“A Place of Becoming” Leadership Educators’ Experience
Teaching Leadership: A Phenomenological Approach

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“A PLACE OF BECOMING”
LEADERSHIP EDUCATORS’ EXPERIENCES TEACHING LEADERSHIP:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH

by
Heath E. Harding

A DISSERTATION

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This phenomenological study described the experiences of twelve leadership educators who were teaching leadership in undergraduate leadership development programs in the Midwest. The central research question was: What are the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions? Teaching leadership was defined as providing developmental opportunities (e.g. formal education, in class instruction, one-on-one, coaching, service learning, individual reflection) to increase both leader and leadership capacity. Educators were defined as individuals who provide developmental opportunities for undergraduates. Participants had at least three years teaching leadership at the undergraduate level and were currently teaching a course with the explicit objective of increasing leadership capacity. Four themes emerged from the semi-structured interviews: (a) “I teach leadership. What does that mean?” (b) “not dancing alone” in the learning community, (c) helping students make a difference, and (d) the educator’s journey: “a place of becoming.” The essence of teaching leadership was about parallel journeys: the students’ journey of leadership development and the journey of self-development of the educators.
Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge, with deep gratitude, the system in which I accomplished this dissertation. In basketball, the person who last touched the ball gets the credit for the points on the scoreboard. However, it takes much more than one person to score points, let alone win the game. Someone had to build the arena and polish the court. It takes hours of practice with great players who make you step up your game. It takes coaches and mentors to give you feedback about ways to improve. Your teammates have to give you room to catch the ball and then someone has to throw you the ball. Basketball would not be complete without cheerleaders and fans to cheer you on when things aren’t going your way.

The system in which I live and work includes so many people that it is impossible to name all the people who have contributed by helping me put this dissertation in the scorebooks. I am also unwilling to rank your contribution in terms of hours or the value of your contribution. You have likely contributed in some way to completing this dissertation if you are reading the acknowledgments. If you have given me a high-five or ‘some love,’ then you have contributed to this dissertation. Do not dismiss your contribution; molehills do add up to mountains.

I am grateful to my birth family, my UNL family, my chosen family and the educators who have shared and continue to share their wisdom with me. Blessings to all of you!
Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  Definition of Terms .................................................................................................................. 3
  Significance of Study .............................................................................................................. 5
  Summary .................................................................................................................................... 6

Chapter Two: Literature Review ............................................................................................... 7
  Leadership Theory .................................................................................................................... 8
  Leadership Development ......................................................................................................... 13
  Leadership Development Programs In Higher Education ..................................................... 22
  Summary .................................................................................................................................... 29

Chapter Three: Methodology ................................................................................................... 31
  Qualitative Research Tradition: Phenomenology .................................................................... 31
  Constructivist Worldview/Epistemology .................................................................................. 35
  Pilot Study .................................................................................................................................. 35
  Participants/Educators ............................................................................................................ 36
  Research Questions .................................................................................................................. 38
  Data Collection .......................................................................................................................... 38
  Data Analysis ............................................................................................................................. 39
  Validity ....................................................................................................................................... 40
  Ethical Considerations .............................................................................................................. 42
  Limitations ................................................................................................................................. 43
  Delimitations ............................................................................................................................... 43
  Role of Researcher ..................................................................................................................... 44

Chapter Four: Findings ............................................................................................................. 47
  Participants/Educators ............................................................................................................. 50
  “I teach leadership. What does that mean?” ........................................................................... 52
  “Not dancing alone” in the learning community ...................................................................... 62
  Helping students make a difference ......................................................................................... 79
  The educator’s journey: “A place of becoming” ...................................................................... 93
  Summary of Findings ............................................................................................................... 108

Chapter Five: Discussion .......................................................................................................... 113
  Discussion of the Themes ........................................................................................................ 113
  Significance of Findings .......................................................................................................... 123
  Recommendations .................................................................................................................... 124
  Further Research ...................................................................................................................... 125
Limitations of Results .................................................................................................................. 127
Personal Reflection ...................................................................................................................... 127

References ................................................................................................................................... 131

Appendices .................................................................................................................................. 137

Appendix A: Pilot Study Interview Protocol ................................................................................ 137
Appendix B: Interview Protocol .................................................................................................. 139
Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent ................................................................................. 141
Appendix D: External Review ...................................................................................................... 142

List of Tables

Table 1: Leadership Development Model ...................................................................................... 15
Table 2: Common Qualitative Research Traditions ..................................................................... 32
Table 3: Phenomenological Research Procedures ......................................................................... 33
Table 4: Themes and Subthemes .................................................................................................. 48
Table 5: Educator Demographics ................................................................................................. 51
Table 6: Theme: “I teach leadership. What does that mean?” .................................................. 52
Table 7: Theme: Not dancing alone” in the learning community ............................................... 63
Table 8: Significant Statement Samples: Modeling the Way ....................................................... 79
Table 9: Theme: Helping students make a difference ................................................................. 80
Table 10: Significant Statement Samples: Sense of Who They Are .......................................... 86
Table 11: Theme: The educator’s journey: “a place of becoming” ........................................... 94

List of Figures

Figure 1: “A Place of Becoming” Leadership Educators’ Experiences Teaching Leadership: A Phenomenological Approach ................................................................. 49
Figure 2: “A Place of Becoming” Making a Difference in the Leadership Learning Community .............................................................................................................. 125
Chapter One: Introduction

*The organizational adaptability required to meet a relentless succession of challenges is beyond anyone’s current [leadership] expertise.*
Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky

In the last 30 years over 1000 leadership development programs have been established at academic institutions (Riggio, Ciulla, & Sorenson, 2003; Rost, 1991) in an attempt to formalize the leader and leadership development process (Day, 2000; Day & O’Connor, 2003; Van Velsor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004) for undergraduate students. These programs have been charged with developing leaders to negotiate increasingly complex problems (Camilllus, 2008; Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009; Zaccaro & Klimoski, 2001). However, little is known about the leadership development process in general (Avolio, 2007; Day & O’Connor, 2003) at a time when more complex situations demand leaders that can exercise more leadership capacity (Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009).

While many undergraduate leadership development programs have been created in recent years, a clear understanding of the preparation process for undergraduate students at academic institutions to lead in this increasingly complex world is lacking. Researchers have found that leadership could be taught, and formal leadership training impacted educational and personal development (Avolio et al., 2005; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999). However, these programs varied widely in both content and pedagogy (Ayman, Adams, Fisher, & Hartman, 2003; Brungardt, 1997; Fritz & Brown, 1998; Fritz, Brown, Lunde, & Banset, 2005), which may be due to the lack of a central definition of leadership found
throughout the discipline (McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Conn, & Baker, 2006; Rost, 1991). Riggio (2008) believes that leadership development programs must improve and that one the best ways to improve them is with better assessment. Before better assessment can be implemented, however, the undergraduate leadership development process must first be better understood.

One way to further investigate the leadership development process in undergraduate leadership development programs is through the lens of the educators who are teaching leadership in these programs. Leadership educators developed and presented core curriculum, provided stories from their own leadership experiences, modeled leadership behavior, coached, provided both challenges and support, provided feedback and guided reflection (Connaughton, Lawrence, & Ruben, 2003; Day & O’Connor, 2003; Doh, 2003; Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992; Niremberg, 2003). “Students and stakeholders spoke consistently about the importance of teachers, facilitators, administrators, and staff members for student leadership development” (Eich, 2008, p. 180). Eich found that these stakeholders or educators helped students expand their thinking and provided examples of leadership when students’ own experiences are lacking. Also, educators provided other critical functions such as support – both inside and outside the program, model leadership behavior, demonstrated integrity or simply asked thought provoking questions. These behaviors were found to be significant for leadership development. Therefore, educators contributed to the success of undergraduate leadership development. Eich (2008) wrote, “high-quality programs are spaces that help students do leadership and understand what they are doing along with others” (p. 186). As part of the undergraduate leadership development process, it is important to fully understand how educators
experience and contribute to this process.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of educators who taught leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions in the Midwest. Teaching leadership was defined as providing developmental opportunities to increase both leader and leadership capacity. A distinction was not made between the types of capacity being developed nor did this study define the methods used for development (e.g. formal education, in class instruction, one-on-one, coaching, service learning, individual reflection). Educators were defined as individuals who provide developmental opportunities for undergraduates. The central research question was: What are the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions?

Definition of Terms

It was important to define several key terms used in this study. For the purpose of this research study, the following terms were defined as:

• Leadership - is the process undertaken to negotiate change. Kotter (1990) differentiates leadership – establishing direction, building teams, inspiring and energizing, and motivating – from management, defining management as the process of coping with complexity. Rost (1991) defines leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (Rost, 1991, p. 99). Participants were not required to have a specific definition of leadership.

• Leaders - are individuals, agents or collaborators who exercise leadership.
• Development - is the process of increasing capacity through knowledge acquisition and application. Development is more than a change process. It implies not only a change, but also an increase, a growth in complexity.

• Leader development - is an ongoing, lifelong process (Van Veslor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004) in which an individual’s capacity to negotiate change is increased. The focus is on the individual’s skills, emotions and behaviors. Leader development may be structured (i.e. coursework, workshops, seminars), unstructured (i.e. mentoring, modeling, brief conversations) or a combination of both structured and unstructured.

• Leadership development - is defined as “engaging with learning opportunities in one’s environment over time to build one’s capacity or efficacy to engage in leadership” (Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, & Owen, 2006, p. 402). Sometimes leadership development is defined as the capacity of a system or organization to negotiate change. For the purposes of this study, leadership development will be used as an inclusive term for both leader and leadership development.

• Leadership development programs - are structured or formalized curriculum, courses, sessions, workshops, etc. with the intended purpose to increase leader and leadership capacity.

• Educators - are defined as people who educate, teach, coach or instruct in formal and informal settings. Therefore, educator is used as an encompassing term for individuals who often have at least some formal responsibility to teach in a formal or semi-formal (course, workshop, seminar, coaching, etc.).

• Leadership Educators – are defined as educators who educate, teach, coach
instruct, or facilitate in the context of leadership.

• Teaching leadership - is defined as providing educational opportunities for leadership development both in and out of the classroom. Coaching is a recommended strategy for leadership development (McCauley & Van Velsor, 2004) and often occurs in one-on-one situations. Also, some institutions do not have dedicated leadership instructors. Some institutions also provide co-curricular programming as part of their leadership development programs.

**Significance of Study**

This study was significant for several reasons. Since educators play a key role in the leadership development process and little was known about their lived experiences, these findings provide a better understanding of the leadership development process from the educators’ perspective in academic institutions. The findings provide valuable knowledge from the perspectives of leadership educators. Both new and veteran educators could gain a better understanding of their role by reflecting on these findings and their own perspective and experiences. Administrators would gain insights into experiences of educators who are teaching leadership. The administrators would be able to provide better support and development for them. Social science researchers would benefit by having a broader, more complete, understanding of the entire leadership development process, including leadership educators, and gain insight for direction for future studies.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions in the Midwest. The definition of teaching leadership was not limited to direct instruction in a classroom. The content and context of teaching leadership was defined by the participants, which also included one-on-one instruction, mentoring, coaching, modeling, etc. A phenomenological design was implemented to answer the central question: What are the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions? The participants were educators who had at least three years of experience teaching leadership to undergraduate students and were currently teaching at least one course with the explicit objective to increase the leader and leadership capacity of the undergraduate students enrolled in the course. The study was significant because there was limited research on how educators participate in the undergraduate leadership development process. This study also provides information that could help administrators prepare, develop, and support leadership educators. The findings provide readers with an opportunity to compare their own experiences to the experiences reported in this study.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Most leaders, and the organizations that they lead, believe that leadership development is important and worth the investment of resources and their personal time to work on their own leadership development. There is a shared belief that leadership development works. Ronald E. Riggio

To focus the literature review, I assumed that the leadership educators were teaching leadership theories in their course or programs with the goal of developing the leadership capacity of the undergraduate students as part of a leadership development program. Therefore, I reviewed three broad categories of literature that relate to leadership educators who were teaching leadership in undergraduate leadership development programs: (a) leadership theory, (b) leadership development, and (c) leadership development programs. The section on leadership theory summarizes some of the major leadership theories and was by no means exhaustive. Reviewing and organizing the sheer volume of literature, both scholarly and popular, was compounded by the lack of a central definition of leadership (Rost, 1991). The literature in this section provided a historical context in which leadership as a discipline and leadership development programs emerged. In the section on leadership development, I reviewed literature that provided a context and better understanding of leadership development in general. I used Day and O’Connor’s (2003) leadership development model to divide current literature into three subsections: human (individual), social (dyad/group), and system (organizational) level of leadership and leadership development. I included literature on leadership that was conducted in an undergraduate academic setting or with undergraduate students. The third section included the sparse literature on leadership development programs at undergraduate academic institutions, the context of this study.
I search multiple electronic databases using terms such as teaching leadership, leadership development, and leadership education. I also searched within journals that publish research studies focused on leadership. Little could be found about these programs in general, and even less was found about the educators who taught in leadership development programs.

**Leadership Theory**

In Burns' (1978) seminal work, *Leadership*, he defined leadership as "the reciprocal process of mobilizing" resources through competition and conflict to achieve goals by both leaders and followers (p. 425). The central purpose of the book attempted to synthesize understanding and data from multiple disciplines into a unified leadership discipline. Yet, over a decade later, Rost (1991) found that the definition of leadership still varied greatly within the field of leadership and across other disciplines.

Trait theory was one of the first systematic attempts to define leadership (Northouse, 2007). The focus has evolved over time but was still a factor in leadership research and programs. It began as a study of great leaders (Great Man theories) and the qualities they possessed, such as intelligence, motivation, confidence, persistence, extroversion, and achievement. When the universality of trait theory began to be questioned, the theory was expanded to encompass situational factors. More recently the focus shifted back to its original focus on traits (Northouse, 2007).

A skills approach to leadership began in the mid-20th Century as a means to move beyond traits. "Skills are what the leader can accomplish" (Northouse, 2007, p. 40). They are often categorized as technical, human, and conceptual. Northouse defined
technical skills related to a specific work task, such as changing your oil or writing a letter. Human skills were defined as skills related to working with people, such as being conscious to the needs of others as well as motivating them. Conceptual skills were defined as the capacity to work with ideas, concepts, and theories. Leadership programs that focus on skill acquisition were called competency-based programs. The goal of competency-based programs was to produce leaders who were competent in specific leadership skills.

There were a number of leadership theories that focused on behavior. The leadership styles approach commonly divided behavior into two broad variables: task/production and relationship/employee. The Ohio State studies, Michigan State studies, and Blake and Mouton studies used this approach (Northouse, 2007). Situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1979) focused on identifying different follower readiness and the adaption of the leader’s style or behavior to that specific situation. A grid was formed using the two variables: directive and supportive behavior. The four resulting quadrants were labeled delegating, supporting, coaching, and directing. Based on the model, once the leader determines the follower’s level of development, he or she could respond with the appropriate style of leadership for each quadrant. The Blake and Mouton Grid (1978) focused on two variables: (1) concern for production or task and (2) consideration for people, which created an additive outcome of “unique and distinctive behaviors that could not be predicted from examining either of the two quantities in separation from the other” (p. 211). Leadership styles were recommended based on these two variables. House (1971) developed the Path-Goal theory of leadership. The Path-Goal theory focused on the path followers or employees took to accomplish production or
task goals. The leader’s purpose was to increase the follower’s production rewards by making the path clear and reducing obstacles and pitfalls.

In the last half of the 20th Century, management and leadership began to be defined as separate concepts. In 1990, Kotter defined management as planning, organizing, staffing, and controlling. He defined leadership as establishing direction, building teams, inspiring and energizing, and motivating. Essentially, managers helped maintain the status quo, while leaders created and shared a vision to create real change. Real change was defined as change that was substantial to an organization or community (Rost, 1991). Rost and Barker (2000) propose that leadership was undergoing another period of reconstruction. They defined the emerging paradigm as post-industrial where leadership was perceived as a mutually benefiting relationship instead of an industrial-based paradigm focused on an individual’s actions to command and control situations and people. The authors defined leadership as the will – intentions and behavior – of many individuals; therefore, leadership was the total will of an organization or community.

In response to our rapidly changing world, research studies have broadened beyond the skills and behavior approach, including aspects of diversity and culture. There have been many studies that have investigated leadership in regard to culture and diversity. Bass (1997) found empirical evidence that suggested that the full range or transactional-transformational paradigm of leadership was universal across organizations and cultures despite cultural difference; “when people think about leadership, their prototypes and ideals [were] transformational” (p. 135). There have also been numerous studies conducted on culture and leadership. Hofstede's five dimensions of culture (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2004) were commonly used in conjunction with leadership. The five
dimensions were comprised of power distance index, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance index, and long-term orientation. Each dimension was represented as a continuous scale that ranged from high to low. A culture’s unique pattern was determined by the combination and interaction of the five dimensions. With increasing globalization, there had been an increase in research studies about cross-cultural leadership, global leadership, and a global mindset.

In more recent years, a few researchers have investigated the intersection between leadership and identity. A prominent question of when researching leadership and identity was how different issues in a person’s life impacted the leadership or followership of individuals. An underlying assumption was that an individual’s identity developed over time and continued to develop until death (Kegan & Lahey, 1984). Other assumptions that framed research on leadership and identity were that humans were comprised of an evolving system of meaning and that these systems shaped individual’s experiences. Kegan and Lahey (1984) argued that a person's identity was one of the largest underlying factors in the way a leader thought, felt, and behaved. Our meaning-making system and the meaning developed within the system impacted how individuals thought about leadership and how they enacted leadership. The system and the resulting meaning, provided structure to a wide range of functions in an individual’s life. Although behavior at the individual level may seem idiosyncratic, they argued that there were consistent patterns across the meaning-making systems of all individuals. Development, therefore, was a matter of evolving or replacing the current meaning-making system with a new one. Development was a process of creating new ways to think, resulting in different outcomes or meanings.
Some studies have begun to incorporate identity explicitly into leadership models. Sensemaking (Wieck, 1995), a communication theory, had recently gained the attention of leadership researchers because it focused on the construction of meaning within social systems. Weick wrote that sensemaking was triggered by equivocal meanings causing people to engage in communication aimed at creating new synthesized meaning. The theory included individual identity; whereby, an individual’s beliefs, values and meanings provided a foundation for interpersonal communication. Wieck argued that meaning was retrospective and could only be known after it was communicated. It was enacted through the integration of cognition and action. It was a social process where cues are extracted from equivocal meanings and clarified. Kriger and Seng (2005) used sensemaking and contingency theory to qualitatively analyze leadership constructs in five major world religions. They looked at the inner meaning of leadership presented within those religions and the possible impact these feelings, views, and models had on the behavior of individuals who ascribed to those specific religious faiths.

A few leadership development programs have begun to incorporate leader identity more explicitly into leadership curriculum. There were a few scholars who believed that identity should be central to leadership development programs. Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, and Owen (2006) used a grounded theory approach to developed a stage-based model of leadership identity development (LID) from a prior grounded theory study (Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). The LID model had six stages: awareness, exploration/engagement, leader-identitied, leadership-differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. Lumby and English (2009) explored the nature of identity and its relationship on educational leadership. They
believed that multifaceted identities were “constantly being negotiated” (p. 97). They also suggested that leadership development and practice did not engage the entire self and proposed that “leadership preparation should be an invitation into identity construction and subsequent performance” instead of knowledge and skill acquisition. As more leadership theorist believed and research results supported that at least some portion of leadership was behavioral or learned, leadership development became a significant thread in leadership literature.

**Leadership Development**

Riggio (2008) argued that there was empirical evidence that most leadership development increases participants’ capacity to lead; however, systematic research on the leadership development process has not been conducted (Avolio, 2007). Scholars have found that leadership could be taught to undergraduate students (Brungardt, 1996; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999) and that leadership education impacted educational and personal development of those undergraduate students (Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001). Zimmerman-Oster and Burkhardt (1999) conducted a multiple case study of 31 leadership development programs for young adults funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. They found that the programs had a variety of different goals and strategies were conducted in a variety of settings. In academic settings funds were used to create new courses in 58% of the programs, while leadership minor and majors were developed in 14% of the funded programs.

Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, and Burkhardt (2001) looked at longitudinal data from 875 students across ten institutions. Their analysis found that students who
participated in programs that focused on leadership development and training showed an increase in leadership skills, understanding of leadership theories, multicultural awareness, civic responsibility, and personal and social values. Three common elements of leadership development programs were found. Programs offered opportunities to service, experiential, and collaborative learning. Due to a reported variety of methods used to increase the leadership capacity of the undergraduate students, understanding what caused the increase remained less clear.

