Telling Our Service-Learning Story: Instructor Perspectives on Service-Learning in the Leadership Classroom

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TELLING OUR SERVICE-LEARNING STORY:
INSTRUCTOR PERSPECTIVES ON SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE LEADERSHIP
CLASSROOM

by
Marianne Lorensen

A DISSECTATION

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TELLING OUR SERVICE-LEARNING STORY:
INSTRUCTOR PERSPECTIVES ON SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE LEADERSHIP CLASSROOM

Marianne Lorensen, Ph.D.
University of Nebraska, 2014

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This phenomenological study examined the experiences of ten college instructors who use service-learning in the undergraduate leadership classroom. Since leadership is often a service-learning outcome for students (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), service-learning is regarded by many instructors as an appropriate pedagogical approach in leadership classes (Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott, & Zlotkowski, 2000; Zlotkowski, 1996). Thus, the focus on instructors of undergraduate leadership courses. The current study employed a phenomenological approach in order to deeply explore instructor experiences. The goal of this exploration was that instructor experiences and the meaning they make from those experiences—their perspectives—will be better understood. The bulk of research on service-learning to date has focused on student outcomes and experiences (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The important role played by faculty is acknowledged but not well explored. Knowing that the decisions made by instructors about the use (or not) of service-learning and the way in which it is approached can impact student outcomes and experiences, it is important to better understand the experiences of instructors. Understanding instructor experiences with service-learning, and the meaning they make from those experiences, can shed light on the decisions instructors make about whether to use service-
learning, what kinds of service-learning strategies to use, and what expectations they have for the outcomes of service-learning relative to their classes and students. Findings from this study indicate that the experiences of leadership educators relative to service learning are closely linked to their perspectives on leadership and to the experiences of their students. Ultimately, instructors who use service-learning to help students learn about leadership find that they themselves gain leadership experiences and their own ideas about leadership are impacted.
Acknowledgements

There are many points in time throughout the doctoral journey when a student wonders how—and whether—she will make it through. I am no different. The truth of the matter is that this had not been a solo journey. I can’t possibly name everyone who took it with me, but there are some people who must be acknowledged as a huge part of my success.

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Dedication

My nieces and nephews were always on my mind as I wrote this. Those who share my last name—Ethan, Evelyn, Nicholas, Olivia, and Luke—as well as those who are yet to be and those to whom I have the pleasure and privilege of being an honorary aunt. I wish for you all an insatiable curiosity, a love of learning, and a passion for something that drives you forward toward whatever goals you may have in life. I love you!
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Purpose

Introduction

Service-learning is an experiential pedagogy in the tradition of John Dewey (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000; Mayhew & Engberg, 2011), and it is often used in college classes, particularly in the last 20-30 years. Consequently, much research has been done focusing on the effectiveness of service-learning and the outcomes most often seen in undergraduate students (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Leadership is a commonly explored student outcome of service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Middleton, 2005), and so it follows that service-learning has also become more common in leadership classes.

Faculty are acknowledged in the research as key players when it comes to the use and success of service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolenko, Porter, Wheatley, & Colby, 1996), however their experiences and perspectives are not part of the literature in a way that might be expected given their key player status. In order to understand service-learning more holistically, it is necessary to include the faculty voice.

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of those who teach undergraduate leadership classes and incorporate academic service-learning in their pedagogical approach. The experiences of instructors who use service-learning are largely absent from the literature and are, therefore, not well understood in spite of the important role that instructors play in the implementation of service-learning. Most research on service-learning is 15-20 years old and focuses on student outcomes and experiences (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Therefore, this research has the potential to contribute to our understanding of both service-learning and leadership education.
Position of the Researcher

As an instructor who has used service-learning in undergraduate leadership courses, I have a particular interest in this study. My own experiences with service-learning are not extensive and, while I can see value to service-learning as a pedagogical tool, I also have some misgivings about it—particularly with regard to the potential for service-learning to result in both positive and negative outcomes for all involved. Examining the experiences of other leadership educators has helped me to know whether my own experiences are common or unique and also to draw on the learning and insight of my peers who have done more work in this area.

Research Questions

This study has a broad central research question as well as sub-questions that were used to guide data collection. The central research question of this study is, “What meaning do instructors make of their experiences with service-learning in the leadership classroom?” Connected to this central question are two sub-questions:

1. How do instructors of undergraduate leadership classes that utilize service-learning describe their experiences with service-learning?

2. What is the context in which those experiences occur?

Qualitative Methodology & Phenomenological Approach

In many instances, research is seen as means of exploring cause and effect. Qualitative research, however, is fundamentally different. Merriam (2009) describes it this way: “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (p. 5).” Since the
research discussed herein aims to understand the experiences of instructors who use service-
learning, rather than a question of cause and effect, a qualitative approach was the best way for
me to proceed.

Within the qualitative tradition, there are a variety of methodologies that can be used. As
with any research, the question should guide the methodological choice (Creswell, 2013;
Merriam, 2009). There are five primary approaches in qualitative research, as outlined by
Creswell (2013). These include ethnography, case study, narrative inquiry, grounded theory and
phenomenology. Within these primary approaches, there are variations in how they may be
conducted (such as single or multiple case studies).

Phenomenology is a qualitative approach to research that is designed to explore the lived
experiences of several individuals in order to discover the essence of the experience that is
common among those who share it (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Moustakes, 1994). This is
consistent with the objective of my research. Therefore, the phenomenological approach was the
one most suited to addressing the research questions that I developed.

Instructor experiences were explored through the collection of syllabi, course materials,
and other artifacts (phase one), along with semi-structured individual interviews aimed at
understanding the experiences, attitudes, and beliefs which contribute to the shaping of instructor
perspectives (phase two). This strategy provided multiple points and types of data collection.
Once the interviews were transcribed and themes were identified, peer de-briefing was used to
verify themes. Additionally, themes were shared with participants as a means of member-
checking (phase three). There were three phases to the data collection process, past and present
experiences were discussed, and there was an opportunity for follow-up questions (common in phenomenology; Moustakes, 1994) if they were deemed necessary.

The interviews were semi-structured one-on-one interviews between the researcher and the participant (also known as the co-researcher) that built on the basic prompt, “Tell me about your experiences with service-learning.” Participants were asked to specifically recount experiences with service-learning that they deemed to be rewarding, challenging, exciting, and disappointing or frustrating. In order to obtain a diverse array of perspectives among participants, leadership educators from across the country were recruited for involvement in this study. Therefore, nine of the ten interviews took place over the telephone while one of the interviews was conducted face-to-face.

The methodological approach for this research will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

Terms & Definitions

Service-learning is an experiential pedagogy. Beyond that, definitions and types of service-learning vary among educators (Eyler & Giles, 1999). With that in mind, it is important to recognize that instructors may not use the same definitions for service-learning. In order to be mindful of this variation and also in an attempt to capture a variety of service-learning strategies that may not use that specific term, I employed Madsen’s (2004) definition of academic service-learning as the basis for identifying participants (and the service-learning projects they use) for this study. This definition considers academic service-learning to be:

a multidimensional pedagogy (a form of experiential learning) that is integrated within a credit-bearing course in the form of an organized, thoughtful, and meaningful project.
Students are paired with agencies or organizations that have specific needs related to the content of a particular course. Students then perform the needed community service while, at the same time, using course content and reflecting on their experiences for enhanced learning. (p. 329)

This definition of service-learning allows for the inclusion of experiential projects that may not be referred to, by the instructor or students, as service-learning but which do fall under a broader umbrella that includes various forms of service-learning (potentially referred to as civic education, civic engagement, community involvement, and community-based learning, to name a few possibilities. At the same time, it helps to distinguish academic service-learning from other forms of experiential education.

In specifying that the instructors will be using service-learning as part of undergraduate leadership courses, it was also important to be clear about what is considered a “leadership course” for the purpose of this study. Instructors were eligible to participate if they taught courses which are transcripted credit-bearing courses that have leadership in the title and/or in the explicitly stated learning outcomes of the course or are connected to larger leadership programs such as majors, minors, or certificates.

Finally, given the variation in instructor types, from graduate assistants to tenured professors, and many types in between, it was necessary to distinguish the type of instructors who were eligible to participate in this study. In an effort to include a variety of instructor types while also ensuring that those instructors had sufficient depth of experience upon which to draw, it was determined that eligibility for participation would be reserved for those instructors who

- teach transcripted courses for undergraduate students
- serve as the primary point of contact for students in the class
have partial or full decision-making authority about aspects of the course such as learning outcomes, pace and method of content delivery, assignment expectations and grading

- work directly with students in the execution and/or reflection and processing of their service-learning experience

- and whose primary role at the institution is other than that of student

These specifications allowed for the potential inclusion of adjunct faculty members, lecturers, staff members, tenured faculty members, and also those faculty members who are pursuing tenure or are in non-tenure seeking positions. Additionally, these specifications did not allow for the inclusion of faculty or staff members who oversee but are not directly involved with the instruction of the course nor of full-time graduate students who are teaching as part of their assistantship responsibilities. While these individuals may have valuable perspectives, it is likely that their experiences and perspectives differ from those who are more directly and consistently involved with instruction in the ways described above.

**Assumptions, Delimitations & Limitations**

This research was conducted with the assumption that the participants would be honest and forthright about their experiences and that their experiences would reflect the experiences of similar instructors who did not participate in the study. While qualitative research is not, by design, able to be generalized, there is an assumption that the information gathered from this research is similar to the experiences of other instructors and provides insight into instructor perspectives on service-learning.

As a researcher, I brought some assumptions to this research as well. The assumptions took the form of informal hypotheses or things that I anticipated would emerge from the data. I
assumed that instructors who use service-learning as part of an undergraduate leadership class do so because they inherited a class where service-learning was used and/or because they believe that service-learning will result in a leadership outcome for their students. I also assumed that instructors who use service-learning in an undergraduate leadership class have modified the service-learning project or their expectations of it over time as a result of lessons they themselves learned from repeated use of service-learning. Finally, I assumed that instructors who use service-learning had a critical event or experience that represents their attitudes and beliefs about service-learning and prompts their continued use of service-learning as a pedagogical approach in the undergraduate leadership classroom.

Although qualitative research lacks the potential for generalization, it is assumed that the information gathered from this study will reflect some elements of common experience among leadership instructors who use service-learning (Creswell, 2013). Multiple validation strategies were used so that leadership educators who use service-learning would able to contextualize the information and find application to their own experiences. An effort was made to diversify participants in the sample, but there are some delimitations. For example, all instructors are from large public institutions, and most instructors in the sample (eight of ten) are women. Additionally, only two participants were visibly distinct as people of color (data about and ethnicity were not collected). Therefore, the experiences of those in this sample may speak to a specific sub-set of leadership instructors—such as women at large public institutions—or may not resonate with other instructors (men, people of color, instructors at small and/or private institutions) in the same way. Finally, instructors in disciplines other than leadership may not have experiences or perspectives that are similar to those of instructors who teach leadership.
While a phenomenological approach is arguably the best existing methodological approach with which to explore individual experiences, there are some limitations inherent in the approach as it pertains to this particular study. The sampling strategy involved the use of professional contacts and networks to identify participants, with the goal of finding nine to ten individuals who met the criteria and were interested in participating. As mentioned previously, one of the delimitations has to do with the representativeness of the sample. A related limitation relates to the sample size. While a sample size of ten is appropriate for a phenomenological study, a larger sample size could increase the likelihood that results will resonate with the larger population.

A second limitation is related to the way in which the one-on-one interviews were conducted. It was only possible to interview one participant face-to-face. All others had to be interviewed over the phone. While this strategy served the purpose of the study and provided valuable information, it might be assumed that face-to-face interviews would have provided more in-depth information.

**Significance of Study**

To date, research in the area of service-learning has focused almost exclusively on the experiences and outcomes of the students. This is understandable for many reasons. Chief among them is that the student outcomes and experiences are the things that help educators and administrators understand whether learning objectives are being met and decide whether the investment of resources is worthwhile. Service-learning can be a very time intensive proposition for all involved—especially for the students and the instructors. Service-learning may also require the commitment of other resources, the development of campus and community
partnerships, and the ability to justify what might be seen by some as an unorthodox approach to education. Therefore, it is important to be able to answer the questions, “Why are we doing this?”, “How does it benefit student learning?”, and “Is it worth it?”

The role of instructors in service-learning is critical and, while it is acknowledged as such, their voices are not a prominent part of the literature on service-learning. If it is important to understand the student experience with service-learning, it is at least equally important to understand the experiences of those who decide whether students will be expected to participate in service-learning and how that experience should look.

Furthermore, while leadership has long been assumed to be an outcome of service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Morrison, Rha, & Helfman, 2003; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005) and service-learning has been used as a pedagogical tool in leadership classes, the information available about the use of service-learning in the leadership classroom comes primarily from business and professional schools in the late 1990s. Over the last 20-30 years, there has been an increase in leadership classes on college campuses (Greenwald, 2010), and those classes are not exclusive to business schools. Therefore, it is important to have research that is more current, inclusive of a variety of undergraduate leadership classes, and considerate of the instructor experience.

This study contributes to the larger understanding of both service-learning and leadership education through the exploration of instructor experiences. The absence of faculty and instructor voices in the service-learning literature has prompted some scholars to conduct research focused on those particular stakeholders (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Clayton & Ash, 2004; O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009; Pribbenow, 2005; Shapiro, 2012). Few, if any, of these research endeavors have been phenomenological in nature. Since the purpose of this research
was to explore the experiences of instructors who use service-learning in their undergraduate leadership courses, the use of phenomenology allowed me to identify the core themes and overall essence of that experience.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Objective

The purpose of this review of literature is to provide an overview of research on service-learning and an explanation of the intersection of service-learning and leadership education. In addition, gaps in the body of knowledge will be identified. The information provided here will make clear the value of the research that was conducted.

What is Service-Learning?

When conducting research relative to service-learning, it is important to be clear about what service-learning is. Although service-learning has been used on college campuses for several decades, and has experienced resurgence in the last 20-30 years, there is not one uniform definition of service-learning—nor is there consensus within the academic community about what service-learning is (Dicke, Dowden & Torres, 2004; Dipadova-Stocks, 2005; Zlotkowski, 1996). Service-learning is typically seen as a form of experiential education designed to help students bridge the gap between theory and practice by placing them in real-world community settings where they will be challenged to address ill-structured problems in our society (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000).

It may not always be clear how service-learning differs from other types of experiential education, such as internships, practica, or even student teaching (Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, the biggest difference is sometimes seen in the ways in which students are expected to engage in the community. According to Dipadova-Stocks (2005), “Service-learning, properly designed and implemented, is grounded in the value of the human dignity and the inherent innate worth of the individual” (p. 352). In other words, service-learning is partly about the application of knowledge but is more importantly about helping others in the process.
Helping others may also take many forms. A common distinction in service-learning occurs between the concepts of “service to” and “service with” (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Lewis, 2004). Some service-learning experiences place students in a community setting where they are responsible for providing a service to those who are in need. An example of this might be serving meals at a homeless shelter or soup kitchen. Other service-learning experiences require students to work alongside members of a community in order to address a social issue or problem. Examples of this might be building a Habitat for Humanity house alongside the family who will eventually live there or participating in the planting and cultivation of a community garden with those who will be consumers of its produce. The distinction between “service to” and “service with” is often accompanied by a corresponding distinction between charity and social justice. In other words, service-learning that is structured as service to others is seen as promoting charity, while service-learning that is structured as service with others is seen as promoting social justice (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Lewis, 2004). While the connotations of the terms “charity” and “social justice” may lead to the assumption that the latter is better than the former—and therefore, that “service with” is preferable to “service to”—both types of service-learning are thought to have their place in the academy and the community. The type of service-learning used in connection to a college course depends, among other things, upon the nature of the course, its learning outcomes, and the developmental readiness of the students. Some courses may lend themselves better to one type of service-learning than the other, and both have been shown to be beneficial to students (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Lewis, 2004).

Even though charity-based and social justice-based projects each have their place and can contribute to the learning and development of college students, Eyler and Giles (1999) maintain that “service with” has a greater power to help students learn and to create and sustain important
habits that will persist beyond graduation: “Although we would not devalue individual helping as part of the development of social capital, we would argue that service-learning and higher education in general need to pay attention to the problem-solving capacities of college graduates in order to sustain life-long constructive involvement in the community” (p. 155).

Often, time and opportunity are at issue when determining whether a service-learning experience will be grounded as an act of charity or one of social justice—service to or service with. The reality is that social justice experiences are usually more time intensive, both to create and oversee and to carry out: “A social justice model has high costs in terms of faculty time and institutional commitment, and potential benefits—community empowerment and social change—are not guaranteed. In the end, a ‘consultant model’ of service-learning, a model that falls closer to the charity model than the social justice model, is far easier to accommodate” (Lewis, 2004, p. 94-95).

