small geographically area.

This area is very close to the border. Therefore, most students and citizens have family ties to those living across the border in Mexico. Many of the students are recent immigrants with no formal schooling. Other students are also second and third generation immigrants. Moreover, many of these students and their families have

economic and immigration challenges. For example, Tejano town's average household income is \$35,958 with 30% of its population being below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Furthermore, 38% of the population is under 18 years of age, and 28% of the households are of Mexican descent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Therefore, with these statistics in mind, the town of Tejano is challenged by both increasing growth and poverty.

Furthermore, the culture in Tejano as well as the school district mirrors the culture of their governing bodies. The makeup of the city council and the school district board is predominantly Hispanic. There have been changes in the last 30 years in the political arena of the local government. Due to corruption and scandals in city government, the city moved from a mayor to a city manager. Specifically, due to nepotism and misappropriation of funds, the city adopted a charter that required the city manager to have governmental experience outside of the city, thereby eliminating local corruption. This change began to influence other governmental entities. More and more career politicians were not reelected, and changes began to occur at city council, the local school boards, and the county government. By the late 1990s, Tejano ISD implemented single-member district type of government in the school district. These two major changes created critical events in the history of the town of Tejano and Tejano ISD. Some of these memorable moments for Tejano ISD were analyzed during this study.

Another important aspect of the context of this study is the leadership of Tejano ISD over the last 30 years. Tejano ISD has had 10 superintendents in the last 30 years

with eight coming within the last 10 years. The relationship between the board and superintendent has a contentious history. I served for over 12 years as a chief financial officer and interim superintendent during this period.

Primary Participant: Jesus J. Amezcua

I am the primary participant in this study. I am a certified public accountant (CPA), and I was the chief financial officer for the Tejano Independent School District for a period of 12 years from September 1995 to June 2006. During the period of August 2005 to March 2006, I was interim superintendent. In addition, I was administrator in charge from December 2006 to February 2007. It is important to know that the district school board did not name an interim superintendent and chose to name an administrator in charge

In preparation for these roles, I earned a bachelor's degree in business administration with a double major in business administration and accounting, three masters' degrees, a CPA license, and over 20 years of experience. These educational qualifications allowed me to take on many challenges and positions in an effort to improve the school system, including my positions as chief financial officer and interim superintendent. Because of my experience and education, I was also appointed by the local university to teach college (graduate and undergraduate) courses in the area of business administration and accounting. I am proficient in two languages, and I am able to teach university courses in both English and Spanish.

During my tenure at Tejano ISD, there were many events that were marked by politics, ethical dilemmas, and controversies. These critical incidents (Brookfield, 1988) were identified through the interview with my dissertation advisor

The Interviewer: “Chair”

According to Patton (2002), the other major participant in a conversation is the other person. I selected my dissertation chair to interview me similar to a study by conducted by Boys (C. Clark, personal communication, 2010). I felt that due to her experience in the field, we could go in-depth to gain a greater understanding of the critical incidents (Brookfield, 1988) of the time as chief financial officer and superintendent. My dissertation chair has rich experience in public schools and is able to understand the challenges and the politics I encountered at Tejano ISD. My professor is not associated with Tejano ISD in any form. For purposes of my study, I referred to her as “chair.” My chair’s professional background includes being a former principal, administrator, and current university professor in a major university in Texas. Next, I will discuss the data analysis for my study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a recursive process that occurs during and after data collection. According to Sandelowski (2004), “Data collection, preparation, analysis, and interpretation are processes that overlap temporally and conceptually in qualitative work” (p. 372). Data analysis is a reforming or reorganization of the data so that qualitative data can be interpreted and knowledge produced. Sandelowski (2004) stated:

Qualitative analysis is a means to knowledge production that involves the separation of elements of data according to some a priori or data-derived system.

Analysis involves the break up or breakdown of the data. Analysis or the breaking up or down of qualitative data, requires that they be prepared in a way that will accomplish the purposes and intended product of the research project. (p. 372)

My analysis included examining the data through reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action and reflection-for-action, which I discussed previously in this chapter. To begin the reflective process, I identified from the interview transcriptions, critical incidents during my tenure as chief financial officer and interim superintendent. Moss, Springer, and Dehr (2008) in their study of reflection in teacher professional development stated, “We used ‘critical incident’ to mean memorable in terms of perception of failure or success. We used these binary distinctions as a way to ensure that teachers conceptualized one experience they considered a failure without focusing only on failure” (p. 499).

Moreover, Dunfee et al. (2008) referred to Brookfield’s description of a critical incident as “an event (either positive or negative) that stands out as having particular significance for a learner” (p. 61). In my tenure as an interim superintendent, there were many critical incidents. Some were positive and some were negative. The identification of these critical incidents was the main result of reflection-on-action, looking back on a particular situation. Moreover, during the interviews, I did reflect-in-action. That is, I was thinking about my thinking as well as reflecting on my emotions around these critical incidents described during the interview. This reflection was captured as my chair, the interviewer, provided intermittent questioning about my thinking and how I was feeling in the interview moment. “To routinely stop and think in the moment,” is the way Arendt (as cited in Schön, 1987, p. 26) described this reflection-in-action.

In analyzing the data, the third type of reflective practice, reflection-for-action, was employed. Reflection for action means that I will consider my reflections from the previous two reflective practices: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action. Reflection-for-action informs my future thinking in action. This is what Hughes, referring to Schön's work, says will allow an individual to understand their action and their reflections in order to change future action. According to Yost et al. (2000), "reflection-for-action is the desired outcome for the first two types of reflection" (p. 40). Moreover, "reflection-for-action engages the teacher [and in this case, the superintendent] in reflection to guide future actions" (p. 40).

Reflection constituted data to be analyzed as well as an analytic tool to be used in the data analysis. Specifically in analyzing *reflection-on-action* data, I used open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to identify the major themes of the critical incidents by examining videotapes of the interviews, journal reflections, and artifacts. For example, these critical incidents may be political or social-cultural in nature, which would be consistent with the literature. Reflection-in-action served as an analytic tool to examine my thinking, emotions, and reactions through verbal and non-verbal cues. To accomplish this, I reviewed the video tapes that included the intermittent questioning by my chair, during the interviews about my thinking, feelings, and reactions. For my study, reflection-for-action was the result of reflection in and on action. Therefore, the reflection-for-action will be my attempt to influence my future action.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described autoethnography as my methodology for my study. My specific research question was: “What are the reflections as an interim superintendent and chief financial officer in a predominantly Hispanic school district?” Reflection has been recommended for other professions such as teachers, counselors, principals, nurses, architects, etc. There is a gap in the literature for reflection for superintendents. To address this gap, I further utilized the theories of (a) reflection-in-action, (b) reflection-on-action, and (c) reflection-for-action as I identified critical incidents during my tenure as interim superintendent and chief financial officer. I utilized interviews, artifacts, and journals to collect data. I used my reflections during data collection to identify critical incidents and identify the major themes surrounding the work of the interim superintendent and chief financial officer through reflection-on-action, reflection-in-action, and reflection-for-action. In the next chapter, I provide an analysis of the data collected during the interviews, the review of artifacts, and personal journals.

CHAPTER IV

ENTERING THE GAME

It was the 70s, and I was well acquainted with Tejano politics. Throughout my years in high school, I saw the mayor and many community leaders indicted and/or disenfranchised with the public. Corruption, politics, and change were in the news. Being in school, I heard many stories of political games in the city and the school district. As soon as I graduated from high school, I went out of state to attend college. After four years, I returned to the city of Tejano. I again began hearing the new politics surrounding the community. A new wave of change was in the air, and there were new leaders being elected. The community demanded more voice and participation. To this end, the community changed from a strong mayor type of government to a city manager type of government. In other areas of local government, incumbents were being challenged and in some cases, they were defeated.

As I returned to Tejano, I applied for various jobs, but I was not successful. Early that summer, I secured an entry-level internship job. I was hired by a private manufacturing company as a staff accountant. I was excited to have a job and happy to apply the knowledge that I had learned in school. However, this job was a temporary assignment, and I was still sending resumes to many organizations including the city of Tejano.

Later that summer, I was interviewed for a staff accountant at the city, but I did not give myself much chance because I did not know anyone at the city. It was widely known that in order to work for the city, you had to be recommended by someone from

within the organization as a political favor. Furthermore, I was not about to play the political game: That is, if I received a favor, this meant that I was in debt to someone. This could potentially be detrimental in the future. I did not want to play this game. Yet, most new candidates would pursue this relationship and were linked to someone within the city either through friendship or through kinship. First, I did not have any friends or relatives in the city. I had been away for four years. Secondly, I did not want to be appointed because of a political favor.

Nevertheless, I did not think that this interview would go anywhere. To my surprise, the hiring manager was from out of town, and he wanted someone from out of the city for the position. My boss was a person who believed in doing the work and not playing politics. We shared this common value, and I was hired as a staff accountant. During my eight-year tenure, I was able to improve my skills and contribute to the success of the organization. I was promoted several times and positioned myself for management. All of these achievements came while avoiding politics and the political games that often surround employees working in a government setting. However, there is a Mexican proverb: *“El que quiere nadar, se tiene que mojar.”* This means that if you want to swim, you must get wet. I was about to get wet.

Pregame: Prelude to Tejano ISD

It was a hot day in the summer of 1995. It was early in the day, and we were waiting outside a church. We were attending a funeral of a colleague in Tejano Town. I was a member of the city of Tejano’s finance department, and all of my staff was in attendance at San Luis Rey Church near a school called McDonnell Elementary School

(part of Tejano ISD). As we were waiting to leave the funeral, we started to talk about some of the latest news in the city. One of the most talked about events was the appointment of a new superintendent for Tejano ISD. Mr. Arroyo, one of my staff, immediately said, "I know her; we are lifelong friends." Other staff mentioned that she was succeeding a long-term successful superintendent and that she was the first female superintendent in the history of the district. Great controversy surrounded the district at this time because the district's assistant superintendent for finance was placed on leave due to allegations of impropriety and misappropriation of funds. The recently hired Tejano ISD superintendent was now looking to fill this vacant position. The district had also created a new position of internal auditor. The entire community was talking about these two positions and the new superintendent. There was a great deal of interest in the personnel decisions because they would begin to define the administration and future decisions.

As we left the funeral, I joked with Mr. Arroyo and said, "She should hire me to fix all of the district's problems." It was at that point that I started to think about the possibility of leaving the city of Tejano, where I had worked for the last eight years. A few weeks passed, and I decided to apply for both positions at Tejano ISD. My decision to apply was prompted by a disorienting dilemma that I experienced when I did not get a promotion at the city.

“Nadie Es Profeta Es Su Misma Tierra” (Dichos Frases y Refranes

Mexicanos [Dichos], 2008):

My First Disorienting Dilemma

I had been working in the city for approximately eight years, and all of the positions to which I was appointed were based on my merit and skills. I had been successful in all of my previous positions and had been systematically rewarded with promotions. I had moved from staff accountant to internal auditor and then to revenue manager. My latest position was assistant director of finance, and I was in line to be promoted someday to director of finance. In early 1995, the city’s director of finance decided to move to Austin, Texas, and the position became vacant. At that time, I had been the assistant director of finance for more than one year. The finance department was recognized as an excellent department and had received various awards from distinguished governmental finance associations.

As the director resigned, I was asked to be the interim director while a search for a new director was conducted. As interim director, I was responsible for the development of various financial plans for the city and was asked along with the city manager and other city officials and financial advisors, to lead the presentations to rating agencies in New York City on behalf of our city. I had become an expert regarding the city’s budget, audit, and financial matters. Many things were going in the right direction. I was continuing the tradition of excellence built by the previous directors; however, this was not enough to get the permanent appointment to the position. There is a popular saying, “Nadie es profeta en su propia tierra” (Dichos, 2008). This Mexican proverb says

that nobody is a prophet in his own land. I certainly felt that I had acquired the knowledge and skills necessary for the finance director position; however, the city leaders did not feel the same way. They opted to hire an outsider to fill the position of finance director.

Not being recommended for the position was disorienting to me because I felt that I had done everything necessary to be appointed to the position. The city manager did not agree with me, and he recommended a more seasoned individual to the position. The city manager felt that I was too young and that I needed more experience on the job. I struggled with his decision because I thought that I had earned it. I began to examine my preparation and critiqued the city manager's decision. Some of my colleagues tried to comfort me after the decision. They let me know how they viewed the decision. They felt that the city manager had made this decision to appease the banking community, which had been very critical of the city over the years.

The city manager's choice for finance director was an individual who was employed with one of the leading banks in the community. He did not have any municipal finance experience. While I felt that the city manager had not made a good decision, the new finance director had excellent experience as a bank executive with superb people skills. I was not happy with the decision. My friends and colleagues continued to say, "It is not you; you are just too young. Your time will come." They saw the appointment of the banker was based on politics rather than any shortcomings that I exhibited as a director. Despite their comments, I reflected on my experience and preparation and began seeking new roles and skills outside of the city.

After a Game Loss: Rotary Enters Into My Life

As I continued to examine my career path and preparation for future jobs, I was introduced to the Rotary Club by a colleague, the director of utilities. I did not know much about it, but I agreed to join. I began to get involved in community affairs and volunteered for various Rotary Club activities. I started to expand my networking skills beyond the office and the classroom. I participated in club events, including volunteering to review scholarship applications, to assist at health fairs, and to help with fund-raising functions and/other club activities. I explored and found new ways to improve as an individual by networking with other professionals. I became more involved in the community. My participation in the Rotary Club was important in my quest to become a chief financial officer as I gained more community consciousness, met other colleagues and professionals, and participated in civic activities.

By the end of the summer of 1995, I was ready to apply for the position of business manager. I had been working as the city's acting director of finance, and I had reached a high level of success at the city involved in important city operations and leading critical projects such as the city's bond sales, tax setting hearings, and financial contingency plans. I felt prepared to become head of a finance department. In city organization, the position is usually titled "finance director." In a school district's hierarchy, the position is named "assistant superintendent for business," "business manager," or "executive director of finance." I had been getting ready for this type of position for more than eight years; so I confidently submitted an application when the position became open.

While I was seeking a business manager position at Tejano ISD, the district was advertising for two executive level positions: business manager and internal auditor. I applied for both positions. I figured that the school district administration would hire from within the organization for the business manager since they traditionally recruited and promoted from within the organization. The other position was that of internal auditor, and it was the first internal audit function established in the history of the organization. Since the internal audit position was a newly created position, the district was actively recruiting outside of the district. I felt well qualified and confident that I could compete for the position of internal auditor more than the business manager position because of my previous experience in developing the internal audit function at the city of Tejano.

Game On: The Political Process for Admission

It was late in August 1995, and I was in a conference center at a local hotel in Tejano Town. The city of Tejano was having its budget workshops with the City Council away from Tejano City Hall to command a more relaxed atmosphere. The layout of the room included work tables, easels, charts, presentation equipment, and many handouts of financial data. Department directors were to present their department's operations and budget plan. I was in the middle of the activity because the finance department was responsible for facilitating the budget workshops and coordinating the presentations. Specifically, I was responsible for supporting the finance director and the city manager and making sure that all initiatives and decisions made by the Tejano City Council were properly tracked so that the final budget could be developed and financial impacts

revealed. The meetings were scheduled over three days. On the second day, I received a message from my office to call Ms. Santos. I did not know who she was. The finance director informed me that she was the secretary to the human resources director at Tejano ISD. I had not mentioned to him that I had applied for the positions. I pretended not to know the purpose of the call, and I did not engage in further conversations with him.

When returning the call, Ms. Santos informed me that the Tejano ISD Committee wanted to interview me for the internal auditor position. I was happy to hear that I was a candidate for the position. I agreed to the interview. As I showed up to the interview meeting, I was not aware that I would be interviewed by a committee. I was surprised to see the composition of the interview committee, which was made up of two Tejano ISD board members, Tejano ISD's external auditor, two Tejano ISD assistant superintendents, and one community member. The community member was the chief financial officer of the local hospital. The interview went well, and I anxiously awaited a call for a second interview.

“Como Te Ven, Te Tratan” (Dichos, 2008)

A week later, I received a call for a second interview with the superintendent, but the message was to interview for the business manager position. The committee felt that I was suited for the business manager position and recommended me to the superintendent. “Como te ven, te tratan” (Dichos, 2008). This proverb translated means, “the manner in which someone sees you is the way that they treat you.” They reviewed

my résumé and discussed my skills during the interview. The result was that I would be a good candidate for the business manager position.

The interview with the superintendent was set to be held in the “white house,” as the superintendent’s office was called. The superintendent’s office was a Victorian house built in the 1920s, and it was painted white and had pillars in front of the house. I developed a list of questions that I wanted to ask her because I was concerned about the district’s commitment to change and its desire to improve its finance operations. I was concerned about the perception of the district in the community, and it was widely known that the district’s previous assistant superintendent for finance was still on leave, pending an FBI investigation. I met with Superintendent Morales, and she was impressed with my résumé and asked if I was ready to come to the district. She further said to me, “The committee recommended you very highly, and I am going to recommend you to the board. Please do not tell anyone of this recommendation. This will be your first test of loyalty.” I was so excited to hear that I would be recommended that I forgot to ask my questions. She also asked me to be in attendance at the next board meeting of Tejano ISD.