Within leadership development there are a plethora of terms, often used interchangeably such as training, education, and development. Ayman, Adams, Fisher, and Hartman (2003) differentiated these terms. They defined training as learning for a current job that was well defined, commonly referred to as technical skills. Education was defined as learning about a specific job that an individual was not currently performing. Education was defined as a structured program designed with the goal of developing capacity for future application. Development was defined as non-specific informal learning process of an individual.

A distinction was made between leader and leadership development (Day & O’Connor, 2003; Van Velsor, Moxley & Bunker, 2004). Leader development research focused on training, education, and development of an individual. Leader development focused on the intra or internal skills an individual leader might possess in order to effectively lead others including self-awareness, self-regulation, and self-motivation. Leadership development focused on the system or network of relationships and its capacity to adapt or change. Leadership development focused on the skills needed to negotiate relationships between leaders and followers or collaborators. The skills
included relational skills, social awareness, social skills, and team interactions.

Leadership development also encompassed larger systems found at the organization and community level. Day and O’Connor (2003) categorized the three levels as human, social, and systems capital as shown in Table 1. The human level addressed the leader’s skills and abilities. The social level focused on the interpersonal skills needed to effectively lead in dyad or small groups. Day and O’Connor defined the systems level as the relational capacity needed to lead organizations and communities.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Development Model</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intrapersonal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Leadership Construct**


**Human level.** Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler (2005) argued that most leadership theories were based on a leader's traits or behaviors, or a combination of the two. The focus on traits and behaviors was reflected in leadership development. Often the curriculum that was being taught in leadership development programs was mostly
traits, behaviors, and skills at the human and social levels. The authors argued that a narrative approach should be used to understanding leaders and leadership.


There was also a body of literature focused on identity and how it impacted leader behavior and leadership processes. Kriger and Seng (2005) wrote that a focus on having (traits) and doing (behaviors and skills) was largely a Western or European Enlightenment perspective. In their study that used sensemaking (Wieck, 1995) as a framework to analyze sacred texts and other notable writings (e.g. *Bible, Qur'an, Abidharma*) of five major world religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism), being (identity) was absent in leadership concepts from the Western or Abrahamic religious traditions. Kegan and Lahey (1984) argued that an individual’s
identity was at the core or foundation for the beliefs, feelings, and behavior of leaders. Several scholars suggested that identity be moved to the center of leadership development (Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, & Owen, 2006; Lumby & English, 2009).

Lumby and English (2009) specifically stated, “leadership preparation should be an initiation into identity construction and subsequent performance, rather than solely aimed at the acquisition of managerial and technical knowledge and skills” (p. 97).

McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, and Baker (2006) reviewed the connection between identity and leadership in the constructive development literature. They found that there was some evidence that suggested an individual’s stage of development (or identity) impacted their leadership behavior. However they found limited research on how intentional development programs impacted identity development. Komives, Mainella, Longerbeam, Osteen, and Owen (2005) conducted a study on undergraduate leaders and subsequently developed a six-stage leader identity development model. The model included awareness, exploration/engagement, leader identified, leadership differentiated, generativity, and integration/synthesis. Interaction with peers, advisors, mentors, and educators impacted the leader development and progress across the stages, primarily through mentoring and providing students opportunities to lead.

**Social level.** The social level moved beyond the individual to encompass the interactions between individuals and small groups, commonly called interpersonal interactions. “Most existing theories, models, and definitions of leadership proceed from the assumption that somehow leadership was about getting people to do something” (Drath & Palus, 1994, p. 5) through social interaction. They proposed that leadership was
a social sense-making process. Leadership discussions and research had largely pivoted around *power* and *influence* in interpersonal relationships. Rost (1991) defined leadership as an influence relationship among leaders and followers. French and Raven (1959) developed a commonly used typology of powers used to influence people. Yukl (2006) wrote that over the last few decades, researchers have investigated how individuals used specific behaviors to influence the behaviors of others. Yukl identified and described influence tactics similar to French and Raven’s (1959) influence tactics.

Day (2000) argued that here were many research opportunities on relational aspects of leadership and Uhl-Bien (2003) argued that there had been a resurgence of interest in interpersonal relationships. One of the most widely researched leadership theories was leader-member exchange (LMX) theory. Leader-member exchange theory focused on the dyadic relationship between the leader and a member (Gerstner & Day, 1997) at the social level. However, the quality of the relationship was found to impact the outcomes at all three levels: human, social, and systems (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998). Research has been conducted on LMX for over 30 years and has shown how high-quality and low-quality relationships impact organizational outcomes. High-quality relationships added value to organizations and low-quality relationships were associated with a range of problems in the organizations. Maslyn and Uhl-Bien (2001) conducted a survey study on the expectations of the quality of relationship and future plans of investment in the relationship. The sample included 232 manager-subordinate dyads from a large international service organization. They found that members in low-quality relationships wanted the relationships to improve. They also found that the members believed that they had tried to make the relationship work, but in the end, the relationship simply could
Myers (2006) investigated the quality of relationships between students and instructor and the impact on the student’s motivation to communicate with their instructor. The LMX7 survey instrument was given to 139 undergraduates in several communication courses at a Midwestern university. Two broad findings emerged from the data. First, relational, functional, participatory, and sycophantic motives were used by students in the in-group at a higher rate than the students in the out-group. Secondly, there were no differences in the rates of excuse-making motives by either group. Myers recommended that instructors be aware that the student’s perceived quality of their relationship with an instructor was one factor that motivated a student communication with that instructor.

Markulis and Sashittal (2006) investigated the leadership team dynamics in an undergraduate business course using a quasi-experimental approach. More specifically, they studied the relationships between leadership modes and the performance and dynamics of classroom teams. They surveyed 18 teams in three different organization behavior courses for a total of 77 students. They found that using the emergent or self-directed leader model in classroom settings left teams leaderless. The teams were characterized by inequitable workloads, low commitment, and poor communication and cooperation. Also, the leaders who did emerge did so under uncertain conditions resulting in ineffective team dynamics. The authors recommend using a rotating leader model in team settings.
**Systems level.** The systems level focused on leadership within organizations or large systems that were comprised of individuals, dyads, and small groups. “Leadership theory has largely focused on leaders—the actions of individuals. It had not examined the dynamic, complex systems and processes that comprise leadership” (Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007, p. 299). To address this lack of attention to complex systems and process Uhl-Bien, Marion, and McKelvey proposed a framework called complexity leadership theory. Complexity leadership theory (CLT) was an attempt to answer Rost’s (1991) called to move beyond a “industrial school of leadership” (p. 181). Complexity leadership theory moved beyond the focus on individual leaders and small groups. Complexity leadership theory was a “leadership paradigm that focuses on enabling the learning, creative, and adaptive capacity of complex adaptive systems (CAS) within a context of knowledge-producing organizations” (p. 298). Complexity leadership theory emerged out of complexity theories from sciences. Complex adaptive systems were large systems composed of small interdependent units or agents that evolved through dynamic, sometimes volatile, interactions in the pursuit of a common goal. CLT was a proposed framework that focused on the creativity, learning, and adaptability throughout the system to meet what Heifetz (1994) called adaptive challenges. Adaptive challenges were those that require new and creative solutions that were outside current understanding. In contrast, technical challenges were problems that were clearly defined and had clearly defined solutions.

Boal and Schultz (2007) wrote about the role leaders played in complex adaptive systems. They hypothesized that strategic leaders used markers to signal opportunities for exploitive and exploratory learning, balance time, and making meaning. They also
proposed that dialogue was a primary mechanism for resource flow between agents in the CAS and that leaders could promote perspective making, taking, and shaping if they managed the dialogue in the system. They wrote that “dialogue is important because it is an under-recognized aspect of the collaboration that is needed in order to build shared meanings and collective pools of knowledge in an organization, but storytelling gives life to the knowledge being generated and shared among organization members” (p. 419). Dialogue was not simply a tool to convey information, but rather a tool to create meaning or common sense (Deetz, 1999). Stories, then, were influential aspects of a CAS; whereas, the stories told by leaders created influential capacity with other agents (Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005) and impacted the flow of resources in the adaptive process.

Sensemaking (Weick, 1995) was developed as a communications theory that focused on the construction of meaning through dialogue. Weick wrote the sensemaking theory was included “authoring, as well as, interpretation, creation as well as discovery” (p. 8). Rather than take an either/or approach, it proposed that the individual impacted the system in ways that should not be ignored and vice versa. Sensemaking processes were retrospective; individuals only knew what they were saying after they had said it. Sensemaking was enactive of sensible environments where action and cognition were combined to produce the environment. Interpretation explained how people coped with existing entities; whereas sensemaking described how entities were created. The authoring that happened in sensemaking related to Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, and Adler’s (2005) belief that narratives were influential aspects of complex social systems.

Drath and Palus (1994) offered a sensemaking leadership theory that critically
examined the role of leadership within a group. “Whatever else we can say about people, one thing that we all share—across cultures, geography, and time—is the ability, and the hunger, to make things make sense” (Drath & Palus, 1994, p. 2). They posited that popular leadership constructs caused leaders to ask how they could utilize authority, influence, and power to lead a team. A sensemaking framework suggested leaders would ask different questions: “What is the nature of this group? What is the most effective process of leadership for this group at this time? How can I, as holder of some authority, … participate productively in this process of leadership?” (p. 2). From a development viewpoint, sensemaking as the apex reoriented the leader as a participant in the meaning making process (i.e. leadership) rather than exerting control through influence. There was a growing body of literature on leadership systems theory; however, a large portion of the literature on leaders and leadership was conceptual in nature, yet to be studied.

Leadership development encompasses a wide range of context. For the purposes of this study, I reviewed literature that focused on leadership development programs in a higher education context.

**Leadership Development Programs In Higher Education**

Academic institutions have answered Burns’ (1978) call for the creation or synthesis of a leadership discipline by establishing over 1000 formal leadership development programs (Riggio, Ciulla, & Sorenson, 2003). Almost every major business program (Doh, 2003) and 65% of agricultural education departments (Brown & Fritz, 1994) had added leadership courses. Even though there had been an explosion of new programs at academic institutions in recent decades, limited research had been conducted
on these programs and their effectiveness.

Brown and Fritz (1994) surveyed agricultural education departments about their leadership/human resource management course offerings. They found that 65% of the 55 departments offered some type of leadership course. Some of the departments had been offering a leadership course for approximately 25 years. A follow-up study in 1998, found that 32 agricultural education departments required at least one leadership course to complete an agricultural education degree. In 1997, Brungardt conducted a literature review on how leaders were developed, educated, and trained. He found that leadership development programs at academic institutions varied widely, in both content and pedagogy. Ayman, Adams, Fisher, and Hartman's (2003) study of nine developmental leadership programs at colleges and universities found that the delivery methods used varied. All the programs used a class or seminar structure in combination with a variety of other delivery methods. Also the requirements that guided participants through these programs were varied. Another finding was that most programs were guided by competencies; however, they were not necessarily based on theories or research, and again varied from institution to institution.

Morrison, Rha, and Helfman (2003) conducted a survey study on a teaching-learning instructional model in a leadership development program. They implemented a model that paired teaching strategies with course content. The model balanced knowledge acquisition with skill development or practice. The model was comprised of four parts: consumer-centric, mutual interdependency, action oriented, and learning recognition. Classrooms became learning organizations when the students selected projects and challenges based on the needs and talents present in the class. Analysis of
the data from 144 students in six courses resulted in strong support for the use of the model and the use of the model enhanced self-discovery in student learning. The authors proposed that knowledge and practical application were at opposite ends of the teaching-learning spectrum, and suggested that learning in leadership development programs be extended beyond the classroom walls.

Interestingly, the leadership educator was not included as a part of the model used by Morrison, Rha, and Helfman (2003). Even though one of the parts of the model was mutual interdependency, it referred only to interdependency between students. It did not include mutual interdependency between students and educators. The educators were assumed to be outside of the framework or were somehow assumed to be objective participants in the process, rather than subjective participants making decisions based on their own experiences and identities. One student’s comment published in the study hinted at the role that the educators played throughout the process: “I would like to applaud you for your creative teaching style, in which I learned from hands-on experience instead only reading” (p. 16). More directly acknowledging the role that educators play in undergraduate students’ leadership development, the authors wrote that the students in this study also felt that their learning was enhanced when the educators modeled effective leadership strategies. Therefore, the role that the educators’ played while implementing this framework impacted the students’ success. Brungardt (1997) also indirectly acknowledged the role that educators played in the leadership development process when he wrote, “Our task is clear: to create far-reaching developmental and educational environments that truly foster leadership capabilities” (p. 91) (emphasis added). Brungardt, an instructor and administrator at that time, used the
word ‘our.’ He obviously assumed that instructors and administrators had an impact on leadership development; however, there was very little research on the experiences of leadership educators and administrators in leadership development programs for undergraduate students.

Nirenburg (2003) wrote about two main criticisms of leadership development programs, specifically leadership development in business schools and colleges. First, business schools were not walking the talk. Leadership curriculum in business schools remained largely fragmented and teacher-centered: whereas, leadership practice was based on responsive networks or post-industrial leadership models (Rost & Barker, 2000). The second problem he addressed was that the content of many programs focused on knowledge about leadership theories and frameworks, leaving students with little practical experience using the models. Students were not given opportunities to reason and apply their leadership knowledge in a complex and quickly changing work world. Nirenburg proposed that leadership development programs use an integrated model that balanced content acquisition and process application. In the article, Nirenburg called on faculty members of business schools to provide more opportunities for students to practice leadership skills; however, in the conclusion section of the article, he directly references administrators in business schools: “By following these guidelines, administrators can encourage the creation of substantive, credit-bearing leadership development programs” (p.10). Nirenburg’s choice of the word ‘encourage’ indirectly referred to the issue of who has authority over course content and pedagogy. Traditionally, faculty in higher education institutions retained control of their course content and pedagogy. Due to the limited research on leadership development programs
it remains unclear if leadership educators maintain control of the curriculum and pedagogy in their courses. What is the decision-making process in undergraduate leadership development programs about curriculum and pedagogy? What role do leadership educators play in the decision-making process?

Elumti, Minnis, and Abebe (2005) also argued that leadership development programs have some major limitations. They echoed Nirenburg’s criticisms that the curriculum in leadership development programs focused on theoretical and conceptual aspects of leadership and neglected more practical aspects. They proposed implementing a three-stage model. The first stage focused on academic knowledge and skills. The second stage included interpersonal and conceptual skills followed by a final stage that was devoted to practical training and learning. Another limitation they discussed was that the programs lacked comprehensive or interdisciplinary curriculum. They called for systemic changes to leadership development programs. What role do leadership educators play in making decisions about curriculum and making systematic changes to leadership development programs?

Rost and Barker (2000) also critiqued the content of leadership development programs. They called for a reconceptualization of leaders, followers, and leadership; and they named their new conceptualization, post-industrial leadership. They argued that leadership scholarship had been heavily dependent on psychology situated in industrial contexts, which was impeded by several outmoded assumptions. First, contemporary psychology was grounded in scientism that assumed that human behavior could be explained through a Cartesian deductive system. Second, contemporary psychology held that an individual was a “unit within which all important psychological processes occur,
and that psychological measurements of an individual are valid as stand-alone measurements” (p. 6). Third, measurements of one individual were applied universally to all other individuals without considering situational contexts. Fourth, relationships followed a cause-effect model resulting in a focus on manipulation and control through leader behavior. Their proposed post-industrial paradigm suggested that behavioral outcomes were not caused by direct and linear prompts. Social relationships were more complex and could not be explained by reductionistic cause-effect models. They proposed using a model that better represented complex interactions that account for unconscious mental micro-processes (i.e. habits) that supported conscious thought patterns which were capable of modifying the unconscious micro-processes, and “collective processes and structures of multiple moral orders” (p. 8). This portion of the model represented the influence that social and cultural values and assumptions had on the behavior of individuals. The authors suggested that the third area of the model, collective processes and structures, had been largely ignored by psychologist and leadership scholars and should be addressed in leadership development programs. Following this three-tiered model, Rost and Barker (2000) suggested leadership development programs focus on the social change process, influence processes, and human dynamics in the social change process. Post-industrial leadership was “based upon the assumption that leadership [was] the result of the intentions and actions of numerous individuals – the sum of individual wills” (p. 5).

Rost and Barker (2000) named educators specifically in their conclusions by suggesting that they update their own knowledge and understanding of leadership. “Educators of the Twenty First Century must begin by updating their own educations” (p.
They called on administrators and educators to integrate more democratic principles into their leadership development programs rather than practicing control and command styles of teaching. This article prompts several questions: Have leadership educators updated their education?, Are the educators implementing more democratic principles into their curriculum?, and Do the educators focus more on human dynamics in the social change process and do they view their own classroom as an environment of social change?

Riggio (2008) argued that leadership development methodology in business organizations had changed very little over the last several decades, echoing Nirenburg’s (2003) argument. The changes that had been made were related to delivery with a host of emerging technologies – primarily the internet. He also stated that there was a need for more and better assessment of leadership development programs. He wrote, “There is every reason to believe that leadership development programs in organizations, particularly in the United States and Europe, must get better” (Riggio, 2008, p. 390). If leadership development programs are going to improve, understanding the entire leadership development system, including how the educators participate in these systems, was crucial for designing assessment instruments.

Eich’s (2008) grounded theory study of high-quality leadership development programs provided valuable insight into the leadership development process. He found that high-quality leadership education programs focused their energy in three areas: creating a learning community, being student-centered, and grounding the curriculum in theory. Under the theme of experienced practitioners, Eich (2008) wrote, "Students and stakeholders spoke consistently about the importance of teachers, facilitators,
administrators, and staff members for student leadership development" (p. 180). The findings identified leadership educators as key figures in leadership development process. If leadership educators are critical in the leadership development process for undergraduate students, more research should be conducted on the experiences of leadership educators in the undergraduate leadership development process.

**Summary**

The research reviewed has shown that the leadership capacity of undergraduate students in leadership development programs increases. Research has also shown that a variety of methods are being used to increase the leadership capacity. There have been commonalities found between programs, but little was known about the leadership development process as a leadership development system at the time of this study. There was also a body of literature critiquing the content of leadership development programs and the authors often suggested models of what should be taught. The articles were obviously targeting people, educators and administrators, who have the ability to influence content selection and to make programmatic changes.

Most of the literature on leadership development focused on the individuals enrolled in leadership development programs. Research had not fully investigated the complex undergraduate leadership development processes and the stakeholders. In the most recent literature, educators were found to be one of many factors in student leadership development process. A few researchers found that educators, administrators, and staff had a significant role in creating high-quality leadership development programs.
through the stories they told and role modeling they exhibited. Other authors discussed the role of adults (including educators) in helping students develop a leader identity.

Leadership educators’ experiences, as participants, were virtually non-existent in the research literature. Their voices were represented as authors of research studies and conceptual articles but rarely as participants. This study provided a window into the leadership development process for undergraduate students from leadership educators’ perspective. The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of leadership educators who are teaching leadership in undergraduate leadership programs.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Whatever else we can say about people, one thing that we all share—across cultures, geography, and time—is the ability, and the hunger, to make things make sense.
Wilfred H. Drath and Charles J. Palus

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions in the Midwest. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to describe leadership educators’ perspectives and experiences, what Creswell (2009) calls the “essence of human experience” (p. 13) in the undergraduate leadership development process. This qualitative research design studied the participants in their natural setting where they were teaching leadership. A qualitative study design provided a more holistic view by including multiple perspectives and factors (Creswell, 2007) involved in teaching leadership.

Qualitative Research Tradition: Phenomenology

Qualitative research methodology spans a diverse array of design structures. Creswell (2007) wrote about five common traditions: case study, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology, as shown in Table 2. The problem that initiated this study was the absence of the voices of educators who taught leadership to undergraduate students in the research literature. Case study, narrative, and phenomenology designs were considered for this study. Since leadership educators’ voices had not been well represented in the research, I wanted to include the experiences of educators who taught at a variety of institutions and had varied teaching experiences.
Therefore, a phenomenological study design provided the best fit to describe the experiences and contexts of the central phenomenon, teaching leadership, experienced by leadership educators.