With that in mind, it is also important to distinguish service-learning from volunteerism or service strictly speaking. Service can be broadly defined to include service-learning, community service, volunteerism, and community outreach (Chesbrough, 2011). For purposes of this research, the distinction will be that service-learning—in whatever form it may take—is a required part of an academic credit-bearing course (although the course itself may be a required or elective course, depending upon the student and the program). It will be a form of experiential education that requires students to learn about social issues in connection with their class and/or through participation in a community setting. This experience could be in the form of “service to” or “service with”. In the context of the course, it may be referred to as service-learning, or it may be referred to in other terms, such as “community-service learning”, “problem-based learning”, “collaborative learning”, or “cooperative learning”. These different names fall under
an experiential learning umbrella that Giles and Eyler (1999) refer to as “civic education” (p. 155). In a recent issue of the *Journal of College Student Development* (2013), Ishitani and McKitrick address service-learning as a form of civic education, alongside such experiential terms as community service, collective action, and political action. Using this umbrella, rather than focusing on experiences that are explicitly called service-learning, allows for the inclusion of a variety of experiences which are consistent with the multiple definitions and objectives of service-learning as it is used in college and university settings.

Madsen’s (2004) definition of academic service-learning pulls from a variety of prior definitions commonly used in higher education, and is consistent with the distinction made for this research. Academic service-learning is:

a multidimensional pedagogy (a form of experiential learning) that is integrated within a credit-bearing course in the form of an organized, thoughtful, and meaningful project. Students are paired with agencies or organizations that have specific needs related to the content of a particular course. Students then perform the needed community service while, at the same time, using course content and reflecting on their experiences for enhanced learning.” (p. 329)

**Student Outcomes & Perspectives**

The bulk of research to date on service-learning has focused primarily on the benefits to students in terms of motivations, perceptions, attitudes and behaviors, and learning outcomes (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). This is understandable for two main reasons. First, it is important to understand the outcomes of service-learning in general. Knowing what service-learning leads to can assist educators in determining the most appropriate ways to use it and what they might reasonably expect as a result of doing so. Associated with that is the need for accountability.
Stakeholders in higher education—including administrators and students—want to know that resources are being used toward experiences that promote student learning and development. Therefore, specific information on what students are learning and how they are benefiting from service-learning is critical. It tells educators whether their time, energy, and other resources are being used in ways that are productive and consistent with the aims of the course and the institution.

In the same way that educators don’t always agree on the definition of the term “service-learning”, there is also not always agreement as to what the intellectual and personal aims of service-learning are or should be. This is not an issue of which outcomes are good outcomes, but rather an issue of which outcomes are most relevant and realistic given the characteristics of the students, the course, and the institution (Rama et al., 2000). For some service-learning experiences, the desired outcomes are more focused on personal development and changes in perspective (attitudes and beliefs). For others, the desired outcomes relate most to skill development; and for still others, the goal is behavioral change in both the short and long term (Zlotkowski, 1996; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000; Moore, Boyd, & Dooley, 2010; Reinke, 2003). Ultimately, educators acknowledge that there are both academic and personal outcomes desired through the use of service-learning. In addition to helping students understand theory in action, there is also a hope that students will become more socially responsible and civically engaged (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Godfrey, 1999; Mayhew & Engberg, 2011; Morgan & Streb, 2001; Morton, 1995; Myers-Lipton, 1998). The breadth and depth of outcomes that are anticipated and outcomes that are achieved is an indication that service-learning work has the potential to be highly complex (Einfeld & Collins, 2008).
According to Dicke, Dowden, and Torres (2004), it’s possible for service-learning to achieve learning outcomes, fail to achieve learning outcomes, or even to achieve unanticipated learning outcomes: “The issue is not one of learning per se but, rather, what it is that students are expected to learn, and whether they are learning it.” (p. 201). In other words, academic service-learning makes the most sense to implement if it is achieving the goals that have been identified for the experience and the class to which it is connected—whatever those may be.

Service-learning has been shown to promote cognitive and moral development in college students (Dicke et al., 2004) and to promote self-authorship (Jones & Abes, 2004). Additionally, research into service-learning has shown that skill development occurs in areas such as communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Rama et al., 2000; Reinke, 2003; Einfeld & Collins, 2008). As previously mentioned, service-learning is an experiential strategy that has been in use—in various forms—on college campuses for quite some time. In that time, evidence of its effectiveness has been mixed. In the 1990s and at the turn of the century, as service-learning was re-gaining popularity as a learning tool, scholars in the field noted that there did not seem to be much solid proof that service-learning did in fact have an impact on skill development, community activism, and overall civic responsibility (Kolenko, Porter, Wheatley, & Colby, 1996; Myers-Lipton, 1998). In fact, there is some research which indicates that service-learning has the potential to cause regression in students. In other words, some service-learning has been shown to lead to decreases in student self-esteem and persistence in negative stereotypes and biases held by students prior to the experience (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). There remained, however, a persistent belief that the desired positive impacts could and would occur if educators were intentional about the implementation of service-learning (Morgan & Streb, 2001; Zlotkowski, 1996;). Reinke (2003) articulated this tension well
in saying, “Proponents claim that service-learning improves critical thinking skills, the integration of theory with practice, general work-life skills such as communication, and promotes civic engagement. Evidence of these benefits, however, is limited and mixed” (p. 5). In their review of research on college student development, Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) maintained that “The weight of evidence shows—conclusively, we think—that participation in community service in general, and service-learning in particular, has statistically significant and positive net effects on students’ sociopolitical attitudes and beliefs” (p. 304). Furthermore, according to Pascarella and Terenzini, positive outcomes of service-learning appear to increase according to the amount of time spent engaged in such experiences.

While there may still be many who remain unconvinced as to the effectiveness of service-learning (Friedman, 1996; Speck, 2001), additional research over the course of the last decade has helped to strengthen the argument in favor of this pedagogy. Rama and colleagues (2000) maintain that the use of service-learning has increased because of its effectiveness and that “. . . students in the S-L section (of a college course) scored significantly higher in measures of social responsibility, sense of personal efficacy, and interest in the academic subject matter than did a control section of students” (p. 675). By 2005, Papamarcos notes that:

The benefits of participating in traditional service-learning are well documented. Findings indicate that the service-learning experience enhances social responsibility and personal and value development at a variety of academic levels. . . as well as self-efficacy and related constructs. . . Experience also indicates that service-learning improves skill levels and academic performance. . . and allows students to better place classroom material in meaningful context. (p. 329)
Several years later, Mayhew and Engberg (2011) noted that “Research has also documented the connectivity between service-learning and outcomes related to social justice and multicultural competence” (p. 24).

While it is fair to say that use of service-learning and support for its effectiveness have increased over the last decade, it would be inaccurate to say that findings from the research have proven definitive—particularly with regard to the development of a sense of social responsibility and long-term civic engagement behaviors (Einfeld & Collins, 2008; Hunter & Brisbin, 2000; Ishitani & McKitrick, 2013; Kolenko et al., 1996; Myers-Lipton, 1998; Rama et al., 2000). Some of this discrepancy is likely due to the kinds of growth and development being examined and the population in which it is being examined. In other words, college students come to campus from many different places and bring with them many different experiences. Their levels of development and readiness when they arrive are not always the same, and the institutions they attend are also different. Furthermore, Morton (1995) raises the possibility “that we do not necessarily experience service as growth along a continuum, but that we come into service with a primary orientation, and work our way out of this orientation” (p. 28-29).

Einfeld and Collins (2008) noted that the goals of the course and the service-learning experience do—and should—influence the outcomes that are reached and those that aren’t. In their study, for example, they found that students expressed a sense of personal empowerment but did not express a commitment to social justice. In a class where the primary aims were related to personal development, this outcome would be expected. Additionally, they found a wide range of “attitudes, beliefs, and levels of commitment to social justice, multicultural competence, and civic engagement” among the participants in their study, which “underscores the complexity of service-learning experiences” (p. 103).
While the participants, goals, and contexts for service-learning are varied, two overarching objectives are those of citizenship and leadership (Godfrey, 1999; Morrison et al., 2003). These are also overarching objectives of higher education (Middleton, 2005). Therefore, use of service-learning in higher education settings would make sense if it is shown to help students develop as citizens and leaders. The creation of the Campus Compact, a consortium to promote service in higher education, is an indication that many college campuses agree (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Dipadova-Stocks (2005) articulates the connection nicely: “Higher education in the United States has long been expected to produce capable and ethical graduates who are prepared to assume positions of responsibility and contribute to the community” (p. 346).

Another representation of the link between higher education, leadership, and citizenship can be seen in the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2009). Emerging from a consortium of higher education professionals, this model frames leadership as the interplay of seven different values and competencies focused on the goal of positive social change. While it has potential for broad applicability as a leadership model, the Social Change Model of Leadership Development was devised as a guiding framework for the development of socially responsible leadership in college students. The subsequent research around this model has focused a great deal on how to help students develop the competencies therein.

In his research on the Social Change Model, Dugan (2006) included community service (“defined as volunteering time in the campus or local community”, p. 337) as one type of involvement that he believed might assist the development of socially responsible leadership in college students. Other types of involvement addressed in his study were positional leadership roles, student organization membership, and participation in formal leadership programs. Of
these four types of involvement, Dugan found community service to be the most influential in the development of socially responsible leadership among college students. Although Dugan did not limit his focus to service-learning, but rather looked at community service more broadly, his findings are important to an understanding of the relationship between service-learning and leadership development. Service-learning was not explicitly excluded from Dugan’s concept of community service, and prior research into the connection between service and leadership development has indicated that students benefit equally from service and service-learning:

[In 2000, Astin and colleagues] concluded that service-learning does not add to the students’ leadership abilities, but rather that leadership growth occurs at the same rate in both community service and academic service-learning. One explanation proposed by Astin and colleagues is that academic courses using service-learning tend to focus more on cognitive skills and their development rather than on the development of leadership skills. (Sessa, Matos & Hopkins, 2009, p. 170-171)

As noted previously, the outcomes achieved through service-learning would ideally be consistent with the aims of the project and the course to which it is connected, provided that these outcomes are appropriate and intentionally pursued (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolenko et al., 1996; Papamarcos, 2005). In some cases, leadership development and social responsibility may be the explicitly articulated goals of service-learning; and, in other cases, they may be consequences that were not necessarily articulated but are embraced nonetheless. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) observed that students who engaged in service-learning often developed the skills and confidence to assume leadership in the classroom as a result. It is also possible that students who are participating in service-learning will develop in ways that, while not always referred to as leadership, are consistent with attitudes and abilities commonly viewed as important for both
leadership and citizenship. These include, but are not limited to, interpersonal skills, cultural competence, and ethical sensitivity (Zlotkowski, 1996). Godfrey (1999) posits that “Service-learning courses seek to enhance students’ citizenship skills primarily by placing them in the middle of some of our society’s most intractable problems” (p. 372). Although leadership is not mentioned in that statement, it is worth noting that problem-solving skills are also frequently seen under the umbrella of leadership (Govekar & Rishi, 2007; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Morrison et al., 2003).

The connection of various skills and behaviors to both citizenship and leadership does not indicate confusion about the concepts. Rather, it demonstrates the inextricable connection between citizenship and leadership that is recognized in the Social Change Model and other theories and approaches within the post-industrial paradigm of leadership (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2009; Rost, 1991).

Use of Service-Learning in Leadership Classes

Given the commonly-held view that leadership is an outcome of service-learning—whether primary or coincidental—it stands to reason that service-learning would be a common pedagogical choice in leadership classes. Zlotkowski (1996) observed that “… much of the momentum behind the service-learning movement… has been provided by academics—and concepts—tied to the social sciences and liberal arts” (p. 12). The interdisciplinary nature of leadership studies may result in it being viewed as a social science. However, the emergence of leadership classes on college campuses (as opposed to leaving leadership as an implicit outcome of academic and co-curricular learning) has been a fairly recent development (Greenwald, 2010)—which means that service-learning pre-dates leadership coursework, as such.
The bulk of literature available on service-learning in leadership classes is focused on its use in business schools, and the bulk of that is focused on graduate and professional courses (Bies, 1996; Collins, 1996; Friedman, 1996; Goldstein et al., 2009; Graham, 1996; Kolenko et al., 1996; Mercer, 1996; Reinke, 2003). In the 1990s when the use of service-learning was on the rise, so too was the belief that business schools had an obligation to infuse social responsibility in their programs. This was done most often in leadership and ethics courses, and the most common strategy used toward this end was service-learning. In 1997, the Academy of Management developed several initiatives to promote service-learning as a pedagogical tool in business schools (Dipadova-Stocks, 2005). The previous year, the Journal of Business Ethics devoted an entire issue (vol. 15, no. 1, January, 1996) to articles from a symposium on the use of service-learning in business schools: “The innovations being undertaken by the business school are designed to develop leadership, creative problem-solving and teamwork. “However, in addition to developing these skills the business school is striving to develop leaders with an understanding of the broader responsibilities of leadership” (Mercer, 1996, p. 112). Expected learning outcomes in the business school classroom grew to include enhancement of knowledge to help balance theory and practice, teamwork and communication skills, ability to adapt to changing conditions in the workplace, and emphasis on innovation (Govekar & Rishi, 2007). Additionally, professional associations across the country have highlighted their emphases on ethical practice and social responsibility in their fields. A shift began to occur from focus solely on technical skills and expertise to a demand for interpersonal and leadership skills (Rama et al., 2000).

One instructor noted the potential of service-learning to enable students’ understanding of business, leadership, and social concepts that may have initially seemed too abstract: “At the
same time, I was very frustrated. Frustrated because students were unable to develop an understanding of the absence of power, or powerlessness, even with good teaching materials. Indeed, students viewed powerlessness as some ‘academic’ concept, with little relevance to them now, or in the future” (Bies, 1996, p. 104). In this case, service-learning could be used to connect theory to practice through the experience of what power and powerlessness mean in a community setting. Furthermore, an understanding of power and powerlessness contributes to a larger understanding of leadership, both theoretically and in practice.

The aforementioned issue of the *Journal of Business Ethics*, along with some subsequent research, has addressed leadership outcomes for graduate and professional students including medical students and those in MBA and MPA programs. The aim of service-learning with these students was to help them develop “a broad set of skills such as coalition building, policy advocacy, fundraising, program planning, motivation, and facilitation,” which may not be part of their regular curriculum (Goldstein et al., 2009).

Generally speaking, there is a great deal of confidence in service-learning as a means for leadership development. The focus on graduate students in the existing literature might be a reflection of that confidence, signaling a belief that sufficient information about service-learning with undergraduate students has already been obtained. Another possibility is that service-learning experiences with graduate and professional students are believed to have a greater impact and that research is more prevalent with those students in order to examine that belief. These two possibilities are not mutually exclusive, and either might help to explain the seeming lack of recent research on student outcomes with service-learning in the leadership classroom. It has been posited that upper-level courses could be more conducive to meaningful change when it
comes to the benefits of service-learning, or at least that the question is worth asking (Morton, 1995; Kolenko et al., 1996).

In addition to the seeming lack of recent research on service-learning in undergraduate leadership courses, there is also a gap in research when it comes to information about the student outcomes of service-learning in leadership classes that occur outside of business schools. There are many academic disciplines and colleges, other than business, where leadership classes are offered as part of the curriculum (Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt, & Arensdorf, 2006; Greenwald, 2010). Finally, another noticeable gap is research related to the perspectives and experiences of instructors who teach courses with service-learning components.

The Faculty Perspective on Service-Learning

The bulk of research into service-learning focuses on student outcomes. This makes sense, especially given the amount of time and energy needed to conduct service-learning properly (Litzky, Godshalk, & Walton-Bongers, 2009; Rocha, 2000). However, the role of faculty members has not been dismissed when it comes to the success of service-learning. In fact, faculty are recognized as people who have strong influence over service-learning—beginning with whether it is used at all (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolenko et al., 1996). There are some examples where departments and colleges have incorporated service-learning as a consideration in the promotion and tenure process for faculty, which may serve as a validation and an incentive, but that is not a particularly common practice (Kenworthy, 1996).

Some faculty members have a philosophical objection to academic service-learning, citing the paradox of mandatory volunteerism as a detractor from both service and learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Speck, 2001). Other faculty members have a belief that service-learning can be effective, or at least sufficient curiosity to try it out and see for themselves. Perhaps with
favorable results: “Faculty who use service learning discover that it brings new life to the classroom, enhances performance on traditional measures of learning, increases student interest in the subject, teaches new problem solving skills, and makes teaching more enjoyable” (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, p. 222). As with student perspectives and outcomes, faculty reactions to service-learning are mixed. This is true for both undergraduate and graduate classes (Friedman, 1996).