The night of the board meeting, the Tejano City Manager was in attendance (there was a city contract on the Tejano ISD Board Agenda). We acknowledged each other as we met in the front of the Tejano ISD building. At that moment, I had not told him of the recommendation by Superintendent Morales. He did not stay long in the meeting, so he did not hear her recommendation for business manager and the subsequent board approval. Late in the evening, the Tejano ISD Board came out of

executive session and unanimously voted to approve me as the new Tejano ISD Business Manager. This day would mark the first of many critical events to come at Tejano ISD.

Game First Move: Reorganizing the Tejano ISD Finance Department

As I started to work at Tejano ISD, I learned of the challenges that I faced. I began to evaluate staff, the finance department procedures, and the functions that each staff member was assigned to do. The more that I checked and analyzed the department, the more I realized that there was a serious problem. The staff did not have the capacity to produce good financial information, including financial statements essential to the board of trustees' ability to make financial decisions. With every action that I took to evaluate the department, I learned that no one in the district would take a step without ulterior motives. In Spanish, this means, "No dan paso sin huarache" (Dichos, 2008).

"No Dan Paso Sin Huarache" (Dichos, 2008)

The process of evaluating the department was very interesting, and it took several days for me to come to any conclusions and several months to take any action. I encountered various setbacks that delayed my recommendations. One of these situations was when I asked for budget information from one of the budget analysts. I requested the budget calendar so that we could develop a process to allocate funds to schools. His response was, "We need to ask Superintendent Morales for her approval before we implement this process." He did not want to pursue this because it could cause problems for him in the future. He was used to a different process of budget allocation. Previously, providing funding to schools was more of a political process rather than a function of rational allocation. The culture of the district was that if the finance department would

allocate funds to the schools, they were in good standing with those schools; thus, there was a future expectation between them. That is, they did not take a step without an ulterior motive (“No dan paso sin huarache” [Dichos, 2008]). I continued to get this kind of response from the staff.

Another similar situation was when I asked the director of accounting for financial statements. He said, “We get those when the auditors come at the end of the year.” I then asked him if he knew the fund balance was for the district; he said, “The auditors tell us what the number is after they make all of the adjustments.” At that moment I felt frustrated and angry that the internal staff did not have the capabilities or the will to produce good financial reports. I could not believe what I was hearing from the director of accounting. He did not know what financial statements were or how to prepare them. He further did not have any motivation to develop a process to prepare them. His ulterior motive was only to survive politically by not providing information that could be used against him or the finance department. It is important to note that he had been a personal political appointment a few years ago by the previous superintendent after a recommendation from a board member. The director of accounting had an economics degree with little preparation in the area of accounting.

“Al Mal Paso, Dale Prisa” (Dichos, 2008)

As I completed my evaluation of the finance department, I concluded that I needed to reorganize the department and all of its functions. I had taken over a department that needed change in order to meet the new demands of the organization and the Texas Education Agency. In September 1995, Senate Bill 1 had been approved

by the Texas Legislature, and there were new requirements that the finance department had to implement. For instance, the legislation mandated a change in operations by implementing site-based, transparent, and accountable school district operations. The current organizational structure of the department needed to be adjusted in order to meet the new mandates. Superintendent Morales had given me the authority to make changes, but this decision required her written approval and a briefing to the board since it dealt with personnel assignments. It was not an easy task in an environment where personnel changes were not welcomed.

Once I made the decision to notify the superintendent and the staff about the reorganization, I waited for her approval for several weeks. Superintendent Morales waited for the right time to convey the news to the board. There were personnel changes, which were unpopular with some of the staff who were politically connected to board members and district administration (including the superintendent and assistant superintendents). There is a Mexican saying: “Al mal paso, dale prisa” (Dichos, 2008). This proverb means that you should not delay a potentially bad step. In this case, I knew that the reorganization would require several employees to be changed from their positions and potentially could lead to termination of employees’ employment. The plan also included the creation of two new functions in the finance department – risk management and fixed assets. They were to be created by moving current staff within the finance department to those positions. Risk management and health insurance were controversial issues since my first month of hiring, and I felt that these functions needed to be established in Tejano ISD. The district did not have a risk manager, but there were

many insurance issues that needed to be addressed. Furthermore, the fixed assets reconciliation was also an area of improvement identified by the external auditors, and the district needed to correct it before the end of the year. These two new functions were to complement the finance department and optimize the use of the internal staff in areas needing improvement.

Anticipating the New Year, I submitted my reorganization plan recommendation in early November 1995 to Superintendent Morales. However, the superintendent did not want me to implement the plan until she had a chance to brief the board. This briefing did not take place at the February board meeting. The initial presentation was made at the finance committee meeting, but the completed plan was submitted at the board meeting later in the month. Once approved, the personnel changes were made. Several staff members were reassigned, and functions were realigned so that the finance department was transformed into a highly effective department.

As I implemented the reorganization, I shared my plan with several internal and external colleagues to get their feedback. Most of them warned me about the culture in Tejano ISD, but they understood the rationale for the changes. The big test for the reorganization was going to come when procedures changed and affected the schools' administration. The primary concern for me was to make sure that this reorganization plan focused on providing support to the instructional programs and school personnel, as well as providing financial information to the superintendent and the Tejano ISD board. In a short period of time, the department began providing financial reports to school administrators, the superintendent, and the Tejano board.

“En Ningun Gallinero, No Deber Haber Más de un Gallo” (Dichos, 2008)

Months went by, and I experienced another disorienting dilemma. “En ningun gallinero, no deber haber mas de un gallo” (Dichos, 2008) is a Mexican proverb that means, “There can only be one rooster in a hen house.” When I was interviewing for the position earlier in the year, the superintendent told me that I was replacing the assistant superintendent for finance (out on administrative leave because of an FBI investigation). She mentioned that there was very little likelihood that he would be returning to Tejano ISD. A month after my reorganization, Superintendent Morales told me that she would be bringing back my predecessor at the beginning of July in another capacity. The former assistant superintendent still had one year left on his three-year contract, and the Tejano ISD board did not want to buy out his contract. They wanted for him to be brought back to work in the district in some capacity.

Superintendent Morales recommended that the administrator on leave (former assistant superintendent for finance) be brought back in a newly created role of assistant superintendent for risk management and fixed assets. This position was to report directly to the superintendent. This action was what I had been concerned about since I accepted the position. As Ms. Morales told me the news, I mentioned to her that it would be a challenge working in an environment where there are two employees from different departments overseeing a finance function. As she continued to give me the news, she also mentioned that he requested two of my staff to be assigned to him. One person that he requested was the budget analyst that I had reclassified as a risk manager. The other

employee was a budget specialist who had also reported to him under the previous organization structure.

I felt that this action was a no-win situation. If I agreed to the transfer of staff, the unsaid message to the staff was that the former assistant superintendent was now in charge instead of me. If I did not agree, I would be seen as a problem staff member who was not a team player who would not work with the superintendent. I felt that I did not have a choice. The request also came with a reclassification request to increase the compensation of these two staff members. Upon further reflection, I requested that the superintendent approve a lateral transfer with no change in pay or pay grade for the two individuals. She agreed and asked me to proceed with providing notice to the finance department staff. I brought in the two staff members individually asking them if they wanted to be transferred under the agreed conditions. The risk manager immediately agreed. He felt that the reclassification was a matter of time because he had been promised by the previous administration. Remember the saying “No dan paso sin huarache” (Dichos, 2008). This was another example of someone in the district not taking a step without an ulterior motive.

The other staff member, who was more interactive with other department staff, liked the department changes that were made. She did not want to be transferred. She was different from the risk manager in that she embraced the reorganization plan. Given that only one employee was transferred and that they still needed clerical assistance, Superintendent Morales approved a new secretarial position for the risk manager and the assistant superintendent for risk management and fixed assets. This move settled the

issue temporarily, but more critical events were to come in the near future as a result of his return to the school district.

Game Under Review: Tejano ISD and the Taxpayer's League

As I continued my career at Tejano ISD, prominent community members were very active in trying to influence the district in becoming more transparent and open to the public. Tejano ISD had been a district that had grown to be a mid-size district of approximately 24,000 students. At one time, it was the only district in Tejano Town, and its enrollment had peaked at 25,000 students. The boundaries were the city limits to the north and the Mexican border to the south. A small school district grew around the city limits. In the early 1960s, there was interest in merging the two districts because the smaller district did not have enough resources. The smaller district needed the larger district in order to provide similar opportunities to its students.

Over the years, the demographics changed, and the smaller district in the outskirts of town kept growing. By the late 1990s the small district was the same size as Tejano ISD and was projected to surpass it in enrollment. Now the larger district was the neighboring district, and they had growing conflicts in the district similar to Tejano ISD.

Furthermore, the community in the late 1980s went through a change in governance at the city. That is, the city changed from a strong mayor form of government to a city manager form of government. Before the 1990s, most Tejano Town chief executives and governing boards stayed in office for a long time, and the community seemed content with the political process. As the community began to see changes in the city, new groups began to emerge and become more participatory in the

political process. Some of these changes had impacted the neighboring district and the city, and now they were looking for Tejano ISD to make similar changes in governance.

Among the groups that began to influence the political process in the city and school districts included the Taxpayer's League, local political activists, and teacher associations. Some of the disorienting dilemmas that I experienced included these groups.

Influence From the Taxpayer's League: "Cada Loco Con Su Tema"

(Dichos, 2008)

There is another Mexican saying: "Cada loco con su tema" (Dichos, 2008). This proverb means every crazy person has his/her theme. The Taxpayer's League had its own theme and its own version of how to conduct business in Tejano ISD. The members of these groups were prominent members of the community who at one time or another were in good graces with the leaders of the community and the Tejano ISD board. That is, they were friends, colleagues, business partners, and/or members of the same social clubs.

The Taxpayer's League's theme was to influence Tejano ISD to change its budgetary and personnel practices. The League's main point was that the district was using taxpayers' money and that Tejano ISD should not be wasteful in its operations. The League focused on travel expenditures by the superintendent and his cabinet, the superintendent's discretionary funds, and the assignment of district personnel. The League also had criticized decisions made by the previous superintendent.

One particular disorienting dilemma that I experienced was when Mr. Faro, the spokesperson for the Taxpayer's League, came to the first meeting of the board after I was hired and signed up to speak during the public forum part of the meeting. The board meeting's first item was to hear from the public. A member of the Taxpayer's League had been attending this part of the meeting each month. The first board meeting for me was September 1995, and Mr. Faro criticized the board for past decisions. He was a prominent member of the community and was well respected in the business sector. He wanted for Tejano ISD and the board to make decisions in a more businesslike manner, report how it spent its money, and allocate more money to instruction rather than to administration. One of Mr. Faro's comments to the board was that the board should report expenditures by function to the public like other districts. In an attempt to deal with this request, Superintendent Morales requested a meeting with Mr. Faro. During this meeting, I was asked to provide information about the district's expenditures. The district was counting on my good reputation to show to the Taxpayer's League that Tejano ISD was utilizing sound business practices since the hiring of a new business manager.

Another disorienting dilemma was when the Taxpayer's League made accusations to Tejano ISD about the lack of transparency in its financial operations. During one of the meetings, members of the Taxpayer's League criticized the school board for not developing a budget that would provide information to the public about its finances. In the same meeting, they accused the district of hiring a new business manager to come in to fix its financial problems. The Taxpayer's League was convinced

that the district had not changed its ways because although a new business manager had been hired, the district continued making bad personnel decisions. The Taxpayer's League shifted its focus to personnel decisions and the number of central office personnel (especially the number of assistant superintendents). They claimed that the assistant superintendents were not needed.

The focus on assistant superintendents prompted the superintendent not to hire an assistant superintendent for business. Instead, a position of business manager was created. Tejano ISD went through constant criticism for personnel decisions, and one event that kept the focus on Tejano ISD by the Taxpayer's League was a grievance against the assistant superintendent for administration, alleged to have made inappropriate advances toward a human resources staff member. In the end, the grievance was settled, but the criticisms continued. Another assistant superintendent was criticized for the handling of the grievance. There were more problems at Tejano ISD, and the Taxpayer's League continued to bring them up at the monthly board meeting during the public forum section of the meeting.

Most department directors were required to attend the board meeting, and I would take notes during this time. The finance department had been the target of the criticisms in the past, and I wanted to make sure that there were no issues with functions or staff within the departments that I supervised. On a routine basis, the day after the board meeting, I would discuss the public forum comments with my staff to make sure that there were no activities or actions that would end up in the public forum. Although it was hard to determine what would end up in the public forum, we were all sensitive to

the public criticisms, and we would check with each other to make sure that we did not have any surprises.

As the Taxpayer's League began using the public forum to influence changes in the Tejano ISD decision-making process, two other major groups began to position themselves similarly. One was a group of concerned citizens, who worked to push for single-member districts for trustee elections. The other was the teacher associations, which began to participate more actively in the political process. The group of citizens was backed by a local law firm, the Taxpayer's League, and the teacher associations. They all wanted the board to change from an at-large system of electing board members to a single-member system.

These groups were advocating a more representative government. Tejano Town had gone to the at-large system of representation, and these groups were pushing for such change for the school district. The local law firm involved with this group also pushed hard by criticizing the lawyer who represented the Tejano ISD board. The teacher and employee associations also felt that by changing the system, there would be board member seats that could be filled with members who were sympathetic to the associations. Furthermore, the Taxpayer's League's interest was to change the board altogether and assist in electing members who would be more business-like minded individuals who favored reducing taxes.

In the next two years, after much involvement by these groups, Tejano ISD decided to make a change to single-member districts. Three members of the board were scheduled for reelection in early 1997. These three board members were long-time

members of the board and were viewed as part of the political stronghold of the district. Two were defeated. This marked the first time that the Tejano ISD board would have board members elected via the single-member district process. While the single-member district system was projected to improve governance and district operations, things were not going to get any better under the new board. The administration of Tejano ISD felt that chaos had come to the board from the public forum and that things at Tejano ISD would not be the same again.

Game Changer: Momentum Changes the Superintendency

With the change to single-member district elections at Tejano ISD, the superintendency was changing, too. The superintendent, Ms. Morales, had been appointed by the at-large board of trustees, and now with the majority of the board members wanting single-member district elections, the role of the superintendent was about to change.

For more than 20 years, Tejano ISD had one superintendent. He was the leader of the school district, and the at-large board was viewed as a partner of the superintendent. The superintendent and the board worked well together. The group formed a team of eight, which is what the Texas Association of School Boards promotes in its board training modules. The at-large board hired Superintendent Morales, the first female superintendent in Tejano ISD history. However, given the change in school district elections to a single-member district system, the community was changing, and with the newly elected single-member district board, the superintendent began to experience a number of critical events and disorienting dilemmas.

Changing of the Guard: “Juntos Pero No Revueltos” (Dichos, 2008)

The Tejano ISD and the superintendency were not the same after two of the new board members backed by the Taxpayer’s League had been elected. The prominent members of the League and the avid supporters of reducing taxes were now represented by two members of the board.

While the rhetoric seemed to fit the board discussion regarding the attorney’s contract, not all members of the board agreed on the selection of the board attorney. During board member campaigns, some of the candidates’ platforms were to remove the board and the attorney serving the board. Furthermore, there is Mexican saying: “Juntos pero no revueltos.” This proverb means that we are together, but not commingled. Members were together in changing the Tejano ISD board, but they had varying preferences regarding the attorney position. The board was together in changing the attorney and in reducing costs and taxes, but the trustees seemed to disagree on how to achieve these goals.

With support from two other members of the board, the two trustees supported by the Taxpayer’s League had a quorum and were able to start dictating policy to make changes in the way the district operated. One of these changes was the hiring of a new law firm to represent Tejano ISD. This new firm was well qualified but was perceived as being connected to the board members. The previous attorney was Tejano ISD’s attorney for multiple years and did not change her regular hourly fee. The new board now wanted a new attorney, and the board was willing to pay a higher hourly rate. The change in legal counsel had an impact on the superintendent and the finance department because

the attorney was involved on a routine basis with reviewing contracts and other business matters. I welcomed the hiring of the attorney because the previous attorney often interfered with superintendent and board decisions. This attorney seemed to want to provide opinions based on fact rather than politics. The superintendent, however, saw the new attorney appointment as another change to her control as superintendent. The administrative team also saw this change as the board trying to change further the culture of Tejano ISD. The superintendent assessed this action as one of the first decisions that would negatively impact Tejano ISD over the next three years.