Table 2

*Common Qualitative Research Traditions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tradition</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>Develop an analysis of events, process, or program of a bounded case or cases using multiple sources of data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnography</td>
<td>Describe behavior and language of a culture-sharing group with the purpose of creating a cultural portrait.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Generate a theory by studying data, commonly collected from interviews and observations, about a process, action or inaction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Tell a story of the lived experiences, creating a portrait of an individual or few individuals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phenomenology</td>
<td>Describe the essence of a phenomenon shared by all of the participants, focusing on experiences, meaning, and context.</td>
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Phenomenological inquiry seeks to acquire scientific knowledge through “concentrated studies of experience and the reflective powers of the self” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 25). It is the philosophy and science of trying to obtain knowledge through the examination of the experience of the participants in combination with the researchers’ consciousness. A phenomenological study design “involves a return to experience in order to obtain comprehensive descriptions that provide the basis for reflective structural analysis that portrays the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). A phenomenological study focuses on “describing what all participants have in common”
Data is often collected from open-ended strategies such as interviews and observations. Creswell identified the major procedures for conducting a phenomenological study as identify the common experience shared by several individuals, acknowledge the philosophical assumptions of the phenomenological tradition, collect data, analyze the data, and write a report as shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Phenomenological Research Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Determine if a phenomenological design is the best fit</td>
<td>I selected phenomenology as the best study design to describe the experiences of educators who taught leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify the phenomenon of interest</td>
<td>I selected the common experience of teaching leadership as the central phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledge philosophical assumptions of phenomenology</td>
<td>I was guided by a constructivist epistemology that assumes people seek and construct meaning out of their social interactions with the external world. I also recognized my role and attempted to bracket my own experiences in the research process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect data on the common experience</td>
<td>I used the two broad questions recommended by Moustakas (1994) to create the interview protocol: What have you experienced? and What are the contexts of your experiences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the data</td>
<td>I identified the significant statements and eliminated overlapping meanings. I clustered the statements into units of meaning and formed themes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Describe the experiences of the participants</td>
<td>I described the themes that emerged from the data and wrote, both, a textual description comprised of the experiences and a structural description of the context of the experiences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a composite description of the essence</td>
<td>I synthesized these descriptions into the essence of the central phenomenon.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Moustakas (1994) identified the core processes of phenomenological research as epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences. Epoche is the conscious bracketing of the researchers own experiences and lens to obtain data and findings that are as objective as possible. In the transcendental-phenomenological reduction stage each experience is considered as a bounded unit. The imaginative variation process focuses on understanding the structural essence of experience. The synthesis of meanings and essences is where the imaginative variations are integrated with the transcendental-phenomenological reduction to create a unified description of the phenomenon. There are several assumptions that are central to transcendental phenomenology. The first assumption is that the researcher can actually bracket their biases. The second assumption is that the perceiving self is an authentic self and present. The third assumption is that pure states of being are obtainable. The fourth assumption is that perception is not distorted. The fifth assumption is that the phenomenon under inquiry was authentic. Evidence is obtained from inquiry into life experiences of the participants whereby understanding was derived from the core meanings and essences communicated throughout the inquiry process.

Eich (2008) found that leadership educators were critical to the formation of quality leadership development programs. To more fully understand any process, diverse perspectives are needed to create a more accurate picture. Therefore, it was important to understand the undergraduate leadership development process from the educator’s perspective. It is important to know the essence of what it means to teach leadership, especially since the undergraduate leadership development programs were varied.
Constructivist Worldview/Epistemology

Philosophical assumptions are often covert influences on research practices and need to be identified (Creswell, 2009). Creswell recommended that researchers overtly discuss the guiding philosophical worldview, accompanying assumptions and how the worldview shaped a study. This study was guided by a constructivist epistemology. Constructivist epistemology, foundational beliefs that guide behavior (Creswell, 2009), posit that people seek and construct meaning out of their social interactions with the external world (Kegan & Lahey, 1984). These varied and multiple meanings are subjective to each individual, causing the researcher to investigate complex relationships rather than reducing meaning to narrow categories. Working from a constructivist worldview, researchers often focus on the participants’ views and voices, the participants’ multiple realities, to prominently describe the central phenomenon throughout the study. Researchers work to be cognizant of their subjective meanings when designing, analyzing and reporting findings.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted using a qualitative research design to prepare for this research proposal. Institutional Review Board approval was granted prior to purposefully selecting three participants. Semi structured interviews, lasting 30-40 minutes, were conducted using an interview protocol with all three participants. The central research question was how do leadership educators make sense of teaching leadership? Seven themes emerged from the coding process: pieces of the puzzle; facilitating their
development; it depends, it depends, it depends; bag of tricks; co-creative journey; and ambassador of leadership. Important lessons were learned from this pilot study. First, a more rigorous design study, such as phenomenology, was needed to increase the validity and credibility of the findings. Secondly, more participants need to be included. Thirdly, this pilot study demonstrated a need to more fully understand the perspectives of leadership educators. Three themes addressed this need: pieces of the puzzle, facilitating their development, and co-creative journey. These three themes describe the experiences of the educators in their attempt to combine pieces, such as predetermined objectives and text, theories, activities, and their own experiences, into a course that facilitated students’ development at the same time being aware that it was a co-created journey. The fourth important result of this study resulted in changes to the interview protocol. Changes were made to the interview protocol to reflect a phenomenological study design, and questions were altered to better understand the participants’ experiences and the context of those experiences.

Participants/Educators

Polkinghorne (1989) recommended that data be collected from 5-25 participants who have experience with the central phenomenon being studied. Purposeful sampling was used to select 12 participants who could provide insights into the central phenomenon. Informational redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was reached when interviewing the tenth participant. Two more interviews were conducted to ensure that no new information or themes emerged. Participants were currently teaching an undergraduate course that had the explicit objective(s) to increase leadership
development. The participants had at least three years of experience teaching leadership. No criteria for employment status were used (i.e. full time, adjunct, instructor) to select the participants. Institutional classification was also not used as a selection criterion for participation because teaching pedagogy and content varies widely between programs (Ayman, Adams, Fisher, & Hartman, 2003; Brungardt, 1997; Fritz & Brown, 1998; Fritz, Brown, Lunde, & Banset, 2005). Although, I attempted to include both men and women in equal proportions, only two men agreed to participate in the study. Multiple emails were sent to invite male educators to participate. I did not use racial and ethnic identity as a purposeful selection criterion due to the lack of racial and ethnic diversity of faculty and graduate students who were teaching leadership at academic institutions in the Midwest.

Participants were invited via email, phone, and personal conversations. Since I have been a leadership educator since 2002, I recruited participants from professional contacts with colleagues at different institutions in the Midwest that I felt would provide insight into the central phenomenon. I attended the 2009 and 2010 Association of Leadership Educators conferences and established professional contacts with other leadership educators. I also used snowballing sampling by asking participants to recommend others leadership educators who they felt could provide insights into the phenomenon. More about the actual participants can be found in the Chapter Four. To contextualize the findings, the participants in this study were referred to as educators or leadership educators throughout the findings and discussion sections.
Research Questions

Moustakas (1994) wrote that there are two primary questions of phenomenological research: (a) What are the experiences of the participants? and (b) What is the context of those experiences? Lived experiences are the direct experiences and perspectives the participants have with the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

The central question for this study was: What are the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions?

The sub questions were: (a) What are the lived experiences of the educators who teach leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions? and (b) What are the contexts in which educators teach leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions?

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data to answer the research questions. An interview protocol (see Appendix B) was developed, focusing on the lived experiences and the context of those experiences. The interviews lasted an average of 57 minutes and were audio recorded with the participants’ permission. I also asked participants to provide me with self-selected artifacts (syllabi, handouts, activities, pictures, quotations, pictures, journal entries, blog posts, etc.) that would help me understand their experiences of teaching leadership. Nine participants who were interviewed face-to-face provided me with original artifacts, copies, or photographs. Three participants, who were interviewed over the phone, did not provide me with
artifacts but some described some artifacts to me. The actual artifacts were not included in the findings of this study but their descriptions and explanations were included in the data.

**Data Analysis**

Creswell (2009) suggested six steps in the data analysis process. The first step was to organize and prepare the data. I organized and prepared the data by either transcribing the audio recordings myself, or having them transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriber. The transcriptionist signed a letter of confidentiality. The data, both the audio recordings and the transcripts, were transmitted via secure website and stored on my personal laptop, which was password protected. Step two suggested that the researcher gain a general sense of the data. I listened to the audio recordings and read the transcripts to achieve a sense of the data. I also reviewed the submitted materials and notes taken during the interviews. Creswell recommended paying attention to what the participants were saying in general and the depth of information discussed on the initial review of the data.

The third step was to code the data. I used MAXQDA (MAXQDA, 2010) to assist with both data preparation and analysis. I followed steps recommend by Moustakas (1994) to select significant statements in the transcripts that provided insight into the central phenomenon. Significant statements were coded using *invivo* codes when appropriate. *Invivo* codes are derived from the participants’ actual phrases or words as opposed to conceptual or assigned codes (Creswell, 2009). The codes were organized into preliminary units of meaning in MAXQDA. A list of significant statements,
organized into units of meaning, was generated to conduct the horizontalization process, a process to identity non-repetitive, non-overlapping statements.

Step four of the process recommended by Creswell was to create subthemes and themes. The remaining significant statements were reviewed and then organized into subthemes and themes. Step five was to construct representations of the themes, both experientially and contextually. “Phenomenology is committed to the description of experiences, not explanations or analysis” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). The themes were discussed using thick and rich descriptions (Creswell, 2007). Next, cumulative textual and structural descriptions were written based on the themes that emerged. The textual description described “what” the participants experienced and the structural descriptions described “how” the experience occurred. In summary, a final “essence” was composed to provide a culmination of the experiences and contexts of the central phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) – teaching leadership. The final step recommended by Creswell was to discuss the lesson learned from the analysis process. He recommended including the researchers interpretations and comparisons of the data to literature and theories relevant to the research study. A discussion of the findings can be found in Chapter Five.

Validity

Creswell (2007) recommended that at least two validation strategies be used for any qualitative research study. This study used member checking, peer review, and thick and rich descriptions. Stake (1995) argued for participants being involved throughout the research process. Member checking is the process in which participants are asked to read and determine the accuracy of the findings. Member checking consists of providing
participants with some combination of analysis, interpretation, and conclusions for their review for accuracy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) consider member checking to be “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). I sent out excerpts of the findings to the educators for their review and incorporated their comments and suggestions. Some of the participants also provided feedback on the order and construction of the subthemes.

Peer review allowed an external source to review the research process (Creswell, 2007). The role of the peer reviewer was to ask difficult questions to ensure that I was using valid research processes and methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I contracted with a colleague familiar with phenomenological research design methods to serve as an external reviewer. I sent materials via email to familiarize the reviewer with the specifics of this study, such as the central phenomenon and research questions as well other design specifics. I also sent her two out of the 12 transcripts to analyze. When we met face-to-face, we discussed the research process I was using and the actions I was taking to bracket my own experiences as I conducted the research. We then went through the two transcripts and compared significant statements. Our significant statements were in agreement approximately 80% of the time. When differences did occur, we were often in agreement about what the participant was saying but disagreed about which sentence best captured the meaning in the text segment. There were a few instances when the statements were not alike or it was a segment that was not code by the other person. Our differences were mainly due to how we broke the transcripts down into segments of text. I tended use a leaner coding process than the reviewer. A letter further describing the service provided by the external reviewer can be found in the Appendices.
Thick and rich descriptions of the participants and/or setting provide readers with the opportunity for transferability (Creswell, 2007). Essentially, readers make a judgment about whether the findings are relevant to their situations and contexts. I used the quotations from the participants to provide thick and rich descriptions of the themes that emerged. When, appropriate I integrated the experiences of multiple participants and provided context to provide a richer understanding of the themes.

**Ethical Considerations**

All participants were treated in accordance with the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB). Although no known risks were associated with this study, there were several considerations. First, pseudonyms were assigned to protect the participants’ identities, since confidentiality was crucial to establishing trust with the participants. Second, accuracy is central to conducting qualitative research and it is important that the findings capture an accurate account of the participants’ experiences (Creswell, 2007). Therefore, member checking served as a validation strategy and was also an ethical consideration extended to the participants. Being able to bracket your own experiences is also a key to maintaining ethical standards when using a phenomenological study design. I kept a journal to make my own experiences and reflection more transparent and wrote about the role I played in this study. Third, since I am a colleague in the field of leadership development, the steps discussed above were taken to maintain ethical standards and as well as my own sense of integrity as a professional in the field.
Limitations

This study had several noteworthy limitations. First, the sample size (12) inhibits the ability to generalize across a population. The findings were relevant to the individuals and institutions where the research was conducted; however, readers may be able to transfer the findings conceptually to their environs. Also, with the use of thick and rich descriptions, readers may be able to transfer relevant findings to other situations and contexts (Creswell, 2007). Secondly, the sample was not representative of gender, race, social class, or religious affiliation. Since only two males participated in this study, I considered removing the male participants from this study; however, their experiences were not qualitatively distinct from the experiences shared by the female participants.

Delimitations

There are many different leadership development programs across a wide-ranging field of organizations: academic institutions, corporations, non-governmental organizations, and community-based programs. These programs target a variety of participants that vary in age, job role, and career. A delimitation of this study was that the study was focused on a subset of educators who provide leadership development for undergraduate students at academic institutions. Restricting the participants to those currently teaching a course on leadership excluded the experiences of other leadership educators that engage in leadership development without teaching a sanctioned course at an academic institution. Since there are over 1000 leadership programs across the nation at academic institutions, this study was delimited to participants who are teaching leadership in institutions geographically located in the Midwest.
Role of Researcher

My own role in this study was based on personal experience as a leadership educator. I have taught in two different formal leadership programs and facilitated many workshops in academic and community settings. My own journey in making sense of teaching leadership has its own twists and turns, up and downs. My own perspectives, beliefs and strategies, that influence what and how I teach, have changed throughout my own journey. They continue to change with each new experience.

A key assumption when conducting a phenomenological study is the ability of the researcher to bracket their lived experiences and biases (Creswell, 2007). The commonly used term is “epoche” (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher’s everyday understandings and judgments are set aside so the researcher can examine the phenomenon from an intentionally naïve perspective. It is the intentional process of eliminating “everything that represents a pre-judgment, setting aside presuppositions, and reaching a transcendental state of freshness and openness, a readiness to see in an unfettered way” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41). The challenge of epoche is the ability of metacognition. This is a similar concept to Heifetz and Linsky’s (2002) description of being on the dance floor and in the balcony at the same time when leading. The researcher needs to be aware of his or her own thinking and how it is impacting his or her conclusions and behavior.

Due to my own experience as a leadership educator, I was cognizant of my potential bias and need to bracket my own perspective (Moustakas, 1994). I diligently attempted to believe that my experiences were unique or that they were the exception rather than the rule. Leadership scholar, Margaret Wheatley (personal conversation, April, 2003), provided me with prudent advice that I keep an eye out for the surprises
because they help me identify what I believed. If someone was surprised, he or she likely believed something different. In this study, I looked for what did and did not surprise me. If something did not surprise me, I reflected upon the reason for the lack of surprise in order to decrease my own biases. Was I not surprised because I held this as a “truth,” as something I believe without warrant, or did I believe this from collecting informal data through my own experiences and conversations with colleagues over the years? In essence, what was the root cause of my own agreement or disagreement with what was found in the data? When writing about the themes, I used the participants’ voices extensively to ensure that I was bracketing my own experiences as a leadership educator.

Based on the pilot study and prior to conducting this study, I proposed that the research would reveal two unique aspects of teaching leadership. First, leadership was a field that educators practice at the same time they are teaching about leadership. The idea of a co-creative journey emerged in the pilot study. In teaching leadership the leadership educator had to “walk the talk” during every minute spent interacting with students. The educator’s ability to influence their behavior, their integrity, and their leadership was on trial every day. Educators in other disciplines may not be so openly practicing their content everyday in front of their students. Leadership educators are leading at the same time they are providing instruction about leadership concepts. The second aspect I proposed would emerge from the study was that the identity of the educator would play a role in their experiences because an individual’s behavior, emotions and thoughts derive from their identity; therefore, their identity would be central to teaching leadership. Who the educator was as a person – their identity – was central to the way they taught leadership and the way they led while they were teaching leadership. Their style of
leadership and teaching would be determined by their identity or preferences and their ability to be cognizant of their identity, and subsequently deviate from their personal preferences.
Chapter Four: Findings

Go to the people. Learn from them. Live with them. Start with what they know. Build with what they have. The best of leaders when the job is done, when the task is accomplished, the people will say we have done it ourselves.

Lao Tzu

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of educators who teach leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions in the Midwest. The central question for this study was: What are the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions? The sub-questions were: (a) What are the lived experiences of the educators who teach leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions? and (b) What are the contexts in which educators teach leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions?

Four themes emerged from the experiences of the leadership educators as shown in Table 4: (a) “I teach leadership. What does that mean?” (b) “not dancing alone” in the learning community, (c) helping students make a difference, and (d) the educator’s journey: “A place of becoming.” The educators shared how they personally defined leadership and the experiences they had defending the need for leadership education. The bulk of the experiences they shared focused on their interactions with the students, both inside and outside the classroom. One educator used the term “learning community” to describe the learning environment that extended beyond the classroom. The experiences in the learning community focused on the kind of learning environment or community the educators attempted to create and to engage the students in their own learning and leadership development process. The educators also shared some of the strategies they
Table 4

*Themes and Subthemes*

“I teach leadership. What does that mean?”
- Defining and defending leadership, as a discipline, was a common experience. The educators often felt the need to explain the relevance for leadership development programs for the students, institutions, and the broader community.
  - Defining leadership
  - Defending leadership
  - Relevance of leadership

“Not dancing alone” in the learning community
- One of the biggest challenges in the learning community, which extended beyond the classroom, was getting students to engage or dance with the educators. The educators also modeled the curriculum through their instruction and behavior.
  - The learning community
  - Beyond the classroom
  - Getting students to dance
  - The educator’s role, responsibilities, and rewards
  - Modeling the way

Helping students make a difference
- The educators talked little about developing skills and more about helping students develop as individuals to prepare them to make a difference in the world. The educators developed strong relationships with the students and enjoyed being apart of the students’ development and successes.
  - Be the best they can be
  - Preparing students to make a difference
  - Making sense of who they are
  - “The relationship matters”
  - “A real moment of joy”

The educator’s journey: “In a place of becoming”
- The educators developed their identities and leadership capacity simultaneously with the students. Teaching leadership provided opportunities for reflection about the educators’ own identities and practices.
  - At home with leadership
  - Colleagues
  - Personal challenges
  - Being authentic
  - Leadership educator’s identity
Figure 1: “A Place of Becoming” Leadership Educators' Experiences Teaching Leadership: A Phenomenological Approach

“A Place of Becoming” Leadership Educators’ Experiences Teaching Leadership: A Phenomenological Approach

The educator’s journey: “In a place of becoming”

At home with leadership

Colleagues

Personal challenges

Being Authentic

Leadership educator’s identity

“Not dancing alone” in the learning community

Getting students to dance

The learning community

Beyond the classroom

Modeling the way

The educator’s role, responsibilities, and rewards

“Defining” leadership. What does that mean?

Defending

Relevance

“Helping students make a difference in the world”

“Be the Best they can be”

Preparing students to make a difference

Making sense of who they are

“The relationship matters”

“A real moment of joy”
used to get the students to engage or to ‘dance,’ as one educator put it, as well as, their perspectives about their role and responsibilities in the learning community. Modeling the way was an important responsibility in which they all the educators agreed. A significant amount of the experiences that the educators talked about were centered on helping the students make a difference in the world which created a lot of joy as the educators helped students be the best they could be and preparing the students for the future. The educators’ journeys to become leadership educators emerged as another significant theme. They also shared their experiences of developing their leadership, both in and out of the classroom, often as the direct result of teaching leadership to undergraduate students.

Participants/Educators

The participants in this study, as shown in Table 5, were referred to as leadership educators or educators throughout the findings and discussion chapters to contextualize their experiences. Participant information has been summarized to protect their identities. Eleven of the educators taught leadership at a public academic institution at the time of the interview. While the other educator taught leadership at a liberal arts institution and also had taught leadership at a public institution in the past for a number of years. The educators had from 3 to 30 years of experience teaching leadership to undergraduate students. The average number years of teaching at the collegiate level were 13.9 years, and the average number of years teaching leadership at the collegiate level was 10.6 years. The educators’ ages ranged from 28 to 63 years old with a mean of 45 years old. Eight of the participants had received a doctoral degree and some of the
degrees were specifically in leadership or had an emphasis in leadership. The other doctoral degrees were in related fields such as communication, curriculum and instruction, human ecology, or student affairs. One educator had a degree in an unrelated field of study. The remaining four of the educators had master degrees and out of those four, two were currently pursuing doctoral degree in leadership. Although attempts were made to include more male educators, only two male educators chose to participate in this study. In reviewing the transcripts, there were no major differences among the experiences shared by the male and female educators, although future studies may reveal a difference between the experiences of male and female leadership educators. The educators identified as white or Caucasian except for one educator, who identified as a person of color.