Faculty are often the ones who decide whether or not to use service-learning in their courses and, if so, how it will be structured. Even in cases where faculty members may have inherited a service-learning course or are teaching with service-learning at the behest of a dean or department head, their perspectives matter. They will have influence, either directly or indirectly, on the perspectives of their students with regard to the service-learning project; and they will be facilitators of learning. The faculty member is the person with whom rests the responsibility and “burden of helping students take complex real world community service experiences and use these experiences to enhance the student intellectually, morally, and in some cases, spiritually” (Kolenko et al., 1996, p. 141-142).

Framing faculty involvement with service-learning in that way gives rise to several questions. Chief among them are:

- How do faculty and instructors make decisions about whether or not to use service-learning and on what do they base those decisions?
- How do faculty and instructors determine learning outcomes for service-learning?
- How do faculty and instructors know what students have learned as a result of service-learning?
What have faculty and instructors learned as a result of incorporating service-learning into their courses?

Dicke et al., (2004) emphasize that:

(F)aculty members often have strong and varied opinions about service learning and the outcomes that should be achieved; however, they do not always discuss these opinions with their colleagues. Faculty consensus is not a prerequisite for establishing effective service learning initiatives, but it helps to have the support of others when implementing the pedagogy. (p. 201)

Furthermore, understanding faculty experiences with service-learning can provide opportunities for the sharing of best practices, ensuring the intentionality of instruction, and advancing the effectiveness of service-learning—especially in the leadership classroom. Exploring faculty perspectives can lead to positive outcomes for both faculty members and students; and consequential improvements to service-learning can lead to positive outcomes for the community organizations that are recipients of and partners in service-learning. According to Morrison, Rha, and Helfman (2003), this is particularly true for leadership classes: “(M)ore attention should be paid to the effectiveness of instruction in refining student leadership skills of decision making, conflict resolution, and consensus promotion, among others” (p. 11). Finally, the faculty perspective can help shed light on elements of successful service-learning. Student perspectives and outcomes are of critical importance, to be sure, but faculty can speak to those things and provide some insights of their own: “All parties must be clear with regard to what is being sought in the context of the engagement, with an equally clear understanding of what ‘success’ looks like” (Papamarcos, 2005, p. 331). In connection to that, the perspective of faculty can be one way to understand whether students are developing leadership skills through service-
learning—rather than taking for granted that leadership development is occurring since it has been generally identified as an outcome associated with service-learning in the past.

The lack of literature speaking to the faculty perspective on service-learning might lead to the mistaken conclusion that it is unimportant, when in fact it is clearly very important. This research explores those important faculty experiences and perspectives on service-learning. Specifically, the perspectives of the instructors of record in undergraduate leadership courses were sought. The absence of faculty and instructor voices in the service-learning literature has prompted some scholars to conduct research focused on those particular stakeholders (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Clayton & Ash, 2004; O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009; Pribbenow, 2005; Shapiro, 2012). Few, if any, of these research endeavors have been phenomenological in nature. Since the purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of instructors who use service-learning in their undergraduate leadership courses, the use of phenomenology allowed me to identify the core themes and overall essence of that experience.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of those who teach undergraduate leadership classes and incorporate academic service-learning in their pedagogical approach. As with any research project, it was important to select the most appropriate approach for addressing the purpose and research questions. The purpose of this chapter is to briefly explore the methodological tools available and explain the selection of the chosen approach.

Research Questions

This study has a broad central research question as well as sub-questions which were used to select the appropriate methodological approach and guide data collection. The central research question of this study is, “What meaning do instructors make of the experiences with service-learning in the leadership classroom?” Connected to this central question are two sub-questions:

1. How do instructors of undergraduate leadership classes that utilize service-learning describe their experiences with service-learning?
2. What is the context in which those experiences occur?

Qualitative Approaches

“Qualitative research,” according to Marshall and Rossman (2011), “is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena. Its various genres are naturalistic, interpretive, and increasingly critical, and they typically draw on multiple methods of inquiry” (p. 3). The aim of qualitative research, then, is to understand phenomena. This does not necessarily equate to a cause and effect exploration. It is an exploration of what is happening with an understanding that what is happening is likely to be complex, multi-layered, and varied. Creswell (2013) addresses five common qualitative methods (see Table 1) that can be used to explore phenomena. These
methods include ethnography, grounded theory, narrative inquiry, case study, and phenomenology.

Narrative inquiry, case study, and phenomenology were all considered as possible methods for this study. Narrative inquiry was ruled out since it typically focuses on one or two individuals and seeks to tell their life stories (individual narratives) rather than explore their experiences around a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2013, p. 70-76). For this study, the objective was to explore a specific phenomenon with a broader number of potential participants rather than to focus on the life stories of a few participants. Case study was considered but then rejected as the best method since the phenomenon being explored this study is not restricted to certain boundaries such as those based on institutional characteristics, geographic locations, or specific points in time. Phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate approach to use in this study because the objective was to explore a phenomenon, the experiences of instructors who use service-learning in the leadership classroom. Phenomenology allows for a deep exploration of this particular experience without restrictions imposed by other approaches.

Table 1

<table>
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<tr>
<th><strong>Common Qualitative Methods</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnography</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Grounded Theory</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Inquiry</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Case Study</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomenology</strong></td>
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Ultimately, phenomenology is the ideal approach for studying phenomena such as this (instructors’ experiences with service-learning in the leadership classroom) because its primary focus is on the phenomena itself rather than on the broader experiences of an individual or a case or cultural group (Creswell, 2013). Existing literature on faculty experiences with service-learning (Clayton & Ash, 2004; O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009; Prebbinow, 2005; Shapiro, 2012), although it has perhaps brought important information to light, has not employed a phenomenological approach that would speak to the essence of that experience.

**Phenomenology: A Qualitative & Constructivist Approach**

The objective of the research was to understand the lived experiences of instructors who use service-learning in the undergraduate leadership classroom. This experience is the central phenomenon of the study. Moustakas (1994) explains that “Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses” (p. 58). This is also appropriate with the proposed research, since the primary intent is to understand an experience which is not yet addressed in the literature. Explanations and analyses would be premature and were therefore not the goals of the study. Consistent with Moustakas’ (1994) position, “The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (p. 13).

Phenomenology is seen by Moustakas (1994) as the first point of knowledge and also the ultimate decider of what that experience means. The core processes of phenomenology are designed to guide the exploration by the researcher and participants (also sometimes referred to as the co-researchers). The core processes of phenomenology are:

- *Epoche* – The researcher brackets her biases in an effort to remain objective.
- **Transcendental – Phenomenological Reduction** – The consideration of each individual experience independent of others.

- **Imaginative Variation** – The identification of structural essences of the experience.

- **Synthesis of Meaning and Essences** – The integration of individual experiences and structural essences in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the overall experience.

These processes are also described by Moustakas (1994) in connection with phases or stages of phenomenological research. The phases of phenomenology, as outlined by Moustakes (and discussed in greater detail in the data analysis section of this chapter), were adhered to in this study:

- **Bracketing**, in which the focus of the research is placed in brackets, everything else is set aside so that the entire research process is rooted solely on the topic and question;

- **horizonalizing**, every statement is treated initially as having equal value. Later, statements irrelevant to the topic and question as well as those that are repetitive or overlapping are deleted, leaving only the Horizons. . . ;

- **Clustering the Horizons into Themes**; and **Organizing the Horizons and Themes Into a Coherent Textural Description** of the phenomenon. (p. 97)

The phenomenological method is consistent with both the qualitative tradition and a constructivist worldview. Creswell (2013) explains that constructivism (also referred to as social constructivism) is rooted in the belief that reality is constructed through lived experiences and interactions. Our interpretations of these experiences and interactions form our perspectives and beliefs about the world around us. These perspectives and beliefs have the potential to be both similar and different in comparison to the perspectives and beliefs of others. According to the
constructivist framework, “The goal of research, then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ views of the situation” (Creswell, 2013, p. 24-25). The constructivist view is evident in phenomenological research.

**Identification of Participants**

This research was designed to explore the experience of instructors who use service-learning in connection with undergraduate leadership classes. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological studies should include “a heterogeneous group. . . that may vary in size from 3 to 4 individuals to 10 to 15” (p. 78). This study involved ten participants who were solicited through the use of my personal and professional networks. Initially, I contacted leadership educators I knew and asked if they met the criteria for the study and would be willing to participate. If they did not meet the criteria or were unable to participate for some other reason, I asked if those colleagues could direct me to other potential participants. This purposeful snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009) used specific criteria to identify potential participants who I then formally contacted and invited to participate. In order to be eligible to participate, instructors had to meet the following criteria:

- teach transcripted leadership courses for undergraduate students.
- serve as the primary point of contact for students in the class.
- have partial or full decision-making authority about aspects of the course such as learning outcomes, pace and method of content delivery, assignment expectations and grading.
- work directly with students in the execution and/or reflection and processing of their service-learning experience.
- primary role at the institution is not that of student.
Instructors who met those criteria and used service-learning (as defined by Madsen, 2004) in their undergraduate leadership courses were invited, primarily via e-mail, to participate. Additional information about the participants will be included in Chapter 4.

Sources of Data

This study included multiple forms of data collection. Initially, each instructor who agreed to participate completed a survey to provide information about their institution, their role at the institution, and the courses they teach. They included, with the survey, copies of their course syllabi and any relevant documents addressing the expectations and guidelines for the associated service-learning experiences. In addition to serving as a data source, this initial information was also used to verify that the instructors and their courses were consistent with the parameters of the study.

Once I had collected and preliminarily reviewed this initial data, I conducted a one-on-one semi-structured interview with each participant. These interviews were guided by the central research question and included the following questions as initial prompts:

1. What is service-learning? How would you explain or describe it?
2. Tell me about your experiences with service-learning.
   a. Tell me about a really exciting experience you’ve had with service-learning.
   b. Tell me about a really disappointing or frustrating experience you’ve had with service-learning.
   c. Tell me about the biggest challenge you’ve experienced with service-learning.
   d. Tell me the most rewarding thing you’ve experienced with service-learning.
3. How have you changed or evolved over time as a result of your experiences with service-learning?

4. What do you learn or gain as a result of using service-learning in your classes?

5. Why do you use service-learning in your leadership classes?

The interviews were not limited to those questions exclusively. Rather, those questions served as prompts for deeper discussion of the participants’ experiences. I had the opportunity, as a result, to clarify participant responses and ask follow-up questions as needed. Nine of these interviews were conducted via telephone and one was conducted in person. Distance was the primary factor in determining the medium through which interviews were conducted in order to make participation convenient for the instructors who agreed to be interviewed. Interviews were recorded by the researcher and transcribed by a third party.

**Data Analysis & Validation**

Based largely on the assertions of Moustakas (1994), Creswell (2003, p. 193-195) proposes six phases for phenomenological data analysis, which were utilized in this research to analyze the data. First, I addressed my own experiences with the phenomenon through written reflection and additional bracketing. This was done in order to identify my biases and in an attempt to achieve and maintain objectivity as much as possible. Second, I identified significant statements about the experience form each of the individual accounts. These statements were seen as carrying equal weight and were used to develop a list of significant statements that is free from overlap and repetition. Third, I used this list to craft groups of themes (also referred to as meaning units). Fourth, I wrote textural descriptions of what happened. These descriptions included direct examples and quotations from the participants themselves. Fifth, I wrote
structural descriptions of how the experiences happened. Ultimately, I used the textural and structural descriptions to create an integrated composite of the essence of the experience itself.

Due to the sample size, I elected to create meaning clusters without the use of computer software. To the extent possible, I developed in vivo codes for the meaning clusters based on the words and phrases of the participants themselves.

**Validation Strategies.** Creswell (2013) considers validation in qualitative research to be “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (p. 249-250). I used several strategies for validation (See Table 2). First, there was a clarification of researcher bias where I reflected on and bracketed my own experiences and perspectives, in keeping with the phenomenological tradition (Moustakas, 1994). Triangulation was utilized in that data from interviews as well as syllabi and other supportive documents were used to analyze and corroborate findings. Peer review was also utilized. Portions of the interview transcripts were shared with qualified peers who were asked to provide an assessment of emergent themes. I met with the peer reviewers in two small groups of three reviewers each to discuss the results and consider their perspectives. Additionally, member checking was utilized. Participants were asked to react to the themes and meaning clusters that I identified. This step allowed participants, in their roles as co-researchers, have the opportunity to accept or clarify the themes that have been identified. Finally, rich, thick descriptions will be utilized. The researcher has described participants and their settings in great detail so that readers can make determinations about the transferability and applicability of the participants’ experiences to the readers’ own context and experiences.
Table 2

*Strategies for Validation*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Clarifying Researcher Bias</strong></td>
<td>Inherent in phenomenology as part of the bracketing phase of analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triangulation</strong></td>
<td>Using multiple data sources to provide a full picture of the experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Peer Review</strong></td>
<td>Using the expertise of colleagues to verify/challenge researcher interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Member Checking</strong></td>
<td>Allows participants to confirm/clarify researcher interpretation; satisfies an ethical consideration of the study;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rich, Thick Descriptions</strong></td>
<td>Providing extensive details so that readers can determine transferability</td>
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Consistent with Creswell’s (2013) suggestion that there be at least two validation strategies, five validation strategies were used to help analyze data in this research endeavor: clarification of researcher bias, triangulation, peer review, member checking, and rich, thick descriptions.

**Ethical Considerations**

The study had no known risks to the participants. There were, however, ethical considerations associated with the research. All participants were treated according to the expectations of the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB). Each participant was assigned a pseudonym in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. This allowed participants to trust the researcher and be honest and straight-forward with the information they provided. Accuracy of information was also addressed through the member checking strategy, in which participants could validate (or not) the identified themes and verify (or not) that their
experiences are being appropriately represented. Finally, my bracketing of my own experiences helped to maintain the ethical standards of the research. Bracketing also helped to maintain my integrity as a leadership educator and professional colleague of the participants. This bracketing occurred through the use of a journal and researcher notes associated with the interviews and interview transcripts.

**Limitations & Delimitations**

The study made use of multiple validation strategies, including clarification of researcher bias, triangulation, peer review, member checking, and rich, thick descriptions. Even so, there are potential limitations. The sample size of phenomenology and the nature of qualitative research prevent generalization across the population. The validation strategies employed address this issue but cannot eliminate it entirely. Additionally, the sampling strategy sought diversity among participants but could not guarantee it. Some geographic diversity did occur, and so did some diversity across roles at the university (faculty, staff, lecturer, tenured, non-tenured), diversity of institutional type was not strong, nor was gender or racial diversity. A final key consideration that limits generalization is that this research focuses on the experiences of leadership educators specifically, and their experiences may not be reflective of the experiences other educators have with service-learning.

In addition to the delimitations, there are also limitations to this study. The first, associated with the delimitation issue of representativeness, is the number of participants. There were ten participants who met the criteria of the study and agreed to participate. Phenomenological studies can be both smaller and larger than this, although a larger number of participants might have yielded a greater depth and breadth of information. A second limitation
has to do with the one-on-one interviews between the researcher and the participants. The majority were conducted via telephone in order to accommodate a variety of participants. This strategy is appropriate and provided valuable information. However, that medium may not have provided the same depth of information as would in-person interviews.

**Role of the Researcher**

The first phase of data analysis in a phenomenological study required me, as the researcher, to assert my own beliefs and experiences and set them aside as unique or distinct so that I could approach the project as objectively as possible (Creswell, 2013). Moustakas (1994) refers to this as epoche. In order to accomplish this, I used a journal to reflect on my experiences and beliefs about the use of service-learning in the leadership classroom. Review of the journal has allowed me to further identify my own biases and assumptions. Additionally, I recorded my thoughts and reactions upon listening to each of the interview recordings and reading each of the interview transcripts.

My interest in this topic comes from my own experiences as a leadership educator and my involvement, both as a student and an educator, in service-learning experiences. In addition to understanding how the experiences of other leadership educators compare to my own, have an interest in examining instructor perspectives in general in order to learn more about the use of service-learning in undergraduate leadership classes. I hope that this study will make a positive contribution to the field of leadership studies by shedding light on an often overlooked element of leadership service-learning pedagogy – the perspective of the instructor.
Chapter 4: Findings

Overview

The central research question driving this study is, “What meaning do instructors make of their experiences with service-learning in the leadership classroom?” In order to answer this question, I asked participants to tell me about their experiences—exciting experiences, rewarding experiences, challenging experiences, and frustrating or disappointing experiences. In this way, I was able to learn about the experiences themselves, how the instructors thought of those experiences, and how they interpreted the meaning of those experiences. The related sub-questions for this research were, “How do instructors of undergraduate leadership classes that utilize service-learning describe their experiences with service-learning?” (which was addressed by having them describe various experiences) and “What is the context in which those experiences occur?” Some information about the context of experiences came from the descriptions and other information provided during the interviews, and some of the information about context came from the surveys completed by each instructor prior to the interviews.