Game Changer: The Effective Tax Rate is Adopted

As the change in legal counsel was completed, the district headed into the summer months, which is when the budget is prepared and reviewed by the board. Additionally, as business manager, I coordinated the preparation of the budget. Funding was projected to be minimally increased since the funding formulas approved by the legislature were not changing. The district was heading into the first year of the state biennium. The only impact in funding would come from the local tax effort by the school district. Given the state funding formula, the budget was prepared and balanced by utilizing any first-year cost savings to allow the district to use them in the second year of the biennium. The only changes in funding included the calculation of tax rates because of the funding formula. However, the Texas Education Agency had not provided clear direction to county appraisal districts on the calculation and publication of tax rates.

With the change to single-member districts, the board of trustees now included two board members, wanting to reduce the property tax rate. However, they were not familiar with the correlation of tax rates and state funding. The tax setting process for school districts was different from the city or county tax setting process. The changes in the law allowed for the district to calculate the tax rate based on available funding. In governmental entities other than school districts where values would increase, the rate that would bring in the same amount of dollars was called the effective tax rate. Many organizations, like the city, proposed to approve this rate to fund their budget. However, for school districts, the adoption of the effective tax rate would reduce the amount of state aid provided to the school district.

I recommended maintaining the same tax rate and not reducing it to the effective tax rate. However, the board approved the effective tax rate. I felt that this would bring chaos not just to the superintendency, but to the district because reducing this rate meant that Tejano ISD would lose more than \$3.5 million per year over the two-year biennium. The reduction in tax revenues was felt over the next four years, and the fund balance was reduced to dangerously low levels. It became a challenge to recover from that decision. Nevertheless, Tejano ISD reduced more staff and programs in order to meet its fiscal responsibility, but this resulted in the instructional program not having enough resources to provide an adequate curriculum, and learning opportunities for its students. I felt it would be challenging to recover from this situation, but Tejano ISD would be resilient.

Game Within a Game: A \$144 Million Bond

Tejano ISD had a number of instructional and facility needs. Despite the loss of revenue, the administration was able to reduce costs in personnel by increasing the teacher-pupil ratios and by suspending obsolete programs and administration services. While the district did realize a loss of revenue, the administration identified a number of facility needs over the same period of time. School buildings were old and needed repair. A needs assessment was conducted by an outside architectural firm, and a total of \$144 million worth of projects was identified. The district's quest was to improve the schools through a bond issue. This program would be the district's largest bond issue in its history, but it identified needed repairs, improvements, and upgrades to the schools.

This bond issue was a project that the board was willing to ask the community to support. As a business manager, I was asked to seek support of school personnel, the community, civic groups, and other organizations. This was a quest that Superintendent Morales and the board felt to be a priority for the district, and it would be a strategy to reduce some of the maintenance costs being charged to the general fund. By creating a bond program, the district would be able to shift maintenance costs to the capital projects fund and thus improve its fund balance.

While the board and the superintendent were in agreement with the bond program, they had some differences in the methods of carrying out the program. Both felt that the bond program was important to the community and schools. Their differences dealt with the implementation and participation from the public and groups such as the Taxpayer's League and the historical society, whose mission was to preserve

old buildings in the community. The board wanted public input, but they did not want the public to determine the process.

Despite the internal disagreements, the \$144 million bond issue was approved by the community by a large margin, and I was asked to develop administrative procedures for its implementation. During this same period of time, another board member election was being conducted. This was the second election under the single-member district system. There were other members of the board who were up for reelection. The result of the election yielded one new board member.

First Meeting: "El León No Es Como Lo Pintan" (Dichos, 2008)

As a new board member was elected, Superintendent Morales scheduled an orientation meeting with the new board member to provide information about the district. This occurred when the new board member, Mr. Va, was added to the board. He was a former member of the Tejano City Council, and I knew him when I worked at Tejano City. Mr. Va was an administrator of the county's community action agency, and I felt that he knew about the relationship between boards and administrative teams. Mr. Va, as part of his job, also worked with a board, and he knew of the dynamics of administration. Superintendent Morales also felt the same way. However, we often say in Spanish, "El león no es como lo pintan" (Dichos, 2008). This proverb means that the lion is not how we portray it. The superintendent and I could not have been more incorrect about Mr. Va. We thought that he would be supportive of the administration, but he was critical of the superintendent and did not trust the administrative team.

While he had this mistrust of the overall school district staff, he once mentioned to community members that he trusted the work of the finance department. I felt that I was in a tough situation because he trusted me but did not trust my boss and colleagues. Furthermore, I was in a quest to improve the district in his perspective, but the superintendent was in a chaotic situation because of his perception toward the other administrators. As the new board member started working with other board members, Tejano ISD became more chaotic as the board president started to question the superintendent in public.

**The Publisher Letter: “No Hagas Cosas Buenas Que Parezcan
Malas” (Dichos, 2008)**

Shortly after each election, school district boards reorganize and elect new board leadership. The board elected a new board president, and he was a longtime board member who had been reelected under both the at-large system and the single-member district system. His election as board president was good news for the superintendent because he was a great supporter of her. However, as the superintendent and I worked with the Tejano ISD board, we saw the board began questioning administrative decisions. That is, it was becoming harder to deal with them when items were reviewed at board meetings.

Superintendent Morales and I had been working with the district for almost three years in our individual capacities, and we had seen the change of the Tejano ISD board. The board president had been reelected in his last election, and he was one of the original members of the board when she and I were hired. He supported the efforts and

changes that the superintendent and I were implementing in the district. The superintendent and I both felt that we were in a quest to reach excellence and that things would eventually get better. For me, it was a quest to make things better each day for the finance department and the district. That was the main charge that Superintendent Morales had given me since I started working at Tejano ISD. However, she was in chaos, and she did not think that it would get better.

It was late May 1997, and Tejano ISD was in the process of making personnel assignments for the upcoming fiscal year, and renewals and assignments of contracts were entertained by the board. One of these assignments included principals and administrative staff. The board president and the superintendent discussed the superintendent's recommendation prior to the meeting, and the president disagreed with several parts of the superintendent's recommendation. The May board meeting was scheduled, and the superintendent made her recommendation to the board. During the meeting, the superintendent habitually would make subtle signs to her staff in the audience when she would ask them to come to the podium. She would further show her emotions about various items of disagreement with the board. This was a personal characteristic and not signs of disrespect. During the May board meeting, she signaled her staff about a personnel item, and she thought that she was sure of a particular item. This is often said in the Mexican culture: "No hagas cosas buenas que parezcan malas" (Dichos, 2008). The proverb means, do not do anything right that appears to be wrong. She was thinking that the decision that the board took was what she had predicted, and

she signaled to the staff. The board president misconstrued her gesture, and he wrote a letter to her the following day.

The letter was not a surprise because it contained their mutual disagreements and discussions. However, it was remarkable because it was published in the local newspaper. The board president mentioned his perceptions regarding unprofessional behavior and her ability as a leader of the district. This chaos was not to get any better for her. While the letter and the discussion were resolved, it had created a lasting mark in their relationship. Shortly thereafter, Ms. Morales announced her retirement from the district effective June 30, 1997.

Game Changer: Changing the Quarterbacks

After Superintendent Morales left the district, a new superintendent, was hired who, like his predecessor, tried to work with the board elected under the single-member system. Another election came about a year later after new Superintendent Young was hired. This time, three board members were elected under the new single-member district system. While the next few years were a struggle for the superintendent, there were some district programs that were improved. Among these were the implementation of new curriculum, bond programs, and administrative programs.

Political Games Surrounded Dr. Young's Tenure: "Tanto Peca El Que Mata La Vaca Come El Que Le Amarra La Pata" (Dichos, 2008)

Dr. Young's tenure lasted four years, and he and I worked well together. While there were challenges in the district, there were also some advances in curriculum and bond program implementation. There were two critical events that were significant to

me. One of these was a positive event; the other was negative. The first critical event came early in Dr. Young's tenure as superintendent. Dr. Young became superintendent at a young age. He was about the same age as I was, and this was his first superintendency. His experience had been as assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction at a school district in the valley region of Texas. He was considered an outsider to the community, but he was welcomed by district staff, the community, and the board. As Superintendent Young and I worked together, the position of chief financial officer opened up at a neighboring school district. I was approached by that district's superintendent to consider moving to the district. As I considered the offer, I contacted Superintendent Young, who requested that the board reclassify my position from a business manager position to chief financial officer and assign me more administrative duties and related compensation. While the internal offer included changes in duties, title, and compensation, the compensation was minimal.

Nevertheless, I felt that the district valued my work, and I stayed with Tejano ISD. This administrative move was a critical event for me because I felt that the board was supportive and its intent was for Superintendent Young to have more time to focus on instruction. The board felt that I could handle the finances and other administrative operations, such as transportation, child nutrition, technology, risk, maintenance, warehousing, construction bond program, and others. I felt that I was on a "high note" because I could link financial decisions with the implementation of a large part of the budget so that the instruction programs were supported effectively. However, this

administrative move would not last long. Changes in the board made it apparent that the school district was going through a transformation.

Shortly after the changes in my duties, the board began to change. Board members felt that there were two superintendents in the district: one superintendent for instruction and one for all other issues. One board member once said that he had been told that the superintendent had recommended an excellent bond program and that the district was willing to pay the related taxes associated with the cost of the program. However, he was not referring to Superintendent Young. The board member mentioned that they were referring to the chief financial officer, whom they thought was the superintendent. This was an example over which the board began to show disagreement about the chief financial officer's visibility and perceived control of the school district. Thus, the board began to place pressure on Superintendent Young requesting that he be more involved in the areas of finance, operations, and the bond program. In addition, there were other internal challenges that Superintendent Young faced, including staff members who were sharing information and reporting events and decisions directly to board members. These activities created an environment of mistrust between the superintendent and the board. Therefore, the next critical event came shortly thereafter.

The board communicated to Superintendent Young its wish to make changes in the administrative ranks. Several actions taken by Superintendent Young over a short month span included the non-renewal of the human resource director's contract, the appointment of the executive director for operations, and the change in administrative duties for the chief financial officer. The second most significant critical event under

Superintendent Young was this change in my duties. I was called into his office and notified that he wanted me to focus on the finances of the district only and that he was removing some of the administrative duties that related to maintenance, transportation, and food services. He did not mention to me that the board was making this change. Superintendent Young mentioned that it was the board's decision to give me more time to focus on the budget and finance operations. There is a Mexican proverb: "Tanto peca el que mata la vaca como el que le amarra la pata" (Dichos, 2008). This proverb means that it is as much a sin for the person who kills a cow as the one who holds on to the cow's leg during the kill. Superintendent Young had not stood up to the board, and he was letting the board make decisions for him. I felt that he was placed in a difficult ethical dilemma. I felt that he had to decide whether to work with the board and attend to the trustees' wishes or to work with his administrative team and organizational structure. I understood his dilemma, and it was the first sign since I had been hired by the district that I did not have the complete support of the board. I continued to work with Superintendent Young and the board as best as possible until Superintendent Young left Tejano ISD. As Superintendent Young left, the board hired an interim superintendent to guide the district.

Game Changer: Yet Another Interim Quarterback Who Becomes the Starter

After Superintendent Young left Tejano ISD, the board hired the Texas Association of School Boards to conduct a search for a new superintendent and a retired superintendent to act as interim superintendent during the search. Interim Superintendent Key was hired for only two months; however, but there was one major critical event

during his short tenure. The board wanted the superintendent to sit below the board. That is, the seating arrangements were an issue, and the board requested that the boardroom be changed so that the superintendent's seat was removed from the traditional level and placed at a new superintendent's table below the board's seats. Superintendent Key stood his ground and did not make any changes and suggested that the board work as a team of eight instead of dividing the team. As the decision to make changes to the boardroom came, the new superintendent was named, and he was Superintendent White, who came out of retirement from the neighboring district to take the position.

**Politics Get More Intense for the Superintendency: “El Diablo Sabe Más
Por Viejo Que Por Diablo” (Dichos, 2008)**

The Tejano ISD board hired Dr. White as the interim superintendent, but after two months, the board offered him a long-term contract to be the Tejano ISD Superintendent. The board had great respect for him, and the trustees felt that he possessed the experience that they were expecting in a superintendent. Superintendent White came to Tejano ISD, and I was glad because he had tried to recruit me when Superintendent Young was at Tejano ISD. Superintendent White and I worked well together, and he relied on my work in the areas of finances. The most significant critical event came when he reorganized the district. There is a Mexican proverb: “El Diablo sabe más por viejo que por Diablo” (Dichos, 2008). This means that the Devil knows more because he is old instead of being the Devil. This was the situation with Superintendent White since he had been working with school districts for more than 30 years. The board relied on his knowledge and wisdom. However, he made a series of

personnel changes that further created a distrusting environment among the administrative staff of Tejano ISD. Superintendent White brought individuals from other districts to fill in the following positions: human resources executive director, internal auditor, director of student services, chief of police, special education director, and executive director for administration. All of these individuals would create challenges for the superintendent and for Tejano ISD. The district had not hired an administrator outside the internal administrative ranks since the board hired me as the business manager. Tejano ISD and I experienced many critical events after the hiring of these positions. The one that was most significant was the hiring of the human resources executive director. Although no one but the superintendent was involved in the selection process, this decision was the most positive decision for the Tejano ISD administrative team because the new director was able to work well with the administration. The board did not agree with some of the personnel decisions made by the new human resources director. Thus, more challenges arose between the board and Superintendent White. Due to continued mistrust and increasing communications between Tejano ISD administrative team and the board, Superintendent White decided to retire after approximately one year of service.

Game Changer: Another Interim Quarterback Is Recruited: “Si Quieres El Perro, Acepta Las Pulgas” (Dichos, 2008)

After Superintendent White’s retirement announcement, the board felt that they overlooked many administrators in Tejano ISD when they made the decision to hire someone from outside the district. Therefore, the board requested that any internal

administrators wishing to serve as superintendent submit an application. I immediately submitted a letter stating that I was not interested in the position. I felt that the board was not stable, and there was an environment of mistrust between the board and the superintendent. The trustees created more chaos by dictating their wishes as they had done so with the previous three superintendents over the last three years.

Despite the chaos, one internal administrator submitted a letter of interest. She was Ms. Garza, who had been with Tejano ISD for more than 10 years. She was well qualified and had strong community roots. She was also well respected in her field and by teachers. Despite her qualifications, she soon discovered the pressures in the superintendency. There is a Mexican proverb: “Si quieres el perro, acepta las pulgas” (Dichos, 2008). This means that if you really want a dog, you must accept its fleas. In other words, if she really wanted this job, she needed to accept it as it came and not complain about it. Superintendent Garza accepted the job and began to complain about the board’s actions even though she knew the situation before she accepted the position.

Superintendent Garza faced an intense political environment at Tejano ISD, and the district became divided internally among the staff and externally in the community. It was a time in which everyone on the administrative team took sides and aligned with either the board or the superintendent. Several administrators did it openly, and others privately maintained their loyalty. The culture of the district became even more political and difficult to operate. There were many critical events during this time, but one of the more significant one was Superintendent Garza’s reorganization of the Tejano ISD administrative team.

The chaos at the administrative level was widely known in the district and the community, and it further received more attention when Superintendent Garza reorganized and removed the executive director of curriculum and instruction from her position and assigned another administrator in the district to the position. Superintendent Garza had received complaints, and she engaged the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the educational agency to investigate a program handled by the former executive director of curriculum and instruction. The district became more divided, and it was difficult to deal with staff members who were loyal to the previous director. I was asked to investigate possible misappropriation of funds, which meant that I was perceived as aligned with the superintendent.

A series of critical events and challenges continued for 11 months, and the problem culminated in Superintendent Garza walking out of the board's executive session after disagreeing with them. In the next few days, the board called for a special meeting during which the board removed her as the interim superintendent and named me as the next interim superintendent.

Game Management: Managing the Superintendency. “Juega Las Cartas Que Te Da El Tiempo, El Mañana Es Solo Una Pierda De Tiempo” (Serrat, 2012)

Days after the superintendent walked out of the meeting, I was approached by the board president and asked to consider serving as interim superintendent. I accepted knowing the challenges and the Mexican saying, “Si quieres el perro, acepta las pulgas” (Dichos, 2008). I knew that this dog (Tejano ISD Superintendency) had fleas, and I thought that I could help transition while a new superintendent was recruited.

Working as interim superintendent, I had placed myself in a chaotic situation. The board would have a different perception of my work in Tejano ISD. Over the first 11 years, I worked with five different boards under two different systems of election: at-large and single-member districts. The members from the first board of trustees that hired me had a different philosophy of school district operations than the one that hired me as interim superintendent. The first board was focused on the general welfare of students and the district. While the board was viewed as political and controlling, the board members were primarily involved in policy and political issues. The board that hired me an interim superintendent was mostly seen as board members who were concerned with operations and micromanagement.