Table 5

*Educator Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Number of years teaching at collegiate level</th>
<th>Number of years teaching leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Shane</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Large four-year, public, research</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mave</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Large four-year, public, research</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Small four-year, private</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Large four-year, public, research</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jean</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Large four-year, public, research</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Large four-year, public, research</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Medium four-year, public</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bett</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Large four-year, public, research</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Average: 13.9   Average: 10.6*
“I teach leadership. What does that mean?”

The experiences of the leadership educators in this study shared a broad narrative of trying to define leadership within the field of leadership, defending it to others and staking a claim to the relevance of leadership courses and programs for undergraduate students at academic institutions. The educators’ definitions of leadership varied but primarily focused on engaging in behaviors to accomplish a goal or task. The educators expressed a need to explain and in some cases defend leadership to people outside of the leadership field on their respective campuses or to the public. A part of explaining what they do was to talk about the relevance of leadership development programs.

Table 6

Theme: “I teach leadership. What does that mean?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“I teach leadership. What does that mean?”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Defining leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defending leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevance of leadership</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Defining leadership. A common experience for these educators was talking to people about teaching leadership and leadership development programs. A few of the leadership educators in this study felt that it was important to have a common language when trying to define and defend leadership. Carol even felt frustrated by the challenge of not having a specific common language of leadership. “How we talk about leadership, you know, our vocabulary, I think, is awfully important. We don’t have a common vocabulary. That’s confusing.” She found it difficult to communicate what she did for a
career. Some of the educators have settled on standard explanations when inquiries arise. Shane found it a challenge to clearly articulate what he does for a profession when other people ask. “I teach leadership. Well, what does that mean?” he asked rhetorically at the beginning of the interview. After saying several more sentences that didn’t seem to express what he wanted, he finally said, “It’s just kind of tough to articulate.”

Knowing that there is disagreement about the definition of leadership in the literature (Rost, 1991), I was interested in how the educators defined leadership. I didn’t directly ask the leadership educators what their definitions of leaders or leadership were in the interviews, but in most cases the educators talked about their beliefs about leaders and leadership. In a few of the interviews I asked directly about their definition of leadership if the educators didn’t share it, since so many of the educators eventually did expressed their definitions. The answers varied, but they had some common elements, which I discuss in the following paragraphs based on a progression of similarity or overlap.

A few of the educators discussed their belief that leadership was more than a position. Marge said, “There are people who are in positions who are not leaders, and there are people who are leaders every day who are not in positions.” They commonly talked about working to change students’ perspectives that leadership derived from a position, such as president. Several educators expressed a definition of leadership that centered on accomplishing a goal or making things happen. June liked to boil it down for students. “I tell students that leadership really at its most basic level is making things happen. And that has to happen in relationship.” Other educators changed the focus from the task (getting things done) to getting other people to do the tasks. Mave said
leadership was “the ability to get others to do things that they might not otherwise do.” Many of the educators centered their definition on the concept of getting other people to do something or the social influence that a leader must possess to overcome a barrier of some type. Cindy nuanced this idea of social influence as “an influence over someone else” [emphasis added]. June said that the task could be empowering others instead of an external or concrete task. She expanded on her definition by adding that it could also be “a process that empowers others to achieve some things of importance.” This definition of leadership changes the task from an external change to an internal change – other people’s internal sense of empowerment. Her perspective centered on influencing other people in ways that help them find their own power to accomplish goals. Her definition also included an aspect to differentiate everyday accomplishments from accomplishments of importance.

Cindy also talked about the component of consistency. “I think people who consistently change or influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others, and they do so in a very significant way, that’s what I would define more as your leaders.” The aspect that she added was that the leadership behavior needed to be consistent for someone to be considered a leader. Random or inconsistent influence was not considered leadership. Kathy focused on the idea that leaders influenced a change or created an outcome that served the common good.

Exercising leadership really does mean helping to move an idea, a group, a process, to move it forward in whatever way that you can. Obviously, my broader sense of leadership involves service. It has to be for the common good, there’s some value to it as well, but in terms of the process? My [thinking] around the process is really just about moving forward. [It] has less to do with the specifics of motivation, team building. It’s just doing whatever it takes to move a group or an idea forward.
While she was clear about the change or outcome needed to serve the common good, she was more ambiguous about specific leadership behavior. When looking for leadership, Bett looked for leader and follower roles that were more fluid, where people moved back and forth between the two roles. Carol found it confusing when marrying the idea of serving the ‘common good’ and leadership. She asked rhetorically, “What is serving and what is leading?” In 1970, Greenleaf wrote about integrating these two concepts into one field of leadership – servant leadership. He described a servant leader as someone who helps followers accomplish their goals rather than influencing them to accomplish the leaders’ goal. She wanted more clarification within the field of leadership on how these and other concepts were different to alleviate her frustration.

An emerging area in leadership scholarship is the idea of leader identity development (Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). Shane’s definition reflected this perspective on the importance of an individual’s identity in a social influence process.

I see the leadership component being central, knowing oneself and mastering your own identity, understanding maybe your own personal philosophy of leadership, and then observing and relating to others to find out some of their leadership skills, abilities, talents, personality types, and seeing how you interact and influence others in a team.

His perspective shifted the focus of achieving a desired outcome through social influence, what others have considered the central component of leadership. This definition of leadership was still situated within a context of social influence but differs in that the central aspect of leadership was not the social influence or outcome that occurred as mentioned by other educators, but gave attention to the underlying identity or identities of individuals within a social process.
Jean couldn’t clearly express her definition of leadership anymore. Even though she asked her students to define leadership, she could not articulate a clear definition of leadership.

I couldn’t give you a neat, clean, two sentences: Leadership is…. Ah, I, I couldn’t do it. I, I, if you make me, I’ll come up with something but I don’t, I, I think about that because sometimes… we have students define leadership. And I’m like, I don’t think I can do it anymore.

I found this inconsistent with the other educators in the study. Most of the other educators had, fairly easily, shared his or her definition of leadership. I probed to discover why she felt that she could not express a definition. I asked how long she had felt like she could not define leadership since she had over 25 years of experience teaching leadership. She said that she used to have a clear definition of leadership, but now she just knew leadership when she saw it. She made a few more attempts in the interview but finally said, somewhat in resignation, “Because it’s, it…I can’t.”

Defending leadership. The leadership educators related experiences of trying to explain and defend teaching leadership to others within their respective academic institutions and to the general public. Carol said, “You have to defend yourself. For right or for wrong, you have to demonstrate that you are an academic discipline.” The educators took a variety of positions on why leadership should be considered a discipline. Some the criticism of leadership as a discipline was scholarly, as well as economic. In the current academic climate, some institutions are looking for ways to reduce programmatic redundancy and prioritize resources, pitting disciplines against each other over limited resources. Kathy states, “In some cases they’re absolutely right. It’s not a discipline, but you know, you have to be willing to stand in a room of pure science folks and defend. That’s the challenge.” Even if she felt it was not a disciple, it was still
beneficial for students. Shane talked about defending leadership based on the perceptions that leadership courses and programs teach soft skills rather than hard or empirical science. “The theory then drives the practice as to why it's important, because if you miss that then all of a sudden this program becomes fluff.” He felt a need to justify what he was doing on scholarly grounds to justify having the leadership development program at an academic institution.

Defending leadership as a disciple often occurred in face-to-face contexts on campus. Shane was also cognizant that integrating theory was an indirect way to defend leadership as a discipline. He had integrated theory into courses as a way to defend against the perception that he taught “fluff” or soft skills, not hard science. Defending leadership as a discipline and its relevance to academic institutions caused some stress for Shane. “It is extremely stressful sometimes to articulate [to the outside person] exactly what we do and the purpose that we serve on a university campus.”

Kathy believed that teaching leadership was not a new phenomenon. She believed that substantial portion of scholarly work and teaching about history has focused on leaders and their leadership. “I believe that the study of leadership happened before the Ohio State studies and all of that. That’s what history has always been is the study of leadership, at least in its earliest forms, that’s what it was.” A contemporary example of the intersection of history and leadership is Gardner’s book, *Leading Minds* (1995), in which he writes about significant historical figures or leaders. Marge felt that leadership should be considered a discipline because there was a scholarly process applied with the objective of advancing the understanding and practice of leadership. She believed that “leadership is like any other discipline [because] there are always things that people can
do to improve themselves and to learn more [about] how to be more effective.” Even though their response varied, the educators shared a need to defend leadership. After a conversation with a faculty from another department about whether or not leadership was a discipline, the faculty member suggested that maybe he needed to observe one of Bett’s classes to better understand what occurred in a leadership development program.

**Relevance of leadership.** The relevancy of teaching leadership was another sub-theme that many of the educators shared. This subtheme overlapped with the sub-theme of defending leadership. Whether or not they felt leadership was a discipline and in spite of an unclear common definition of leadership, the educators felt that teaching leadership was relevant. Given that these are leadership educators and that this was their career, one might assume that they thought that teaching leadership was relevant to at least some portion of undergraduate students. The educators addressed the issue of relevance from two broad perspectives. They shared their beliefs about who should participate in leadership programs (relevant to whom) and the benefits of their participation (relevant to a successful future) (Brungardt, 1996; Cress, Astin, Zimmerman-Oster, & Burkhardt, 2001; Zimmerman-Oster & Burkhardt, 1999).

Whether leaders are born or made has been an ongoing debate for years. Leadership trait theory is based on the assumption that leaders are born with specific leadership traits; therefore, leadership education is unnecessary (Northouse, 2007). However, behavioral theory suggests that leadership is a result of specific actions that can be taken with intentionality; therefore, leadership education is warranted. While the educators did not reference this debate overtly, it was implicitly present. A few educators
commented directly on their belief that leadership programs could and should be available to everyone. They believed that learning about and practicing leadership was relevant to everyone because it had the potential to help all students be more successful. Marge said, “I believe everyone is an emerging leader,” and that everyone needed to be aware of their capacity to lead and follow. “They just may exhibit it in different ways, in different times. Every day you ebb and flow through being a leader and being a follower and a team player and you need to be aware of those differences.” Jean similarly believed that everyone was a leader and had a responsibility to exercise leadership throughout different aspects of a person’s life. “Everyone can exercise leadership, and you have the right, you have the responsibility, and you have the opportunity to exercise leadership in your life—in your everyday life, in your family life, in your church life, in your community life.” They believed that being aware of the “ebb and flow” of leadership roles could help students be more successful. Not only did some educators feel that leadership should be open to all students but that leadership belonged on academic campuses because it was about learning – one of the pillars of academic institutions. “Who said leadership is all about learning? I think that was maybe John Kennedy. I can’t remember, but…anyway, it is all about learning.” Again this educator alluded to a belief that leadership could be studied and learned as opposed to a belief that individuals were born with innate leadership abilities and skills.

Most of the educators who talked about the relevance of leadership programs, focused on why they thought leadership programs were directly relevant to students. Shane thought that students were already engaged in the leadership process before they enrolled in a leadership course or program, but often the students were not aware of why
or how they were leading. He felt that the students were just engaged in the leadership process without conscious awareness. Shane states, “By teaching students basic concepts of leadership, I think we are filling in the ‘why.’” The educators felt that leadership courses were helping students become more aware and intentional about their leadership process and the student’s purpose in an active role in leading. Rachel addressed the ubiquity of leadership. Since leadership was everywhere, students needed to be prepared to engage in that process responsibly. “It could impact them right now in their student organization. It could impact them when they go home and live with a roommate or go home to a family. I really felt like this stuff is really important to learn no matter what career you choose or path. This is important for everyone to know.” Karla said it succinctly, “Leadership is a life skill. It’s absolutely essential.” Other educators echoed this idea that what was taught in leadership courses and programs was very useful on the job, in their personal lives, in their families and in the community. Jack believed that leadership programs helped students be more successful in their current and future jobs.

Shane felt that leadership development programs helped students discover their identities. It helped the students have a better understanding of their strengths and weaknesses as well as who they were or who they wanted to become. He believed that when students have a better understanding of who they are, it impacts their relationships positively. Similar to Shane, Cindy felt “any student would benefit from learning about building positive relationships or identifying talents within themselves and within others.” For her, leadership programs were relevant because having a better understanding of one’s own identity and others’ identities can lead to better relationships, whether on the job or elsewhere. She believed that students in leadership programs
gained a better understanding of how their own talents and the talents of others impact relationships.

Some of the educators believed the knowledge and skills the students got impacted their friends, families, and communities. Cindy went so far as to say that she felt students also benefited the students’ relationships with their family and friends. Cindy said that students often talked to her about how their experiences in the leadership program had impacted their relationships with their siblings and other family members, as well as their relationships with intimate partners. Cindy felt that teaching leadership had even impacted her own family. She related a conversation she had with her dad. “My dad said to me, ‘Cindy you have really changed how I look at my relationships in that you’re so good at investing in people. It really has changed the way that I view my friendships and my relationships.’” She also talked about how it had impacted her intimate partner’s relationships with his siblings and friends.

The educators felt that leadership was a relevant topic to teach because the impact doesn’t just impact the campus community, it also ripples out into the community. Some students were asked to hone their leadership competencies outside the classroom by engaging in leadership opportunities through activities and organizations both on campus and in the broader community. Students in Carol’s courses have to acquire or improve “competencies through coursework, classroom instruction, and then experiences outside the classroom.” This means that there was an opportunity for the leadership knowledge and skills to have an impact beyond the classroom. The students were asked to implement what they had learned in community settings. Jean believed that leadership was relevant because “it helps transform people’s lives.” The educators felt that what the
students learned extended beyond the single individual; it extended into students’ on-campus and off-campus communities, helping students be more successful leaders now and in the future.

In summary, the leadership educators expressed a variety of personal definitions of leadership that served as an undercurrent of their experiences. They also shared experiences of defending leadership as a discipline and that leadership coursework should be available to more than an elite few. They also discussed experiences of making the case of how teaching leadership was relevant to the students who participated in leadership education. Shane captured the overall feeling that the task of teaching leadership was still somewhat ambiguous. He said, “I just said that to you and it still doesn’t really make sense in my head.”

“Not dancing alone” in the learning community

The educators shared many experiences about directly teaching leadership to the students. While most of the experiences they shared focused on the classroom, they also shared experiences about teaching leadership beyond the classroom. This theme includes experiences about the teaching environment, both in and out of the classroom. The educators in this study also shared their experiences working to get students engaged in their own learning and their role and responsibilities to the learning community. The sub-themes that developed from the interviews are: the learning community; beyond the classroom; getting students to dance; the educator’s role, responsibilities, and rewards; and modeling the way.
The learning community.  Wenger and Snyder (2000) call the learning environment for people who share the same professional practice a “community of practice.” McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, and Baker (2006) argue communities of practice are “a type of holding environment that facilitates developmental movement” (p. 642). The educators describe similar communities of practice that were created when they taught leadership to undergraduate students. In my interview with Shane, he talked quite a bit about creating a learning community as a teaching and learning strategy that was prevalent in the program where he teaches. He intentionally created a holding environment that he felt would facilitate the developmental movement of the students. Jack didn’t call the learning environment a learning community, but he stated, “I think of myself more as a facilitator rather than an instructor.” He valued collaboration in the classroom. In this case he liked to create a collaborative environment with the students to create growth opportunities. Many educators shared the perspective of getting students involved in their own learning. Jean said that it was important to provide opportunities for students to “chime in and create a learning environment for everyone.” If students didn’t “chime in” then it wouldn’t be a shared learning environment. Shane also thought
it was important that students contribute ideas and perspectives to the learning community. It was important that students hear their voice and the voices of their peers. “I think every student in the class needs to hear their voice and hear what their voice sounds like in that learning community.” He felt that if students didn’t hear their voice in the learning community early in the process, they wouldn’t have any motivation to contribute verbally later in the semester.

The educators also shared experiences trying to create safe and respectful learning environments where students felt comfortable enough to voice their perspectives. Mave felt that an important way to get students involved was by “having an authentic, genuine discourse” with the students. June felt that the discourse should start with sharing her expectation of the students and getting the students to share their expectations of her. It was important for her to do this because she felt that it helped everyone, including her, be more accountable. It was also important for June to “always have utmost respect for the individual with whom we are interacting.” Jean said, “Everybody has something of worth in them, and so you have to believe in them and see how they can grow.” Others included asking questions, listening, being empathetic, caring and showing concern as critical behaviors to create a safe and respectful learning community. Another educator felt that it was important for the students to “work on getting them to know each other so they feel comfortable discussing things.” A few educators talked about ensuring that students knew each other better so they would be more willing to discuss and disagree with other students’ perspectives. Jean acknowledged that even though she tries to get students to fully participate in the learning community, the educator has power that may make his or her participation different from the students. Shane asked the question
directly, “How do we form these learning communities in a respectful, safe environment, but we still provide a little bit of challenge?” Jack said that he also struggled to create an environment where the students felt like they could share their perspective while he could challenge them. He wanted to be able to challenge their perspectives but not shut down the students’ willingness to share in future discussions.

**Beyond the classroom.** A lot of the experiences that the educators talked about were about the classroom environment; however, many of the educators shared their belief that teaching leadership extended beyond the classroom environment. June taught in a classroom setting for a number of years before she took a new job that didn’t have any classroom instruction included in her responsibilities. She talked about the day she made the joyful discovery that she was still teaching even though she didn’t have a classroom: “Oh, my gosh! I’m teaching! I’m just not grading papers.” She laughed as she said this, as if she were remembering how relieved she was to still be teaching. Karla found the four walls of the classroom a limiting factor when it came to teaching leadership. “I don’t think we can provide that experience within the limits of our classroom, but they can go and have that experience and then bring it back to the classroom.” Kathy agreed that teaching leadership doesn’t just happen in the classroom.

The advising and the mentoring and the one-on-one, the clubs and organizations, [and] all the programming that we do, I consider all of that teaching and leadership. Some of that happens formally in a classroom where grades are assigned, and then others not so much. Theoretically I don’t compartmentalize that, but institutionally, sometimes I do. I don’t actually ever think that it happens only one place or in one way.

Institutional policy requires faculty to compartmentalize or categorize different aspects of
a position, but it may not break down that way in practical terms of teaching leadership. Other educators went so far as to name other things besides “for-credit classroom instruction” that they considered under the umbrella of teaching leadership. Two educators talked specifically about the coaching they did with their students. Marge incorporated coaching into her courses so she could work with students one-on-one to accomplish their goals. Jean saw coaching as a vital part of her work with students to help them be better leaders as well. The coaching she provided was in an advisory role or informally, but she tried to coach students with their individual needs in mind. Sometimes students have rejected her willingness to help, but she was fine with that since she wanted to meet students where they were and knew that letting them fail was sometimes a better lesson that giving them pre-emptive advice. Carol taught leadership in community contexts and settings, working with students to become better “community leaders.”

In the interview with Kathy, she reframed the concept of teaching leadership. For the purposes of this study, I defined the term ‘teaching leadership’ to encompass both in and out of the classroom. I communicated this to the educators at the beginning of each interview. Kathy felt that a better way to describe the phenomenon of teaching leadership was to view it as a development process or system (Boal & Schultz, 2007; Uhl-Bien, Marion & McKelvey, 2007; Weick, 1995) instead of instructing or teaching students. “A lot of it wasn’t so much teaching leadership as the process of development, personal development.” For Kathy, it was about developing leaders as opposed to teaching leadership content. She felt she was facilitating students’ leadership growth and development wherever the student happened to be – in the classroom, in a mentoring
situation, in an organization, or in the community. She went on to say

If we are going to be authentic in developing students, it is unhelpful to compartmentalize what happens in the classroom [from] what happens in the dorm room [from] what happens in the person’s private [or] family life and their professional aspirations.

Her focus was on developing students’ leadership capacities whenever and however she could.

**Getting students to dance.** The educators considered getting students directly engaged in the learning and development process to be a key aspect in teaching leadership. Kolb’s (1984) research on experiential learning is often cited when discussing learning and direct experiences. Marge said, “I know that research tells us that we learn best when [we're] actively involved.” She cited Kolb directly when she talked about how she engaged students in the leadership development process. Kolb argues that students need four abilities to be effective when using experiential learning, the four being the ability to have concrete experiences, to reflect, to generate abstract concepts, and experiment actively.