Shapiro (2012) tells us that experiences with service-learning courses and initiatives influence the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that faculty have for service-learning work. But what are those experiences? What are the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations of the instructors who use service-learning? This research project allowed me to begin answering those questions, particularly with regard to leadership educators. Initially, I asked each of the participants to complete a survey. The survey served two purposes. First, it provided me with some basic information about the instructors and their courses. Second, this basic information also allowed me to verify that the instructors met the qualifications I had identified for participation in the
study. Table 3 provides a basic summary of the participants and their courses (upper and lower class level).

Table 3

**Overview of Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>M/F</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Class Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Assoc. Prof. (Faculty)</td>
<td>Leadership Studies</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Chicano Studies</td>
<td>Public Land-Grant</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claire</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Teaching Assoc. (Fac)</td>
<td>Ag. Education</td>
<td>Public Land-Grant</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jennifer</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Public Land-Grant</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Instructor (Staff)</td>
<td>Leadership Studies</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Asst. Prof. (Faculty)</td>
<td>Leadership Studies</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Professor (Faculty)</td>
<td>Ag. Education</td>
<td>Public Land-Grant</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patti</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Advisor (Staff)</td>
<td>Leadership Studies</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Assoc. Prof. (Faculty)</td>
<td>Ag. Education</td>
<td>Public Land-Grant</td>
<td>Upper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Lecturer (Staff)</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Public Land-Grant</td>
<td>Lower</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table indicates, there were a total of ten participants. All of them came from public four-year institutions, and six of them came from land-grant institutions (notable because land-grant institutions have service as part of their institutional mission; APLU, 2012). Eight participants were women, and two participants were men. Five participants were in faculty roles (including tenured, tenure-seeking, and non-tenure-seeking), and five were in staff roles (including staff in both academic and student affairs). Most of the participants taught upper-level courses, meaning courses at the 300 and 400-level, although two of the participants were teaching lower-level courses or courses at the 100 and 200-level.
Departmental homes for the participants and their courses were varied. This was not surprising, given that leadership is a multi-disciplinary field. Two participants were based in hard science academic homes (biology and engineering), one participant was based in cultural studies (specifically Chicano Studies), three participants were housed in departments of agricultural education (departments varied in name but usually included some elements of education, communication, and/or leadership in the agricultural field), and four participants were in academic homes that were identified as being focused on leadership studies. Despite the variation in academic homes, the courses taught by these participants shared many common goals with regard to learning outcomes. The most prominent and common learning objectives these instructors had for their courses included involvement in the community, an understanding of society and social issues, understanding of and experience with change, and the opportunity to apply theoretical concepts to real life practice. True to the criteria for participation in the study, each of them taught courses that were either focused on leadership, with leadership learning and development as an explicitly stated goal, and/or affiliated with a transcripted academic leadership program of some kind (major, minor, or certificate).

Two of the ten participants, Sarah and Michelle, made deliberate decisions to incorporate service-learning into the courses they teach. All other participants inherited courses or programs with service-learning as an established, or at least an expected, component. This was understood by those participants prior to acceptance of their roles and responsibilities. Knowing this information, it could be supposed that Sarah and Michelle’s experiences might be noticeably different than those of their colleagues in this study. With regard to the core elements of instructors’ experiences with service-learning, that did not prove to be the case. Nor were the experiences of the male instructors, Adam and Kevin, noticeably distinct from the experiences of
their female counterparts. Fundamentally, there were common elements to the experiences of all the leadership educators who participated, regardless of their roles at their respective institutions, their academic backgrounds, or even the amount of time they had spent using service-learning in their courses. Those factors, while not seeming to alter the core essence of the experience with service-learning, did have an impact on instructors’ learning and development, which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter and also in the final chapter.

Each of the ten instructors participated in a semi-structured one-on-one interview with me. Nine of those interviews were conducted via telephone, and one was conducted face-to-face. The difference in medium does not appear to have affected the results. Each interview lasted approximately 40-60 minutes, with most lasting close to a full hour. The interviews consisted of the following questions, along with follow-up and clarification questions that emerged during each interview:

1. What is service-learning? How would you explain or describe it?
2. Tell me about your experiences with service-learning.
   a. Tell me about a really exciting experience you’ve had with service-learning.
   b. Tell me about a really disappointing or frustrating experience you’ve had with service-learning.
   c. Tell me about the biggest challenge you’ve experienced with service-learning.
   d. Tell me the most rewarding thing you’ve experienced with service-learning.
3. How have you changed or evolved over time as a result of your experiences with service-learning?
4. What do you learn or gain as a result of using service-learning in your classes?
5. Why do you use service-learning in your leadership classes?
Information from the interviews was considered individually and in total, and the emergent themes, their intersections, and sub-themes will be discussed in this chapter.

Each of the questions in the individual interviews helped me to understand different elements of the instructors’ experiences with service-learning. Responses to the first question, asking how the participant would define or explain service-learning, and the last question, asking why the participant used service-learning in connection with his or her leadership course, were perhaps the most revealing. Posing these questions allowed me to understand that leadership educators see service and leadership as deeply connected. Sarah, a faculty member in agricultural education, put it this way: “I think that when you do that (give of yourself without expectations), that causes one to learn about leadership and learning and organizations and development of oneself. So I see service-learning as the outreach of being a servant leader.”

Laura, a faculty member in leadership studies referred to service-learning as a way for leadership educators and students to live their discipline: “(W)e are living our discipline. You know, we tell young people if they see something wrong in their organizations or their communities or their whatever, they should do something about that. And we’re gonna try to help them have the tools to know how to do that.”

And Claire, a faculty member in agricultural education, pointed out that service-learning was, in her estimation, the best way for students in her program to demonstrate their competence as students of leadership:

(T)hese students who are in what we call Ag Leadership Education. Well, what does that mean? We’re always tryin’ to define what the heck that means. So, student teachers go out and do student teaching. It’d be crazy. You wouldn’t think about hiring a teacher who hadn’t taught before . . . So that’s why . . . they’re student teaching. So what, on our side, what are our Ag Leadership students doing to prove themselves? . . . I feel like we have to continue offering a service-learning approach in teaching leadership.
In most of the interviews, participants talked about the importance of students being able to apply their leadership learning in real life situations. They saw such an opportunity as the impetus for skill development, critical thinking, and a better understanding of how things work in the real world. These notions, when shared by participants, prompted me to inquire further. Specifically, why use service-learning rather than some other form of experiential education?

Patti, an advisor and instructor in leadership studies, talked about the complexity of service-learning and its applicability to a wide array of academic disciplines:

I think what service-learning does is maybe gets people outside of a perspective that they would normally be in and gets you outside your comfort zone and thinking about issues that not just are related to one sector or one discipline, but are more, like hunger is an issue that doesn’t reside within the government or non-profits or business. It resides within all of those and in collaboration. And I think sometimes service-learning lends itself more to getting to see like those more complex challenges to where as if they just did an internship, maybe at a business or at a non-profit, they may not see kind of that interrelatedness.

Jennifer, who oversees a leadership program for students in biological sciences, noted that most of her students would be working in communities after graduation—and not necessarily the same communities in which they grew up:

(Service-learning) seemed to be a really natural fit of both sort of that hands-on learning about leadership and about community issues. I feel like it’s the most responsibility that we have for our students who are planning to go out into the community, for many of them who are interested in health or doing research or, you know, doing things that will impact a lot of the communities that are surrounding the university community. They need to have some experience with this before they go out, like just as an ethical piece. Like how could they go to med school and become a doctor if they have never once interacted or understand the issues in the local Somali community, the Hmong community, you know, with a homeless population, with, you know, all these different communities that they’re gonna be serving as a health professional. You know, to me, that’s an ethical piece of “Who are we graduating as, as students? And do they have that civic mindedness at all?”

Aware that most of his students probably viewed leadership as something that happened in the workplace but may not have given much thought to it beyond that, Adam (a faculty
member in leadership studies) talked about the importance of helping them understand that leadership occurs—and is needed—outside of regular business hours:

I don’t want them to think about leadership just in their job. That is an important place for leadership to take place, but there are many other opportunities for leadership to take place. I mean, I, I communicate to students that [clears throat] I mean, basically wherever humans interact is an opportunity for leadership to take place.

Kevin, an instructor in leadership studies, talked about the potential for service-learning to evoke an emotional connection as a singularly powerful learning tool:

I’ve found it’s the most powerful way to get students to connect academically and emotionally with the content. That the things we do with service-learning are more impactful and as measured by reflections, both verbally and written. Those reflections are more powerful and the learning is more powerful than when presented any other way. So, that’s why I use it kind of like from a selfish academic side if I’m focused on what the students are learning then I think they learn best when we do service-learning.

It is clear, from the responses of participants that service-learning is seen by these leadership educators as real life leadership—not just because it provides the chance to learn and practice leadership skills or see leadership being demonstrated by others, but also because it is (presumably) an opportunity to participate in working toward the common good and finding solutions to social problems in a way that may not happen as often in other experiential learning settings. Service-learning, like leadership itself, is messy, is about others, and pursues the common good. These core elements or themes that connect service-learning and leadership also shed light on the essence of the instructors’ experiences with service-learning. The three core elements or themes and the sub-themes they share will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

In addition to the three core elements or themes, the instructors indicated that service-learning experiences led to learning and change—for students and for instructors. In fact, it became clear during the data analysis phase of this project that the instructors’ experiences with
service-learning were interwoven with the experiences of their students and that the instructors may be going through a progression very similar to their students when it comes to experiencing service-learning. This similarity is consistent with the findings of Clayton and Ash (2004), although the current research uncovered different phases than the prior research. The similarities between instructor and student experiences will be noted in the discussion of the core themes and their shared sub-themes. Table 4 summarizes the four core elements or themes of instructors’ service-learning experience:

1. Service-Learning is Messy
2. Service-Learning is About Others
3. Service-Learning Pursues the Common Good
4. Service-Learning Leads to Learning and Change

Due to the overlapping and interwoven nature of the themes, several sub-themes are connected to more than one main theme. These intersections and connections are also addressed in this chapter.
### Table 4

**Overview of Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Themes &amp; Intersections</th>
<th>Sub-Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service-Learning is Messy</td>
<td>Logistics &amp; Management Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control / Lack of Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intersection of Messy/About Others)</td>
<td>Challenging Ideas &amp; Pushing Boundaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Being Prepared &amp; Ready to Serve Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-Learning is About Others</td>
<td>Connection Between Instructor &amp; Student Experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Importance of Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Intersection of About Others/Common Good)</td>
<td>Responsibility to/for Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Experiencing the Impact of S-L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-Learning Pursues the Common Good</td>
<td>How Instructors View Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What Instructors Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service-Learning Leads to Learning &amp; Change</td>
<td>Application of Course Concepts to Real Life Settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Replacing Old Mental Models with New Ideas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Major Theme: Service-Learning is Messy**

Participants in this study were clear that they believed leadership itself to be complex, ill-structured, and challenging. Adam was the first one to use the word “messy”:

While the notion of leadership is sexy, we try to challenge students to recognize that it’s messy. It’s **really** messy. It’s experiencing frustrations, trying to figure out how you’re going to work around those frustrations, and then, basically not take no for an answer, and figure out how to get it done.
Service-learning was seen the same way, and that was one of the reasons instructors determined it to be an appropriate pedagogical tool for leadership courses. To understand just how messy service-learning is, it is important to remember that even the term “service-learning” is messy. Many different definitions exist for the term “service-learning”, and many different terms have been used to describe similar sorts of experiential education strategies—which allows instructors to clarify their own intentions while attempting to minimize some of the negative connotations that could be associated with the term “service-learning” (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

With one notable exception, all of the participants in this study either used the term “service-learning” to describe the experiential education component of their courses, or they were at least unfazed by my use of the term. Anna, however, was the exception. Although she had agreed to participate in this research with the understanding that it was focused on the experiences of instructors with service-learning, her reticence to use that term was clear at the outset of our interview: “The reason I’m hesitating is because I think there’s a definition that I, that is used in the academy that I tend to use. And because there’s some significant components of what is, what I’ve seen play out as service-learning that I think is problematic.” In other words, service-learning means something different to Anna than it does to Madsen (2004).

For Anna, who teaches courses in a department of Chicano Studies, the term “service-learning” implies a charity based or service-to approach which she found incongruent with her personal and professional values: “I think that’s traditionally been done very one sided where it’s the students who are thinking that they’re the one that’s doing the service, and they hope to get some learning out of it. . . And I couldn’t be part of it.” Anna preferred to use the term “engagement work”, and the experiential education that was incorporated into her courses was
consistent with the definition of academic service-learning being used in this study (Madsen, 2004).

While many of the participants in this study spoke about working for the common good and serving others, Anna—who identified herself as a critical theorist—was the only participant to overtly talk about power, privilege, and social justice in those terms. It was clear that these considerations were of deep importance to her and played a key part in the messiness of her own experience with service-learning:

What right did I have to be (there)? If I’m gonna go mess up somebody else, I’m gonna go mess up my own backyard and not somebody else’s. . . and so, it started to me really this social-political-racial, you know, awareness that has done nothing but grow as I continue to do this work. I do it. I believe in it. I believe that there’s a lot of really good things that *can* happen. But I think it is usually the exception and not the rule. And I think there’s more times than not we do more harm than good. And I think most of the times, most of the vast majority of students have no idea about it.

Beyond the complicated nature of the term “service-learning” the experience of doing service-learning is also complex and ill-structured.

**The messiness of logistics & management issues.** It will not likely be a surprise to anyone who has used or learned about service-learning to know that part of its messiness comes from logistical and management issues. These issues are related to both the class itself, the ill-structured nature of service-learning, and the constraints and expectations that may be placed on the experience by the institution and by the community organization or partner. Several instructors in this study identified logistics as a challenge in their work. Patti, an advisor and instructor in leadership studies, remembered a time when she had to deal with the bureaucracy of an external agency with whom she was hoping to partner for service-learning:

And so, I identified an issue that would be really beneficial for our community to learn more about. But, the process . . . we have to sign a contract and there’s all these different rules and regulations and stuff. So it took me like six weeks to get through the red tape.
And so my students didn’t get the project until six weeks into the semester.

Patti went on to explain that her students never really engaged with that particular project. She believed that the delay caused them to lose interest and shift their focus to other responsibilities. Kevin, an instructor in leadership studies, said, “I think, I think the logistics is my hardest challenge.” Searching for service-learning opportunities for a lot of students in a small community, he often finds that local agencies are saturated with student volunteers. Theresa, who teaches leadership courses for engineering students, acknowledged that her students have a difficult time figuring out how to incorporate service-learning into their already very full schedules:

(Students) being able to make the time, making it a priority to get it done. That’s been the biggest challenge is the logistics of it. They panic at the beginning of the semester when they’re told they have to do twenty hours of service, which averages out to what? A couple hours a week? Which, in my mind, requires them to spend, you know, an hour less off the Internet a week. [laugh] You know, they hear that and it’s such a barrier. You also have to understand that most of the students that I’m serving are engineering students. So on average they’re taking seventeen hours of courses, seventeen, eighteen hours of courses a semester sometimes. And they’re heavy loaded with math and science courses, so they’re already panicking and freaking out just for their…just for their coursework, course load.

When deciding whether to use service-learning and how to approach it, instructors were compelled to consider not only their course objectives but also the size of their classes. If service-learning is valuable, and if the objectives of the class are important, it would make sense to want more students to participate. As more students participate, the instructor’s ability to manage the class and expectations while maintaining the value of the experience of service-learning for their students is called into question. “How do we continue to have that high touch kind of approach when our classes are getting bigger and bigger?” Claire asked me, rhetorically. She went on: “Leadership and service-learning and collaboration and community engagement
and all this. Students want to have this stuff on their resume. Well, that’s all great but when your courses start getting so big, how can you make it meaningful for everybody?”

Michelle, a tenured professor in agricultural education, acknowledged that effective service-learning introduces competing goals:

The bigger it gets, the more I would begin to lose what I’m trying to advocate for and role model and practice. I have all their names memorized by the first night when they leave class. And I start doing that with the roster before they ever show up and start memorizing the roster. So that night when they leave, I’m tryin’ to role model, I’m shakin’ their hands at the door as they’re leaving and using their names. And I think that’s critical! But if I get bigger than that, I start losing my ability to do that. And, I truly would have to give up, I think, my service-learning component because of the volume of kids I would have and the hours that it would take just to manage a class of that size. And so, I say that to say that the service-learning component, I think I would have to lose if I added more students to the class which financially would be the best thing for the department is to add students to the class. So, service-learning there’s a, what would you call it? Not a yin and a yang there. It would be working against each other, I’m afraid, in the financial resources of the department. To make it financially more sustainable would mean I would probably lose what I think is a pretty valuable component, which is the service-learning piece.

Instructors understand that, despite their possible enthusiasm for service-learning or their faith in it as pedagogy, it may not be appropriate for all classes when logistical issues are considered. Service-learning, though popular, is not a silver bullet for leadership learning.