Nevertheless, I was committed to make a difference and try to help Tejano ISD. As I was assigned, I began to evaluate the organization to assess whether any adjustments needed to be made. I focused on assessing the cards that I had been dealt. As the Mexican proverb says: “Juega las cartas que te da el tiempo, el mañana es solo una pérdida de tiempo” (Serrat, 2012). I did not want to make changes, but rather work with the status quo. I felt that the previous four superintendents had made too many changes in a small period. There had not been enough time to determine whether those changes were going to make a positive impact on the district. I felt that it was time to wait and see if they were going to work. I wanted to play the cards that I was dealt and allow time for those changes to take effect. I figured that time would let us know the effectiveness of the decisions.

The chaos in the superintendency continued because I had inherited a culture of mistrust, miscommunication, and a divided administrative team and board. While being the interim superintendent, I went through many critical events. Most of them were negative events, and there were three that are most memorable.

The first critical event was the ethical dilemma in the handling of the previous interim superintendent assignment. The board asked me to make a recommendation regarding her assignment. They did not want her involved in the curriculum and instruction program because they felt that the staff was divided due to the previous reassignments. The board expressed its interest in a different assignment. I felt that the district needed healing from the multiple changes that had occurred in the past; thus, I assigned her to handle special programs.

This was a no-win situation. The board did not like my recommendation and neither did former interim superintendent Garza. Days went by, and Ms. Garza retired from the district. Although this was best for the organization, I felt that I did not achieve a compromise. I felt that I could work with the board and the former interim superintendent, but they were not willing to work with each other. I was in for a challenge as I encountered many other critical events. There is a Mexican proverb: “A ver de qué cuero salen más correas” (Dichos, 2008). This means we will see who can make the most straps from a skin. I was determined to meet the challenge and work with the district and the board to make a better school district.

My commitment was challenged each day of my tenure. The second critical event that I encountered was the removal of a high school track coach from coaching,

limiting him to teacher duties only. The event happened during an evening at one of the high schools. The track coach took some of the student athletes to run at the local lake so that they could practice running through cross country hills. The lake was approximately three to four miles from the high school. The students rode in the back of his small truck, and when he made a turn, some of the students fell from the truck. None of them appeared hurt, and he continued to proceed with their practice at the lake. In the middle of the night, one of the students felt discomfort in her neck, and the parents took her to the hospital where they learned what had happened. Several of the other students and parents also confirmed the event to the athletic director who followed up with them and had all of the students checked by a physician at the hospital the following day.

Upon reviewing the situation, it was apparent that the coach had placed students in danger, had not reported the incident and/or rendered aid to the students immediately. Parents were upset, and I asked the athletic director for an investigation and a recommendation. It was recommended that the coach be removed from coaching and be limited to teaching duties. The incident was reported to the board. The students were not hurt, but there were a number of policies and procedures that were violated by the coach. I briefed the board. Instead of being unhappy with the behavior, they were unhappy that I had removed him from coaching duties. The coach's spouse was a clerk working in the superintendent's office and was aligned with the board members. She, as other administrators who did not like the athletic director, labeled the action as a harsh action on an innocent coach. This was an example of how the internal division in the

administrative team affected the operations of the district. The challenges continued, and more critical events were to come.

The third critical event was the ethical dilemma of whether to submit an application for the permanent superintendent position. I did not want to submit an application for the position. My first intent was to help transition to a new superintendent; however, I did not want a political appointee to be selected. When the time to submit an application came, I did not submit an application. However, I was asked to submit a proposal of achievements and goals to the board president. I felt that if the board wanted to appoint me, it could do so. One of the board members who received a copy of the proposal met with me and gave me a list of items to accomplish in order to be considered for the position. This meeting was my next critical event.

The fourth critical event took place one afternoon at Tio Hut, a local restaurant. A board member called me and urgently told me that he needed to talk to me. He said that he needed to discuss a way to garner support and to get at least four votes I needed to be appointed superintendent. He provided me with a list of what he felt each board member wanted from me as interim superintendent before the board would consider me for the permanent position. This board member had gone through TASB's Master Board Member Program, and he felt that he wanted to help me. He gave me a handwritten list on a small yellow tablet, and it was categorized into construction, personnel, and policy practices. This list was further segregated by a board member and included the following items:

Board Member's Game Plan (List)

1. Deal with architects
2. Deal with middle school facilities and construction issues.
3. Deal with hazardous materials
4. Deal with personnel issues
5. Deal with student issues
6. Deal with policy issues
7. Deal with health issues
8. Deal with parental issues
9. Deal with accountability
10. Deal with discipline
11. Deal with after school
12. Deal with drugs
13. Deal with principals
14. Deal with administrators
15. Deal with custodians
16. Deal with police
17. Deal with investigations
18. Deal with campuses
19. Deal with board members
20. Deal with teachers

As I met with this board member, I felt that there were many issues that needed attending. While some were valid and others were more political, I listened to him and let him know that I would look into some of the matters. However, there is a Mexican proverb: “De lo dicho al hecho, hay mucho trecho” (Dichos, 2008). This means that there is a gap between saying and actually doing something. These items were going to take time, and I did not have much time to show progress. A couple of the issues had been addressed already and completed, yet he did not know it. Nevertheless, this was another sign that there was continued mistrust and miscommunication in Tejano ISD. Soon thereafter, I experienced another similar critical event dealing with personnel matters.

The fifth and last significant critical event was when the board asked me to consider recommending a principal aligned with the board for the position of human resources director. This position was open for several months since the human resources director had decided to leave for a university position. The board was interested in the selection of this position. Some of the internal staff had been positioning themselves to be considered for this position by the board. However, the superintendent had to make the recommendation. I delayed the hiring and assigned an internal staff member to the position in hopes of avoiding the recommendation. There is Mexican proverb: “El que quita la ocasión, quita el ladrón” (Dichos, 2008). This means that if you avoid the event, you can avoid a thief. In this situation, I was avoiding a decision so that it would not cause another political situation and further divide the district.

Several months went by, and I could not delay the decision further. Several personnel decisions were expected at the March board meeting, and the board also expected to make a decision on naming a superintendent finalist. I had five personnel recommendations to present: human resource director, social studies coordinator, parental involvement coordinator, principal, and bilingual coordinator. Three of these individuals were linked to board members. The board did not want to accept all of the recommendations and were also concerned that a new superintendent would be hired soon. Thus, I recommended tabling all of the selections and letting the new superintendent review them. The board wanted me to proceed with selected recommendations; however, I told them that I would either recommend all of them or none of them. I suppose both the board president and I had this saying in mind: “Aqui no mas mis chicharones truenan” (Dichos, 2008). This means that only my pork skins crackle. The board wanted to be in charge, and there was a struggle of control and decision-making regarding personnel and administrative matters.

Soon I learned that the board had decided on a new superintendent from the Coast, and he was to start at the end of the month. At the next board meeting, I made my last report to the board and turned over a briefing on the status of the district to the board and the new superintendent. I returned to being chief financial officer, and the board gave me a plaque to recognize my service as interim superintendent.

CHAPTER V

MAKING SENSE OF MY STORY

Theoretical Frameworks

To analyze my autoethnographic study, in addition to Schön's (1983) reflective practice which was I discussed previously, I used Mezirow's (2000a) transformative learning model, specifically the identification of disorienting dilemmas, the precursors to transformative learning, and the types of critical reflection necessary for the analysis of my frames of reference during the transformative learning process.

Transformative Learning

Transformative learning is part of the study of adult learning. According to Clark and Wilson (1991), transformative learning is fundamentally concerned with deriving meaning from experience as a guide to action. Mezirow (2000a) defined transformative learning as

the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action. (pp. 7-8)

Mezirow (2000a) further stated that we all form frames of reference from experiences to which we attach meaning and significance, and that frames of reference are made up of two dimensions: (a) habits of mind and (b) points of view. According to Mezirow (2000a), habits of mind are defined as “a set of assumptions—broad, generalized, orienting, predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (p. 17). Mezirow (2000a) further delineated that “habits of mind become

expressed as points of view” (p. 18). For my study, I analyzed my habits of mind and my points of view during the period in my life as chief financial officer and interim superintendent.

During my study, I analyzed the steps leading to transformative learning.

Mezirow (as cited in Brock, 2010) developed this theory in 1978 and 10 steps leading to a new perception of the world. The critical events led to transformative learning for me.

Mezirow’s (as cited in Brock, 2010) 10 precursors have been linked to a specific type of reflection (Table 1).

Table 1. Intersection of Reflective Practice and Transformative Learning

Precursor to Transformative Learning	Type of Reflective Practice
1. a disorienting dilemma	Reflection on
2. self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame	Reflection in and on
3. recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change	Reflection on
4. exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions	Reflection for
5. a critical assessment of assumptions	Reflection on
6. provisional trying of new roles	Reflection for
7. planning of a course of action	Reflection for
8. acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans	Reflection for
9. building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	Reflection for
10. a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective	Reflection for

Mezirow (as cited in Brock, 2010) further stated that not all of the 10 steps are “required to experience transformative learning” (p. 123); however, most of these steps were present in my critical events.

The first precursor is experiencing a disorienting dilemma, and at Tejano ISD, there were many critical events that triggered a disorienting dilemma. According to Taylor (1989), disorienting dilemmas or trigger events are: “Incidents or experiences that disturb the individual's current view of reality....They are disorienting dilemmas; they are experiences or events which demand attention and cause the individual to stop and think” (p. 227 in Lyon, 2002, p. 4). The critical events that I experienced in my tenure impacted my perspective at the district. According to Clark (1993), there are two types of disorienting dilemmas: (a) a trigger event and (b) an integrating circumstance. A trigger event is an event similar to what Moss (2008) described as a memorable moment. It is a significant event that impacts your daily activity. There were many of these events at Tejano ISD. An integrating circumstance is what Clark (1993) defined as a situation where there is “a build-up of events that offers an individual an opportunity to make meaning from an experience” (Lyon 2002, p. 4). At Tejano ISD, there were many integrating circumstances over my 12-year tenure. Eventually, these circumstances built up and triggered other precursors.

According to Snyder (2008), Mezirow also outlined three precursors to transformative learning: (a) context, (b) critical (self) reflection, and (c) critical discourse. Snyder (2008) further explained that context happens within the “learner’s life experience” (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004; Mezirow & Associates, 2000) (p. 165). My life experiences at Tejano ISD represent the context of this study.

The second precursor to transformative learning is critical reflection. During data analysis, I utilized self-reflection to interpret the critical events I experienced as a chief financial officer and interim superintendent. According to Merriam (2004), “having an experience is not enough to effect a transformation” (p. 62) and “critical reflection on experience is key to transformational learning” (p. 62). Criticos (1993) affirmed Merriam’s view in the statement, “effective learning does not follow from a positive experience but from effective reflection” (p. 162). Mezirow (as cited in Merriam, 2004) identified three types of reflection-on-experience:

Content reflection is thinking about the actual experience itself; *process reflection* is thinking how to handle the experience; and *premise reflection* involves examining long held, socially constructed assumptions, beliefs, and values about the experience or problem. Premise reflection, or critical reflection on assumptions, can be about assumptions we hold regarding the self (narrative), the cultural systems in which we live (systemic), our workplace (organizational), our ethical decision making (moral-ethical), or feelings and dispositions (therapeutic; Mezirow, 1998). (p. 62)

The third precursor to transformative learning is critical discourse, which is defined by Cranton and Carusetta (2004) as a special form of dialogue that has as its goal, reaching a common understanding and justification of an interpretation or belief. Mezirow (2000a) and Snyder (2008) have said that discourse, although related to self-reflection, is important in the process of transformative learning. Critical discourse allows individuals to create a new frame of reference by trying a new role and validating it. In this study, the critical events I experienced as chief financial officer and interim superintendent at Tejano ISD enabled me to develop a new frame of reference.

Brookfield (as cited in Merriam, 2004) also believed that critical reflection is at the heart of transformational learning, opining that “an act of learning can be called transformative only if it involves fundamental questioning and reordering of how one thinks or acts” (p. 62). Brookfield (1998) further stated that

critical reflective practitioners constantly research assumptions of how they work by seeing practice through four different lenses: (a) the lens of their own autobiography as learners of reflective practice; (b) the lens of the learner’s eyes; (c) the lens of the colleagues’ perceptions; and (d) the lens of theoretical, philosophical, and research literature. (p. 197)

In this study, I considered the learner’s lens when analyzing the critical events through the storytelling of the narratives. Additionally, I utilized the elements of transformative learning to analyze the critical events I experienced as a chief financial officer and interim superintendent at Tejano ISD.

Analysis

“*You actually experienced all of this?*” This was the comment made to me by many colleagues with whom I have shared my life experiences while at Tejano ISD. I remember my first encounter after my release from Tejano ISD with one of my best friends who said, “*I cannot believe that they are treating you this way!*” We saw each other at the university hill, looking at each other with a puzzled look in our eyes. I had left a meeting with Superintendent Garza who told me that I could not continue working for Tejano ISD until the administration reviewed the results of a study. My immediate reaction to the situation then was that of chaos, anger, and disbelief that it was happening to me. Five years later, I felt a sense of relief because I realized that what I had encountered prepared me for survival; I have learned from all of those life experiences.

As time has passed, my reflection on the experiences was of understanding and learning, and every day that I encountered a similar situation, I felt better prepared to deal with the situation. Nevertheless, understanding these experiences required a deep analysis of them.

Autoethnography focuses on the overlap between the researcher and the self, thus highlighting the life experiences as an analysis through narratives. My intent in “writing” about my experiences was to offer people who are distant to the school district environment personal insight into my life experiences, providing a basis of comparison to those who have experience in similar events. My purpose in “analyzing” my autoethnography is to make sense of my 12-year experience as a part of my life, not just for what I could learn from it, but for what others can learn from it.

Salient Themes

In my study, there are several themes that have come to light. The surfacing themes that I have identified as salient to the ability to produce significant understanding of my study include: (a) disrespect, (b) ethical dilemmas, (c) politics, (d) bullying and oppression, and (e) change. There were five themes that were identified as a result of the study. Table 2 shows one example of each theme linked to a type of reflective practice.

Table 2. Salient Themes Categorized by Reflective Practice Type

Theme	Reflection-in-Action	Reflection-on-Action	Reflection-for-Action
Disrespect	I felt that I was disrespected because I was not part of the “in” political group.	Upon further reflection, I compensated for these feelings by trying to be perfect in my job.	Moving forward, instead of trying to compensate or be perfect, I feel that I must have a calm and open conversation with the person.
Ethical Dilemmas	I recognized the presence of conflict when I was in disagreement with the superintendent over the reorganization of the finance dept.	Upon further reflection, I realized that sometimes I managed it well and other times contributed to it. I did not understand the pressures and politics of the superintendency.	Moving forward, I feel that I need to understand that there may be unknown variables that affect a decision and that often I am not ready to hear them or be privy to them.
Politics	I felt that the Taxpayer’s League was a powerful organization that was critical of district officials, and I wanted to avoid their criticism.	Therefore, I realized that I began placating the Taxpayer’s League.	Moving forward, instead of placating the Taxpayer’s League, I need to convey my position in a diplomatic manner.
Bullying and Oppression	I was upset by what I perceived as bullying and oppression of me and my staff.	Looking back on it, I feel that my reaction to what I perceived as bullying and oppression went back to situations and feelings I experienced as a child.	Moving forward, again, I need to address the behavior directly with the person.
Change	With the many superintendent changes, I tried to adjust and comply with the new superintendent priorities.	In retrospect, I wanted to stay in Tejano ISD and continue as the CFO.	Moving forward, I feel that I need to stand my ground and be able to communicate my values.

Disrespect

In reviewing the critical incidences in my narrative, I realized that I often experienced a feeling of being disrespected. Reflecting more deeply, I believe this emotion originated from not feeling accepted or part of a group. Moving to the United States after living in Mexico for 12 years was challenging. I had always been seen as a gifted student because I was ranked first in my class. This, however, seemed to cause

others to see me as different from the rest of the students. When I moved across the border to Tejano, I continued to feel different from the rest of the students, not because of my studies, but because of my appearance and culture. Being from across the border comes with its own definitive culture and folklore that stands out when you cross the river. Being in a new country, my gestures, dress, and overall appearance were different from the folklore in the United States. I was now part of the United States and part of the city of Tejano, and people in the community are able to notice when someone is not from their side of the river.

Every Mexican knows that there are two Mexicos, just as he knows that there being two is not purely a metaphysical concept, although it has its transcendental implications. The concept of the Mexicos refers to facts to be understood in the world of things. One Mexico – the real one, in the platonic as well in the ordinary course sense – is found within the boundaries of the Mexican republic. The second Mexico – the Mexico de Afuera (The Mexico abroad) as Mexicans call it – it is composed of all the persons of Mexican origin in the United States... Mexican folklore and that of Mexico de Afuera are commonly thought of as two related distinct entities. (Paredes, 1993, p. 3)

Not only did I feel different because I was from across the river, I was an only child, which was not the norm in a Mexican American family. Most of my friends came from large families, and it was seen as strange to be an only child. Moreover, as I entered the educational world at Tejano ISD, I found myself trying to overcome a number of barriers, referred to by some researchers as borders. According to Phelan, Davidson, and Yu (1993), there are various borders, sociocultural, socioeconomic, structural, and linguistic, that act as barriers to a student's connection to the classroom and school context. Additionally, when I moved to the United States, I was 12-years-old, yet placed in kindergarten upon entering the Tejano public school system. Although I

was an honor student in Mexico, I did not have the required English language skills, prompting my placement into kindergarten at age 12 by the school district. This change was a barrier in many ways because of the difference in the classroom environment. I was looked upon by teachers, students, parents, and others in the community as different because of my age and size in comparison to the five-year-old children in my class.