Mave also believed that a critical aspect to teaching leadership was students’ willingness to engage in the leadership development process. She addressed this expectation at the beginning of every class she taught and worked all semester to keep students engaged. She went on to say that giving students opportunities to engage with the leadership content “really helps them learn what it is to be a leader and what their own leadership abilities are and how they can develop them further.” Kathy believed that the educators must not only engage students in their own learning and development process, but the opportunities to engage must be provided consistently. Concepts must be
practiced again and again, with opportunities for reflection. “You have the theory or the concept, you apply it, you practice it; it’s not something that you apply it once and you get it. You have to practice it. And then you reflect on it.” Providing students with opportunities to engage and reflect sometimes was not enough. Jack found it frustrating when students would not engage in the opportunities he provided. “I was up there dancing, trying to get everybody else to dance and nobody would dance ... and so it caused me to really examine why they weren’t dancing. Why was I the only one dancing?” Giving students a place to dance, and in Jack’s case, showing them how to dance, still was not enough to get students engaged in their own learning. The educators’ experiences were similar to the adage about dragging a horse to water. The educators could drag the students to the dance floor, but they could not make them dance.

Many of the educators had their own personal philosophy about how to get student to dance once they were at the dance floor; however, a common strategy for engaging students in their leadership development emerged. The educators talked about getting the students to drive the learning and take ownership of more than just their learning processes. Mave said, “I just feel like if they aren’t taking responsibility for their own learning... then it’s almost futile.” Some of the educators talked about giving the students more responsibility in determining topics, activities, and discussions. Jean felt it was important to let students make their own discoveries about their leadership development. “I think most people don’t want to be told what they need to know. I think they need to have some self-discovery and figure that out for themselves.” She felt that the learning would mean more to the students if they discovered it on their own. Shane invited, or in some cases, actively challenged students to shape the class. He felt that
students’ opinions about the course syllabus were just as important as their opinions and perspectives about the leadership content. “I invite [students] to challenge where the class is going and bring in [their] opinions and perspectives.” He said that it was also important that the students have a say in determining the pace that the class covered the content. Shane related a story about being busy during the summer and then quickly constructing a syllabus at the last moment that may or may not have met the needs of the students. He preferred to discuss the syllabus with the students and get their collective input rather than imposing his ideas of what was important to cover. Rachel didn’t feel comfortable letting students drive the curriculum, but encouraged the students to drive the discussions about the topics.

One of the challenges in getting students more involved in making decisions about their development in the classroom was the power differential between students and educators. Shane asked, “How do we relinquish the power and empower our students to drive the content and talk about the academic discipline of leadership in their own words, and then we continually affirm and listen and just inject some framework, some models?” Shane tried to give away some of his power as the educator so students could chart their own path but to retain enough power to give the course structure with leadership frameworks and models. He found it to be challenging to get the students to take the next step and lead when dancing.

Some of the educators discussed some specific challenges to getting students to engage in their leadership development or to get the students to dance with the educator. The educators reported that lack of prior concrete experiences could be a barrier to getting students to engage in their own learning. Jean thought that many of the students
“are void of experience to apply what they’re learning.” She felt the students had not had enough experiences that they could relate to the content. Jack experienced the same challenge with his students saying, “I'm always looking for stories that illustrate certain points.” Since students often didn’t have their own experiences or stories to relate to the content, he used stories from his own experiences (Eich, 2008; Shamir, Dayan-Horesh, & Adler, 2005) or gleaned stories from other people in his life. Jean and Karla both felt that one could only do so much in the classroom to provide students with leadership experiences.

Another barrier that kept students off the dance floor was a lack of understanding the relevance of the content. Jack found that students didn’t engage unless they could grasp the relevance or were able to put the leadership concepts into a specific context; therefore, he sometimes found himself working to create a perception of relevance. “I had to sell them on the notion that this could be information that they could use.” He found himself creating a need since the students did not have adequate prior experiences to understand the need for effective leadership. Jean tried to make the leadership content relevant by “ask[ing] them to think about something that’s important to them or kind of get them impassioned about something” they want to change. Without prior experiences to relate the content, she tried to create a current context by asking them to relate it to something that matters to them in the present. She was not trying to create a perception of relevance but instead to invoke their passion and interests to create relevance to engage them in their growth and development.

Several educators reported that students often entered leadership programs believing that leadership was primarily positional rather than behavioral. The educators
reported that if students did not have or want a current position of leadership than the content often lacked relevance for them. If students were not in a formal position, then it was harder to get the students to understand how course content might apply to their lives. Jack wanted them “not [to] think of leadership as a title but as a function. I want them to think of it as a function that they themselves can do.” He felt this view of leadership made leadership development relevant for everyone, thus he hopes it will increase students’ engagement in the leadership content. The positional view of leadership held by many students also created a different kind of challenge for Jean. Again, the students wanted the educators to lead when dancing. The students expected the educator to provide all the answers rather then engage in the dialogue and help the students to discover their own answers to complex questions.

Part of the challenge that Kathy pointed out in engaging students was that individual students engaged differently in the classroom. “Students come at varying levels of readiness for this type of work, and everyone learns a little differently; people will apply things in different ways.” For her, engagement needed to take on different forms and be applied at different levels to meet as many students as possible. Carol mentioned this as well in her interview. She noted that it seemed that current students were more varied in their personal needs and challenges than in the past. June remarked, “Nowadays, class is just one of the many, many things that they do, you know, to try to schedule into their lives.” Carol mentioned that her students were “doing multiple things all the time, which really bothered me initially.” She found the current students to be less patient and less apt to stay focused on topics or discussion than in the past. The educators were experiencing competing interests with students’ personal needs, jobs, and mobile
technology. Although she felt that students’ personal needs should be met, it created more work and often frustration for her.

Shane’s strategy to get students to dance was to have them teach the concepts. “I think the magic there is that a student can take a course, but unless they're asked to teach that course and facilitate key components of a learning activity or exercise, I don't think it sticks with them.” Some of the educators commented on whether or not students were taking leadership courses to fulfill requirements or because they want to learn more about leadership, implying that this difference impacted students’ perception of relevance and engagement. Mave thought this impacted their perception of relevance but worked to change that by the end of the semester:

Because really what I love is that, even though that’s the case, I think that the majority of them, at least when I look at the evaluation comments come out of there, having found some value in the class, even though they maybe had to take it for a requirement, and that was their perception. I almost feel like that’s a challenge, but it’s an exciting challenge to maybe overcome, to [say to the students], “Okay, well, you’re taking it for a requirement, but you’re going to have a good time anyway and learn something along the way.”

Mave recognized that getting students to dance could be a semester-long process. She took even more satisfaction when students who didn’t even want to dance were leading the dance by the end of the semester.

**The educator’s role, responsibilities, and rewards.** The leadership educators shared their experiences with the students in the learning community, but they also talked about their role and responsibilities in the learning community. Little has been written about the role and responsibility of leadership educators in the leadership development process of undergraduate students (Eich, 2008; Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, &
Osteen, 2005). One of the responsibilities that the educators discussed was control over the leadership curriculum in their courses. The educators experienced varying degrees of control over the curriculum in the courses they taught. Some of the educators were given already prepared curriculum to teach, while others were actively engaged in deciding the scope and sequence of more extensive leadership programs. Many educators talked about putting their own personal touch on the courses they were teaching. The amount of change they could make varied. In some cases, the syllabus and textbooks were predetermined by the other faculty or at the departmental level. Although the syllabus and textbook were already determined, Mave still was able to change some aspects of the course. “I was given the freedom to do some things that I felt like, for me, made a big difference.” Though she did not have the freedom to make wholesale changes, it had a large impact on her satisfaction teaching leadership. June, who had over 30 years of teaching, shared that she has seen many people handed an already completed course to teach. She said that restricting an educator’s freedom to alter a syllabus or course is “an efficient thing to do, but I don’t think it’s very effective for the whole learning process.” She believed that making a course your own takes time, but based on her experiences, it was a worthy use of the time. She felt that educators were more effective if they had a personalized connection to the material they were teaching to the students.

A few of the leadership educators reported that it was a challenge to decide what to teach in the broadening field of leadership. June, who has taught leadership to undergraduates for over 30 years, felt teaching leadership was “pretty uni-dimensional at the beginning. And now, it’s very multidimensional in terms of how we help folks.” She
went on to say:

Now we think about this marvelously diverse world in which we live, and the fact that leadership is different when we are talking about different racial and ethnic groups, sexual orientation, age, ability, all of those things really affect the leadership process in such important ways, and...we didn’t think about that back in the ’70s.

Research and practice has increased the understanding about leadership and about leadership in varying contexts.

Jean felt that it could be a challenge to develop curriculum for single courses and whole programs because the field of leadership was growing. The challenge came from deciding what to teach and how to teach it. “We still haven’t figured out what we want to teach because it’s so hard to figure out. There’s so much.” Brungardt (1997) found that the content and pedagogy was diverse across multiple leadership programs. Kathy found it challenging to take what was known about leadership and integrate that into a scope and sequence of courses in a co-curricular leadership development program. “There’s not a lot [of curriculum] out there! And it’s [challenging], especially for how one operationalizes the teaching of leadership.” The challenge of having lots of knowledge and topics from which to choose from to put into a limited curriculum frustrated Carol. She asked, “Is there a set of leadership competencies somewhere we all can buy into?” However, she still felt that it was important to work through the frustration of not having a universal and clear set of competencies to follow, “I think whoever is teaching or facilitating the learning needs to have a common understanding of what it is (laugh) they’re trying to teach and how it all fits together.” She seemed to be laughing at the paradoxical nature of teaching students about leadership while at the same time trying to figure it all out for yourself as a leadership educator.
Many of the educators felt that they had a responsibility to put the students first. Putting students first and letting them drive the learning often produced unexpected results. The best plans could go off track. Carol suggested, “You have to go with the flow. You have to say, ‘Oh, yeah, we could do that today instead of this, as long as it’s not too out there.’” Unexpected results can be unintended opportunities to teach or teachable moments. Jean believed that an educator had to really know who he or she was working with and wait for whatever comes his or her way as a teachable moment. She went on to say, “I always am kind of assessing where I think they’re at and what I can do to help them grow and what their real interest is in.” She saw it as her responsibility to take constant assessment of the students and their needs and then weaving that with her knowledge of leadership to create the next learning opportunity for them. She believed that teaching leadership should be seen as an experiment.

I guess that’s the cool thing about teaching is that it still needs to be an experiment, and some things you do are going be terrific, and some are just going [to] really be bad. But one thing I know is that my students tell me that leadership classes are a hell of a lot more interesting than most other classes.

When educators turn some of the control over to students, the outcome becomes less predictable, but the students liked it.

**Modeling the way.** One of the strongest themes to emerge from this study was modeling the way for the undergraduate students. Many of the educators talked about the responsibility of modeling leadership, both in and out of the classroom environment, which Morrison, Rha, and Helfman (2003) found to be important in their study on teaching and learning in a leadership development program. Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, and Osteen (2005) found that “adults played different roles in
influencing student movement through the leadership identity development stages” (p. 596). The undergraduate students in the study reported that adults had served as models and mentors. Kathy discussed how she once thought teaching leadership should be focused on the leadership content in the course, but believed at the time of the interview that how the educators were practicing leadership with the students was also important.

I thought you were teaching leadership if the content was leadership. That’s what you were having them read and, and you were discussing it, then…it was missing the whole component of how you operate in the classroom also teaches leadership.

She went on to say that not only was it important, but how the educator led the students in the learning community might be even more important than the content. “What we teach may not nearly be as important as… how we teach.” The leadership educator’s behavior and language was a part of the curriculum. The educator’s own leadership in the learning community was being used as a teaching strategy. Jack intentionally used his behavior to teach leadership. “I attempt to run the classroom the way I think effective leadership should be demonstrated.” In some cases, modeling effective leadership meant admitting mistakes made in previous class periods. Karla said that the reason she admitted mistakes to her students was that she hoped “it shows them that as a leader or as somebody in charge you can make a mistake and go back and say, ‘You know, let’s look at this again.’” The educators felt that teaching leadership meant more than course content and activities.

A few educators recommended that the modeling needed to be consistent when working with students. Marge said you needed to be “modeling the way everyday.” The educators felt that modeling should not be limited to just when the educators were working with students directly. The educators felt accountable to model effective
leadership every time they engaged with students face-to-face. Shane talked about modeling good leadership through his electronic communications with students. He used the example of teaching undergraduate students that good leaders respond to emails within 24 hours and then returning to his office to find an overwhelming amount of email messages. He felt it was important to walk the talk even if it meant staying late to reply to all the emails. For others the modeling needed to be consistent in their leadership programming or departmental mission. Shane talked about the expectations of class leaders to model effective leadership to first and second year students in the leadership program. “If our class leaders model positive leader behavior, it is going to rub off on our students not only in their behavior but even in their language, their vocabulary.”

Karla was aware that there was an expectation to model leadership in other contexts, for example when she was advising student organizations or having hallway conversations with students.

These experiences suggest that teaching leadership is a multi-leveled process. Educators had to be cognizant of teaching, content, and pedagogy, while modeling leadership simultaneously. Heifetz (1994) suggested leaders needed to be able to be on the floor dancing and be in the balcony with an overall perspective at the same time to be more effective. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) write:

Achieving a balcony perspective means taking yourself out of the dance, in your mind, even if only for a moment. The only way you can gain both a clearer view of reality and some perspective on the bigger picture is by distancing yourself from the fray. Otherwise, you are likely to misperceive the situation and make the wrong diagnosis, leading you to misguided decisions about whether and how to intervene… The challenge is to move back and forth between the dance floor and the balcony, making interventions, observing their impact in the real time, and then returning to action. The goal is to come as close as you can to being in both
places simultaneously, as if you had one eye looking from the dance floor and one eye looking down from the balcony, watching all the action, including your own. (p. 53-54)

Kathy advocated for team-teaching to help educators be on the dance floor and in the balcony simultaneously rather than having one educator divide their attention. When two educators were teaching together, she felt that one educator could be facilitating the content (dancing) and another educator could be focused on facilitating the leadership process (observing from the balcony). Kathy also suggested that the educators must be aware of another component in addition to monitoring the content and the leadership process in which they were participating as role models; she felt the educators needed be conscious of their own values and beliefs. Walking the line meant “engaging students on a very real, personal level that engages your values and your beliefs and your actions.” Marge put it a different way, stating, “You have to be who you say you are and you have to walk the talk.” Karla believed one had to integrate one’s values, beliefs and actions at a much deeper level than engagement or simply stating who a person is. A person needed to “embody what it is that I’m trying to expect them to do.” They were suggesting that educators teach the content, consciously enact effective leadership and be cognizant of their internal beliefs and values underlying their behavior at any given moment.

In summary, the theme of “not dancing alone” in the learning community included the educators’ experiences about the learning environment or learning community, which included experiences teaching leadership beyond the classroom setting. It also included the experiences of engaging the students in their own leadership development process. The educators also shared their perspectives on their roles and
responsibilities, which addressed the importance of modeling effective leadership for the students. Examples of significant statements for this subtheme are listed in Table 6.

Table 8

**Significant Statement Samples: Modeling the Way**

- Leadership is learned both by what it is that students read, but also how, how they experience what happens in the classroom. So, umm...yeah, it’s happening at multiple levels.
- What we teach may not nearly be as important as that we teach or how we teach or how we learn and equip ourselves to learn.
- If our class leaders model positive leader behavior, it is going to rub off on our students not only in their behavior but even in their language, their vocabulary.
- I thought you were teaching leadership if the content was leadership. That’s what you were having them read and, and you were discussing it, then...it was missing the whole component of how you operate in the classroom also teaches leadership.
- We walk that line, ah, partly with our programming, but partly with the way we teach and what we teach.
- You really have to be willing to, to walk that line.
- You have to be who you say you are and you have to walk the talk.
- Modeling the way every day.
- I want to model the behavior that is consistent with our mission.
- I attempt to run the classroom the way I think effective leadership should be demonstrated.
- We hold ourselves accountable.
- I have to walk the walk.
- I think it’s a responsibility about any good teaching is that you need to be modeling good leadership.

Helping students make a difference

The third theme that emerged was that the educators felt that one of the main purposes for teaching leadership was to help students make a difference in their lives, their families, their communities, and the world. If students were going to make a difference, they would have to work toward reaching their potential or be the best they
could be in their current lives and in preparing for their future lives. Students would need to gain a better understanding of who they may be as people and leaders as well. The educators felt that building strong relationships with the students made a difference in this process. The educators also talked about the satisfaction and joy in helping students work towards their potential and make a difference.

Table 9

Theme: Helping students make a difference

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<td>Be the best they can be</td>
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<td>Making sense of who they are</td>
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<td>“The relationship matters”</td>
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**Be the best they can be.** “Our job is to take that raw talent and develop it,” stated Cindy. For many educators, it wasn’t about just improving the raw talent of their students, but rather about developing that raw talent into the best it could be. Helping students be the best they can be was what Karla considers the “primary objective” of her job as a leadership educator. Jean shared this expectation of the students from the beginning of working with them. “I have really high expectations for you, and I want you to be all that you can be.” She gave them tough love, saying:

I just think that sometimes they’re over-rewarded, so when I think of teaching students today, I really expect more out of them. I give them bad grades. I rip their papers up with red pens, and I still say, “Your content’s great, but you need to ramp your game up, you know. If you think you can submit this in a work situation, it’s not going to happen for you.”
She doesn’t want to make them cry but was trying to get them prepared for life after college. The educators talked about helping students make a difference in their current situations like campus clubs and organizations as well as residential organizations like residence life and Greek life. June believed it meant, “helping folks to do all they can do, be all they can be, for the context within which they live, for their community, whatever that would be.” Being the best they could be meant doing that everywhere, not just in the classroom.

Kathy had been helping students be the best they could be in other areas of their lives before she became a leadership educator. She was working with undergraduate students as scholars. It wasn’t until she started formally teaching leadership that she realized that she had been teaching leadership all along but didn’t think of it as such. “I’ve always been interested in helping students develop as scholars and citizens and didn’t realize it, but leadership was all a part of that. I just didn’t use the language.” Cindy broadened the idea of helping students be the best they could be to go beyond leadership roles and behaviors to encompass the whole person. She not only wanted them to discover their talents, but she wanted them to use those talents to realize the best versions of themselves no matter their roles. “My sincerest hope and my sincerest prayer is that my legacy of impact would be that, after having a relationship with me, someone else aims to be a better person. They want to be the best version of themselves.” Cindy used leadership as an avenue to help students become better individuals.

Others felt that helping students be the best they could be should go beyond benefiting just the individual. Some of the educators were focused on helping students reach their potential for a nobler goal. Leadership development, for them, was about
helping student use the best versions of themselves to make the world a better place. As Marge said, “[I] assist individuals to be the best they can be so that they can help make the world a better place.” They were working towards helping students gain individual success that eventually would translate into a better world. Carol believed “the world needs leaders who listen, who can take action, who can gather information, take that information, and use it to create good.” For these educators, the end goal was bigger than individual success. For June, preparing students to make the world a better place was not just her job. She not only took helping student reach their full potential as the primary objective of her job, but it was possibly the primary objective of her life. “Some of us have been placed on this Earth to help folks to achieve their potential for the world. And I think that that’s a part of the heart of leadership is having that belief in the common good.” June believed that leadership development played a significant role in helping undergraduate students reach their full potential and change the world.

Preparing students to make a difference. The educators also shared what they thought was important to prepare students to make a difference. The educators talked sparingly about common leadership skills and behaviors; however, a few educators did mention building students’ self-confidence. Jack felt that confidence was essential to preparing students to make a difference. “I have seen that as students have told me over and over and over again, ‘I didn’t know I could do this, and I can.’” While skills were important, Jack believed that it is also important to go beyond these standard leadership skills. He tried to prepare students by helping them “discern what their own personal giftedness” was and integrate that into their leadership practice. Several educators felt
that students needed to identify what they were passionate about and focus their energies on making a difference in the world related to their passion or interest. Jack felt that preparing students to make a difference in areas that they care about would lead to a life of fulfillment for them. “If they find a way to make a living where they’re engaged in the things that [they] care about... that would be a life of fulfillment for them.” Getting students to work on the things they care about was Jack’s way of indirectly impacting the things he cared about. He said he didn’t have time to work on all the things he cared about, but through the students he could indirectly contribute to changing the world.

An important component in preparing students to make a difference for Cindy was to be genuine with the students. “How do you make it genuine?” She asked. “That’s what’s been my interest in helping them be most effective.” She felt that if she was genuine with the students, “they’re more likely to replicate those kinds of relationships” with others. She felt it was her job to help students develop their own talents but also try to get students to do the same thing and genuinely invest in the people in their lives. She wanted them to be prepared to invest in other people, the way she had genuinely invested in them. For her, preparing students for her meant getting students to keep the ripple effect going. “I feel like my job is to turn [students] around towards other people and make [them], help [students] think deliberately about ‘how do [they] invest in other people?’, ‘how do I bring out the best performance in everyone I come into contact with?’” Sometimes students weren’t open to the advice about ways to improve from educators. Jean was sensitive to who was open to help and those students that were not open to advice. “I’ll put my energy where there’s going to be some reward for the person. I mean, I didn’t completely give up on that [other] person, but it was pretty
futile.” She knew that sometimes students have to follow their own path to becoming the best they can be.