Instructors find themselves asking the question, what can we reasonably expect to accomplish with service-learning? Many of the instructors who participated in this study expressed struggles with that question in one way or another. Claire spoke of it as one of her greatest challenges:

how to make it a service-learning course that does so many things, that teaches collaborative leadership, that has students…engaging in the community. It has students bringing organizations together. It has them reflecting on their own leadership style like a, I feel like…we try to do…we try to do a lotta things when we say that we’re gonna do service-learning.

Similarly, Adam expressed concern that leadership educators often try to cram too many things into one class: “In (some classes), you’re tryin’ to compress, to shove everything into one
three-credit-hour class of leadership theory, leadership skills, plus the service-learning.” For Adam, that strategy meant that none of those things—theory, skill development, and service-learning—could be covered in any reasonable depth.

The answer to that question of how we maintain service-learning effectiveness as our class sizes and programs expand does not lie in the expectations of the service-learning experience alone. In addition to class size and number of sections, instructors must also factor in limitations imposed by the needs of service-learning partners, busy student schedules, and whether students possess the skills necessary to fully engage in and meet the expectations of the service-learning project.

**The messiness of control—or lack of control.** The instructors in this study recognized that service-learning introduces elements into their class over which they have little or no control, and they had varying degrees of comfort with this loss of control. Kevin noted this as one of his biggest challenges with service-learning:

I guess often maybe a…you’re almost adding a new component into the course. So like in a traditional course, you get to control the schedule entirely, you know. You just go in the classroom this time to this time and you say what we’re gonna talk about and, and the content we’re gonna teach and all this and what readings we’ll do. But service-learning brings in someone else that has needs too that are equally as important. . . So you lose a little bit of that control. And so I think that’s the hardest thing is, it’s easier to have complete control of something and just do it your way. But, I don’t think that’s as good.

Laughing, Adam expressed sentiments similar to Kevin’s, that the best thing to do is to share control—and also that it is sometimes more easily said than done: “I know relinquishing control like that is not exactly inside my personality comfort zone. And so, my struggle with that too is to, to try to figure out, “OK, when do we, l, just relinquish that control for the students to have that freedom to fail?” ”
Giving students that freedom to fail also makes the students themselves uncomfortable sometimes: “(I)t makes them have to take ownership of their own work and their own, and it’s hard for them,” Anna observed.

Instructors also question the degree to which they should exercise the control they do have. The biggest place where instructors have control over service-learning is in their design of the project and its associated expectations. The struggle instructors have here seems to focus on both the inherent messiness of service-learning, which has both advantages and disadvantages, and on the role of the instructor as a facilitator and supporter of student learning. Claire put it this way:

(I)t’s a struggle as an instructor to decide how much do you structure these opportunities and set the table for students, and how much do you let them decide? How much do you allow students to choose the service that they are interested in and how much do you pre-structure a service-learning course for them? You know, so those are two completely opposite ends of the continuum. Here’s the structure. Here’s the plan. Go make these. Go fulfill and make this, fulfill this need that I have defined for you. Or, do they come into the class and you say, “Go make social change. I’ll see you in fifteen weeks.”

Instructors are concerned that providing too much structure for students will frustrate the ill-structured nature of service-learning that contributed to their decision to use it in the first place while being simultaneously concerned that not providing enough structure will handicap the students and prevent them from being able to be successful. Too much structure could prevent students from truly engaging and taking ownership of the project, and not enough structure could have the same effect.

Michelle talked about exercising flexibility with project expectations, which she controlled, in order to combat some the logistical challenges with which she struggled, like fitting service-learning into crowded student schedules:

I think kids, for the most part, are very willing to try it, especially when we offer. . .
different options. So they’re very willing to try it. It’s just that scheduling thing. I’ve got two girls this semester who, who commute … one girl only is on campus for the length of time of my class on Thursday night. So, one on one, I’m very willing to work with them to try to tailor make something. I don’t offer that upfront as an option right away because some will tend to choose more quality-type experiences than others. And some will choose something that I consider to be way more service than service-learning, and I don’t want that. So, I want them stretching a little bit. We have these bright, fabulous students that, if we can make a dent, I, I would prefer to go that way initially. But these girls, because they’re commuting, one’s mom is an elementary school teacher so she’s actually doing something at the elementary school where her mom teaches. And another girl is working in her community with their services for special need learners. So they carved out a couple of things on their own that are fabulous. And, and so I don’t lay that out as an option initially, but when they choose to come to me and ask, then I’m very willing to help tailor make something outside of (the original) options.”

Another place where instructors presumably have at least some control is the behavior of their students during the service-learning experience. Instructors feel responsible for their students’ behavior, and therefore they tend to spend time in class preparing the students. They want students to understand what is expected both from the project and from their behavior. However, instructors recognize that they can’t possibly prepare students for everything they may encounter. Anna really struggles with this, and it’s something that is constantly on her mind when she approaches her engagement work: “I guess it was a combination of feeling like no matter, like I can never cover everything and, and I was, I could control my behavior and that’s the best I could do.”

Consequently, instructors must relinquish some control and trust that the students will behave appropriately. This is sometimes more easily said than done. Anna shared a story of a service-learning experience where her students could be trusted—for her, an example of service-learning the way it should be—and a story of a service-learning experience where a student disappointed her so much that she actually left her position as a coordinator of a service-learning program in a foreign country. In spite of intense training and preparation, a student had ruined the weekly clean water supply of his host family by washing his feet in the water (which,
presumably, he had learned during his training was meant to last the whole household for several
days): “I went over all kinds of stuff and power and privilege and race and class and gender and,
and…indigenous issues impacting the communities and all kinds of stuff. And down to like the
latrine. . .” But she learned six months after the fact that not every student had taken the training
to heart:

Well, apparently at six a.m. on Wednesday morning, she had gotten up to start a fire and
to start doing stuff. And here was the young man who was supposed to be the, who was
staying with her, sitting on the countertop with his pant legs rolled up, and he was
washing his toe and his feet, he had his feet fully submerged in the only clean water that
they were gonna have for like four days. And he was washing his feet. He, she, she told
me he was like sticking his fingers in between his toes. So she had no clean water for four
days, so she had to go and walk four kilometers to go get it. No one ever knew. I can’t
even tell you, I cannot even tell you…how I felt. And so, so I said I wasn’t gonna do that
again.

And she didn’t. What Anna experienced with the student who washed his feet in the
family’s only clean water was one example of an instructor’s fear coming to life. Instructors are
unable to guarantee that students will never disappoint each other or their service-learning
partners. Theresa worried about this too:

So that, to me, is what I think keeps me up at night about the service-learning experience
of students because I can’t control that. I can’t control how they behave out on the site
and so I often take it personal when they do have such a poor experience because I don’t
want them to have a poor experience.

So the question becomes, how much are instructors willing to risk for the sake of student
learning? Adam spoke of students’ failure to follow through on their commitments as
particularly disappointing and frustrating for him:

(S)ome of the most powerful learning experiences for the students is where they can
experience these challenges and experience also potential failures, where they have
enough freedom to fail. That, that’s also kind of important but…I struggle with that as
well, as an instructor, because I understand the different reputations that are at stake.
And so I, I struggle with how much freedom to allow students as well. But all in, all in
all, one of the biggest challenges that I experience is where, where students just aren’t
following through with, with what they say they’re gonna do.
Laura spoke, with some regret, about a time when she relinquished control in an effort to help students be successful. She ended up being disappointed in the students and in herself as well:

I made the fatal error of allowing a team of three students one time who just were dead set on a project that they could not influence another student to be on their team ‘cause I always say the minimum on a team is four. And they, they lobbied me hard, and I let them do that. And so throughout the semester, they, there was one girl that was very involved in the project, very engaged in the cause, and a hard worker. There was another guy that really could give a rip about any of it. . . And then there was another girl that I couldn’t tell for sure about her, and I didn’t know her personally. And so I, I let it happen. The guy quit the class completely. In fact, I heard later he quit school completely. The other girl that I didn’t know ended up…being very, very…uninvolved. She kept coming to class, but she was doing little of the work outside class time. And so it really ended up one girl that did this, an entire project. The good news was, she did a great job. But the bad news was, she did not get a team experience. And of course, part of our goal in providing this opportunity is that they, they learn a lot about teamwork, they have to hone their communication skills, they work together to solve problems. And she, she got cheated out of that. And so I was disappointed in myself, at that time, that I let that happen.

The place where instructors believe they have the least amount of control is the service-learning partnership. Certainly, instructors may play a part in initiating and maintaining those relationships, and they have a role to play in that partnership; but, like Kevin, they sometimes struggle with what that role is:

I think I was kinda doing that constant balance of, of how much do you let, how much do you kind of let students experience failure in developing these partnerships as learning and, and how much do you kind of take a stronger role in, in establishing a partnership…that, that will work for both sides. I think I was erring on the hands-off side of it, and I think I probably shoulda taken a, a bit heavier hand in helping them have that conversation with that community partner of, of really “What do you want out of this and here’s what we want out of it and can we build something together that works for everybody?” So, I think I should’ve stepped in and helped the students have that conversation a lot earlier than I did. Well, I never did. So, I kinda wanted them to see what that process is like of finding a community partner and having that conversation, but I didn’t do enough to support them in that process. So, that’s definitely something I’d do differently.
Many of the same reasons that instructors choose to use service-learning in the first place are also the sources of challenge and frustration. Community needs don’t happen according to the class expectations or schedule. Kevin talked about having to adjust to that:

I actually think the biggest challenge, and it’s something I’m getting over slowly, is just… it often doesn’t fit necessarily within the expectations of students and the academic structure of the university. Like, it doesn’t necessarily always occur during our class time and community partner needs don’t perfectly align with what, you know, we wanna get out of something. So, so I think there’s always just this kinda struggle to, to make sure that the project still fits within the class, you know. So it’s great if we could have a, so we do one with a group called Friendship Meals, which is like a local Meals on Wheels. And, you know, the meals have to be delivered at a certain time every day. So, it would be awesome if that time was flexible with students’ schedules or if that time could be different from day to day, depending on which student was delivering the meal, you know. It would be wonderful if it worked for students, for all students, in their schedules. But it just, it just doesn’t because the meals do have to be there at 10:30 every day.

Understanding and meeting the expectations of the partners can also be a messy business. Each stakeholder in the partnership—the instructor, the students, and the community organization—has expectations for the experience; and those expectations don’t always jibe. This could lead to disappointment for any or all of the stakeholders, with instructors left holding the bag. Do instructors advocate more for their students or for the community partner? Do they facilitate the connections between students and community organizations, or do they give students responsibility and control over that? To what degree do they contribute to the partnership without completely controlling it? To what extent do they help students and partners identify problems? To what extent do they help students and partners fix those problems? These are questions with which Sarah has had to wrestle. She would be glad to have these things communicated and understood more readily:

Organizations, they preach that they, they want volunteers, they want people to come out, and so, you develop these service-learning projects that would be really beneficial, whatever. But their expectations aren’t always communicated. So, so if you pick one of those organizations and you decide you’re gonna do your service-learning project there,
it’s sometimes the lack of communication with that organization of what they really want…what they really need. . . But if you’re going to an organization to serve, and what they really want is not communicated well, then…I mean, it makes it frustrating for the person that really wants to, to serve your organization.

Michelle also expressed some disappointment with what she sees as a lack of timely response on the part of community agencies:

Probably the most frustrating and disappointing is getting the kind of, of…response and help to (have) the students be engaged in the projects as quickly once the class starts as what I would like. Last night was my fourth night of class. And I have students that still haven’t heard back from their site leaders for placing them in their service-learning projects. . . I would have preferred to have been able to walked in the third week of class and everybody would’ve done their orientation by then. But I can’t control that piece of it.

**Intersection of Themes: Messy / About Others**

Part of what adds to the complexity and messiness of service-learning, and potentially many other forms of experiential education as well, is the involvement of other people. Theories of leadership in the post-industrial paradigm emphasize that leadership is less something one does to others and more something one does with others. (Rost, 1991) From that perspective, it is easy to see why leadership educators find service-learning to be a real life example of leadership. In almost all cases, service-learning projects are designed so that students can learn while they are performing a service for others or creating or producing something that will—either directly or indirectly—benefit others.

In most instances, community members or the clientele of a community agency are the beneficiaries of the service. In some instances, they may also be the collaborators. The clientele, however, are not the only stakeholders. The instructors are deeply invested in a partnership with their students and with the community. Service-learning is also about those others. It involves various stakeholders, including but not necessarily limited to the students, the instructors,
community members, and those who are affiliated with the community organization with which
the students and instructors partner. This means that, ideally, each stakeholder focuses some of
their energy on the needs and expectations of the other stakeholders. This is where the themes
messiness and being about others intersect.

**Challenging ideas and pushing boundaries.** Most educators would probably agree that
part of their job is to help students think about things in new and different ways. This is
particularly true when service-learning is involved. In an effort to help students understand
complex issues from a variety of perspectives, the participants in this study expressed a belief
that they must challenge their students. In order to do this effectively, instructors must figure out
where students are, meet them there, and then figure out how to guide them to a new place.
Instructors put themselves in their students’ shoes so that they can help their students stand in the
shoes of other stakeholders. Jennifer is particularly attuned to the importance of doing this:

I remember one student’s story in particular, and I thought it was just a great example of
the arc sort of service-learning where he kind of came into it and wasn’t really happy
with the service he was doing in the community ‘cause it was, in his opinion, kind of
menial and repetitive and not really direct service and helping a lot of people in what he
was perceiving to be help. So I kind of challenged him throughout the semester to think
about more of why his position as a volunteer was necessary in the organization or if that
position didn’t exist, what would that mean for the organization? How did his work help?
And he sort of came around by the end of the semester, and he . . . recognized at the
beginning that he was really kind of cynical about the work he was doing. And then at the
end of it, recognized that, even though it was sort of menial and repetitive tasks, it was
also really necessary for the organization to be able to do the work that they did in the
community.

Anna agreed: “Because it’s about their learning. And so, I want them to be part of
something where they’re turned upside down or where they are a part of something that they,
that they didn’t ever think could happen. . .”

Michelle noted that pushing students out of their comfort zone wasn’t always solely an
intellectual exercise or even necessarily about the service itself. It could even be about something
as simple as figuring out how to overcome the logistical challenge of getting to their service sites:

I love it when the students can be forced to have to figure out the city bus system… because there is such a stigma about who rides the bus and “I don’t ride the bus.” Get over it! It is city transportation. It is going green. It is affordable. And students here can ride free on our city bus system with their student ID. It doesn’t cost them anything to ride the city bus. But just the stigma, especially of a lot of my good ol’ country boy kids that, heaven forbid, they would ride a city bus and…… And so it’s great. I love it when some way, somehow they are forced to have to figure out and get on and ride the city bus system.

Ideally, instructors make decisions about what to do and how to do it based on the needs of their students. In some cases, students can articulate their needs. In many cases, instructors understand that students need to be exposed to new ways of thinking about themselves even if the students themselves aren’t aware of this need:

I think the biggest challenge for me as an instructor is to facilitate conversations with students in class regarding some topics that they haven’t really thought about much before, and they might be thinking about for the first time. And getting them to think a little bit beyond their experiences that they grew up, maybe the things that they were taught from their family or from their community about different populations of people, about different social issues.

Jennifer was very aware that, while pushing boundaries is necessary, pushing too hard could defeat the purpose: “So for me, the, the challenging piece with that is to balance how much you push them and how much you don’t because you don’t want them to shut down or become defensive about different topics.” The goal is to expand students’ horizons while avoiding a level of discomfort and dissonance that would cause students to shut down and disengage from the conversation entirely, thereby receiving no benefit from it. Jennifer also found that she had to moderate and mediate as students challenged each other.

I remember, this was probably three or four years ago, I was teaching this course and one of the students in a discussion made a comment about people who are homeless and basically that they’re homeless because they choose to not take advantage of all the resources that are available to them in the community to help them move out of
homelessness. And so that was a really difficult conversation for me to facilitate ‘cause there were other students in the class who clearly were reacting strongly to her statement. But then when they were reacting strongly to her and telling her that she was wrong or that she was not thinking about this the correct way, she became really defensive and shut down. So it wasn’t a great learning experience for anybody in the class. So it was really challenging for me to figure out how do I sort of gently challenge her to think of a different perspective while not causing her to think that she’s being attacked, you know, by asking her to think differently.

Anna also related an experience where students in her class were made uncomfortable by peers who resisted considering new or different perspectives:

The vast majority or all of (students in this particular class) were white women. And there was a pretty strong feeling from most of them that as long as they were nice and had no intention of doing any harm, they sort of had the right to go kinda anywhere in the world and sort of do anything, whether they were invited or not and whether they spoke the language and whether they knew if something was a private ceremony or not. And so I found that pretty challenging. And there was two gals in particular that just really couldn’t even agree to disagree. It was just wrong to think otherwise. They thought, that as long as you have no intention of doing any harm, then what could be bad about anything that you do? So like Ivan Illich’s *To Hell With Good Intentions*, for example, you know. Like they were infuriated by that article and with what right did he have to say that and they just totally disagreed. And they couldn’t even agree to disagree with him, they were so mad at him. And there were two students of color in that class. And they would come to me, not really wanting to go to class. And so, that’s not… I mean, that sort of happens in teaching but it was based off of so much of the work that we’re doing in community engagement work and understanding power and privilege and how that plays out.