I did not have command of the English language and had trouble communicating with other kids. I did, however, manage to connect to the other students primarily through the universal language of play and sports. Midyear, as my English improved, I was advanced to the third grade. A major consideration in moving me was my physical size. The third grade students were taller than the kindergarteners, thus I could fit in better with the group. Once in the third grade, I continued working on improving my linguistic skills so that I could fit in with the other children. However, because I was older and had been exposed to sixth grade mathematics in my Mexican elementary school, I was ahead of the group in that discipline. This made me stand out even more.

While my early experiences were a part of my cultural acquisition and assimilation in school, I felt that there were a number of methods I used to deal with my new environment. According to Spindler (2000), education is a form of socialization into a given group, and it is this process through which a student acquires a cultural knowledge in order to participate within that group. Crossing the border into a new world in Tejano was cultural acquisition. Wolcott (1991) stated that “as a concept that points to human processes in which we are all engaged-from first breath (and even

earlier, in the sense of acquiring communicative rhythms) to last-culture acquisition is quite real” (p. 257).

Phelan et al. (1993) outlined three strategies that students use to deal with crossing borders. The first includes a strategy where the student adapts to his or her surroundings, but hides his or her real identity. This was referred to by Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba and Gaventa (as cited in Phelan et al., 1993) as “internal oppression” (p. 65). While in elementary school, I worked to keep my true self away from my peers by not sharing my home experiences with my teachers and other students. I felt that it was important to adapt to their expectations and share an image that would meet their standards. While efficient on the short term, this strategy was harder for me over time because it began to change me, my perception of myself, and my decision-making ability.

The second strategy identified by Phelan et al. (1993) is when students adapt completely to the patterns of their groups when they are in the minority of their surroundings and return to their social group habits when they go home. This compares to acting one way for others and being oneself when at home. I used this strategy as I entered middle school and high school. This action troubled me because over time, I felt that I was portraying someone other than myself just to satisfy the situation and others. For example, I tried to get interested in topics and activities that were important to my peers. One of these activities was football. This perception changed everyone’s image of me in the years to come.

As I entered high school, I continued my desire to fit in with other students. I chose to participate in organized athletics in school. I began to focus more on athletics than academics. My emphasis on playing football had an impact on my academics. Still, my grades were better than average and the grades of most other student athletes. While my class grades were average, I excelled in football where I again felt that I was different from the group. I was voted captain of the football team and excelled on the field; yet, I did not have many other things in common with my teammates. I had not attended the same elementary schools as my peers, nor did I have similar upbringings as my peers because of my recent immigrant status.

Most of my teammates knew each other because they had played together since elementary school, and I was the new kid who only started participating in the ninth grade. I continued trying to fit in the group. I worked at preparing myself and excelling on the field and being an example for my teammates. Also, as a student, I had passing grades but did not stand out in academics. There was a general feeling among the football players that we were not supposed to be on the honor roll. Nevertheless, I excelled and achieved one of the better grade point averages on the football team. I was different from the norm.

The third strategy, suggested by Phelan et al. (1993), used to help deal with crossing borders, is for students to blend their identity into the different worlds without hiding any major elements and becoming highly successful in their endeavors. While this last strategy can have immediate benefits, it can also have some high emotional costs later in life by receiving criticism from other members of the group or culture for

not adhering to social norms and rules. I, too, tried this strategy in high school, and at times, was successful and everyone felt that I was part of the group. However, many of my peers changed their behavior toward me because they perceived that I was more successful than they were because I was offered more opportunities than they were offered due to my ethnicity and economically disadvantaged status in seeking college scholarships.

Moving from high school to college was quite an adjustment. I had not yet been away from the border. I was admitted to an out-of-state college where I experienced adjusting to yet another new environment. My high school team had excelled in football, and I, along with some of my teammates, was recruited to attend a private college in Missouri. I continued to excel both in football and in academics. My peers even selected me as captain of the team. Being in the Midwest, I was again a minority among the players and students. However, even though I was 1,000 miles from the border, folks in the college saw my ability and not just my heritage.

Upon completing college, I returned to my hometown, Tejano, where I began my career working first with the city and then with Tejano ISD. Having been away from Tejano for college, I did not recognize some of the leaders in the community. My success in college had come at the price of being detached from my community. Moreover, I was not in tune with the politics nor the community issues.

Many of my friends had left the city or had moved to another part of the city. The little town of Tejano had grown, and I felt like a new kid on the block. As I applied for my first job with the city of Tejano, the interview committee focused on my newness to

the community because I had been away from Tejano for some time. Having limited local ties was viewed as a strength, so, I was hired. While at the city, I moved up the ranks and excelled over eight years. Over this time, I felt that I had become more a part of the city, but I again did not have ties with other city employees or extensive family ties in the community like other employees. I was an only child and did not have many relatives in the community. Thus, working in the city of Tejano as an internal auditor and finance director, I felt that I was independent and not biased in my work. It was important also not to have any political ties because being in such a position would require independence in making decisions. That is, an auditor or finance director needed to have the ability to make recommendations free of bias, conflicts, and other barriers that could prevent him or her from making sound decisions. After eight successful years working in various capacities for the city of Tejano, I changed industries and moved to Tejano ISD as CFO.

This was one of the few times that the Tejano school district did not hire someone from within the district. The superintendent wanted someone from outside the district to come in and make significant changes in the business office. Being new to Tejano ISD gave me both an advantage and a disadvantage. The superintendent and the board supported changes in the district, and they saw me as an independent person who could guide the district in a different direction. The teachers and other internal staff felt that this was a disadvantage because I did not have the internal ties that many of them had. Nevertheless, I stayed at Tejano ISD for 12 years.

During my time at the district, I excelled and implemented many positive changes in the business office and in other areas of the district. Over the years, I went through seven trustee boards, each viewing me in different roles. While the earlier trustee boards wanted changes, the board members in the last five years of my tenure had a different agenda—they wanted political change. Dealing with a change in the philosophy of the board had an impact on my daily activities. I experienced negative attitude changes toward me and my staff from the board. I felt that their agenda and goals were different from mine. I tried hard not to let politics guide my work while the board members were becoming more involved in the day-to-day activities of the district. Furthermore, I also saw how board members began to place agenda items for the purpose of influencing administrators to make personnel and policy changes, and further their special interests as well as political groups.

I felt that I was disrespected because I was not part of the “in” political group, and, moreover, I did not have the family and community ties that other administrators had. I felt I was on my own. Feeling disrespected in Tejano ISD was what I considered a disorienting dilemma. Prior to Tejano ISD, I had not worked with an organization where administrators were disrespected.

My experiences over the 12 years were marked with disrespectful behavior, leading me to question my role and existence in the school district. I questioned my values and my abilities. I also second guessed my preparation and my decision to be at Tejano ISD. I felt uncomfortable with my surroundings, and I tried to determine if I was really supposed to be in the organization. I felt ill-prepared to handle the disrespect from

board members. Looking back on their behavior I felt that I compensated for these feelings by trying to be perfect on the job and by not making any mistakes or causing any conflicts. To avoid conflict, I gave in to the demands of the board members. I traded my survival as a CFO for acceptance.

According to Hart (1999), “our reactions to conflicts were learned early in our lives” (p. 25). I was always told by my parents that I should try to avoid conflict. In regard to my work, I thought that if I avoided conflict with the board, my job would be secure and I would be accepted. In other words, I tried to be apolitical and just do what the board wanted me to do.

In a 2000 survey conducted by the American Association of School Administrators, over 48% of superintendents saw themselves as adviser, 49.5% as decision maker, 1.2% as functionary role, and only 1.7% as political strategist (Björk & Lindle, 2001; Glass et al., 2000). According to Björk and Lindle (2001), “data presented herein suggest that superintendents persist in adopting apolitical strategies that may, in fact, exacerbate tensions” (p. 86). This strategy was not consistent given the increase in interest groups as pointed out by Cibulka (as cited by Björk & Lindle, 2001). Moreover, Björk and Lindle (2001) stated that “speculation concerning these seemingly politically suicidal leadership strategies focuses on three possible explanations: (a) professional culture, (b) inadequate preparation, and (c) limitations on methods used to ascertain superintendents’ roles in their work with boards” (p. 86).

Björk and Lindle and Kowalski (as cited in Kowalski, 2005) also stated that “the behavior of highly political superintendents was regarded as unprofessional” (p. 8). With

only 1.6% of the respondents (superintendents) seeing themselves as political, superintendents tend to ignore political pressures. I, too, ignored the politics while working as CFO and interim superintendent. I was focused on working in a professional environment and therefore, ignored the political pressures that surrounded my position. According to Malen (as cited in Björk & Lindle, 2001), “politics in schools acknowledges nested arenas of political interests, alliances, and conflicts internal to schools and school districts” (p. 79). Similar to the literature, Tejano ISD had its share of political interests with the accompanying alliances and conflicts, and I dealt with them by ignoring them. My actions created more conflict and led to more disrespect from the board. Conflicts continued during my superintendency; many involving ethical situations or dilemmas.

Ethical Dilemmas

The next salient theme ensuing from the critical events that I encountered during my tenure was ethical dilemmas. Many of my experiences and conflicts at Tejano ISD can be characterized as stressful, ethical dilemmas. Learning to handle these situations became one of my most important priorities. Because I have always been passionate about my integrity and beliefs, and because many of these situations were contrary to my beliefs, these situations became an emotional rollercoaster for me.

I did not get the job at the city: A disorienting dilemma. Analyzing the game at Tejano ISD, I recall that each of my critical events could be considered a disorienting dilemma. One event in particular was when I was passed over for promotion while working for the city of Tejano. I perceived that my boss had made a choice based on an

ethical dilemma of his own. He had to select from the seasoned, established candidate who had community and political ties and the young and upcoming candidate, me. Not being selected for the promotion impacted me. While the ethical dilemma was not my own, I felt that my supervisor's personnel decision was one that he had to make. That is, he had pressures from the community and the city council to consider the more well-known and connected candidate. His decision affected me deeply because I thought that hard work, loyalty, and dedication would yield me a promotion. Yet, this was not the case, and I encountered my first professional disappointment. This event caused me to change the way I looked at myself. I was focused on getting things done at the office without taking into account any other aspects of my life. My priorities were work and education. I did not spend enough time with family and friends. I also did not engage socially in the community. After experiencing the disappointment of not being promoted, I began to change my life priorities and change the manner in which I looked at work and other aspects of my life. This event changed my perspective as Mezirow (1994) stated, and my point of view about work. At that time, being passed over was devastating to me because I felt that I was most qualified. I recall discussing this situation with coworkers and feeling discontent with how I was treated. I had feelings of not being wanted so I proceeded to look for other jobs and get involved with other community activities. After my disappointment, I questioned myself, my abilities, my preparation, and the manner in which I worked in the organization. I felt that I was not doing enough; therefore, I began to explore other options for my career and seek new roles and relationships that would benefit my career. While I was involved in academic

and professional organizations, I joined the Rotary Club, which allowed me to change my perceptiveness of my career and my position in the community.

Reflecting back on my actions after being passed over for a promotion, I felt that I was not experienced enough to understand my supervisor's action. His belief was that I could learn from a more experienced individual. I did not understand that there were politics and ethical issues at hand. My boss had made a recommendation based on his assessment of me and the other finalist and surmised that he would be better served utilizing the skills of both candidates. I did not understand that decision then, and while today, I understand his intent, I still do not feel it was the correct decision. I quickly realized that sometimes people do not want to accept that they have the qualifications or that they are not yet fully prepared, and this was my situation. At that time, I could not see that I had limitations. Moving forward, I now understand that I really was not ready. Nevertheless, I continued to experience more critical events with ethically disorienting dilemmas.

The political process for admission. I experienced my first critical event at Tejano ISD while interviewing with the superintendent for the CFO position. During the interview, she told me that I should not discuss being recommended for the position with anyone prior to the meeting, as a sign of loyalty to her. This request immediately made me feel uncomfortable and that I was being thrust into an ethical dilemma. I wanted to maintain confidentiality; however, I also wanted to notify my supervisor that I was being recommended for a position in another organization. The ethical dilemma was in selecting between two choices that I thought were proper action given the circumstances.

According Kidder and Bloom (2001), an ethical dilemma can also include making a choice between two situations that are perceived to be the right choices. Mezirow (as cited in Brock, 2010) stated that not all of the 10 precursors of transformative learning are required to experience transformative learning, and in this situation, I too only experienced a few of these precursors. Being asked to not reveal the recommendation was disorienting to me because it led me to question how I would react after the interview. I felt joy as a result of the news from the superintendent, but I felt that I could not let anyone know about it. I also felt guilt for not being able to say anything to my friends and family members. I had been taught by my parents to be truthful in all of my endeavors; however, this was one situation that I was required to keep from my family, my friends, and my coworkers. I felt uncomfortable about not being truthful.

Looking back on this experience, I feel that going through an interview and being asked to maintain confidentiality was the appropriate action although I did not feel so at the time. As my experience expanded through the years, I feel, as a leader, I often was asked to make a choice among two correct options. Examining my point of view closer, I have experienced similar situations, and I feel that my perspective comes from my parents who taught me that I should be truthful in all situations, but also be mindful of situations that require confidentiality and respect. Many times, I remember my parents talking to friends and family members, and I heard them being less than forthcoming. At that time, I was too young to understand what they were doing; however, it was my perception that they were not telling the entire truth. I often asked my parents about such situations. They mentioned that many times, you might come across a situation that must

remain confidential. Their advice was to do so in order to avoid hurting someone's feelings. As I reflected on what the superintendent had asked me to do, I felt that I did not want to let anyone know about the superintendent's recommendation because if the action did not get approved, I would have potentially created an uncomfortable situation at work for my supervisor, my friends, and myself. Nevertheless, my point of view regarding this type of situation came about from my upbringing and family advice who always told me to be truthful and confidential when needed.

Furthermore, my ethical values come from my family and religion. My father showed me how an ethical person makes decisions and how one lives with integrity. Taking an in depth look at his examples, I now see he was giving me advice that influenced my future behavior. I learned to be true to those morals and values. Instilled in me were integrity and ethics. I remember my father sharing many instances of when he was placed in positions requiring him to exercise these values. One of the most memorable examples narrated to me by my father was when he had to decide to commit his mentally ill sister to a health clinic. His siblings urged him to do so because they did not want to care for her. They wanted someone else to take the responsibility. At that time, there were seven brothers and sisters, and they had inherited a house where his mentally ill sister was living. He felt that he could not send his sister away to a mental institution because he felt that all siblings should care for their sister. He felt a moral obligation, and he arranged for a nurse to care for his sister in her home instead of a private hospital. He was firm about his obligations and made sure everyone knew it. His decision was not popular with his siblings; however, being morally strong was more

important to him. I developed my values and morals from my father's examples and advice. In addition, my life experiences over the years have influenced the way that I deal with ethical issues.

First move: Reorganizing the Tejano ISD Finance Department. The next critical event and most noteworthy disorienting dilemma that I experienced was the reorganization of the finance department at Tejano ISD. Within the first 90 days of employment with the district, I recommended a change in the organizational structure for the finance department to the superintendent. Superintendent Morales reviewed it and told me that she agreed with my recommendation. However, she also notified me that she was bringing my predecessor back to the school district as assistant superintendent for risk programs. This event caused me to question my existence in the organization and the true intent of my hiring. As I heard this comment, I remembered her first directive relating to my recommendation for hire. In this situation, I felt the same uncomfortable feeling that I had when she told me that she was recommending me and to keep it confidential. I began to question not only my abilities but my previous decision to move to the school district. I further questioned whether the recommendation by the superintendent was genuine and whether I was in fact brought in to make a difference or just to appease the community perception. This was a critical moment. Reflecting on it, I also saw that the community questioned the superintendent's actions. I again began exploring new roles in order to deal with this situation. I explored new ideas and avenues for possible movement from the district. I was fearful that I had made the wrong decision and questioned whether to continue working with the superintendent or decide

to disagree and move away from the organization. I self-examined to figure out a possible exit plan and get feedback from my peers.

Looking back on my actions and situation at Tejano ISD, I encountered ethical dilemmas stemming from micro politics. It became apparent that in these critical situations, the micro politics came from the superintendent. Blasé (1991) defined this concept as:

the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part political action results from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivation to use power to influence and/or protect. Although such actions are consciously motivated, any action, consciously motivated, may have “political significance” in a given situation. Both cooperative and conflictive actions and processes are part of the realm of micro politics. Moreover, macro and micro political factors frequently interact. (p. 11)

In the Tejano ISD, I experienced situations where politics was used by various individuals to influence specific decisions by the board and the superintendent. Some of these individuals were often employees, community members, board members, vendors, and other stakeholders. I also recall that every individual who was associated with the school system possessed some kind of political angle.