While some educators talked about preparing students to make a difference in their current lives, others talked specifically about preparing them for life in the future, beyond college. Jean said that students needed to “understand that there’s a bigger world out there, and there’s leadership everywhere.” She was trying to prepare them for future challenges. Students had returned to campus and thanked her for helping them to be prepared to handle an array of challenges they were currently facing in their jobs and their personal lives. Part of preparing students to be successful in the future was to increase their confidence about their skills before they leave the institution. Kathy said, “Our job as educators is when people leave this institution, they’re off to something that they feel good about and are equipped for.” This was the biggest challenge for Jean, helping students prepare to make a difference with limited information about what the future would be for them. It was like practicing for an imaginary future that may or may not come to fruition.

The biggest challenge is helping them to think about how you really use what you learn and that you might want to start practicing before you get to the place that you absolutely need every skill set, trick, passion—everything that you can conjure up—to be successful.

Jean talked openly about why she took this challenge so seriously: “I get really scared for these students.” She knew that students came into classes with limited experience of a bigger world and the challenges they were likely to face beyond college. She was worried that students learn leadership theories and skills but would be unable to apply the knowledge once they were in the work world and their communities. “That’s what I fear. These kids know skills and they know leadership, but do they know how to go out and
make change in a community?” She worked hard getting them to think about how the leadership theories and skills apply to actual and potential situations. She knew that “if we don’t open [their] minds a little bit while they’re here, wherever they go, they’re going to get into trouble.”

Making sense of who they are. A part of preparing students to make a difference was helping students make sense of who they are (Drath & Palus, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 1994; Komives, Owen, Loberbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006). For some of the educators it was helping students “make sense of their life,” and for others it meant helping students gain a better understanding of their gifts and or “talents within themselves.” Some educators wanted to help students have a clearer understanding of both their personal and leader identity. Jack said, “I want [students] to leave with a clear sense of who they are as a person and as a leader.” He wanted them to know their strengths and weaknesses. Jean was careful not to impose her beliefs on the students but rather wanted to “help them expand what they believe in.” The students needed to construct their own sense of who they were. For Shane it was about “understanding [their] values and understanding [their] personal philosophy.” It was about getting students to open up in a real and authentic way that allows them to discover what they believe in, their values, and their personal philosophy. This was a challenge for June to get students to “be real because they were trying so hard to filter what it was they were saying in class.” She tried to provide a safe place so students could discover and share their core selves. Regardless of the challenge to get students to open up about their own sense of identity, it was important to Kathy for
students to be able to answer questions about their personal and leader identities in the capstone leadership course. “The hope or the intention is that you actually, after four or more years as an undergraduate, you would have the answers to those questions of ‘who am I?’, ‘what do I care about?’, ‘what kind of difference do I want to make?’, and ‘how am I going to do that?’” She found value in providing a leadership development process for students to answer those questions. The educators valued intentionally providing students opportunities to make those discoveries about their personal and their leadership identities. Examples of significant statements for this subtheme are listed in Table 7.

Table 10

*Significant Statement Samples: Sense of Who They Are*

- Helping them find their identity
- I want them to leave with a clear sense of who they are as a person and as a leader.
- Ask those kinds of key questions to help students make sense of their life
- You would have the answers to those questions of ‘who am I?’, ‘what do I care about?’, ‘what kind of difference do I want to make?’, and ‘how am I going to do that?’
- I’m open more open to what other people think leadership is and maybe I can help them expand what they believe it.
- Identifying talents within yourself
- Setting up active learning exercises and in hopes that the light bulb goes on and you can see that
- I feel like this, this is what we’re helping them with is establishing their leadership identity.
- We have found that some students open up a lot, and it's amazing what they share but it's real, it's authentic.
- Always to get them to be real because they were trying so hard to, um, filter what it was they were saying in class
- Understanding [one’s] values and understanding [one’s] personal philosophy
“The relationship matters.” Whether the leadership educators were working to help students be the best they could be, preparing students to make a difference, or helping students make sense of their identities (Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005), the relationships the educators experienced with their students mattered (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1998; Myers, 2006). Many educators commented about the importance of building relationships with students and the impact that had on various aspects of teaching leadership. Jack talked about the frustration he experienced when he felt he was not connecting with his students when he first started teaching leadership in the classroom.

I wasn't happy with the interactions I had with students, and I never really clicked with them... and I tried. I decided to try something different. For the second semester I deliberately didn't wear a tie all semester, and I had much better rapport with the students.

In some cases it could be more than just not connecting with the students. Carol shared experiences of inappropriate student behavior towards her and others. “I have had students be incredibly rude.” Even though other educators felt that educators should become more a part of students’ lives, Jack believed that his relationship with students should be established with clear expectations and boundaries. He wanted to maintain a sense of professionalism by building rapport, rather than friendships, with the students.

The educators talked about a variety of positive outcomes for building relationships with students. The educators felt that getting to know your students better through stronger relationships helped students reach personal goals and objectives. Carol said, “You have to spend time with a student to really help them pick and choose and research and find co-curricular activities” that meet their personal needs and goals. Better relationships with students could also make the students feel more comfortable
“going and talking to a faculty member about what they’re studying and how what they’re doing relates to their goals and objectives.” Learning how to build stronger relationships was even more important than students mastering some of the leadership content for one educator. Shane said, “Regardless if they really learned the components, hopefully they're learning how to build relationships.” Carol felt that the relationship the educator has with students impacted far more than just their leadership.

Spend time talking to students individually and in groups, in the classroom and outside the classroom. It’s the only way you really learn about a person and they learn about you. I just think relationships are really important in terms of your progression in your development as a human being.

She felt that a lot of emphasis should be placed on the relational aspects of leadership development. Cindy was concerned about more than just building strong relationships with students she was currently teaching. “It’s my job to help them be most effective within all of those relationships, be it with family, friends, or otherwise.” She wanted students to be able to build strong relationships for a lifetime.

It was important to be genuine when building relationships with students. Cindy said, “I firmly believe that relationship has to be genuine from the beginning.” It was important for Mave to be genuine in the classroom working with students as a class as well as with each individual student. “I have a genuine interest in these students as students and an individual.” For Jack being genuine was an effective way to build rapport with students that was missing when he first started teaching leadership. “If you are unwilling to publicly acknowledge your limitations with your students... you are missing an opportunity to create a bond with them, to create rapport... not a friendship, but rapport.” In some cases, the sense of genuinenss can ripple throughout the entire learning community. Cindy said that sometimes she could “feel this very genuine spirit
in the room because I’m genuinely interested in what they have to say.” She also said that when she was genuinely engaged in relationships with students, her best work happened. When Jack started to connect and build better relationships with his students he found that he "wasn't dancing alone anymore.”

Building strong relationships with students was very rewarding to the educators. June said, “We have the great opportunity to develop so many relationships with so many students, and it’s very gratifying to have them say, ‘Thank you. You made a difference in my life.’” The relationships developed with students were more meaningful for Mave than the relationships she had in other parts of her professional life. “I have to say, [teaching leadership is] by far one of my favorite things that I get to do because the connection that you get with students in the classroom is, for me, much different and much more rich than what I get in my workday today.” Mave said,

I really get to know the students well. I get a huge glimpse into their lives and understand what they’re going through on a day-to-day basis, and so, it’s given me an even greater appreciation… and understanding of what their life experience is like at the time.

She felt that the relationships that she built when teaching leadership gave her an even greater opportunity to help the students make a difference in ways that she didn’t experience anywhere else. Kathy felt a sense of reward when she got more than a glimpse of her students’ lives. She felt a sense of reward when students intentionally invited her to be a part of their lives.

Building and maintaining strong relationships with their students provided a challenge for the educators; however, it was worth it for Cindy. “It’s the most energy draining, but the most rewarding responsibility, I think an educator has. Ah, yeah! It takes a lot of work to be meaningfully engaged in your students’ lives.” It may have
taken a lot of energy to develop strong relationships with the students, but it was worth it for Jean as well. “I feel like people, mentors, helped me transform myself through college, so for me personally, as an educator, if I can reach somebody, and they have a lesson that sticks with them and in their life, and they can use it, then I’ve earned a paycheck.” She was just passing the care and individual attention she got from having relationships with her mentors to the next generation of leaders. For June, the relationships she had with students helped them transform into effective leaders. “For me, the transformational piece was always either in the classroom or, in so many instances, the one-on-one relationships that would exist.” June used her relationships with students to teach leadership and help students make a difference in the world. Bett has taught leadership for ten years and works hard to stay connected with students who have graduated; however, some connections get broken. “It makes me sad when I lose connections with students.”

“A real moment of joy.” Preparing students to be successful at making a difference in the world brought a lot of joy and satisfaction to the leadership educators (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992). For Marge it was the daily joy of helping students grow into their potential. “You get to work with people and help them be the best that they can be.” The joy could come from simply reaching one student and helping him or her develop a skill that would stick with him or her so he or she can use it later in life. For others, the joy came from knowing that students had learned or grown by being in the leadership course or program. Jack found satisfaction when students put it all together.

What I love is when the student learns what they care about, what they are gifted at, and what they have the power to do. Once the student learns those three
things, it’s almost like they have the elements of combustion, and they take off.

One of the joys that Kathy had was working with seniors that were preparing to graduate. She had them reflect on their leadership journeys. “They reflect on kind of the journey to date, when they can articulate where they came from and where they are now, and that’s a real moment of joy.” The “best part” of the job for Karla was to “prepare [students] for when they leave college.” Several educators commented that they felt a lot of satisfaction and joy when they saw or heard that the students had gotten the job they wanted or had been accepted into the graduate school of their choice or another kind of big success the student had achieved. Cindy was happy when students came back to campus and told her about how they were making a difference. “I love it! I love it! It’s the coolest thing ever when students come in and then talk about some big success that they had.” Hearing about the success of former students made June very proud as well: “I’m very, very proud of the work that I did, and I am exceedingly proud of the folks with whom I worked because they’re doing amazing, amazing things.”

Even though they love working with students, it was still nice to get feedback or a pat on the back every once and a while that the educators were making a difference in the students’ lives. Mave was aware of her need for some type of feedback or recognition from the students. She found a sense of satisfaction and joy when reading students’ positive comments from course evaluations. Students would make comments about how much they learned. “I’m a person that needs a pat on the back, but you get more of a feeling of, ‘Wow, I’ve kind of made a difference in these students’ lives’ or ‘I’ve done a good thing.’” The positive student comments she received were one of the things she was most proud of. June related a story of seeing former students in the
community and how they often thanked her for preparing them to be successful leaders, saying “It was just so gratifying to know that the students had really, umm…I knew they appreciated me.” The real joy for June was knowing that she had served somehow: “[I] made a difference in somebody’s life.”

Sometimes the pat on the back came in the form of cards or trinkets that student gave or sent the educators. Cindy said, “You’ll never walk away unsatisfied from that. Especially (sigh), you know, when you get a boxful of cards…letting you know what you’ve done for them.” Even though Cindy loved getting the cards from students, she felt that she didn’t deserve the credit for their success. She was just being a vehicle for the students to express their talents. It felt weird to her to be “taking credit when really there were a lot of people along the way who made that possible.” Jean would rather avoid the recognition; she was comfortable staying in the shadows with a word of thanks or a visit from a former student now and again.

I just really want be behind in the shadow and help young people be leaders and be successful at what their dreams are. And I’m okay with that… I just try to do the best I can every day, and maybe, I don’t know, it’s nice when someone says ‘You’ve made a difference in my life’ or whatever, but I don’t care. I’m just, I know what I’m doing is right, so I don’t need a legacy.

Her own sense of making a difference was recognition enough for her and she was satisfied with her own assessment of her work teaching leadership. She knew what her legacy was, and that was enough.

In summary, the theme of helping students make a difference was comprised of five subthemes. The educators were focused on helping the students be the best they could be in the present and by preparing them to be successful in the future. A significant part of preparing them to be the best they could be was by helping the students make
sense of who they were and helping them understand their identities. The educators felt that throughout this process the relationship with the students impacted the students’ abilities to reach their potential. The educators found satisfaction and joy throughout this process, especially when students would return to campus or let the educators know about the success they were experiencing after leaving college. Jean shared her satisfaction in helping to prepare one student to make a difference: “I didn’t transform her; I helped her transform herself.”

**The educator’s journey: “A place of becoming”**

The first three themes pertain to the external experiences of being a leadership educator. The fourth theme that emerged revolved around the educator’s internal journey as a leadership educator. The educators shared their experiences of becoming interested in leadership and subsequently becoming leadership educators. They talked about the influence of colleagues on their journeys and the personal challenges they face teaching leadership. A significant part of their experiences as leadership educators was their own developmental processes within the learning community. Stacey (2007) argues that an individual’s identity is co-constructed with other people in the communities in which they participate:

Human beings live in communities and whatever they do is a joint performance conducted by them in communities of practice... Joint activity is carried out in ongoing conversations between people in which they negotiate what they are doing and how they are making sense of what they are doing. In this activity, they become who they are – together they construct their identities.” (Stacey, 2007, p. 2)

The identities of the leadership educators would be expected to develop as they
participate in a community of practice with the students and their colleagues. However, little has been written about the experiences of leadership educators or their developmental processes while teaching leadership. The sub-themes are at home with leadership, colleagues, personal challenges, being authentic, and the leadership educator’s identity.

Table 11

**Theme: The educator’s journey: “In a place of becoming”**

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<td>Personal challenges</td>
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<td>Being authentic</td>
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<td>Leadership educator’s identity</td>
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**At home with leadership.** The leadership educators shared that their interests in leadership, which eventually led to their interest in teaching leadership, began with experiences with leadership mostly in high school and college and in some community activities. Bett, however, attributes her interest in leadership to experiences in elementary school. In first grade, she led the top readers’ group. The group was even named Bett’s Reading Group. “Other students looked at me as someone who was leading them, whether it was in reading, or just within the classroom.” She said that this lead to other leadership opportunities throughout K-12. Mave was involved in high school activities that provided leadership to other students, such as student government. “I really have had an interest just in the topic of leadership, probably since high school and just being involved in different activities and especially Student Council.”
For other educators, it was their college experiences that piqued their interest in leadership. Cindy’s interest “stemmed primarily from a leadership experience as an undergrad.” She was paired with an adolescent as part of a mentoring program. I was asked to work with a young leader, and I was so surprised by how much I cared and how much I changed as a person when I was basically given the responsibility of developing the talents of a young leader. She changed her major to education but soon realized that she was much more interested in the social dynamic in the room than teaching and learning. Shane’s interest also began as an undergraduate student. He attributed his interest in leadership to a pivotal experience serving in a leadership position. “Being in a leadership role within the [organization] got me really, really excited” about leadership. Other educators said it wasn’t serving in specific roles but a general interest in the “social dynamic” of the classroom or learning community. Cindy was interested in “how people are perceived to be leaders.” June also had an interest in the leadership process prior to teaching leadership, but she didn’t attribute it to at specific time in her life or experiences. “My whole life, actually, I’ve been engaged in leadership. So I’ve always been intrigued with the processes.” Marge had a similar experience with her interest in leadership and said, “I always knew I was a leader, and I had positions of leadership but also, just in who I was.” Being a leader was a part of Marge’s identity rather than something she did. Jean’s interest in leadership was transformed by her interaction with a frequent presenter at regional and national conferences. She said the presenter “was way far ahead of the game… I changed what I wanted to do with my life [and] I went into higher education. [Because of her] I had a great passion for leadership.” This transformation for Jean has resulted in over 25 years of working in the area of undergraduate leadership development.
Discovering that leadership had an academic component or that they could have a career teaching leadership was an a-ha moment for some of the educators. Jean said, “When I got into this profession, I knew I was home.” It was a feeling of coming home for Jack as well. “Once I figured out that leadership was my field, everything clicked into place.” Jack had been searching for a ‘home’ for a while and was excited when the academic field of leadership felt so comfortable. Cindy hadn’t been intentionally searching for her place; it was a sudden realization for her. “All of a sudden (snap), kind of a light went on, like, oh, my gosh! This, this is something I’ve been so fascinated by for a long period of time.” Learning about the field of leadership came easy for these educators; the language of leadership didn’t feel foreign to them. Jack said, “It's like everyone is speaking my language.” Jack related a story of being in another country and the challenges he faced since he didn’t speak the native language. He said finding leadership as a discipline was like coming back to his home country where he could understand what people were saying; leadership felt like his native language.

The educators shared different paths to becoming leadership educators. For some, it was a logical next step to move from studying leadership to teaching leadership. Others took a less direct route to teaching leadership. Mave didn’t know if she would like teaching leadership to undergraduates, but she said yes to an opportunity to teach and find out if she would like teaching leadership or not. “I was given the opportunity to be able to teach a [leadership] class. I was delighted to be able to do that, and really ended up liking it even more than I think I expected to!” She became passionate about “helping students develop as leaders” similar to the way she became passionate about the academic component of leadership. Rachel got a chance to teach in her master degree
program, and the faculty that she worked with and the feeling of making an impact on students inspired her. Kathy saw being faculty or an educator as too far removed from practicing leadership. Her perspective at that time of being a faculty member meant she would have to focus on theoretical aspects of leadership instead of practicing or applying theoretical concepts. Prior to getting involved in teaching leadership, Kathy felt that “the life of a faculty member seemed too remote or too distant from issues… the action. And so, I never really wanted to be a faculty member.” Other educators talked about teaching leadership as being a part of their core identity. As mentioned before June felt like she had been interested in leadership all her life, so teaching about a life-long interest was a natural fit. “I know I frame my leadership in a teaching perspective because that’s what I was born to do, was to be a teacher.” Teaching leadership for Jack was more than just a job as well. Teaching leadership was about his identity; a leadership educator was who he was: “If I were to go to a job where I didn't get to teach leadership, it would be a loss for me. It would feel like I wasn't being me.” Coming home to leadership and the eventual teaching of leadership to undergraduates was an important step on the educators’ journeys.

Colleagues. Colleagues were identified as important models and mentors that helped the educators on their journeys and in their current positions as leadership educators. Models and mentors played a role in the development of undergraduate students as well (Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005). June shared how the learning that she gained from having rich discussions with colleagues and others had impacted her understanding of leadership. “Over the years, the individuals with
whom I have had rich conversations have been so important to help me learn about leadership.” Bett felt that she relied on colleagues to keep her informed about new research results and to bring back ideas from workshops. For some of the educators, their colleagues were not just helpful for their understanding and growth about teaching leadership but shared a sense of being in it together. “I don’t think of leadership development as an individual effort or activity—of the person learning or of the person who’s interacting with the learner,” stated Kathy. She believed that a student’s leadership development happened within a system of learning and growth that included other educators (Boal & Schultz, 2007; Drath & Palus, 1994; Stacey, 2007; Uhl-Bien, Marion, & McKelvey, 2007): “As a faculty, we’re a learning community and so that’s what feeds the process, too.” Kathy used ‘we’ more than ‘I’ in her interview. Her use of ‘we’ was incredibly pronounced when she discussed reviewing the scope and sequence of leadership program at her institution. “We’re in the process of doing full curriculum reviews, scope, and sequence—what do we teach; when do we teach it; how do we teach it?” Teaching leadership was a team sport for her.

Shane and Karla felt that their colleagues were invaluable to them as well. They met to share teaching ideas and strategies as well as help with their teaching styles and personal challenges. Their colleagues often served as mirrors to help them improve their teaching. Shane’s own passion for teaching leadership came through when he talked about how well he liked working with other passionate people. “Research shows that people quit people. People don’t quit jobs, and the people here are extremely tremendous. They are passionate about what they do.” June attributed a lot of her success as a leadership educator to the people around her. “I think that the magic in an organization
happens through great people doing very hard work for a reason that they all passionately believe in.” The contribution their colleagues made to the educators’ collective success and happiness was an important aspect of the educators’ journeys. Mave experienced being disconnected from her colleagues. She felt that she did not have an opportunity to talk to her colleagues on a daily basis. “There’s not even an opportunity, frankly, to have a conversation with somebody unless I initiate it.” She valued those interactions but found it hard to engage in opportunities for dialogue since she only teaches one or two classes and doesn’t have an office in the same building as the department.