Patti observed that it might be easier for someone from outside the class to get her students to think about things in different ways and be willing to engage in service-learning:

My students come into my class and they’re just like, “Why are we doing this?” And they don’t wanna listen to me because I’m their teacher so… I think that’s why like bringing in, when we Skyped in a (national figure) from (a major awareness campaign), it made a huge difference in their like buy-in right away. . . because it was someone who was outside of (our school), outside of (our town), you know. And they just, they were more willing to just listen to him than they would’ve been to listen to me.

As Anna pointed out, it is sometimes necessary to make tough decisions about how to meet the needs of students when those needs don’t seem to square up with the aims of the class.

She mentioned to me that she decided not to place in engagement work settings the two students
from her class who just did not seem to “get it”, or even try: “And…so, two of them I didn’t
place because I just didn’t think it was fair to do that which meant that I had to figure out what to
do with ‘em here.” This challenging and boundary pushing often requires instructors to put their
own goals and perspectives aside—or at least question those goals and perspectives—so that
they may serve the needs of the students and help the students serve the needs of the community
partners. Anna continued:

And then they got mad and. . . the challenging part for me was to really try to
understand...was it about me and a power piece on my part? Did, did I, did students have
to agree with me in order for me to place them? Is that what it was about? Or was I really
sort of pedagogically following through with what I believed? And was that true to the
spirit of education? I went around and around, and I talked to a lot of people that semester
because. . . I felt like this is (an upper) level class, you know, so your level of analysis
should be much higher than that. . . In the end, I felt like I had tried, if I, if I hadn’t been
successful, I’d been pretty darn successful in truly trying to take the high road of trying to
give her all kinds of readings and different things to do and, and not have it always be me
to talk, but have other people have to talk it through and try to get her to understand. But
it was challenging because it questioned like kind of the same way where I was just like,
I’m not gonna do this anymore. It makes me think…how many times, she was a senior,
how many other places around campus, around the world, around the United States, are
we placing folks who, in my humble opinion, shouldn’t be placed? You know, and at the
expense of the organization?

In Adam’s case, challenging and boundary pushing sometimes occur in the face of
negative student attitudes. When students resist the idea that social problems exist in the first
place or that they might have roles to play in the perpetuation or the solution of those problems,
this is where leadership educators see a need for leaders and leadership. He tries to get students
to dig in rather than give up:

(O)ne project I’m thinking of in particular…students would have an experience,
“Well...our project supervisor said no, we couldn’t do that because of this particular time
or whatnot.” Or “We tried to go find a venue for, to hold this particular softball
tournament, and the city park said no, we can’t use that park. So we, we just can’t do
anything.” Well and my response is, “Well, what are you gonna do about that?” “Well,
we just can’t. I mean, it’s just, it’s impossible. We can’t do it so...we’re just done.” And,
I mean, I’m being a little bit facetious, I guess, in how I’m describing this. But, but I get
the sense that…that’s what often happens is that people, they have one thing that goes
wrong and then, all of a sudden, their whole attitude is, “Well, it’s not gonna happen. Yeah, we can’t do that because of this. We can’t do this because of that.” And so they start attributing all of the failures or all the challenges of the project to other people or other things or other places. And it’s my job to try to really challenge them to think, “Well, no, these challenges really reside within you.” And sometimes that can be really frustrating. Really frustrating for the students. It can be kinda frustrating for myself [sic] as an instructor of the class, as well.

The concept of adaptive leadership includes the characteristic that the people with the problem are the problem and the solution (Heifetz, 2006). This is what instructors like Patti, Anna, and Sarah try to help their students understand even when the students feel at a loss for how to tackle seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

In an effort to help students’ horizons expand, instructors find that the use of service-learning also expands their own horizons. When asked about the benefits they have received, or the things they have learned as a result of using service-learning, many instructors spoke of an expanded understanding of social issues and alternate perspectives, which is also the objective they had in mind for the students:

I think, you know, one of the things that… the other thing I think that I gain besides what I’ve already talked about is… learning to understand different walks of life and different personalities. And I guess all day when you’re involved in academics, you’re kinda used to that mentality, if you will. (Sarah)

You know, I think I’m much more aware of seeing how power and privilege plays out through class and race and gender and sexuality and academic power and community voice and, so I think I’m much more aware of that. (Anna)

(I’ve) become much more community minded. Become much more service-learning oriented. Become much more aware of the needs and struggles of schools, people, poverty. I, I wouldn’t have known much at all about… the food deserts that are two miles from… campus if it hadn’t been for the service-learning, seeking out those opportunities for my students. But that’s just heartbreaking to know that (thousands of) students who are living pretty good lives are two miles away from food deserts in the city where the university is located. That’s pretty gut-wrenching and heartbreaking. And so, it’s made me more passionate [sic] for people that don’t look like me. (Michelle)

I learned a lot about like how this generation of students sees the world and their purpose. And, so like kind of, like listening to them as they process through a course and
why, why are they going out in the community and why are they putting hours in outside of just reading and taking tests and stuff like that. (Patti)

**Being prepared and ready to serve others.** Another sub-theme that emerged from my interviews with this group of instructors was preparation and readiness. This idea was about making sure that students were adequately prepared—at least as much as possible—to engage with the messiness of service-learning. Adam expressed concern over whether his students were ready, particularly from a maturity standpoint:

I mean, I’ll describe it in, in the sense of where students have not quite yet developed like emotional intelligence skills appropriately or, some could attribute that to elements of maturity. I mean, us in the leadership field, would probably attribute it more specifically with regards to emotional intelligence. . .

Sarah concurred. Even though she said many students’ attitudes change over the course of a service-learning project, she can’t help but be discouraged by the attitudes she observes at the beginning of a semester:

You know, honestly, it’s been frustrating trying to teach a servant leadership course and incorporating service-learning into a course because I just find that some of our students today are so—I shouldn’t say this, but this is how I feel—like very self-centered. And so when it comes to giving back or doing a service-learning piece, it’s like, “Oh, here we go again, you know. Gotta go do this,” instead of embracing the opportunity. It’s very frustrating and disappointing to me.

It was also clear that, even though instructors seemed most focused on making sure their students were prepared, there was also a realization that instructors themselves are not always as prepared as they could or should be to be part of service-learning work. This was a big concern for Anna:

It’s the responsibility of the faculty and the staff to be much more aware of power and privilege and, for me, I think, that’s our starting point when you start doing community university or community school, school community work. You know? I don’t believe in just sending people out. You know, I do it for Chicano Studies and we’re a small department. And I can have it pretty much, pretty decent understanding of who’s doing what, you know, and even that sometimes gets big. And this is really small. So institutions that have these rules that everybody’s gotta go do two hours or twelve hours
before they graduate, you know... my father’s an instructor with a college... And he’s supposed to start sending students out, and he has no idea what he’s doing, you know. It makes me nuts!

Instructors like Claire may have conceptualized what they believe is an appropriate project for their students only to find that the students are lacking in the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in the project—skills and knowledge that the she assumed students would have obtained prior to arriving in her classroom:

(W)hen I told them they’ve gotta come up with three community organizations to bring together around this vision. And you’ve got to, at least once, you’ve gotta bring them all together for a meeting. So in the same room or Skype somebody in or whatever it is. And so, there were a number of students who struggled with how you put together a professional meeting agenda, how you communicate with a group of people through a group email or through a Facebook page? How do you keep everybody on the same page?... That was one of their major assignments. They had to have a strategy meeting. Well, when I watched some of those teams struggle with how you plan and host and execute a professional-level meeting, like these are all things I assumed they could do by the time they were seniors ...

Consequently, instructors also have to set aside their own plans and goals in order to meet students where they are and help them get ready to move forward and be successful. In Claire’s case, this has meant a revision of other courses in her academic program so that students do have an opportunity to gain knowledge and skills prior to reaching the course where they will be responsible for service-learning:

So now, in my (lower-level) course I’m teaching in there how to write a professional meeting agenda, how to write a professional email. So it’s informing...by asking my students to go out in the real world and perform, I’m finding out where their skill shortcomings are... So then I can help them with that readiness in the lower-level courses.

Theresa has found it helpful to spend time early in the course explaining why there is a service-learning expectation. She decided to do so after noticing that her students were struggling
to see the connection between leadership and service-learning—and therefore were less likely to achieve the kind of learning she hoped for them:

(W)hat’s frustrating to me is when a student struggled with understanding that what they learn in class is to be applied to their service-learning experience. And their effort, they just really make no effort. And that’s the point, is making the connection. They, for some reason, just can’t understand how what they’re learning in class should apply to what they’re doing out in the community.

At the same time, Theresa also believed that students were, perhaps, more capable than their instructors tend to give them credit for:

So many of these students have done so much in their high school, and they get here (as) a freshman and you forget that. You forget that they have a world of experience before they even came and sat in our classroom. So if we present the challenge for them, I think they’ll live up to the challenge. And that’s part of the thing too, I think, with that generation. They want ownership. We send them mixed messages. (We tell them they) need to do things, and then when they do, their hands get slapped ’cause it’s not our way. You didn’t do it our way.

In situations where the students are prepared, instructors like Anna notice, and so do community partners:

I remember this one (farm worker) saying, “You know, (the student) picked us up from the airport and she knew all about our organization. And she asked us really, really good questions.” It’s about an hour drive, and they said, “It was just amazing to have people who knew who we were.”

In cases where instructors and students are ill-prepared, moving forward with service-learning could do more harm than good. They can also, as Anna noted, create more work for the community agencies with which they partner:

I think students think that they’re serving. And sometimes maybe they are. But oftentimes having been on the other side many times where I’ve been the receiving of the students, it’s oftentimes a bigger pain in the ass than it is… …pardon my French, to do all the work and to train them and to keep them in line to make sure that they’re doing X, Y, and Z and they’re not being knuckleheads and so I think oftentimes students, staff, faculty, folks who are at the university and things (don’t) really realize how much effort it takes to truly host students and how of those that are sent, the very small percentage that really step up to bat and do it.
The paradox, in many cases, is that service-learning is about others and sometimes students are the others. But they aren’t the only others. So does that mean their learning and development should come at the expense of the community? There may be differing views on that, but what is clear for the instructors who participated in this study is that service-learning is a way to prepare students to be better citizens and professionals working in communities of the future. This is consistent with the goals of most leadership courses. So there is a push and pull that comes with giving students opportunities to learn while making sure that they know enough to be prepared for that learning. There is no doubt that this is part of the messiness of service-learning and its focus on others that is a serious consideration for many instructors.

**The messiness of partnerships.** All of the instructors I spoke with recognized that partnerships are critical to service-learning. Instructors might worry about their abilities to build relationships with partners, like Patti does:

> Personally, my biggest challenge is building relationships with community partners. I am not naturally a good relationship builder. So I can be kind of shy and timid and so just going out and trying to make a new partnership with someone is challenging. I don’t want to take up too much of their time or, you know, like I’m asking too much of them. And so I know that’s definitely an area I could really work on. And one thing that’s helpful is we now this year have someone in our department that is in charge of community partnerships. So she is actually making lots of relationships within our community and then can help connect faculty to those people so that that relationship building might go a little bit more smoothly.

Others, like Laura, have played multiple roles in a partnership or maybe have not always been certain about the role they should play in those relationships:

> I am the person who is the community liaison and so I go out and I work to create new partnerships. I try to develop our partnerships that we already have. I try to make more meaningful the ones we’ve had for a long time. But the most frustrating part to me is to be *that* person that is lining up all these projects, and then (the projects aren’t) successful. That, that’s probably it. It is so frustrating to me to know how desperately the community organizations are *needing* this work, how I’ve gone out and sold them as highly effective, and then from time to time, they aren’t all. Probably the biggest change for me is, today, I
don’t take it upon myself to be nearly as involved in the problem solving as I was the first few years. I just, I was part of it those first few years. I think I invested too much of myself the first few years. But you don’t have to go to every meeting that they’re having with their community partner. You don’t have to go to every single event that they’re hosting. You don’t…I, I think that’s been the greatest evolution for me because it, it would just suck your life out of you. And, and yet, early on I didn’t wanna miss anything. But over the years, as your responsibilities grow and life happens and all these other things get in the way, it was such a draw. And I, I’ve been able to separate myself personally from their actual projects much better than I used to.

While the instructors understood that they were most directly connected to their students, several of them—like Claire, Theresa, and Anna—had prior experience working in communities. So they felt a certain protective instinct toward community partners and their stakes in the process. Claire put it this way:

So I think…service-learning should engage both the student and the community that they’re serving. I think service-learning should be an engagement, a learning experience and engagement by the student embedded in a community context. And I guess what I mean by embedded is that it, it lasts for some period of time that is significant enough and it’s not just a one-off. You know, we went out and raked leaves for an elderly couple, and we’re gonna call that service-learning. . . I feel like I’m an advocate for service-learning, and I always seem to find myself advocating for the community that seems to be the recipient of the service. And I feel like oftentimes the community…community meaning the group or the organization or the business or whatever it is. I feel like sometimes their needs…get lost and that the student, educators and students use them for an academic purpose, and then they wash their hands of it and say, “OK, see you later. Bye!”

Theresa, who also had experience working as a community partner service-learning, worried about this as well. She also recognized that it may be an unavoidable consequence of some kinds of service-learning—and one with which some community partners seem to have made their peace: “I don’t think you can always avoid those negative impacts, but I think when you’re dealing with (the community), I think the question has to come up. At the same time though, (they’re) accepting our volunteers, so they must not be too worried about it.”
Michelle, like Claire, expressed a preference for long-term and sustainable relationships with their service-learning partners. Not only are these partnerships seen as valuable for continued participation in service-learning across semesters and school years, they can also provide opportunities for students to have a deeper and longer term impact in the community.

Because we’re right now very much advocating for no flash in the pan stuff and instead, what kind of relationships can be built and how can it be sustained? And in the projects, they’re trying to come at it as not a one-shot deal, but how can there be programs in this area where hopefully the ripple effect of that is that (the various) programs all begin to touch each other, merge into each other, intersect with each other, in making a long-term sustained difference. So that’s what the students get shared with them, and that’s what is explained to them. . . And so, I think it’s important that they aren’t necessarily just repeating the same task over and over again. Now to some extent, you can’t avoid that but, where they can keep from just showing up at the agriculture, urban agriculture program and, and hoeing the garden every week, can a part of the time they’re there be hoeing the garden with the student so they’re interacting and talking to the student? And that that’s not what they do every time and that’s not what they do the whole time. So in addition to hoeing the garden, could there also be a time where they are sitting on the ground under the tree or sitting in the classroom and, and learning more about agriculture or learning more about relationships or learning more about careers or whatever it might be that are tied to the objectives of the program? And so, I guess relationships would be a common core element that I would look for in service-learning. I guess sustaining the program would be something I would look for in service-learning. I guess not, not mundane, replicative kinds of things unless I can be doing that with someone in an outreach kind of a way where, where I’m engaging and interacting.

Both the relationships that the instructor has with community partners and the relationships that students have with community partners can have a ripple effect that benefits current and future service-learning. Unfortunately, that ripple could have the opposite effect if the partnerships do not realize their potential. One of the many reasons instructors want students to take service-learning seriously is because instructors understand that they will be the ones left to repair broken relationships (if possible) long after students have moved on. Claire acknowledged that this is a risk instructors who use service-learning are always taking: “So
that’s challenging for me because these are organizations that I want to maintain a relationship with for the long haul. And I don’t want students to sorta, you know [sigh], muddy it up.”

Adam spoke from experience about this:

(When) we work with a client, or a, a community partner, unfortunately, they sometimes get a team that just isn’t very good. And [sigh], that’s unfortunate, but yet, we try to build that, restore that relationship the best that we can between like the (department) or (the university) and that organization. We try to help show them, you know, even though this may not have been a successful project, that doesn’t describe every team and every experience. And so we hope that they would be willing to come back and try to recruit and get a team that might be more successful in the future.

Laura also had experience with this and spoke of her own disappointment at not being able to really make it up to community partners when students don’t follow through on their service-learning commitments:

And as our leadership studies program is growing, we need more and more community partners. So anytime we have a failure of a team, it’s a problem as far…you know, there’s things I can do academically that they at least kinda get what they earned. But the community partners, that’s a disappointment for me when that happens. And it, it has from time to time.