I dealt with these situations and people by using the ethical upbringing and moral values that my parents taught me. Politics in the Tejano ISD created conflict between the superintendent and the board because their beliefs were not in agreement on issues such as finances, personnel matters, instructional programs, and other issues. According to Kowalski (as cited in Eyal & Nir, 2003, p. 547), “the superintendent’s role is considered a high conflict managerial position.” While I recognized the presence of conflict, I

sometimes managed it well and other times contributed to it. Given my personal frame of reference in handling conflict, I was not well prepared to deal with it.

As an interim superintendent, conflict was a constant situation as with all of my predecessors and subsequent superintendents. Many times, it led to their removal from office. Conflict is a part of every relationship; however, too much can lead to long-term problems.

Politics

Another prevalent theme throughout my tenure in the school district was politics. Like conflict, too much politics can also lead to problems and even removal. Tejano ISD was the last stronghold of political power in the city, and my tenure came at a time of transition to a new era of accountability and transparency. This theme was prevalent, as evidenced by the various critical events that I encountered during my 12 years at Tejano ISD. I became part of the new political process. Having previously worked 8 years for the city, I had managed to stay clear of politics and thought that my career at the school district would be the same. I discovered that in the school district, the politics were also the reflection of the city and the community. More disappointing was how politics was used in conducting day-to-day activities, in the board room, in the schools, and the various departments.

Evidence of the political environment came when members of the Taxpayer's League began attending the board meetings and criticizing the administration, the board, and its policies. Prior to working at Tejano ISD, I worked for the city, where I saw citizens attend public meetings and comment during the public forum phase of the

meeting. In the Tejano ISD, several citizens and taxpayers began attending, and they were organized under the umbrella of the Taxpayer's League. These experiences caused me to rethink the way I was doing my job and the expectations at Tejano ISD. I entered the ISD at a time when everything in the district was questioned and discussed in public. This was new to the district, the board, and the administration. In the past, Tejano ISD was a closed organization, and it was not usual for citizens to question the educators and the school system. Tejano ISD was not accustomed to this scrutiny, and the politics were now being felt by all.

I experienced dealing with the Taxpayer's League each month, and it became routine to expect questions from its members. I also realized that due to the public spotlight enjoyed by members of the League, other community members, educators, colleagues, the superintendent, and board members also questioned information presented to the board. Their expectations changed, and when presenting information, it was expected to provide more detailed information.

The Taxpayer's League focused on the level of taxes and reduction of the district's operation costs. My frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000a) with regard to taxes would change with the introduction of the Taxpayer's League. Political pressure took on a new meaning as board members' actions set a negative tone in the community through criticism of the board and the administration. Some of the board members were also politically connected to other community members, and the Taxpayer's League escalated the negative climate toward the superintendent and the administration. Members of the League continued to participate at each monthly board meeting. It was customary that

the Taxpayer's League would comment on agenda items at the open forum. The majority of the comments were meant to criticize the school district. Reflecting on these experiences, I felt that this was very disrespectful. Although I had only been in the district for a short time, this action angered me because the presenter was critical of my new district and more specifically my business office. I remember telling Superintendent Morales, "We have begun to make changes, and we will showcase our improvements in the immediate future. I promise that there will be better times to come." The experiences dealing with the Taxpayer's League changed me. I had new roles to play in this political game; however, I did not know if I was supposed to meet the new expectations from the board or the superintendent. I questioned both motives. I self-examined and had strong feelings and anger toward the Taxpayer's League and the superintendent for not making my role clear. In retrospect, I felt challenged and unsure about my ability to meet the expectations.

I subsequently planned a new course of action and adjusted to the new board philosophy regarding taxes. I tried to adapt and change my ways of dealing with this new scrutiny in all aspects of taxes and the district. My frame of reference for taxes and budgets changed. In retrospect, I feel that the Taxpayer's League changed the way that the school district operated. I remember preparing a list of questions with responses in anticipation of what the Taxpayer's League might say. I also took actions in my day-to-day activity to prepare documents and records that would be ready for public scrutiny. That is, I evaluated the supporting documentation process for disbursements and

contracts in order to be ready for the board meetings. The effect of the League involvement changed the direction and the conversation at Tejano ISD.

Reflecting today on my experiences and actions then, these experiences influenced my point of view and the filter through which I saw the world from inside the Tejano ISD. I began to make changes due to the external influences and not just because I was required to do so as part of my job. I made the adjustment also because I felt that the League's involvement was consistent with my beliefs about the district's transparency and accountability. The Taxpayer's League pushed me to make improvements in the school district by continuing to attend the public forum of the board meetings. I began to take on new actions to improve the system, and I received positive feedback. Over time, the League's members saw the improvements; however, they never acknowledged the internal improvements. The political influence of the League had an impact on the school district environment, and I was in the middle of the political change.

Dealing with politics was not new to me then. My influence in dealing with it came from my parents' early influence. Recalling some of my home conversations, my parents tried to teach me how to deal with political pressures. A memorable event was when my mother was working as a housekeeper for a predominantly conservative household. She would tell me, "Do not comment or say anything controversial to anyone." She was trying to let me know that we did not need to take a position or comment on something that might affect our livelihood. My father would also remind me that we needed to avoid placing ourselves in precarious situations that could affect

our jobs. He would say, “Do not do anything that appears to be contrary to what they say. Be respectful and remain quiet!” This was their way of dealing with the politics. Right or wrong, in those days parents were not questioned.

Reflecting on their advice, I remember listening to and following their lead. During my tenure at Tejano ISD, I struggled with politics, and I could not work within the political process. I tried to find ways to avoid the politics and the pressures, but many times, I created a bigger conflict by not understanding them. Self-examination of my beliefs on politics was one of the hardest things that I have done because while I am influenced by my parents advice, I was also influenced by the change of the times to a more accountable and transparent era and away from a political one.

Present at Tejano ISD was what Marshall and Scribner (1991) identified as a three-part equation around politics: (a) management, (b) people, and (c) actions. They included concepts such as power relationships, conflict, and policy processes. In support of that view in *Politics of Management*, Hoyle (1986) distinguished between management and micro politics. Marshall and Scribner (1991) further said that Hoyle named management as the figure and micro politics as the ground. Using Marshall and Scribner’s (1991) definition of figure, they are the customs, codes, and practices in a school district, and the ground are the dynamics of how people interact around these codes and practices. The critical events at Tejano ISD were marked by political pressures resulting from the interaction of Marshall and Scriber’s (1991) figure and ground, resulting in a highly political environment. I experienced them in the form of micromanagement and interference with the administration.

Single-member district. During my 12 years at Tejano ISD, I encountered significant political issues. This was another confirmation of the politics that I recalled during the superintendency where I encountered many political pressures. One of the variables that enhanced the Tejano ISD politics was the change to a single-member district. The single member district is a system that elects board members according to an individual region in which the member must reside. Previously, Tejano ISD board members were elected via an at-large system. That is, the board members were elected by the voters in the school district. Other local governments within the city had already evolved into single-member districts. The Tejano ISD was the last entity to make this shift. This change brought about a new type of politics to the district. Reflecting on it, I experienced new attitudes toward the superintendent such as disrespect and challenging the superintendent's methods and policies. The newly elected members came in with new agendas and goals to change the school system.

Previously, before the single-member district, board members had their own political philosophies; they could be described as mostly passive acquiescent. Tallerico (1989) defined this board member characteristic as behavior where board members have heavy reliance on the superintendent but with little participation in district activities. While this characteristic of board members prevailed for many years, the district eventually changed to single-member district governance. From that point, the politics changed dramatically. The type of board member elected was more restive than passive acquiescent (Tallerico, 1989).

This change was a disorienting dilemma for the superintendent, the CFO, and the administration. This event caused me to question how I acted with the board and the superintendent, when I felt that there were new politics at play. I was not experienced in dealing with political conflict. I did not realize that I had the right skills to maneuver through this change. The superintendent and I questioned the way that we prepared for board meetings and the roles that we had in the school district. I realized that the new governing system required me to change my frames of reference; this was a new season. Over time, the superintendency and board relationship became more political. I realized that the current board questioned my beliefs and actions more than in the past. Looking back, I failed to recognize the magnitude of the changes and did not adjust my actions accordingly. While I felt uncomfortable with the expectations, I did not see how this affected me.

In retrospect, the change incurred during the reign of the single member district was a disorienting dilemma that should have caused me to adjust the way I prepared for meetings and the way that I operated on a daily basis. I did not understand the difference in their frame of reference. A memorable experience occurred during my first board meeting. I presented information to the board and cautioned them not to approve any items without a proper budget amendment. Afterwards, I received a powerful talk from the superintendent who said, "I have seven bosses and you have one. I will be the only one giving any cautions!" Shortly after the board meeting, the board members had a talk with my boss, letting her know that she should have a conversation with me about speaking out.

This type of situation was an example of what Blasé (1991) described as micro politics or the use of formal and informal power by individuals to achieve their goals. At that time, the superintendent felt that I was borderline disrespectful. She had the conversation with me that created a disorienting dilemma for me. Reflecting on it, I felt that I was being lectured; but years later, after I spent more time in the district, I was able to reflect on it and conclude that it was good advice. The political culture at Tejano ISD was transformed by the change in governance, which allowed the board to become more controlling. This change led to multiple political interferences.

Looking back at how I handled political situations, I realized that I did not adjust to my environment. I continued to act in the same manner while believing that I had a board that was supportive instead of one that seemed to be adversarial toward the superintendent and the administrative staff. My lack of recognition for this new governance style caused me great heartache, stress, and made it challenging to get things approved at the monthly board meetings. I did not change with the times. Unfortunately, this was a management skill that administrators often do not learn to embrace. In my case, I was too stubborn and self-involved in my work. My philosophy was that politics should not be a factor in my day-to-day life. Yet, I was working in a public entity subject to political pressures; therefore, I should have made a more proactive decision. I should have made more of a critical assessment to determine if my frame of reference needed to change and adjust to the new system. At that point, I did not consider whether I should remain employed with this district; I preferred to remain focused on the day-to-day activity. Unfortunately, I did not pay enough attention to the politics that surrounded me.

I recall that my interactions with the board mirrored those of Superintendent Morales. We were both trying to survive at a time of political climate change. She once said to me that I did not have seven bosses. Although true, I felt that the perception of the board members was the opposite. In the past, board members were mostly supportive of the superintendent having low participation in school activities. After the single member district evolution, the board members became more involved, but were not necessarily supportive of the superintendent. Tallerico (1989) classified this behavior as restive vigilance. The changes were experienced by teachers and administrators throughout the entire district. This new level of political pressure was felt at meetings, workshops, and district events.

Individual board members and the collective board increasingly displayed a behavior of restive vigilance (Tallerico, 1989). Evidence of this behavior became apparent when the superintendent and the board had a very public discussion regarding a personnel action. It was a personnel recommendation that went before the board, and a decision was made. However, the superintendent did not agree with the board's action. It was at this point that Superintendent Morales said to me, "I knew how the board was going vote and act this way...following a recommendation over a personnel matter!" Later in the week, she received a letter from the board president discussing her behavior at the board meeting. While she was not surprised, the publishing of this letter in the local newspaper was a shock to everyone. Reflecting on it, I knew then that her comments regarding this new board were another testament that the board had changed. Perhaps she would have been better served by following my parents' advice that

encouraged her silence since the board was not a supportive entity. The new board began to show public signs of disrespect. There were many instances of political pressure exhibited by the board toward the superintendent, other administrators, and each other.

My reflections of these new antics were that they were littered with disrespect and the new political climate encouraged a more negative environment. The new board agendas included controversial items almost every month. Board members submitted agenda items requesting a report or status on a specific issue. The board members were more involved and would question the superintendent over anything and everything, thus the signs of restive vigilance (Tallerico, 1989). The board members remained focused on controlling the agenda and setting a tone of intimidation. Tallerico (1989) further stated that many boards often utilize two models to explain their involvement: (a) agenda building and (b) negotiation and exchange. The Tejano ISD Board wanted to drive the agenda and behaved in a political manner in their exchanges with the superintendent and the administration. While this new process of dealing with the superintendent by itself was not political, the manner in which they questioned the superintendent and staff was extreme and disrespectful. This became a recurrent behavior at the monthly board meetings.

Nevertheless, looking back on my experiences in the board room, I question how I handled situations. I was not collaborative or firm enough to proactively manage the situation. Perhaps I did not have enough experience or maturity to handle such difficult political situations. Over time, administrators are able learn these skills through either a formal education or career experience and eventually it becomes part of your

management style. This learning experience is extremely important to an administrator's successful management of the situation. Once a situation is experienced, it is easily identified and managed on the next encounter. This was what Schön (1983) called reflection-on-action. However, what happens when you encounter something that you have not read or experienced? A disorienting dilemma happens. I experienced something new but did not have a frame of reference for it. I simply had not encountered such political bullying, nor was I ready to deal with it. I felt uncomfortable with the situation and my role. In retrospect, I likely added to my stress and the political strong arm by not possessing the right skills to deal with the situations. Unfortunately, this was not the only evidence of the new political climate and my lack of awareness thereof.

Tax rate adoption. The tax adoption process marked the next phase of the political game. Throughout this process, the politics and new board philosophy became apparent to the community. While being critical of the previous administration, voters elected a new school board. Its purpose was to make changes and reduce costs and taxes.

The new board was focused on reducing costs and taxes first and then providing services within the lower levels of spending. Navigating this situation also reminded me of my parents' advice of agreeing with the conservative philosophies. My parents taught me to avoid confrontations and arguments. Perhaps they did it because they were afraid that speaking out could cause problems and impact their livelihood in a negative manner. I remember hearing them discuss their fears of economic and public failure. They often feared losing their jobs due to pressures placed by employers. They also wanted to avoid

the public stigma of having lost a job. My parents guided my thinking from childhood. As a result, I adopted several of their personality traits.

Examining how I handled matters at Tejano ISD, I feel that in some ways, I was not as successful as necessary. I often functioned out of fear and a lack of experience, not having the strength in making difficult or unpopular decisions. As I questioned my ideas and roles, I felt that my preparation was not enough, even though I thought it was at the time of these critical events. I had come to a leadership position at a relatively young age and the gravity of the responsibility was catching up to me. I began to understand why my boss had not promoted me years earlier while working at the city. He saw that I needed more mentoring and experience. I had not experienced political games and ethical dilemmas, and I was not ready for the political arena that I encountered at Tejano ISD. I soon realized that there were more games coming.

Administrator in charge. Continuing with more political pressure, the board changed superintendents and named an administrator in charge. The board dismissed the superintendent and agreed to buy him out of his employment contract. The board identified an internal individual to oversee the district. However, they did not want to give the title of interim superintendent to anyone. One of the board members said, “I do not want to give anyone this title; we need to be in charge.” The board instead assigned an administrator in charge whom they wanted to give orders to implement personnel changes. I was named administrator in charge; this disorienting dilemma became more political and challenging. I was asked to remove the superintendent from her office the following day. The board president said to me, “Go to the office with a police officer

and have her move to another office.” The board had become oppressive, which is defined by Freire (1970) as “a situation where a person hinders another person from the pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person” (p. 55).

This experience caused me to question my actions and the purpose of my assignment. I felt uncomfortable with the actions and my role expectations. I tried to find more positive ways to deal with the expectations by avoiding confrontations, arguments, and the overall politics of the situations. However, I was not successful. I had not been in this situation and was ill prepared for this climate. While there were challenges in the superintendency, I felt that my inexperience was apparent. Although I did not think so then, looking back, I needed more preparation and tact to deal with this situation appropriately.

I had never experienced such intense political pressures, and I did not know how to handle them. As Schön (1983) mentioned in reflection-on-action, practitioners often encounter situations that are not covered in a book. It was a novelty for me. I felt that this situation was not only political, but oppressive. This oppressive behavior began when the board members became more restive vigilant (Tallerico, 1989), which is defined as non-supportive behavior toward the superintendent. When I was asked to remove the previous superintendent from her office, I refused to follow through with this behavior. Looking back, I still uphold that decision as the right action. As I dealt with this situation, it took me back to my father’s advice about doing things right the first time. My father often encountered situations where he would be asked to do unethical acts; he remained adamant about his refusal stance. However, his stance also came with

the consequences of stress and unpopularity. His teachings influenced me and led me through this situation.

Throughout my dilemma, I felt that I had made the right decision, but there were consequences as well. It was stressful and unpopular. I received many negative comments; and each time that I interacted with the board members, I was reminded of my decision. I questioned my decision often because while I did not follow up on the board members' request, I received negative comments from the previous superintendent. She wanted me to do more. She expressed discontent with the decision and made several harsh remarks to me when I asked her to move from her office. At times, I thought of doing exactly what the board members had asked me to do; I questioned both extremes and felt I was in a no-win situation. In retrospect, I know that they were both wrong, and I acted in the best interest of the district while following my ethical beliefs.