**Personal Challenges.** Another substantial part of the leadership educators’ journey was facing and overcoming their own personal challenges when teaching leadership. The educators shared a variety of personal challenges that included learning the language of leadership, handling the responsibility they felt, helping the undergraduate students be successful, and finding and maintaining a work-life balance. June felt that teaching leadership was “a gift and a tremendous responsibility.” As a new professional, Jean had felt inadequate in her responsibility to teach students about leadership. “I didn’t feel like I had the skill sets to teach others about leadership.” This feeling over the years influenced her style of helping the students decide how to best lead as opposed to telling them what she thought was the right way to lead. Some of the educators moved into a position of teaching leadership after completing advanced degrees, but for some, they had been working in other career fields. For Kathy, “gaining some facility and comfort with the language made a huge difference.” Some of the educators commented on the challenge to stay current in the field since there was so
much scholarly work being done in leadership.

Some of the personal challenges were related to working directly with students, both in and out of the classroom. Carol had noticed a change in the students and their behavior in the learning community. She found it difficult staying abreast of generational shifts in the students she worked with. Other challenges the educators were faced with were meeting different individual needs and values of the students and challenging them in the learning community or one-on-one appropriately (Barbuto, 2000). Carol said that she felt that it was a challenge to meet the students’ individual needs when more students came to campus with more complex needs and challenges. Kathy tried to be cognizant of how she challenged students in the classroom because of the authority she had as the instructor. Another interesting challenge she faced was being aware of the multi-level process happening when she was teaching leadership. She was conscious of needing to teach and model leadership at the same time, referred to earlier as being on the dance floor and in the balcony simultaneously (Heifetz, 1994): “It’s difficult to be both in the mix and have an opportunity to see the dynamic of what’s happening in the group.”

When students drive more of the learning, Karla found it a challenge to address issues that arise during class discussions. She felt that she struggled to think on the spot, and sometimes she had to address issues the next class period.

Quite a few of the educators talked about the “significant energy” that it took to teach leadership, and the toll it took on both their professional and personal lives. Cindy asked rhetorically, “How do you be a positive influence in the lives of others in a way that is genuine and is something that you can keep up 24 hours a day and not have to turn on and turn off from it?” She saw her predecessor turn the energy on when she interacted
with students in the classroom or in her office and then turn it off after the students had left, but Cindy wanted to find a different way to negotiate the energy it took to work with the students. Shane felt the pressure of trying to be on 24 hours a day. He felt that educators were “always on stage. You know the whole fishbowl analogy.” He talked about having his leadership evaluated both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. Sometimes he found that it was tough to live up to those kinds of expectations.

Jean had a lot of other responsibilities besides teaching and didn’t feel like she did as good a job as she could. “I’m pretty busy in what I do, and maybe, the sad thing is that I don’t spend enough time thinking about how I could help my students informally.” She felt like there were lots of distractions competing for her time. Marge said she used to do things “half-assed” while thinking of other things, and she now works hard to not think about all the things she has to do while talking to students.

I think the biggest thing that's changed for me is probably mindfulness, living more in the moment, being present, being engaged because that's so important not to multitask in my brain when I am in a meeting or when I'm working with someone, but to be with that person in that moment.

Being mindful was one of the things that had changed for Marge since she started teaching leadership thirteen years ago.

Cindy had been teaching leadership for four years but still hasn’t established a good balance between her professional and personal life. “I don’t know how to establish good balance, but it seems to me, watching my predecessors, that the healthier that is, the more genuine you are in your work.” She said that she had some insights on keeping a good balance but found that the real challenge was practicing that balance. Jean at one point in her career got burned out on leadership and actually stopped teaching leadership for a few years. The pressure of being in the fish bowl got to be too much for her. “I just
was overwhelmed. And maybe the leadership thing seemed like the thing that was the hardest for me to do, and I just got tired of it.” She focused on other parts of her professional life for a few years before she eventually started teaching leadership again and found a balance that worked for her. Bett’s partner has voiced concerns in the past about the amount of time and energy she was devoting to teaching leadership. She said, “I think you sacrifice some of your personal life, but I think the trade off is worth it.”

**Being authentic.** An important part of teaching leadership discussed earlier was modeling or walking the talk. Most of the educators shared that it was also important to be authentic or genuine when modeling leadership. The literature on authentic leadership has increased in recent years. Shamir and Eilam (2005) found no single definition in their review of the growing field of authentic leadership, and they also found that scholars were using the term in different ways. In 2005, *The Leadership Quarterly* published a special addition because scholars recognized that a “more authentic leadership development strategy becomes relevant and urgently needed for desirable outcomes” (Avolio & Gardner, 2005, p. 316). In the introduction to the special edition, Avolio and Gardner (2005) provided a table that compared authentic leadership development theory, instead of authentic leader development (Shamir & Eilam, 2005), with transformational, charismatic, servant, and spiritual leadership theories as an attempt to help clarify future research directions.

The leadership educators exhibited a variety of components proposed as part of authentic leadership such as values, positive modeling, emotional contagion, follower development, relational transparency, and self-expressive (Avolio & Gardner, 2005;
Shamir & Eilam, 2005). Marge cautioned that leadership educators needed to be authentic in what they’re doing or the students wouldn’t respect them, saying “You have to be who you say you are…If you aren't who you say you are, number one, you aren’t going to have credibility, and number two, nobody is going to want to be around you.”

Shane also thought being authentic lent credibility to what he had to say to students. “You've got to bring a piece of yourself into the mix, I think, to establish credibility.”

Sometimes he brought a piece of himself in to the classroom intentionally, and he said, “sometime you walk into class, and you don't have any of your armor on.” He credited his colleagues for being an inspiration when it came to bringing your authentic self to the classroom. Carol warned, “You don’t want to be somebody you’re not.”

Mave believed that you should be authentic in your passion for teaching and leadership:

If you are enthusiastic about what it is that you’re teaching, that will help inspire the students to really come to love the subject, perhaps not as much as you, but more than where they were at before.

The educators felt that students responded positively to hearing and seeing the real educator. They believed that sharing about their own values and successes, limitations and errors increased rapport and student learning. Bett felt that being authentic was important to building stronger relationships with the students: “I think it opens up a way to connect with the students on a level you can’t reach otherwise.” Kathy brought her authentic self to the classroom not just for credibility, but to help connect academic concepts with practical application.

I bring more of myself to my teaching now and partly that’s just the license that I’ve given myself to connect the academic and the experience – the book learning and the street learning.
Kathy thought that sharing about her own personal experiences was only fair if she was going to ask the students to share openly and honestly. She said, “If you’re inviting other people to value their experiences at leadership development, you really need to be able to model that.” Many of the educators used personal stories and examples from their own experiences to foster leadership development. Jack wanted to make sure students left his classroom with a realistic perspective about leadership. “I want them to see the real messy, painful leadership development as it actually happens.” Even if he had to expose his messy mistakes, it was worth it to him. Modeling authenticity also brought a sense of satisfaction to some of the educators. It was a real sense of pride for Jack. “I am proud of the fact that students get to see the real me.” For Marge, it felt good to let others know that she was on her own leadership journey. “It increases my feeling good that I am doing better about being authentic, because you know you are always a work in progress.” She hoped that the students would realize that they were a work in progress as well.

**Leadership educator’s identity.** At the core of the leadership educator’s journey was the educator’s own identity. It impacted the way the educators engaged students and taught leadership, served as leaders in the leadership development process, and negotiated their own development (Kegan & Lahey, 1984). For Marge, it was important as a leadership educator to be cognizant of her identity as she taught leadership. She said, “You really have to know yourself well.” She believed that who one is impacted the methods and the effectiveness of teaching leadership; knowing who one is helped someone be a better leadership educator. She went on to say, “Before you can help
others be the best they can be, that empowerment has to come from you knowing you, so you'll know how you'll act and react.” Mave was also aware that her own beliefs were impacting the way she taught leadership. “I am a believer in your need to be responsible for your own learning, and that’s probably a big part of what informs the way I teach.” Her core beliefs or identity drove her behavior (Kegan & Lahey, 1984) as a leadership educator. For Shane, knowing his core values allowed him to let students bring their values into the teaching environment, instead of imposing his values on the students. “Know your core first, and then you can be open and inclusive to other people's core values.” He was more comfortable with letting the students drive the learning from their core values instead of always imposing his. Many of the educators thought it was important to know one’s own philosophy of leadership. June recommended that leadership educators be “very clear on your own philosophy of leadership” before you ask students to develop their own. In the sub-theme on defining leadership, I wrote about Jean having a clear sense of her philosophy of leadership, but wasn’t able to articulate it; she thought that developing a leadership philosophy was an important task to ask her students but was unable to clearly express her own leadership philosophy. For some of the educators, part of their identity included being a leader in the classroom. Cindy said, “I think leadership educators may not look at themselves as leaders but they really are, for the fact that they are providing a significant influence for the lives of these students.” Teaching leadership was a multilevel process where educators provided learning opportunities and led in the classroom (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992).

Kathy believed that people, including educators, “are in a place of becoming.” In the eighteenth century, Hegel wrote about the paradoxical relationship between ‘being’ —
who you are, your identity – and who you were ‘becoming’ (Stern, 2002). A significant influence on the becoming process for the leadership educators was teaching leadership. The journey of self-discovery and of becoming was a part of the joy of teaching leadership for Shane:

I guess that's what makes it so much fun, is to say leadership is a journey through life and we will just constantly [be] trying to get better and better and better as we move through it.

Teaching leadership provided the avenue for him to make his life better everyday. For Shane teaching leadership had changed how he leads an organization outside of his professional life. “I am giving my organization more time to storm and talk about the loss and significant loss, rather then just saying, ‘Hey gang, it’s policy from the top down. Let's implement it.’” Shane was walking the talk or modeling the way even when he was outside of the formal teaching environment. Carol openly embraced her sense of becoming by embracing the lessons that were presented to her; she brought a sense of inquisitiveness to it: “There’s something new to discover every day.” Kathy applied what she talked about with students to her own life. “Every time I teach a concept of leadership or we’re involved in an exercise, I find myself doing it myself – questioning who I am.” She went on to explain her own sense of her always-changing journey (Van Veslor, Moxley, & Bunker, 2004):

I am not the same person or … have the same skills. I don’t practice leadership in the same way. My roles in my family, and my work environment, and in my community shift all the time. How I view them changes based on what I’m reading and what I’m doing, so … I’m in a constant development phase because there’s no end game. So yeah, it affects everything. It’s kind of insidious that way. (Laugh) You can’t shut it off.

Jack said, “Teaching leadership is important to me because as I teach it, I am making
sense of my own experiences." Teaching leadership helped Jack understand who he was and who he wanted to become. It provided an opportunity for him to reflect on his own skills and behavior:

I think of myself as developing in my own leadership skills with each semester that I teach leadership, because I get the privilege of being transparent in my own leadership abilities and limitations in front of 20 or 30 people.

Teaching leadership had impacted the way the educators practice leadership. For Jack it went beyond changing his leadership; it was about being a leadership educator:

For me being someone who teaches leadership is the discovery of an identity that was always there but hadn't come out yet. And so I no longer define myself professionally based on what I used to do. I only want to talk about what I want to do now because this is what I am.

Teaching leadership had changed the way he saw himself. It had helped him discover his own identity in the course of helping students discover theirs. For Jack, teaching leadership means more than using teaching strategies to help student learn to be more effective leaders. It was more than just his behavior as an educator. Teaching leadership or being a leadership educator had become a core part of his identity. Through the process of reflecting on his journey in the interview, Jack made a realization.

So I'm going to stumble around a little bit because I don't have words for it. It's self-interpretive... teaching leadership is important to me because as I teach it, I am making sense of my own experiences. I am narrating my life and my experience to others in a way that I hope would be meaningful to them, and simultaneously doing that in the way that I hope empowers them to make a difference in their own lives.

So it's about the whole point of life. Because if people don't make a difference in the world, then what was the point of living? And if I don't find meaning in my own life, then what's the point of living? So it's a coming together of those two points of meaningfulness in life for me. It's where I look introspectively and make sense of my own journey, myself in relationship to the outer world and how I have made sense of this journey and myself as a leader, and I tell that story to others. I take this ambiguous life story and I pick out the points and I tell it in a story form that provides meaning to others in a way that helps them say "I could
be a leader, and I don't have to succeed every time." And it gives them some internal narrative that helps them make the difference they want to make in the world and so for me, teaching leadership is teaching life, it's teaching living.

Yeah, I didn't know that's where I was going, but for me teaching leadership is teaching living.

*silence.*

And there's more to life than leadership but this is the part of life that I know and this is the part of life that I care passionately about and I leave it to others to teach the part of living that they know, but this is the part of living that I know, that I care about, and I believe matters to everyone, should matter to everyone. So this is the part of living that I teach.

Jack discovered that his journey as a leadership educator had transformed into a quest to teach students about life.

In summary, this theme comprised the journey to becoming a leadership educator.

It began with the educators getting their interests piqued in high school and college and their feelings of finding a fit with leadership concepts that felt like the comfort of coming home. Along the journey, they were influenced by colleagues in their quest to be more authentic and negotiate personal challenges. The journey was as much about developing their students’ leadership, as it was about developing their own leadership.

**Summary of Findings**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to answer the central question: What are the experiences of educators who are teaching leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions? and the sub-questions: (a) What are the lived experiences of the educators who teach leadership to undergraduate students at academic institutions? and (b) What are the contexts in which educators teach leadership to
undergraduate students at academic institutions? Moustakas (1994) recommends that textual and structural descriptions be written based on the themes that emerged. The textual description describes ‘what’ the educators experienced and answers the first sub-question. The structural description describes context of the experiences and answers the second sub-question. The essence of teaching leadership is the integration of the textual and structural descriptions, thus answering the central question.

**Textual description.** The textual description is a synthesized description of experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007). The leadership educators found it tough to articulate what it meant to teach leadership to people who were unfamiliar with leadership development. They got asked frequently what was leadership and how did they teach it. Since leadership education programs are fairly new to college campuses, many people were unfamiliar with the goals and objectives of the leadership programs. Educators have also even experienced difficulty trying to help faculty across campus understand their discipline and job. The educators focused on helping students know their core values and identity. The educators felt that knowing your core was important for working with others and accomplishing tasks and goals. It was important for the students to become the best they could be in order to make a difference in the world. They also empowered students to share their voices in the leadership development process. The educators even actively challenged students to shape their experiences and to lead the dance. They felt that relevance was a key to getting students engaged in their own learning. Another common experience for the educators was building relationships with the students. It was important to the educators to establish high quality relationships
with students and to encourage students to have high quality relationships with other students. These relationships were important for modeling effective leadership behavior. The educators also experienced a sense of coming home when they found leadership as an academic discipline and also while teaching leadership to undergraduate students; it felt right to be a leadership educator. As time progressed, teaching leadership helped the leadership educators discover their own identities and hone their leadership skills. It has helped the leadership educators know and understand their own core values, moving them towards being more authentic individuals.

**Structural description.** The structural description is a synthesized description of the context of the experiences (Creswell, 2007). The leadership educators taught leadership in a variety of contexts. Predominantly they taught leadership in a classroom setting. The educators worked to establish a learning community model where each educator was often a facilitator of learning rather than an instructor. Since students were encouraged to shape their experience, the context shifted. Educators also taught leadership outside of the classroom. The educators modeled effective leadership behavior, for example, in their offices, in the hallway, and through advising. They would meet one-on-one in coaching and advising sessions. Teaching leadership also was done outside the classroom setting through clubs and other student organizations with which the educators were affiliated. Modeling leadership behavior also occurred online through email. Teaching leadership was not an eight-to-five job that occurred in formal instructional activities. It was a way of life that didn’t follow a time clock, nor was it contained to one location.
**The essence.** The essence of the central phenomenon is the composite or synthesis of its elements, both the textual and structural descriptions. It is a core description of the experiences teaching leadership as described by the participants and through the transcendental lens of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). The leadership educators in this study reported the essence of teaching leadership was a place of becoming. Teaching leadership was about parallel journeys: the students’ journeys of leadership development, and the journey of self-discovery for the educators.

The educators shared experiences of empowering students to drive the learning, to lead the dance. The educators were preparing the students to make a difference in their world. The educators were constantly role modeling leadership behavior, whether that was in the classroom, in their office, online, or beyond the academic institution. As leadership educators, their lives were in a fish bowl. The educators were constantly practicing leadership under the scrutiny of the students and the educator’s colleagues. It meant the educators had to walk the talk continuously.

The educators also felt that teaching leadership helped them discover their own identities. The journey began with an interest in leaders and leading, followed by the discovery of a sense of comfort when teaching leadership. The educators tried to teach the leadership content at the same time they were trying to make sense of their own lives. Also by sharing their stories and modeling effective leadership, their lives were part of the curriculum. Perhaps this was the reason they found it difficult to articulate what they do; teaching leadership is more than a job or career. Teaching leadership is a way of life for these educators – *teaching leadership is about a community of people helping each*
other discover their identities and then using that knowledge to make a difference in the world.
Chapter Five: Discussion

But for all of human existence, no matter how terrible the time, there always have been people willing to step forward to do whatever they could to create positive change. Some succeeded, some did not. As we struggle with our own time, it’s good to remember that we are standing on very strong shoulders that stretch far back in history. Margaret J. Wheatley

Prior research has recognized that leadership development is a process, which is not well understood (Day & O’Connor, 2003). The broader context for this study was the leadership development process for undergraduate students. The purpose of this study was to describe the experiences of leadership educators as part of the leadership development process for undergraduate students. Included in this chapter are discussions of the four themes that emerged from the experiences of the educators: (a) “I teach leadership. What does that mean?”, (b) “not dancing alone” in the learning community, (c) helping students make a difference, and (d) the educator’s journey: “a place of becoming.” Also discussed in this chapter are the significance of the findings, recommendations, limitations, and a personal reflection.

Discussion of the Themes

“I teach leadership. What does that mean?” In 1991, Rost dedicated an entire book to the variances in definitions of leadership he found in publications and proposed a post-industrial definition of leadership to alleviate the problem of multiple definitions. He proposed leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and collaborators who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes” (p.99). Rost defined an industrial paradigm of leadership as hierarchical, materialistic, linear, self-serving, and
power-driven through dyadic relationships. He defined the post-industrial paradigm as collaborative, holistic, civic-minded, pluralistic, and systemic.

Similar to Rost’s discussion of leadership paradigms, Drath and Palus (1994) argued that most definitions of leadership were based on power and influence in dyadic or interpersonal relationships (industrial) and proposed a different definition of leadership that drew on systems thinking and meaning-making (post-industrial). They argued that leadership was a social meaning-making process instead of a series of linear cause and effect relationships. People worked together to make sense of a situation and committed to creating change that emerged from the sense-making process. Social influence may be present, but it was not the central aspect of leadership.

Rost and Barker (2000) argued that one of the central problems for leadership development programs was that many programs attempt to use an industrial view of leadership to understand and to measure a socially constructed reality. The industrial approach assumed leadership was a hierarchical, goal-oriented process centered on self-interest and materialism. They argued that a different post-industrial or social paradigm of leadership in fact was emerging, causing the industrial paradigm of leadership to be ineffective. They argued that a post-industrial paradigm of leadership considers the system of wills rather than one individual’s will. The emerging paradigm centered on collaboration, consensus, pluralism, and civic virtues.

Almost 20 years after Rost’s (1991) work, these leaders differed in how they defined leadership, despite Rost’s and others’ attempts to create a single definition of leadership. Interestingly, the leadership educators in this study expressed perspectives and experiences that fit both the industrial and post-industrial paradigms of
leadership. In this study, the educators’ definitions of leadership matched more with an industrial paradigm. Many of the definitions shared by the educators in this study focused on some type of social influence and power to accomplish specific goals or changes. For example, Mave said leadership was “the ability to get others to do things that they might not otherwise do.” There were some definitions that began to move towards a post-industrial paradigm of leadership (Rost, 1991; Rost & Barker, 2000). For example, Kathy’s definition exhibits signs of a post-industrial view of leadership, saying:

Exercising leadership really does mean helping to move an idea, a group, a process, to move it forward in whatever way that you can. Obviously, my broader sense of leadership involves service. It has to be for the common good; there’s some value to it as well, but in terms of the process? My [thinking] around the process is really just about moving forward. [It] has less to do with the specifics of motivation, team building. It’s just doing whatever it takes to move a group or an idea forward.

Kathy was more interested in the process of moving forward for a common or civic good, which would be more similar to Drath and Palus’ idea that leadership is a social sense-making process (1994). The educators’ experiences while actually teaching leadership also reflected a post-industrial or sense-making paradigm of collaboration and pluralism. The educators attempted to give up their power; they invited students to engage in the process. They often rejected traditional instructor-student relationships in favor of more egalitarian roles as facilitators. The educators were more interested in the sum of wills in the learning community and were also very civic-minded, which was similar to aspects of a post-industrial paradigm of leadership discussed by Rost and Barker (2000).