Theresa worried about the short-term duration of many service-learning commitments and how that impacts the recipients of the service—both the agencies and the clientele they serve, especially when it comes to younger children:

We’re meeting such a huge need, and oftentimes it’s life and death situations, you know, it’s emotional, it’s physical, it’s psychological, and then it’s just like the basic human need. And each day, also I’m speaking as far as, as dealing with young people, each day, these relationships are critical for these young people. And so to have someone come in for just twenty hours and then they up and leave, I don’t know how that really benefits that individual. . . honestly, sometimes think it does a disservice because, well, I’ll hear students say, “Oh, it was so awesome. It was such a great experience, and it’s the best thing I’ve ever done.” I’m also, in the back of mind thinking, “Yeah, and the ten-year-old kid you’ve been playing with for the last, you know, twenty hours lost his friend.

The service-learning partnership is really a network of intersecting relationships. Instructors have relationships with their students and with a variety of community stakeholders.
They also have potential oversight for the relationships that students have with each other and with the community stakeholders. Many instructors emphasized a need for mutuality and reciprocity in those relationships, but none more so than Anna. In fact, skepticism about the existence of mutuality and reciprocity in service-learning was at the root of her inner conflict with the pedagogy:

Well, I want there to be a mutuality to it that I think rarely exists because one is that I think a lot of the way service-learning is developed and implemented is rarely based off of true relationships. . . And I think that promotes and exaggerates a charity-based approach which is something that I strongly disagree with. . . I just think we do more harm than good oftentimes. Are there times that we do a really good job? Yeah! Absolutely. But it’s rarely, rarely . . . I don’t even know if it’s possible to even have a mutual relationship but it’s rarely even attempted, you know?

While Anna’s sentiments may have been the most deeply felt and strongly expressed, other instructors were nonetheless clear about the importance of mutuality and reciprocity. They also emphasized that a service-learning partnership where everyone invests, everyone works hard, everyone learns, and everyone benefits is not just a stroke of luck or a random occurrence. It requires intention and commitment. This is of particular interest for Kevin and colleagues on his campus:

So we’ve been kind of trying to learn what…how a community partner defines reciprocity versus how a university partner defines reciprocity and do they match up. So are we even pursuing the same sort of thing? So, that’s of interest to me. How do we . . . make sure that it’s kind of, you know, mutually beneficial, I guess? Certainly the experience drives my interest in that, the experience of trying to navigate that relationship with actual community partners. . . my interest in understanding how to create the experience so that we’re both seeking this idea of a reciprocal relationship. But the way we define that might be very different.

Based on what I learned from these leadership educators, it is clear that something else is essential for them to ensure a reciprocity and mutuality in service-learning partnerships. That something else is an understanding of the expectations that exist around the service-learning.
Each stakeholder has something that they want or need from the partnership. At the most basic level, instructors want their students to learn, students want to satisfy their instructors, and community partners want more people working on an issue that is important to them. Instructors like Kevin understand that being aware of one’s own expectations is necessary but insufficient. If those who are involved in a service-learning partnership do not understand the expectations of others in the partnership, there is great potential for missed opportunities. Expounding on his previous point, Kevin asked, “How do we match expectations of a community partner in a service-learning arrangement with a university partner...?” This doesn’t necessarily mean that everyone has or should have the same expectations—only that partners should communicate and be aware of each others’ expectations. This awareness may influence how each partner approaches the service-learning, and it can also help to ensure that expectations on all sides are met as much as possible.

While communicating expectations between partners might be another piece of the service-learning experience that seems obvious, the instructors with whom I spoke were often surprised to realize that everyone involved in service-learning seemed to be making assumptions about what everyone else wanted or needed. Seldom, if ever, was time taken in the initial phases of the partnership, to collectively discuss the expectations of the partnership. In a story that Jennifer shared, her students were promised one experience and got something very different—and, unfortunately, not aligned with the learning they were seeking:

I had two students volunteering at a community organization who had basically promised them a certain project that they’d both get to work on. They were both really excited about it. It fit their personal and their career interests really well. And the project didn’t get off the ground. The community supervisor was kind of not responsive to the students, would sort of give them other projects to do that had nothing to do with what they had originally signed up for. And so they were really frustrated, and so they were kind of having to do, instead of creating this sort of sexual health education program in the community that they both were really interested in doing, I think one of them was
basically assigned to do kind of data entry. It was just like inputting names into an Excel
spreadsheet. So it was a very different experience than what they had been hoping to do.
And it was a lot harder for me, as an instructor, to help them connect that to the learning
from the class. And so I think that, on just a purely logistical level, the frustration of that
organization not being able to kinda follow through with that project and also not being
very communicative, communicative with the students about what was going on.

Claire spoke of a time when expectations were communicated by the partner but weren’t
consistent with what the students expected—or what they were prepared for:

(We worked with a) woman who is a pastor. And she decided on her own to start up
this…mentoring program. And it’s a wonderful, wonderful thing that she’s done. And
she was kind of struggling with how to turn it into a bona fide nonprofit, you know, and
come up with a board and come up with bylaws and come up with policies and
procedures so that she could apply for grants, right? So she has to kinda show that she’s
an official nonprofit that is legitimate so that she can advance the organization and raise
grant money. . . And so my four students who were a couple of sophomores and juniors…
when they saw the opportunity, I think they originally thought, “Oh, cool! We’re gonna
get to mentor middle school youth in this class.” When, in reality, the partner wanted help
with structuring her organization. So, that was a very difficult concept for students to try
to learn themselves and then teach her, you know? I was kinda helping them find, to find
resources about . . . I mean, some of ‘em didn’t even know, what is a non-profit
organization. They had no idea! So their limited knowledge of the world …and I don’t
mean to, to downgrade students. I don’t mean to say that. . . I mean, we had a great time
and the students certainly, I think they, you know, helped with the pieces that they could
help with. You know, they helped her more with developing a logo and developing some
branding and some imaging because they felt like they could grab onto that. But the down
and dirty stuff about how she can put a board together and how…bylaws together. They
just didn’t have quite enough experience and depth and time to learn that themselves to
then, you know, kind of help her, so…

Kevin shared about a time when students had a vision for their project but didn’t take
time to see whether what they wanted would meet a need in the community:

And they actually wanted to…they had in mind, I think, this kind of…vision of serving
hot meals to folks and kind of the classic soup kitchen sort of scenario. . . And what
ended up happening was no one really needed their help. [laugh] And so they worked
with a couple of church organizations who different days of the week would serve hot
meals, but all these church organizations already had plenty of volunteers.
Kevin also related a clear example of what happens if the various service-learning partners make assumptions about the needs and expectations of the other partners:

(W)e’ve been working with for at least two semesters in this course, we were talking and she said, “Yeah, I’m always so surprised that your students ask so many questions about, about our organization.” And I said something like, “Well, yeah, that’s, that’s great. That’s what they’re seeking out of this is to understand a non-profit better, and so I’m gonna keep encouraging them to ask you questions about how your organization works if that’s OK.” And so we, we sat down together and we talked through these sorts of things and she said at the end of it, “I can’t believe that, that I totally misunderstood what, what this was about.” She basically walked away from the meeting and said, “I thought they were just fulfilling service hours. And so I didn’t know that they were doing all these things. I didn’t know that they wanted all these things out of this experience. I thought they were just fulfilling an hourly requirement, so I’m going to approach working with them totally differently.” And I just thought, “Wow, that’s amazing that [laugh] that you thought that this whole time, and I thought this the whole time, and we didn’t clarify in the beginning...” it’s a little regretful like, ‘Oh, shoot, I should’ve taken care of that earlier,’ but also great for, for the future.

A discussion about expectations leads to a greater likelihood that those expectations will be met, while failure to discuss expectations means that the expectations are less likely to be met and the relationships themselves may suffer as a consequence.

**Major Theme: Service-Learning is About Others**

It seems almost too obvious to say that service-learning is about others. Even if one has only a basic understanding of service-learning and little to no experience with it, it is likely that they would explain it as a way to do something for other people. In some way or another, everyone in a service-learning partnership has to focus on others. They might be focusing on others who are in need of assistance, others who are working alongside them, or others for whom they must provide guidance and instruction. Given this interaction, it seems possible that the experience one has with service-learning can and does influence the experience of others with whom they experience it. This is particularly true for students and their instructors, as is noted in
much of the service-learning literature acknowledging the importance of the faculty role (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolenko et al., 1996).

**Connection between instructor and student experiences.** When asked about specific experiences with service-learning, whether those experiences were exciting, rewarding, challenging, or disappointing, the vast majority of the experiences the instructors recounted were tied to the experiences of their students. Some, like Adam and Theresa, explicitly made that connection when telling their stories. Others did not. In either case, it was clear that the instructors could empathize with their students and also used their students as a gauge for their own success and struggles as an instructor. The instructors felt excited and rewarded when their students experienced success and took ownership of their projects. The instructors felt frustrated and disappointed when their students struggled or let down others in the partnership without achieving their goals.

When asked about an exciting experience he had had with service-learning, Adam responded, “An exciting experience for me is really kinda team contingent.” Later on in the interview, he went on to say, “(T)o be able to live vicariously through the teams, the students, that’s really rewarding.” Although she had been working for community organizations prior to taking on her current role, Theresa did not have experience as a student with service-learning. So, when asked about her experiences in this interview, she told me, “I’ll answer that... in relation to my students.” I didn’t take this as an indication that Theresa was putting herself in her students’ shoes and describing their experiences. Rather, she was telling me that her students often provide a lens through which she views and understands service-learning. The students’ experiences helped Theresa gauge how things were going in the class and whether the service-learning was effective as a teaching tool:
The most rewarding is when, at the end of the semester, you have students who make that connection and are able to articulate in a way that...helps us understand how they’ve now framed their own values and their own opinions and beliefs about whatever. I guess particularly, in my case, in the concept of leadership. So, that’s what is most rewarding for me, (when they) are able to make that connection and clearly articulate it. And then when they say to me it was the best part of the whole class. So, that’s most rewarding for me.

Kevin articulated a clear example of how an experience for one of his students became an experience for him:

(S)he was looking for more of a soup kitchen type experience where she’d actually be serving hot food to people. And she called this particular group, and they, they don’t do that. And they said, “Well, I just don’t know who does. I don’t think anyone in this community does that.” And the student was very surprised by this, and she came back to class and she said, “They just, they told me no one in the community does this.” And there are lots of folks in the room, including myself, that know of places in (the community) that do this. And certainly, I know that this particular service provider also knows that, but they didn’t necessarily want to forward that on. And actually the topic of the day in the class was talking about competition versus cooperation among non-profit organizations. And we’re reading a book that, that had a couple sections on that exact topic. And she brought that up as, well, maybe they didn’t want to lose out on us as volunteers by telling us to go to any of these other groups. And it, it was just like, to me, it was the very first thing that happened, and it really stuck with me as...Wow, for that student who made that call, she will never forget that point. And she shared it with the rest of the class. And they didn’t get as powerful experience as she did ‘cause she actually did the thing and experienced what competition looked like among the service providers. So, I thought that was just a really cool...first step. And, and really grounded me in the practice of service-learning...probably forever.

In many instances, instructors spoke of their rewarding and exciting experiences as those where students exceeded expectations, continued with their projects after the class had ended, or made decisions about their future based on their experiences with service-learning. While the students may have also described themselves as excited or feeling rewarded, the connection for the instructors has to with using these instances as a measure of success. Students who continue to serve and whose service influences them are an indication that the instructors have been successful in helping students “get it”. Michelle shared such an experience:
One of my girls... did her service-learning project at the food pantry. I always give the students a chance, once they get their projects up and started, we take a few minutes at the beginning of each class session and I just ask, “What’s going on in your service-learning projects and how are you feeling and what are you seeing?” And this girl was so excited. She said, “I love my project!” And she had sent a note earlier because some of the students are very hesitant, feel like it’s a burden, think it’s being a pain that I’m asking them to take two hours of their valuable time. And I understand that and can appreciate that, but she just loved her experience. She stayed on in that experience after the class ended. Asked if she could continue, asked the people at the pantry if she could continue, and of course, they loved her too. So she stayed with that project through the rest of the summer, even though the class had ended the first seven weeks. This year, this school year in the fall, she sought out and became active and helped to establish, really, a new student organization (on campus) against hunger. I think that’s pretty exciting testimony to a service-learning project and, ultimately, the goal of having students engage in service-learning. . . (M)ost of (my students don’t experience that, unfortunately; but at least they’re planting some seeds. I would say most of ’em do the two-hour requirement and walk away. But, but to me, her story is one that’s really what we’re after. And even if the sustaining is, is one in their minds if we’ve at least sustained a heart for trying to find ways to give back, my hope is that my pre-service teachers who are in that class, for example, even if they don’t continue something right now when they’re at (college), will they take that spirit into their (careers) and seek out some service-learning opportunities in their communities. So that’s another way to think of sustaining it too is if I’ve sustained the spirit in my heart, where might I, even if it’s not immediate, where might I down the road find some way to continue in that spirit?

Like Michelle, instructors who spoke of these experiences noted that they stood out for two main reasons. First, they were powerful experiences that indicated a measure of success which might have been unanticipated. Second, they weren’t experiences that every student had. They were the exceptions rather than the rules. Even so, most of the instructors who participated in this study told at least one story of a student or student group that exceeded their service-learning expectations.

Other ways in which instructor experiences are linked to those of their students will be discussed in the next chapter.

The importance of engagement. In the same way that process-oriented definitions of leadership emphasize that leadership does not occur in a vacuum (Northouse, 2013), instructors
do not see service-learning as a solo activity for students. In order for service-learning to be an effective tool of leadership learning and an accurate reflection of the way in which leadership educators view leadership, it must include engagement with and responsibility to others.

Almost without exception, the instructors I spoke with talked about the importance that service-learning be an engaging experience for students. “I think I would describe service-learning as the process by which students…engage in their community in a helpful way while achieving some sort of knowledge about the course content,” Kevin said, when asked about his definition of service-learning. Jennifer agreed: “I think, on the basic level, it is incorporating community engagement work deliberately into a course.”

While there may be many ways that students can provide service to others and do so essentially on their own, the participants in this study favored experiences where their students would need to invest time, energy and mental resources working with others. Claire’s comment take on it implicitly acknowledged this tension between what’s possible and what’s preferable: “So I think…service-learning should engage both the student and the community that they’re serving. I think service-learning should be an engagement, a learning experience and engagement by the student embedded in a community context.”

These others with whom students “should” engage included peers and classmates with whom they might be working as a group as well as community members and agencies who would be co-facilitators of student learning and potential beneficiaries of their service. Ideally, engagement with these others provides a foundation upon which relationships can be built and mutual learning will occur. Sarah saw engagement as essential to learning and growth:

It really takes (being) immersed in that experience to understand it and to get where I want the students to be, which is a better servant leader when they’re done! And… that, to me, just takes them to be engaged in the process. (U)nless you are engaged in the process and truly engaged in it, you, you don’t really get the concept. . . (W)hen students
are actively engaged in service-learning, I think they mature a lot.

What’s more, Sarah saw a need to be engaged in the process as well: “So where I come into play in all that is, is leading those charges, but also myself, being out there and being engaged in the community, giving back as well,” she said. While she too maintained that engagement in service-learning helped students learn more, Laura also spoke of service-learning as a means for increasing her own engagement as a member of the local community. “I believe it’s better for, for me, as a faculty member. It helps embed me more in the community. It helps me build a stronger bond between our campus and our community.” At the same time, faculty engagement is not a substitute for student engagement, as Patti learned the semester that her students had to wait several weeks before getting started on their service-learning project:

I had communication with the community partner, but they didn’t really have any integration with community. So altogether [laugh] it was just like a flop. And it was really, it was really challenging just to even get through the rest of the course and a lot of the students kinda turned negative because they just, they’re juniors and they just have way too much to do at that point in their [laugh] college career. So, yeah. That was a really negative experience.

Responsibility to/for others. With engagement in service-learning comes responsibility for others. Making sure that they and their students are prepared and ready for service-learning is one way in which responsibility is experienced by the instructors, but it is not the only way. Responsibility in service-learning is multi-faceted. Instructors see themselves as being responsible to their students, to the community and the specific partners with which they are engaging, and to their institutions of higher learning which are essentially the sponsors of their leadership courses. They also understand that it is important for students to have a sense of responsibility to each other, their community partners, and their alma maters. Claire sums it up well while also acknowledging how challenging that can make service-learning for the instructor: “I mean, all of our classes are hard to teach no matter what. But I feel like if you’ve
got the guts to teach in a service-learning environment, you’re really takin’ it on. Because you’re not only responsible for those students, but you’re responsible for the community organization!”

Jennifer was focused on the responsibility she believes instructors have to prepare students for their future work and involvement in communities. This is a responsibility to the students, to give them the preparation for which they came to college, and to the communities in which those students will work:

I feel like it’s the most responsibility that we have for our students who are planning to go out into the community, for many of them who are interested in health or doing research or, you know, doing things that will impact a lot of the communities that are surrounding the university community, that they don’t. . . They need to have some experience with this before they go out.