As the board continued to make similar requests, I could not remain silent. I communicated to the board president that I would not make changes while I was in charge. They were not pleased and assigned another administrator who would make those changes. I felt as though this was simply more political pressure. My personal and professional preparation had not prepared me for this; I relied on my previous experience and upbringing. I tried to stay calm and act professionally, but often found it hard to remain silent. Political pressure from the board members became routine leading to organizational instability.

During my tenure at Tejano ISD, I dealt with political and ethical dilemmas that often resulted in controversy. At times, these situations were resolved in a manner that was consistent with prevalent political views, and there were other times that it ended with conflict between the superintendent and the board. Dealing with politics and ethical dilemmas was also tied to the salient theme, bullying and oppression, in the superintendency.

Bullying and Oppression

My next salient theme was bullying and oppression. Working in Tejano ISD, I experienced disrespect, political and ethical dilemmas that eventually turned into oppressive, bullying behaviors. I felt that I was the recipient of these types of actions. According to Freire (1970), oppression is “any situation in which ‘A’ objectively exploits ‘B’ or hinders his and her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression” (p. 55). Breault (2003) further stated that this definition included individuals who are kept from reaching their potential. Being a member of the Tejano ISD, I felt oppressed like a person who was not allowed to reach his potential. In specific, often I felt I was being oppressed by the influence exerted upon me during board meetings. Board members included monthly agenda items that focused on demeaning staff members. Too often, these comments were humiliating to me as I stood at the podium addressing them.

One specific experience that is salient in my study was when an item was placed on the monthly board agenda for discussion. This item dealt with the review and discussion of purchasing issues and remained a focus for many months. This bothered

me greatly because it questioned my staff's role within the district, as well as made assumptions on how we operated within the school system. It was an attempt to send a message of bullying and oppression to the director of purchasing and his supervisor (me). I drew this conclusion after observing the facial expressions and body language of board members when asked questions during the meeting. This caused me to feel stressed and insecure when I addressed the board. I understood that I was being bullied because this was a feeling that I had felt previously. Since my childhood, I had experienced this feeling and it had stayed with me. Moreover, these critical events at Tejano ISD were similar to various childhood experiences.

Reflecting on my schooling, I felt that the feeling of oppression, insecurity, and stress were feelings that I had experienced while growing up. While my young perception as a child is different than as an adult, there were several important events that have stayed with me over the years. An important saying from Maya Angelou (n.d.) is, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel" (para. 1).

A particular time when I felt this oppressed feeling was when I was at my mother's workplace. I accompanied my mother to her housekeeping job. Her bosses looked down upon me and made me feel like a visitor and a stranger. The way they talked to me was as if I was an outsider, and I felt stressed and insecure to the point that I wanted to hide my feelings and my presence. I remember hiding away from her work activities by the stairway away from the kitchen. I remember feeling insecure. I felt unworthy of being there. At times my mother would sneak food to me in the stairway,

and I rapidly ate it so that I would not be seen by a member of the family. I often would daydream while waiting for my mom. My dreams were about not feeling this way. I felt that I wanted to be invisible so that I would not bother the family. One time, a member of the family tried to talk to me. I did not understand. My feelings of insecurity worsened causing me to feel like a peasant talking to a patron.

Sitting on the stairway, I was often in the way when someone came down the stairs. My seat was also on the way to the pantry where family members would pass by and see me. I felt that I wanted to make myself invisible to them; this increased my anxiety all the more. I ended up crying but not letting my mom know how I felt. These feelings never left my mind, and over the years, I experienced similar situations that quickly reminded me of them.

Reflecting on my experiences at Tejano ISD, I detected a bullying behavior toward me at the board meetings. I felt there were instances where the board looked down upon me. When I was disrespected and looked down upon during the board meeting, I felt as though I was in the stairway at my mother's job. I had the same insecure feeling. Moreover, the board members' seats were also at a higher level than speakers at the podium. This further enhanced my anxiety and insecurity. I felt every comment and gesture as that kid in the stairway, instead of feeling like a professional in the board room.

This experience caused me to question my abilities and worth in the organization. I felt as though I was not good enough to be part of the school district. At times, I felt that I was treated differently because of my culture, my physical image, and my lack of

social activity with the board and community. I had been sensitive since birth about these issues because I had immigrated to the United States; feeling that I was still seen as someone from across the border. I also carried feelings from the stairway, deep within me. I tried to compensate for this feeling by being more accommodating in my deliberations with those who treated me in this manner. This behavior came from what my parents instilled in me. I did not want to engage in arguments; therefore, I tended to avoid difficult situations and not take a stand on a given issue.

Furthermore, my feelings of oppression have remained with me throughout the years, and another event that scared my thoughts and feelings was from my childhood. This time, it was with my father. I recall a trip that I took with my father across the border into Mexico. Upon returning, everyone had to go through the inspection station on the U.S. side of the international bridge. This was a routine crossing for me until we encountered the comments by the immigration inspector. Upon crossing, it was required to show your identification at the immigration crossing point. My father showed his resident card, and I showed my citizen's green card. The inspector looked at me and jokingly said, "You are an American citizen with a dark rear end." In Spanish, he said, "Eres Americano de cola piedra." I felt that he was disrespectful and oppressive in his words to me. My father smiled because he did not want any conflict. My father had tremendous respect for authority. Because he felt like a visitor in the United States, he did not question the inspector's joke.

The inspector's words caused a waterfall of insecurity, fear, stress, and oppression. I have lived with these feelings throughout my life but never thought of

myself in this manner. I am reminded of the same encounter when someone says something oppressive or gives me that same feeling. I felt the same feelings at Tejano ISD with some of the board members that I felt with the inspector.

Retrospectively, I realize that these feelings were part of my growing up and adapting as I came to Tejano. Coming from across the border, I felt like an outsider even though I was born in the United States. Because I had not experienced the change of the 60s and the 70s in Tejano, Texas, and the United States, I was not able to deal with it socially and culturally. I had grown up in a different town, and I had a feeling of not belonging, being oppressed, and feeling insecure when crossed the border. Thus, I dealt with my surroundings by hiding my feelings and avoiding comments in social settings. At times, I felt that I had a chip on my shoulders that could be tipped off whenever I felt bullied or oppressed. I often looked for those feelings in others too.

Therefore, because of these feelings of insecurity and fear, I acted the same way in dealing with similar matters as an adult. Tejano ISD had its share of oppressive and bullying behavior, and my actions, while expeditious to the situation, caused more critical dilemmas. By surrendering to these feelings, board members were aided in their attempt to influence my behavior.

Tallerico (1989) identified restive behavior as those board members who do not support the superintendent; I felt that my actions further enhanced this behavior. As I failed to directly address the oppressive and bullying behavior, I created a false sense of expectation. Some of the board members had a misconception about me, and this is what Iannaccone and Lutz (1970) called “perceptual differences between school boards and

superintendents” (p. 140). That is, I was viewed as someone who could be influenced to achieve certain agendas. However, I knew that I could not compromise my ethics and integrity. Eventually, my actions ended in losing the game. I had been in the political game for a long time, and it had become intense to the point that I was no longer effective as an administrator. Soon thereafter, more dilemmas continued and the last salient theme surfaced, it was change.

Change

For more than 12 years, I was part of the change at Tejano ISD. With it, often came good things as well as bad things. I felt that I was led to Tejano ISD to make changes and improve the organization. Over the years, I believed that I was expected to make organizational and systemic changes that would yield a better school district. I felt this way since my initial appointment. Superintendent Morales, who initially hired me, gave me the support I needed to improve the district and implement new ways of doing things. I specifically recall one occasion when she challenged me to improve district operations. It was at the end of my first year, and we were meeting to review the results of the audit. I was not in the district when the audit had taken place. At this meeting, we were presented with the letter to management from the external auditors. Their report indicated that there was a need for improvement in various areas that were outlined in a multiple page report. She turned to me and said, “I would like for you to address each area identified in the letter, and I expect zero findings next year.” She was adamant about making improvements. I felt that I had her support and a directive to make the district better.

I promised to do so and began working on the improvements. I felt obligated to accept this challenge because I had been selected by the superintendent and the board. This was a challenging dilemma because the expectations were very high, and the superintendent told me that I was required to make an immediate impact. In my opinion, the district could have hired someone from outside the district; however, they felt that I was the right individual for the job. Each day, the superintendent reiterated that my role and actions needed to be immediate. Superintendent Morales expected instant change, and I felt that it was a similar situation that I had encountered in previous jobs. While it is what Schön mentioned in relying on previous experience, I also knew that there were new expectations placed on me. I was the change that they expected. I had been placed in a similar position in previous jobs and, therefore, was used to being held to such high standards.

Over the years, I initiated many changes and worked with the superintendent and others to implement improvements. As new superintendents came to Tejano ISD, they too expected me to make changes. Looking back on accepting the responsibilities and obligations from Superintendent Morales who was my first superintendent, I took the responsibilities very seriously and did so throughout my tenure. I tried to keep my promise to Superintendent Morales despite the change in superintendents and board members. I was driven by a sense of responsibility and commitment and had given her my word to do my best for the district. This sense of obligation and responsibility was similar to the examples that my father had shown me over the years. In particular, I recall his steadfast commitment to his word with each obligation he made to someone or

something. I felt the same sense of commitment when I gave my word to Superintendent Morales. While it was not quite the same set of circumstances, it was for me, the same type of character building value and belief. After four years of Superintendent Morales' tenure, I still felt the same obligation to do my best.

As new superintendents came to Tejano ISD, there were many new changes and ideas presented to the board. These new philosophies began to shape the district into a different organization. Along with new ideas also came new administrators, superintendents, and board members. I often found myself navigating through new philosophies, points of views, and changes.

One reoccurring change was the appointment of new superintendents. Over my tenure, there were seven superintendents who led the school district. This meant that there were seven different methods of transforming the district. Every time that there was a new superintendent, I experienced a disorienting dilemma. In many instances, I handled them the same way that I handled my first disorienting dilemma when I was hired by Superintendent Morales. However, with every new superintendent, there were new expectations, and I had to question whether I could meet the expectations for each new superintendent since they had a different set of philosophies and goals. My role in the district was also questioned by each of them, while I adjusted to their communication style.

Moreover, I self-examined, and I questioned my abilities and preparation in order to determine whether I could meet their expectations. I found that I had the knowledge and skill, but I also had the same traits that did not portray me well in the eyes of the

superintendent. Some saw me as stubborn, inexperienced, and lacking social interaction with the board. I tried to compensate my shortcomings by depending on my ability to avoid conflict. Looking back on my tenure at Tejano ISD, I felt that I compromised my ethical standards and in some critical events, I created communication conflicts by not listening to the goals of the superintendents and their strategies. I assessed how I acted around the superintendents and boards, and at times, I felt uncomfortable with my actions. I tried to adjust my frame of reference each time that a new superintendent was appointed. In some cases, my points of view were adjusted. However, I could not change my habits of mind. I was too stubborn and did not engage in social interaction with the board or superintendent. I could not have a social relationship with them because of how I felt about them. The feelings of insecurity, stress, and unworthiness were on my mind too much when they made comments that reminded me of the stairway with my mother or the bridge with my father.

Changing one's habits takes time and effort to achieve. All superintendents had a new point of view. They were hired by board members who had also changed their points of view about the district. Subsequently, all of the seven superintendents adapted to the board's pressure. I, however, felt that they were compromising their beliefs. In retrospect, I feel that they were adapting and trying to establish a relationship. That was something that I did not do as interim superintendent or as administrator in charge. Nevertheless, I, too, had to survive.

I was the only constant over the 12-year period, and while I was able to adapt to the new systems and individuals, I did not fully adapt my methods to achieving and

implementing new ideas. I felt that I was still working from the mandate that I was given by my first superintendent and board. I encountered situations that led to conflict and more change in my interactions with the board.

As I collaborated with the new superintendents, I was also working with board members to complete projects such as bond elections. I worked well with the board to get the information out to the public and I was perceived as a team player. Board members exhibited Tallericco's (1989) restive and supportive behavior for a short period, but the board of trustees continued to change superintendents. I developed close working relationships with board members who supported my work. There is a Spanish proverb that says, "Si quieres nadar, hay que mojarse" (Dichos, 2008). This proverb means if you want to swim, you must get wet. I was already attempting to swim in this political pond, but somehow was now submerged in it. When the time came to appoint a new superintendent, I sensed that I would be a good candidate for it because I had been exposed to the new political game, knew the players, and their behavior. However, my actions of change while serving as a finance director and interim superintendent turned out to be just another facet of the game.

In retrospect, the political games allowed me to self-examine after each disorienting dilemma. In some situations, I was able to understand the difference in my frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000a) and points of view. However, overall, I did not change my pattern of thought. Maybe, it was that I rehearsed my upbringing too often, or possessed too many insecurities, stress, or stubborn traits; nevertheless I did not change my frame of reference. I am my father's and mother's son, and therefore could not go

against my beliefs. Although I questioned my actions and looked for ways to improve, I did not do enough to alter my thinking. I tried to find ways of improving my overall abilities and working relationships, yet the themes reviewed helped me understand that while my frame of reference would become better, my habits of mind (Mezirow, 2000a) would be harder to evolve and improve.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE VALUE OF MY STORIES FOR OTHERS

While I was completing my research, I realized that my story was not unique. Many other superintendents and chief financial officers have gone through similar chaos in their jobs. Some of these administrators have been my colleagues; and as I discussed my experiences with them, I felt that their narratives had some of the same elements. Notably, two administrators who served as interim superintendents and chief financial officers also said they went through difficult times during their tenure. They described their experiences as chaotic, oppressive, political, and unethical.

These two administrators reflected on their experiences during a conversation with me about my dissertation, and they both mentioned that their job preparation did not include the experiences that they encountered. One of the administrators mentioned that the superintendency program guides its students to be generalists in the field and focuses on technical matters in the areas of administration, instruction, technology, school finance, personnel, and general leadership. The other colleague also mentioned that the focus during her MBA program was to develop students' technical skills in the areas of finance, management, marketing, and accounting. Neither of these two colleagues mentioned any leadership studies dealing with the chaotic, oppressive, political, and unethical situations that we encountered.

My preparation was an undergraduate degree from Missouri and three graduate degrees from Texas A&M International University. Reflecting on my preparation, I find that the professors who taught the undergraduate and graduate classes did an excellent

job in preparing me to enter the workforce. They all focused on meeting course objectives and in improving the technical skills needed for meeting the CPA course requirements and/or the MBA advancement program. Professors did not focus on the challenges and potential for unethical behavior in the field when working with board members or trustees. There were no reflective practice requirements in any of my preparation programs that would enable me to be prepared for political and chaotic situations that challenged my values and my ethics.

Adult Learning Strategies

The new master programs and superintendency programs still do not fully address the realities of the job. Too much focus has been on the theoretical and superficial part of the superintendent and chief financial officer positions. It is through narratives from practitioners in the field like me, and other administrators who have gone through difficult situations, that the preparation programs can begin to deal with the shortcomings in their certification curricula.

Specifically, the narratives in my dissertation have identified reflective practice and experiential learning, and reflective writing as practices that program developers can incorporate into the superintendent and chief financial officer training programs to enhance preparation.

Reflective Practice and Experiential Learning

According to Kolb (as cited in Hansen, 2000), “learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 24). My critical events added to my experience and they were a function of the environment. Lewin (as

cited in Hansen, 2000) described “human behavior as a function of a person and the environment” (p. 24). Furthermore, Jarvis (as cited in Hansen, 2000) stated that “there is no meaning in a given situation until we relate our experiences to it” (p. 24). According to McAlpine and Weston (as cited in Moon, 2004),

Transforming experiential and tacit knowledge into principled explicit knowledge in this case about teaching requires...intentional reflection for the purpose of making sense of and learning from experience for the purpose of improvement...Reflection requires linking existing knowledge to an analysis of the relationship between current experience and future action. They go on to say that reflection aids in the reflective processes themselves, thereby building or expanding knowledge. (p. 81)

The experiences in my narratives have added to my experience base and expanded my understanding of the various critical events as I consider future action. Moreover, according to Kolb, as cited by Kolb and Fry in Moon (2004),

Immediate concrete experience is the basis for observation and reflection. These observations are assimilated into a “theory” (“Formation of abstract conceptions”) from which new implications for action can be deduced (“Testing implications of concepts in new situations”). These implications or hypotheses then serve as guides interacting to create new experiences (ibid., p. 1). The “new experiences” are, then, in effect, new concrete experiences for further processing in the cycle. The usual interpretation of the cycle appears to be somewhat static, but Kolb not only suggested that learners might “recycle” many times, but also that they start their learning at any stage in the sequence. (p. 114)

Therefore, the concepts of concrete experiences, observation, and reflection are important to the development of learning activities for superintendents and chief financial officers. According to Clark and Rossiter (2008), “learning in adulthood is integrally related to lived experience...in constructivist learning theory, learners connect to their experience through reflection on that experience, and learning is located in

reflection” (p. 64). Utilizing reflective practice and autoethnographic writing allowed me to reflect and assign meaning to my experiences under the experiential learning theory.