The presence of both of industrial and post-industrial/sense-making paradigms in communities of practice may create confusion for educators, students, and other stakeholders. If one used the definition of leadership based on power and influence, then
the objective would be to get students to be proficient at exercising power and influence in their leadership relationships. The objective was to help students influence or manipulate other people into giving them what they desire. If a program defined leadership as similar to the one proposed by Drath and Palus (1994), then the objective of leadership would be to make sense through social interactions. The presence of different paradigms may create challenges when defining leadership and defending the need for leadership programs if different paradigms influence the stakeholders’ views on leadership.

“Not Dancing Alone” in the Learning Community. The educators shared experiences of a learning environment that extended beyond the traditional classroom to include one-on-one coaching, role modeling, and advising organizations, to name a few examples. In the interview with Kathy, she said that she functions within a broader system of leadership development that includes more than educator-student interactions. “I don’t think of leadership development as an individual effort or activity—of the person learning or of the person who’s interacting with the learner.” For her, teaching leadership focused on the process of developing leadership through a network of stakeholders, rather than a dyadic teaching relationship between an educator and a student.

Eich (2008) found that high quality leadership programs developed learning communities. The students and stakeholders who participated in the study consistently reported “the importance of teachers, facilitators, administrators, and staff members for student leadership development” (p. 180).
Eich also found that when educators modeled effective leadership behavior and shared personal stories, it impacted the leadership development of the students as well. Some of the educators in this study considered the modeling that the educators provided within the system of leadership development to be leadership. Cindy said, “I think leadership educators may not look at themselves as leaders, but they really are, for the fact that they are providing a significant influence for the lives of these students.” Similarly, Barbuto (2000) and Kirby, Paradise, and King (1992) made claims that teaching could be viewed from a leadership perspective.

Researchers wrote about similar types of learning communities in professional settings, which often are called communities of practice. Communities of practice formed, often intentionally, to create shared knowledge, to develop individuals’ abilities, and to work on solving problems of interests (Drath, Palus, O'Connor, & Baker, 2006; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). Drath and Palus (1994) argue that communities of practice could facilitate leadership development. In communities of practice, individuals developed, creating new ways to interact in the community, which in turn changed the way people in the community related to one another, and ultimately changed the way they related to the world at large. The educators worked to engage students in the process of creating shared knowledge around the common interest of leadership, which would result in the leadership development of the individuals participating in the learning community. The educators also reported experiences where their relationships with the students changed as their relationship with their families
and other organizations changed, as well.

Eich (2008) found that high quality leadership programs offered student-centered experiences and opportunities to practice leadership as part of the learning community. However, one of the significant challenges that the educators in this study experienced was getting students to become leaders in the learning community. Jack used a dancing metaphor to describe this challenge; he struggled to get students even to dance with him, causing him to dance alone sometimes. Barbuto (2000) proposed that educators adjust their leadership styles in the classroom to match the developmental stages of the students as a means to motivate the students to become engaged in the development process. He used Kegan’s (1982) developmental stages as a framework for his proposal. Baxter-Magolda (2009) used a tandem bicycle as a metaphor to describe the process of engaging students in their development. At the beginning of the development process, the educator rode on the front seat and steered the bike with the student helping to power the development process forward. As time elapsed, the educator gave the student opportunities to ride up front and steer the development until the student felt comfortable riding up front and steering a majority of the time. She also based her work on Kegan’s (1982) stages of development.

Students’ willingness to lead in a learning community may be impacted by the style of leadership the educator practiced in the classroom, as Barbuto (2000) suggested. A few of the educators reported being cognizant of the power they had in the learning community over students. They discussed the challenge of giving away enough power to engage students in the learning community but of retaining
power to manage classroom administrational responsibilities. Some educators reported attempts to move students away from industrial views (position) and towards post-industrial views (collaboration) of leadership. The educators in this study hold primarily industrial definitions of leadership but seem to practice post-industrial concepts in the learning community.

Helping Students Make a Difference. Many of the educators shared experiences of helping students make a difference and of forming rewarding interpersonal relationships with the students in the process. This theme could be interpreted as the goal of teaching leadership. The emergence of this theme seems logical since influencing people to achieve a goal was a common feature of many of the educators’ definitions of leadership. Although the goal of most leadership development is learning or improving specific techniques (Riggio, 2008), these educators talked more generally about the goal of helping students being the best they could be rather than specific skills or behaviors. A subtheme that emerged under helping students be the best that they could be was helping students make sense of who they were or developing the students’ identities. Jack said, “I want them to leave with a clear sense of who they are as a person and as a leader.”

A different way to analyze and interpret this theme was to look at the leadership the educators practiced as a means to accomplish the purpose of leadership development programs: preparing students to make a difference in the world. Karla didn’t directly express the idea that she thought of herself as a leader in the learning community; however, the idea is implicit in her description of her experiences. She admitted mistakes
openly to her students to show “them that as a leader, or as somebody in charge, you can make a mistake.” Cindy was aware of the idea that the educators were leaders in the learning community. She said, “I think leadership educators may not look at themselves as leaders, but they really are, for the fact that they were providing a significant influence for the lives of these students.” If these educators were in fact leading, what kind of leadership were these educators practicing?

The experiences shared by the educators in this study seemed to express elements of servant leadership and transformational leadership. In 1970, Greenleaf popularized the centuries-old concept of servant leadership. Foremost in his view of servant leadership was serving the needs of the followers, students in this context. The educators shared their desires to meet students where they were and get them to add their voices to the learning community. The educators worked to put the students first. The educators also shared experiences as transformational leaders. Burns (1978) defined transformational leadership as a process in which people mutually engage each other to increase their morality and motivation. Leaders who practiced transformational leadership worked with followers to enact higher ideals and values. To accomplish this, the educators modeled the ideals, values, and morality they hoped to inspire in others. Shane hoped that the behaviors and values he modeled would “rub off” on the students.

Kirby, Paradise, and King (1992) provided further evidence these educators may practice transformational leadership. They found that transformational leadership was more prevalent in higher education than K-12 settings and were most associated with individual consideration and intellectual stimulation. The transformational leaders were also very proud of students’ accomplishments. The educators in this study experienced
the need to walk the talk or model effective leadership behaviors for the students. They worked to motivate students to take a leadership role in their own leadership development processes. The educators also acknowledged individual needs of the students and challenged them accordingly. The educators shared experiences of joy when they learned of their students’ achievements. Jean shared her experience with a specific student, “I didn’t transform her; I helped her transform herself.”

**The Educator’s Journey: “A Place of Becoming”**. A significant part of the experience of teaching leadership to undergraduate students that the educators shared focused on navigating their own development process. The educators were in a place of becoming. The educators shared experiences of discovering and understanding their identities as a person, as a leader, and as a leadership educator. Wenger (1998) equated learning with meaning-making. Teaching leadership was the meaning-making curriculum for the educators to learn about themselves and engage in their own development. Teaching leadership took the educators on a journey of self-discovery. Kathy said, “I am not the same person or … have the same skills. I don’t practice leadership in the same way.” It gave them a place to contribute to the world that was congruent with their values and beliefs, but it also created challenges and stress at times, and often led them to unexpected experiences and destinations.

Teaching leadership in a learning community was a social meaning-making process for the educators. Wenger (2002) argued that a community of practice was a social process through which the participants negotiated meaning. Learning or meaning
was created through lived experience in the social contexts. He also argued that participation in communities of practice was a fundamental process in forming an individual’s identity. For Stacey (2007), the meaning-making extended to the core identity of the participants in the learning community. In this context, teaching leadership in a learning community provides an opportunity for the educators to construct their identities:

Human beings live in communities, and whatever they do is a joint performance conducted by them in communities of practice... Joint activity is carried out in ongoing conversations between people in which they negotiate what they are doing and how they are making sense of what they are doing. In this activity, they become who they are – together they construct their identities. (Stacey, 2007, p. 2)

Jack captures the process that Stacey described. For Jack it felt more like a discovery process of a hidden identity as opposed to Stacey’s view that his identity was co-created through social interaction. Jack states:

For me being someone who teaches leadership is the discovery of an identity that was always there but hadn't come out yet, and so I no longer define myself professionally based on what I used to do. I only want to talk about what I want to do now because this is what I am.

Jack was very much aware that teaching leadership impacted the discovery and formation of his identity. Kegan and Lahey (1984) believed that an individual’s identity drives their behavior and McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, and Baker (2006) found evidence that suggested an individual’s identity impact his or her leadership behavior. Maturana and Varela (1987) take this idea a step further, arguing that individuals did not react to environmental stimuli in simplistic terms; rather, individuals brought forth or enacted an environment that was in accordance with the individual’s identity. The brain was not a passive reflector but constructed meaning from its external stimuli based on prior
meaning. Therefore, the world that the individual experiences have not been found as a pre-world but was one in which the individual created relevant to the individual’s identity. These authors suggested that the identity development process and the environment, created in conjunction with identity, was an interconnected, paradoxical system.

**Significance of Findings**

The findings in this study were significant for several reasons. These findings provided a better understanding of the undergraduate leadership development process in academic institutions. Since educators play a key role in the leadership development process and little was known about their lived experiences, this study provided valuable knowledge from the perspectives of leadership educators. Leadership development research has traditionally focused on the individual who was developing, with some attention given to individuals providing development. Similar to Eich’s (2008) research on high-quality leadership programs, the educators in this study described student-centered learning systems that extended beyond the formal classroom. These findings were also significant to understand the developmental process undertaken by the leadership educators as a result of teaching leadership. These findings provided both new and veteran educators an opportunity to reflect upon their own experiences and developmental process. The findings were also significant in respect to the differences found among personal definitions of leadership and teaching methodology.
**Recommendations**

An individual’s identity serves as the foundation for behavior (Kegan & Lahey, 1984; Maturana & Varela, 1987; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O'Connor, & Baker, 2006); therefore, a recommendation is to provide leadership educators more time to explore how teaching leadership impacts their identity development. Administrators should reevaluate professional development initiatives and incentives to account for the time and energy needed for intensive and constant personal development. For these educators, they developed every day alongside their students. Several of the educators shared the importance of interactions with colleagues and mentors. Establishing an intentional learning community of leadership educators would be a worthy endeavor. Also hiring practices should include methods to evaluate an educator’s identity and experiences since they become part of the curriculum and impact the learning community.

Another recommendation is to provide leadership educators opportunities to explore how their traits, behaviors, and identities (e.g. values, beliefs, and definitions) impact their work with students to improve leadership capacity in the learning community. Educators could be more intentional when teaching leadership and more articulate when defending the need for leadership development programs. Exploring alignment and conflict between personal definitions, programmatic definitions, content, and pedagogy would benefit the entire leadership development process of everyone involved, including critics. (See Figure 2)

A third recommendation is to intentionally create rich learning communities for stakeholders involved in undergraduate leadership development process. This included
outside stakeholders who provided service learning, internships, and other opportunities to practice leadership.

“A Place of Becoming”
Making a Difference in the Leadership Learning Community

Figure 2: “A Place of Becoming” Making a Difference in the Leadership Learning Community
Further Research

Overall more research is needed to better understand the leadership development process at academic institutions from different perspectives. More specifically, research on the role a leadership educator’s underlying paradigm of leadership plays in the leadership development process would merit attention. Understanding the leadership/teaching practices of the educators in leadership learning communities more fully would be helpful also. More research needs to be conducted on the different types of learning communities established by leadership educators and their impact on leadership development.

Research on the role that other stakeholders play in the development process is warranted. Student perspectives on the leadership development process could also provide opportunities for insight. Getting students to engage in their own learning was a common challenge these educators faced. Understanding how students engage in their leadership development process provides an opportunity for future research.

There is growing interest in the intersections of identity development and leadership development (Drath & Palus, 1994; Kegan & Lahey, 1984; Komives, Owen, Logerbeam, Mainella, & Osteen, 2005; Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987; Lumby & English, 2009; McCauley, Drath, Palus, O’Connor, & Baker, 2006), which provides more opportunities for research in this area. In relation to this study, more research is needed on the identity development of leadership educators. Based on the findings of this study, an opportunity for future research exists to better understand the identity development of leadership educators as they teach leadership. The educators in this study mentioned the contributions to their
development that were inspired by mentors and colleagues. Understanding the role the educator’s identity plays on the leadership development process of undergraduate students is another possible avenue for exploration.

Limitations of Results

The findings in this study cannot be generalized beyond the 12 leadership educators who were teaching leadership in undergraduate leadership development programs in the Midwest. The findings are also not representative based on gender or race because there were a limited number of male educators who participated, and the educators primarily identified as white. There were also no leadership educators who participated in this study that were teaching leadership in business or educational leadership contexts. Readers can, however, use these findings and contexts to compare their own understanding of teaching leadership, thus providing opportunities for reflection.

Personal Reflection

Being a leadership educator certainly has been a journey for me; it has been a place of becoming. The lessons I learned and growth I experienced when teaching leadership are too numerous to list. When I started, a colleague recommended that I read Rost’s (1991) *Leadership for the Twenty-First Century*. I dutifully read it cover to cover. I tried to digest it, but frankly, I don’t think I did a very good job at the time.

I have worked hard to be cognizant of my own journey as I completed this study.
Interviewing was a challenge at times. I wanted to share in the educators’ joys; I wanted to commiserate with their challenges and share my own challenges teaching leadership. I purposefully kept a professional distance so I would be less tempted to get involved in the interview as an educator, staying in my role as the investigator. A few times I interjected that I would like to dialogue with them about a specific issue at some point after the interview, I even met with one educator for lunch a few weeks after the interview. At times during the interviews, I felt that I was being too professional by asking multiple clarifying questions. One educator stated a few times that she felt like she had covered that topic thoroughly.

Toward the end of this process, Gina, my advisor, asked the question, “How am I different because of the study?” Essentially, how has completing this research process impacted my sense of who I am? I am not sure I can answer that at this point. Years ago I talked to a friend who encouraged me to get my doctorate degree. She said that completing her dissertation changed her. At this point I don’t feel like it has changed me. Perhaps I am still too close to the ‘becoming’ part of the being/becoming paradox. I have yet to take a lot of time to step back to reflect, to compare, or to see if I feel different. One of the best parts of this study was listening to the talented educators talking about the work that they did. What does not come through in this study was how dedicated they were to the students they worked with, nor does this study convey the gratitude that they had for how teaching leadership enriched their lives.

A sense of change, when I do recognize it, will likely come from moments in the interviews. One of the most powerful moments came when I was interviewing Jack; it happened about 40 minutes into the interview. He talked about how much he would miss
teaching leadership if he could not teach it anymore. He said it would feel like he wouldn’t be himself. I asked him to say more about that. His silence lasted about 90 seconds and then he began to talk and to discover what he felt. The more he talked, the more the space became filled with a sense of awe. The air became heavy and time seemed to slow, dripping off each word. When he finished speaking, we both sat there, letting the words and the meaning settle in around us. I am honored to have gotten to hear so much wisdom from these educators.

Summary

The experiences of the leadership educators in this study provided insights on the experiences of teaching leadership in the leadership development process for undergraduate students. The educators worked with a variety of different definitions of leadership and experienced pressure to defend the existence and purpose of their leadership programs. Teaching leadership was a multifaceted process. At the center of this multifaceted system of leadership development was the purpose of making a difference in the world. The educators were working within learning communities where leadership development opportunities for the students included acquiring leadership content, opportunities to practice leadership, observing role models, and building rewarding relationships with the educators. The educators worked to get the student to engage in the dance of their own leadership development – to dance with the leadership content and to have opportunities to practice. At times the leadership content included the educators’ lives and experiences. Some of the educators also stood in the balcony observing the dance as it happened in real time. They could see what happened on the
dance floor and see the larger picture of the audience’s reaction to the performance.

Some of the educators recognized that they were dancing with themselves internally. At least one of the educators was aware that the dancing, the modeling, and the observing were filtered through the lenses of their identities. The educators had two dances going on simultaneously – an external dance with the students and an internal dance with themselves.
References


Wheatley, M. (April, 2003). *Personal communication*


Appendices

Appendix A: Pilot Study Interview Protocol

Understanding how educators make sense of teaching leadership?
Mini-Project EDPS 900K
Fall 2009

Date____________________ Participant ID____________________

Introduction

* Introduce yourself
* Discuss the purpose of the study
* Provide informed consent
* Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
* Ask if they have any questions
* Test audio recording equipment
* SMILE-make the participants feel comfortable

Age_____
Race /
Ethnicity _______________________
Gender _______________________
Years of teaching experience ________
Years of teaching leadership ________

Ice breakers
How did you get interested in teaching leadership?

Questions
What is your personal definition of leadership?
To what extent is your definition similar to the definition used by the program?

What do you think is the central purpose of leadership education?

What is your purpose in the leadership education process?
(How does teaching leadership give you purpose?)

How much of yourself (personal stories, examples, perspective) do you bring into the classroom?
(How important is it to you to share from your personal experience?)

How do you decide what goes into teaching your leadership class?
How do you decide what topics to teach?

How do you decide what teaching methods/strategies to use?

How do you decide what materials to use?

What advice would you give other educators who are teaching leadership courses?

Closing
Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know?

Concluding Statement
- Thank them for their participation
- Ask if they would like to see a copy of the results
- Record any observations, feelings, thoughts and/or reactions about the interview
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date____________________  Participant ID___________________

**Topic Domain:** Teaching leadership (experiences and contexts)

Introduction

- Introduce yourself
- Discuss the purpose of the study
- Provide informed consent
- Provide structure of the interview (audio recording, taking notes, and use of pseudonym)
- Ask if they have any questions
- Test audio recording equipment
- SMILE-make the participants feel comfortable

Age_____
Race_______________
Ethnicity_______________
Gender_______________
Years of teaching experience ______
Years of teaching leadership ______
Degrees_____________________________

**Covert Categories of Interest:**
- Definition of leadership
- Purpose of leadership development
- Their identity
- What do you get out of this?
- What has influenced their views of leadership?

**Guiding Questions:**
1. How did you get interested in teaching leadership?

   a. Describe your leadership program?

   b. What aspects of leadership do you teach?

   c. What challenges do you face when teaching leadership?
d. Why should students be in a leadership development program?

2. What is it like to work with undergraduate students to develop their leadership capacity?

   a. What do you do to increase students’ leadership capacity? (activities, experiences, lessons, learn names, etc.)

   b. Has anything changed over time in how you teach leadership?

   c. What are you most proud of as a leadership educator?

   d. What advice would you give other educators who are teaching leadership courses?

Materials:

Can you show/give me any materials that exemplifies your teaching of leadership?

Closing

Is there anything else you would like to add or share about this topic that you feel is important for me to know?

Concluding Statement

Thank them for their participation
Ask if they would like to see a copy of the results
Record any observations, feelings, thoughts and/or reactions about the interview
Appendix C: Participant Informed Consent

INFORMED-consent FORM

Teaching Leadership in Undergraduate Leadership Development Programs

Purpose of the Research:
This research project explores the experiences of teaching leadership for educators in undergraduate academic institutions. We are interested in what it is like to teach leadership to undergraduate students. To participate, you must be 19 years of age or older. You are invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as having a unique perspective that is believed to contribute to the understanding of leadership development.

Procedures:
Participation in this study will require approximately 60 minutes of your time. A one-on-one interview will be conducted with you discussing your experiences on teaching leadership. This interview will be audio taped with your permission. Interviews will be held at a convenient location determined by you.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to participation in this study.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study which could identify you will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for three years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may call the investigator at any time, if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 if you wish to talk to someone other than the researcher to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input concerning the research process, or to voice any concerns regarding the research.

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your consent confirms that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented.

By signing below, you are confirming that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

___ I grant permission to be audio taped.
___ I do NOT grant permission to be audio taped.

_________________________ (signature) __________________________ (date)

Name and Phone number of Investigator(s)
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Appendix D: External Review

External Review of Qualitative Study

The following is a summary of my external review completed on a qualitative research study undertaken by Heath E. Harding, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. The central question explored in this qualitative research study was presented as "What are the experiences of educators who teach leadership to undergraduate students?"

Review steps completed by this reviewer:

1. Became familiar with the purpose of the study and the overall research question.

2. Reviewed the sample interview transcripts, and met with the researcher to verify coding.

3. Examined the thematic analysis and the researcher interpretations, and verified that they were consistent with the sample transcript reviewed.

Following review of these documents, I met with the researcher to discuss my assessment of the status of his study, including coding procedures and thematic findings. From this review, I consider this study to be well designed and thorough. I believe the coding procedure to be an accurate representation of the research participant's experiences. Further more, from my review of the process employed by this researcher, the study appears to have been conducted in an ethical manner using procedures and protocols reflective of rigorous qualitative research.

Signed this 2 day of February, 2011

Peggy Rupprecht
External Reviewer