Fenwick (2000) further stated that

learning is presented as a reflection-action or mind-body and individual-context binary: recalling and analyzing lived experience to create mental knowledge structures. Implicit is a process of privatizing, objectifying, ordering, and disciplining experience, a process that inserts governance as a matter of course and naturalizes hierarchies of knowledge and skill. (p. 244)

Experiential learning can lead to meaning-making (Bruner, Irwin, Polkinghorne, and Sarbin, as cited in Clark & Rossiter, 2008) of experiences that transform into knowledge. Mezirow (2000b) suggested utilizing a disorienting dilemma to make meaning. I felt that I had many disorienting dilemmas throughout my tenure at Tejano ISD, and my stories and experiences were meaning-making (Bruner, Irwin, Polkinghorne, and Sarbin, as cited in Clark & Rossiter, 2008) critical events that helped me understand my experiences and assign meaning to each of them.

Reflective Writing

Clark and Rossiter (2008) theorize that “Narrative is not only a method for fostering learning; it is also a way to conceptualize the learning process” (p. 61). A number of theorists like Bruner, Irwin, Polkinghorne, and Sarbin (as cited in Clark & Rossiter, 2008) further stated that “Meaning making is a narrative process” (p. 62). Asking superintendents and chief financial officers to engage in writing stories about their organizations and their experiences can enhance their learning and add value to their experiences, thus making them better leaders. Moreover, Clark and Rossiter further stated that “narrative is also how we craft our sense of self, our identity” (p. 62).

Rosenwald and Ochberg (as cited in Clark & Rossiter, 2008) argued that, “Personal stories are not merely a way of telling someone (or oneself) about one’s life; they are the means by which identities may be fashioned” (p. 62).

Relating stories to colleagues and vice-versa creates an opportunity for the mentoring process to occur either formally or informally, and sharing experiences brings about awareness so that others will not make similar mistakes or errors. Clark and Rossiter (2008) posited that:

Every day we are bombarded by a dizzying variety of experiences and we make sense of those by storying them, by constructing narratives that make things coherent. Coherence creates sense out of chaos by establishing connections between and among these experiences. (p. 62)

Making sense of our stories has been important in my study, and our daily lives are filled with experiences that add to our knowledge base. As superintendents and chief financial officers collaborate with other colleagues and share their stories either verbally or in writing, they empower each other to reflect, heal, and improve their past and future actions. Cohler (as cited in Clark & Rossiter, 2008) further stated that, “Narrative may offer a better understanding of the life course than stage theory because it closely parallels the storying process that people use in making meaning of their own lives” (p. 63). Making meaning of my critical events was realized through the process of sharing stories with my committee chair and my colleagues.

Learning through storytelling has been used as a learning tool in the past, and it is a way to engage the learner in exploring old and new ideas as well as the handling of experiences as they impact current and future action. According to Clark and Rossiter (2008),

Narrative links learning to the prior experience of the learner, but at a profoundly human level. It is constructivist, but it involves more than reflection on experience. It is situated, but in way that differs from the practical, problem-solving character of situated cognition. It is critical in that it enables learners to question and critique social norms and power arrangements, but it does so by enabling learners to see how they are located in (and their thinking is shaped by) larger cultural narratives. (p. 66)

Reflection and writing of narratives by superintendents and chief financial officers are often a routine process to improve everyday tasks. Clark and Rossiter (2008) suggested that “writing is a way of making our thinking visible...because we are trying to narrate our understanding of something” (p. 67). However, there are times that these reflections and narratives become critical events that shape our future world. They are what Mezirow (2000b) calls a disorienting dilemma, and often they can be the characteristic of Frank’s (1995) chaos, quest, and restitution narratives.

Moreover, my autoethnographic style of writing about my critical events allowed me to share my narratives to create an awareness of experiences as a superintendent or chief financial officer. According to Philaretou and Allen (2006),

Autoethnographies are normative, narrative delineations (written accounts) (McLaren, 1993) of important everyday life experiences as observed, understood, and communicated (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993) by the researcher/observer through participant/non-participant observational means: the self, life, and writing are three interdependent processes that feed on one another to produce “I” accounts of interpretative, experiential reality. (p. 66)

In my study, the critical events were experiences that provided an “I” account of the reality of working as a superintendent and chief financial officer. I believe that my stories will contribute to the preparation of future professionals in the education realm. Clark and Rossiter (2008) proposed that it is like the concept of teaching a student. Creating a narrative benefits not only the student, but the teacher or mentor because each

can challenge the question and/or narrative. They both are able to learn from the experience (Clark & Rossiter, 2008). In my study, not only have other practitioners learned, I too have learned from experience. Learning from both the theory and experiences is essential to the adult learner. Educational programs should provide more opportunities and strategies for future superintendents and chief financial officers in the area of narrative writing. Doing so will add significant value to their preparation and increase the likelihood of being successful in their jobs.

Recommendations

Policy and Practice

School administrators, in the state of Texas, are not protected by personnel law; therefore, it is important to understand the difference in contractual status between an educator and a chief financial officer. This is an area in which most school business officials are unfamiliar. The contract status of a chief financial officer is at-will, meaning that this administrator does not have continuing rights to a teacher's contract. For many years, Chapter 21 of the Texas Education Code permitted contracts for teachers, principals, and instruction-based personnel; however, the contracts of school business officials are often not subject to Chapter 21. This means that the individual in the business manager (CFO) position does not have the same protection as the instructional employees such as an assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, a teacher, a principal, or a counselor. Therefore, when a board of trustees decides not to renew a contract that is not subject to Chapter 21 rights, the board can merely make a decision without justification. It is similar to a term contract that expires and does not require

renewal or any board action. Thus, a mere no action can terminate employment because the term contract ended.

With this difference in contracts, a business manager (CFO) has less protection and is often more at risk of non-renewal. The business manager often interacts with the superintendent and the board, and there are times when unpleasant decisions and controversial information is discussed. Some of these situations can ignite political disputes among stakeholders and/or have the potential to create a negative and conflicting environment in the school district. Because of the nature of the position, the business manager (CFO) is often required to play devil's advocate and question the situation and facts in order to analyze and make decisions. Board critics often view this function negatively and the person as an obstruction to carrying out board political agendas. This situation is magnified more when the business manager serves as interim superintendent of the school district.

I would recommend that a business manager (CFO) not consider being an interim superintendent because being in such a position might create political situations that can develop and affect the business manager in the future. Furthermore, the business manager has the danger of being viewed as a political person rather than a trusted administrator. Being perceived as a person of trust and integrity is a key element of being a business manager. While these are qualities of a superintendent in theory, in practice, board members and superintendents often place themselves in precarious situations that can challenge their integrity. Moreover, serving as an interim superintendent can change the perception of board members. As an interim

superintendent, I was asked to consider unethical situations and had to make tough, unpopular decisions. With board members, I experienced situations in the superintendency that required making political decisions. Once the business manager is no longer the interim superintendent, board members often have the tendency to not make the distinction between what a person did as interim superintendent and their actions as business manager. That is, board members change their perception of the individual while interim superintendent, and they continue to see him or her as a decision maker even though they are serving as business manager. Therefore, potential conflict is created with the business manager (CFO), formerly the interim superintendent, over change in philosophy and direction of the school district.

If the business manager (CFO) has no option but to become interim superintendent, I would recommend that the business manager only perform these duties on a temporary basis with no intent of becoming the permanent superintendent. By making this intent clear, the business manager will outline definite expectations and will also allow himself or herself the opportunity to return to his or her previous position and function. It will also prevent any future problems or conflict with the new, incoming superintendent. During my interim period, the new superintendent felt that he had to compete with me as a business manager (CFO) because I had been interim superintendent and some of the board members had a high regard for me. Nevertheless, it is important to have a choice of returning to the previous function as a business manager and avoid incorrect perceptions by board members and future superintendent candidates.

Research and Higher Education: A New Way of Implementing Reflective Practice

“Reflective practice is more than a process for capturing professional knowledge; it is also about learning and change” (Hughes, 2009, p. 451). Another recommendation for school business officials and superintendents is to practice reflection-for-action in their daily activities. Kolb (1984) talked about the learning model requiring concrete experience, reflection, generalization, and experimentation. Knowledge can be acquired through education, experience, mentorship, on-the-job learning, and internships. Schön (1987) used reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action as a means to improve performance. Cowan (2006) used both Kolb (1984) and Schön (1987) to justify the use of reflection for learning, as a precursor to action. I recommend that the administrator use reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action to improve the reflection-for-action. As professionals, my advice is to learn, learn, and learn. Also, listen, listen, and listen, and be prepared for future action based on your experience, both formal and informal through the three models of reflective practice: (a) reflection-in-action, (b) reflection-for-action, and (c) reflection-on-action.

Like many administrators, I am able to learn from a multitude of things to include formal education, experience, mentoring, and training in order to improve future performance. Reflection improves the work. It is my feeling that using reflection to solve problems, to improve how a situation is handled, to improve performance, or to enhance the capacity of an individual through self-reflection is essential in becoming a better administrator. Every day is an experience, and it gives us the opportunity to learn and improve our tools to deal with new situations. According to Wilson (2008),

Reflecting on what might be is one of the most powerful mental tools we have at our disposal. Without this ability to speculate about what might be, we would be constrained within the present or the past. If we lack the ability to reflect on the future there could be no plans, no hopes, no aspirations, no wants, no dreams and no desires. (p. 180).

Cowan (1998) named this reflection-for-action, but Wilson (2008) called it reflecting-on-the-future. Wilson (2008) further added that this reflecting-for-action or reflection-on-the-future is “the act or process of reflecting on desirable and possible futures with the purpose of evaluating them as well as considering strategies intended to achieve the objective(s)” (p. 180).

As a result of this study’s findings, I propose a new reflective practice model, summarized in Figure 1. In this model, I switched RFA (reflection-for-action) as a planning tool knowing that we are always in the RIA (reflection-in-action) mode. Your formal and informal education as well as your formal and informal experience develops your need for pre-action or reflection-for-action.

Moreover, we react instantaneously based on the current knowledge. Reflection can be spontaneous and intuitive. Once those plans are experienced, and the reflection-on-action (ROA) loop is initiated in order to recreate experience and once again begin the new planning loop, RFA is used to forecast and predict future action. Subsequently, we all engage in RIA until a new RFA loop is initiated for future action planning.

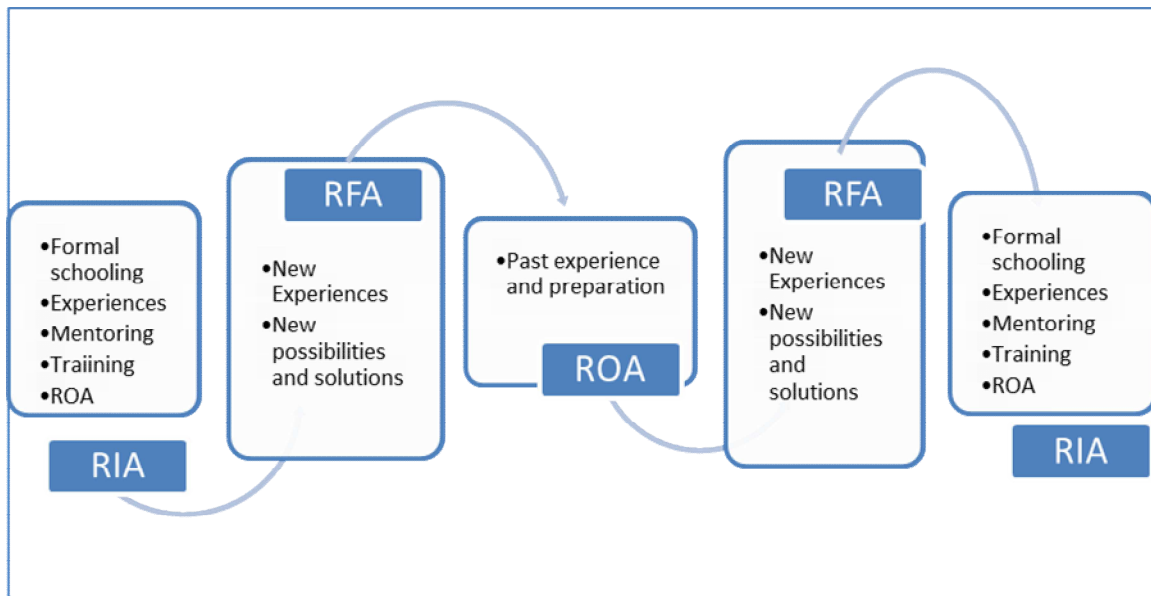


Figure 1. A reflective approach to learning.

Journaling and Peer Discussion

“Reflective journals clarify and extend individual thoughts and concerns” (Collier, 1999, p. 174). Another recommendation that I have for prospective school business officials and superintendents is to utilize journaling and peer discussions as a way to reflect on experience. If a person is going to learn from experience, a person must reflect and also share the experience with others. Many times, I have learned about new situations and events by talking to colleagues regarding their own experiences. I have also used time with colleagues to reflect on previous action, events, or activities. Many times, discussing a situation with your peers gives you a third party perspective and it allows an administrator to gauge whether he or she is headed in the right direction.

I have also engaged in journaling my experiences. I have shared my experiences by documenting my actions and sharing the lessons learned through individual and

group presentations. It is my belief that a person who experiences a positive or negative event that is considered significant in his or her life should share it with others by talking about it and writing about it. Many times if it is a negative event, a person will seek closure through a process, and this can come in the way of reflecting with others by talking about the event or by writing about it. Occasionally, an administrator who has experienced a negative event will seek a healing process in order to reflect, understand, accept, and move forward by learning from the experience. I went through a series of critical events, and I could not have gone through my healing process without writing, sharing, and learning from it. Reflecting on my experience with the dissertation process, I feel that I have learned how to successfully engage in a reflective process and through time, I am hopeful that this skill will improve.

Concluding Thoughts

“Auto-ethnographic accounts of experience, by virtue of being self-reflective, are deeply personal” (Muncey, as cited in DuPreez, 2008, p. 510). My autoethnography was thought about after taking an epistemology course taught by my dissertation chair. During the course, I was asked to develop an outline of a dissertation topic along with research questions. I remember that I did not want to develop a quantitative study because I wanted to venture into an area that was challenging and different from my background. While a numeric and finite study would have been easy for me to undertake, I wanted to personally challenge myself to develop new skills by undertaking a qualitative study. I was also interested in developing a study similar to the writing that my father had developed during his lifetime. In Patton’s (2002) definition, my father was

an ethnographer because he used what he called qualitative inquiry without knowing it. Patton (2002) said that this inquiry “means going into the field-into the real world of programs, organizations, neighborhoods, street corners, and getting close enough to capture what is happening” (p. 48). My father would create short biographies of important community leaders and he utilized some of the qualitative research methods such as interviewing, thick description, participant observation, member checking, objectivity, and fieldwork. He wrote biographies as an ethnographer, and I read some of his articles that he published while he worked for a local newspaper. At that time, I was interim superintendent at Tejano ISD, and I wondered if he would have interviewed me if he had been alive. Would I had been the subject of one of his stories, and what would he have asked me? During my tenure at Tejano ISD, I felt that I had many experiences as interim superintendent and chief financial officer therefore, I envisioned writing an autoethnography.

As I continued with my studies and doctoral work, I began writing the proposal for my dissertation hearing. I planned to prepare a proposal on my experiences as an interim superintendent and chief financial officer. However, my study took a significant turn. After being interim superintendent, I went back to my old position as chief financial officer. However, as a new interim superintendent was hired and I was not asked to return to Tejano ISD, my ability to reflect and write in the development of my dissertation became challenging.

My dissertation work was supposed to take place while I was interim superintendent; however, writing became harder because of the challenging experiences.

I felt that I became what Frank (1995) called the “wounded healer” and what Schön (1987) called a reflective practitioner. It was not easy to talk about the experiences, let alone write about them. I remember telling my story to my dissertation chair, and she told me that it was evident that I was very hurt by the experiences. In retrospect, I could not have written about or learned about the experiences earlier in my study as elements of the dissertation process such as journaling, research, and sharing proved vital to my meaning making. Many of my colleagues asked me over the years, “Why is your dissertation taking so long?” My response for many years was that it was because I was gathering information that was different than other studies. My response today is that I was learning to heal and hopefully setting a stage for healing to ensue in others.

In summary, my new definition of reflection is that it is an art that should be meaningful and thoughtful so that you can assign your interpretation and possibly learn from it. Reflective practice is further a mental, Google search trying to find similarities and known knowledge and, when there are no matches, the opportunity to create new meaning and knowledge arises.

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