Laura spoke of responsibility in two ways. First, she noted that part of her goal as an instructor is to help students themselves become more responsible: “(O)ne of our goals, of course, in the service-learning movement is (to) help instill civic responsibility and to help instill an understanding of the world.” Then she discussed the responsibility that weighed on her shoulders, especially early in her experiences with service-learning. “I think I felt so responsible and so…so, you know, it would look bad on me and, but I just can’t fail,” she said, explaining why she took on a much more involved role in service-learning at that point in time than she does currently.

On the one hand, instructors are challenged by the messiness of logistical issues and loss of individual control they experience in service-learning. On the other hand, the pressure inherent in those challenges doesn’t seem to stem from a desire to regain control. Rather, it stems from a belief in the importance of getting comfortable with the challenges so that students and communities can benefit fully. If instructors are able to adequately prepare themselves and their students for service-learning without feeling a need to micro-manage the situation, provide
appropriate measures of challenge and support to their students, be involved enough but not do the work for students, and if they are able to facilitate relationship building without putting themselves at the center of those relationships, then there is a sense that they have done right by their students and the community. Fulfilling the responsibilities they feel for students and their learning as well as the responsibilities they feel toward communities and their betterment is not usually easy for instructors. However, this focus on others is both a driver and result of their involvement with service-learning. Many instructors, like Sarah, told me that their experiences with service-learning had helped them to be better at considering others’ needs, taking on others’ perspectives and also inspired a greater desire to do for and with others:

I just really started to see myself being more self-serving than really giving back. And that, you know, being a teacher of leadership, I’m like, “Really? Oh, my gosh! Look at your own self. You’re teaching this stuff.” And so… it’s funny because after I taught the course, I could really see a difference in my own teaching, the way I was teaching it because I was more passionate about what I was teaching because I was actually practicing those things.

During their interviews, instructors consistently mentioned that they wanted their students to understand the responsibility they have as representatives. Whether students are aware of it or not, when they are doing service-learning work they are representing not only themselves but also their instructors, the academic unit on campus, their colleges and universities, and even college students at large. The instructors are aware of this, and they strive to help students take it seriously. “They’re being a representative of my university of my class,” said Theresa. “(W)hen you’re a young person and a university student comes to your school, or comes to your after-school program, that is a huge deal.” Anna tried to help her students understand the extent to which she and others would see her students as a reflection of larger groups and organizations:

(W)hat I tell them is that you are representing not only the university, but you’re
representing Chicano Studies, and in some context, you’re representing a college-educated person because there might not be a lot... so whether you like it or not, that’s a big bunch to hold on your shoulders. And, and essentially every single relation that we’re going through is because of a personal or professional relationship I have, so don’t mess it up. And I sort of intentionally make them feel some pressure ‘cause it’s true.

Claire talked about the responsibility she felt for making sure students could handle their responsibilities as representatives:

(W)e better make sure along the way that they’ve got this professional skill set to represent our program, represent the University at a level... It’s a risk you take, I think, in service-learning ‘cause you’ve got these students out there who are a reflection of you, as the instructor, a reflection of the program.

Instructors understand that the community can either benefit or suffer as a result of service-learning. Therefore, instructors feel responsible for doing service-learning the right way. In general, doing service-learning the right way means making a commitment to improve the community and honoring that commitment while also making sure that students learn valuable lessons in the process. It’s fair to say that the leadership educators included in the current study indicated a feeling of responsibility for helping students understand and assume their own responsibilities in service-learning. If they can successfully impart a sense of responsibility upon their students, then the instructors will have fulfilled some of their responsibility toward all of the other stakeholders in the service-learning partnership.

**Intersection of Themes: About Others / Common Good**

There are likely many ways that focus on others can take shape. The important thing for leadership—and, in the case of this study, service-learning—is that the focus on others is meant to ultimately serve the greater good. Being able to experience the impact of their service-learning work allows both students and their instructors to understand how a focus on others can translate into positive social change.
Experiencing the impact of service-learning. One of the common experiences that came up throughout the interviews was that of directly experiencing the impact of service-learning. Instructors, like Adam, indicated a belief that their students learned more from service-learning and took more ownership in the projects if they were able to interact with the clientele of their service and witness in some way the impact of the work they had done: “(I)f they do get the opportunity to interact with the clientele, I think that (is) a really powerful experience on the students themselves where they can see, “Oh, what I am doing is making a difference or can make a difference.”

“When you give students an opportunity to really make social change or affect people’s lives or apply their learning, they grab on to it,” said Claire. One of her students approached her to ask if there might be an opportunity to see the impact of his work. He and his classmates had worked on a project to help families with someone returning from military deployment:

A lot of those students last semester in the military kids project, I mean, they were really proud of what they put together. And I had one student who came back like three months after the class saying, “Can I go to one of these yellow ribbon events? I would love to see these families. I feel kind of…you know, like I wanna see it in action.

Sarah talked about the transition her students made from being mostly focused on the amount of time they were required to spend at their service-learning sites to being focused on the positive impact they were able to have once they had the opportunity to really understand it. "(The students) are so proud of that, and not even proud of themselves but proud of whatever they’ve been able to contribute to wherever they were serving.”

Furthermore, my participants mentioned that experiencing the impact of service-learning was something that allowed them as instructors to feel more connected to and positively about service-learning. For instructors, experiencing the impact of service-learning might entail direct interaction with the clientele or some sort of tangible outcome, as it does for students. It might
also entail observing students making connections between class concepts and their service-learning work (like Kevin’s experience with his student who was exposed first-hand to competition among local non-profit organizations). Adam acknowledged that experiencing the impact of service-learning was powerful for him as the instructor. “(H)aving the chance for me also to interact directly with the clientele like some of the teams have been, that also gives me a lot of joy,” he said, indicating that this interaction was one of the most rewarding parts of service-learning.

Patti talked about a time where she got to see the fruition of her students’ work on a rain garden at the zoo even though the students themselves did not get to see it:

I think the most rewarding thing was when we left that rain garden, there were these little, . . . (we had) planted some like tall grass and stuff like that. And there was a rain storm that happened afterwards, and people had to go back and replant and I wasn’t even sure if it was gonna take. And then when I went back, it was last semester, the beginning of last semester, to start my partnership for a new class, I got to like walk out and see the rain garden that had established itself. It was healthy. It was vibrant. And it’s also in the area where they’re now starting a daycare at our zoo which is really cool in itself. And so, it’s kinda like the centerpiece of this outdoor play place. So I think just seeing some of the service that you provide is actually tangible and actually really helped the community. . . I think that was really rewarding.

Instructors believe that directly experiencing the impact of service-learning is not always possible for their students. However, if directly experiencing the impact of service-learning is possible, instructors see it as ideal to do so. The emotional connection that is forged through such an experience has the potential to deeply affect both students and instructors in the long-term. Anna put it this way: “I think in the United States we are so egocentric. We’re so individualistic. And that when (my) student said, ‘I’ve never worked so hard for somebody other than myself,’ she got to feel what it was like to live her humanity.”
Experiencing the impact of service-learning—living their humanity, as Anna put it—helps to create some of the critical experiences and defining moments that shape an individual’s service-learning story. Part of Sarah’s service-learning story includes an experience she had at a local soup kitchen:

(T)hese two really old ladies came through. I mean, basically they had no teeth, they had, I mean, they had nothing. It was very cold here. It was probably about three or four years ago, and they came through and we served ‘em a meal and most people that, that do this kinda work, they’re just like, “Oh, I’m here and I’m doin’ this.” Well, I went out and actually sat out where they were eating and talked and listened to, their life stories and...at the end of that conversation, one of the old ladies just started cryin’. And she’s like, “I don’t really ever get an opportunity for people to even care about me to even wanna know what my life story is. And thank you for giving your time to come here and serve us food because, you know, we don’t have anything.” And it was just kinda one of those moments where all of the giving back just...it’s not about you. It’s about giving out to others. So, that was kind of an exciting ah-ha moment that these kinda things are important.

Anna’s service-learning story includes the experience of the student who ruined his host family’s clean water supply, and it also includes the time that she and her students worked together to put on a conference for migrant farm workers:

I’d say that probably the best experience that I’ve had, and it’s one of the few times where I’ve, I’ve felt like this is how it’s supposed to work. (O)ne of our community partners heads up an organization of migrant farm workers. . . I had been very involved in the community and knew a ton of folks. There was a call for a national conference to try to get a authentic farm worker voice as this particular organization was developing out a fair, domestic fair trade label, whatever. . . So I was on the planning committee, and I offered the use of the students in this effort however, for whatever that might be. And so, students were assigned, they had already been taking this semester-long class on migrant farm workers. They were knowledgeable. And then the group that was assigned to, to work with this conference, they did (all sorts of things, including) picking folks up from the airport and driving them to (where they needed to be). They were taking notes. They were serving food. They were doing all kinds of stuff. And they did a bang-up job. They did great. And, and there was one gal who had a particular skill in doing PowerPoint collages and she was a photographer and whatnot. So we went down there. We all stayed for five days. They stayed overnight at the hotel, and they worked, they didn’t work around the clock, but there were times when they were up ‘til two, three in the morning working. And...so by the end of the conference, they had all of the notes done in both English and Spanish for every session. They had, I mean, we were on it, right? And then
the students, unbeknownst to me. . . Unbeknownst to me, they had been taking some
group pictures and whatnot and the gal had made this beautiful collage of the whole
weekend. And they used their own money and they found a place that was twenty-four-
hour photo thingy. And then at the last day when it was time to go, they knocked on the
door when we were doing our closing session, and they said, “We’re, we’re really sorry
to interrupt, but could we come in, please? We have something.” And we said, “Yeah.”
And so, they came in and here they had, for every participant, they had this plastic see-
through folder, and it had the picture, the front had a collage and below had the group
picture. . . And they gave one to all the farm workers. Well, the farm workers stood up
and gave them a standing ovation. So then, the students started crying. And then I started
crying. And then the farm workers started crying. And... it was great. It was great. It felt
like, I mean, partly I had had such a long relationship. We knew the students had just
gone through a semester’s work so they weren’t knuckleheads about asking dumb
questions, and they were very humble. And I just thought, “Yeah, this is how it’s
supposed to work.” . . I had a lotta students come back and say that they had never
worked so hard for somebody other than themselves.

Adam’s service-learning story includes a princess at an event for Big Brothers Big
Sisters:

Big Brothers Big Sisters is an extremely active organization here in our community. A
number of years ago, they were struggling with trying to recruit Little Sisters. A lot of
their clientele, like the kids that they help provide services for, are from single-parent
households. And oftentimes, that single parent would be the mom in the household. And
so, in trying to recruit Little Sisters in this program, the moms believe (that they
should be the sole female influence in their daughters’ lives). And so, they don’t need a big
sister. So, it’s sometimes a, a struggle to recruit . . . girls into the Big Brothers Big Sisters
program. And so what Big Brothers Big Sisters did, they wanted a team of students to put
together a program that intentionally recruits these little girls to participate in the Little
Sisters program. The team partnered with (a local beauty school) to do like an evening of,
of up-dos where they, they provide an event where these people that are being trained in
beauty school would do these up-dos for little girls, and then they’d also . . . have kind of
a fashion night, so to speak, for moms. And that would also provide then Big Brothers
Big Sisters an opportunity to share with these mothers whatever kind of services they provide
for young girls and how they could benefit from them. And so, what happened was that
during this event the little girls as well as their mothers went through these up-dos and look
really beautiful. And then they separated out the little girls and their mothers, and so Big
Brothers Big Sisters personnel could talk to the mothers about the services they provide.
But then what happened with not only did the little girls have this experience of looking
like a princess, the team also invited a student from our campus who was Miss ________.
She had won a pageant that’s a part of the like Miss America pageant system. And so,
there was winner of a regional beauty pageant. And she was crowned . . . And so she
walked in with full gown, the sash and the tiara. And seeing the faces of these little girls
that then got to interact with who they thought was a princess. Their eyes were lighting
up. I mean, they’ve never had the chance to experience . . . these little girls don’t have a
lot of advantages in life. And giving them an experience to interact with a princess… was…wow! That was neat.

And it also included a little boy’s first fish story:

(Big Brothers Big Sisters is) trying to create an outdoor mentoring program where we (give) kids an opportunity to get outside and go fishing or participate in archery or participate in a shooting event, that’s completely outside of their experiences. A couple of semesters ago, one of our project teams put together an outdoor event . . . (on) kind of a ranch just on the outside of town, a ranch that has a pond and some hay bales. And so, they put together an event where these kids could come out and do fishing and do archery. They got fishing poles from the area game and parks office, and had some personnel from game and parks that helped participate in teaching the kids how to fish and such. (T)hese kids, when they get a chance to come out and, and fish, and you know, catch a fish, the first fish that they’ve ever caught in their life, I mean, I remember the story of one kid that after the event, he, he ran up to his mom, and I overheard him, just shouting at his mom saying, “Mom! Mom! You’ll never guess! I caught a fish that was ninety pounds!” And already at nine or ten years old, this kid, even though he’s never fished before, he knows how to tell fishing stories. It’s great!

It is particularly exciting for students and instructors when the impact of their service-learning project exceeds the expectations they and their partners might have had for it. A project that meets expectations is certainly always hoped for. A project that fails to meet expectations is disappointing, although the potential for learning still exists in that circumstance. To experience a project that is successful or beyond successful is also a defining moment in an individual’s service-learning story for both students and instructors alike. When asked about experiences that excited them and/or that they found rewarding, all the instructors talked about experiences where students continued with their projects or their engagement in a social issue after the conclusion of a class or an academic term. These examples were ones where the students themselves were excited, and their enthusiasm rubbed off on their instructors.

In addition to Michelle’s aforementioned experience with a student who continued on in her service at a food pantry and also created a student organization centered around the issue of hunger, other instructors also had experiences where students moved forward with their work
after the conclusion of the course. Anna told me about a group of students who put together a video highlighting Latino businesses in their community. The video was requested by a government official, and it took much longer to produce than she had anticipated. The students who were working on it elected to continue—and remained friends long after their work was completed. Laura told me about a group of students she had who chose a project related gender violence and worked with her non-profit:

(I)n th(is) course they know when they enroll that it is going to be the field work course. (I)n the first week or two of the semester, get to self-select a project with their team, so that specifically means they select their team around who’s interested in what projects. And we have four to six students that work on a team. And they work on that project all semester. So ours is a very intensive service-learning experience that they put in far more than the twenty, thirty hours that many service-learning courses talk about. And so, last fall one of the team projects that was chosen in my class was to work with a local non-profit that deals with reducing gender-based violence. And so, I had six students in the service-learning course on this one project. Now there were four other projects going on with all those other students. But this one project in particular was working on a project that the local non-profit had identified, working with a non-profit organization in Namibia, Africa, to try to bring a Namibian African art exhibit about gender-based violence for display for a month in our local area art council. And so, six students worked on that last semester with the local non-profit and really hammered out nearly all of the details about how that would look. But they planned it around the month of February. And so it’s very symbolic that it is near Valentine’s Day in the month that people think about love and hearts and all things wonderful and good with relationships. And it symbolized so much gender-based violence happens in the name of love. And so, that project…you know, some of our service-learning projects are started and end within a semester, in fact, many or most of them. Some of them have a life expectancy that then goes on and on. And that particular project is now about to happen. And my favorite part of that whole experience is that those six students that were on that team—they already got their grade; they got their grade the middle of December and they’re done with that project—they’re still involved with it. And they are still gonna be there (in) February, and they still see it as their project. And so that’s been a very cool thing to have this collaboration with these six students in a service-learning course, working with a local non-profit, working with the local arts council, working with a non-profit organization in Africa.

For instructors, stories like this are a sign that they have done service-learning right and that all they had hoped for from that pedagogy had been realized. Laura went on:
Well, there’s a number of elements that make it so exciting to me, but one of them is, one of our goals, of course, in the service-learning movement is help instill civic responsibility and to help instill an understanding of the world. And, if you teach leadership, one of the major elements is to help them learn more about leadership. And of course, persistence, attention to detail, all those things come to mind. And these kids are doing that. And so, they’re doing what we ask of them and in an intense service-learning course, they are going far above and beyond. And that is very exciting to me.

**Major Theme: Service-Learning Pursues the Common Good**

At its most basic level, service-learning is not just about others—it’s about doing good for and with others. Pursuit of the common good, usually by providing for the needs of others or addressing a social issue, is core to the concept and experience of service-learning for the leadership educators in this study. It also speaks to the instructors’ beliefs about leadership and to their personal and professional values.

**How instructors view leadership.** Laura referred to service-learning as “living the discipline” for leadership educators. Each in their own way, the instructors spoke of leadership as a process or activity that focused on improving society. Patti put it this way:

I think a lot of people perceive leadership as a very different thing, like it’s about how to make an agenda for a meeting or be an authority figure or those sorts of things. And we don’t believe that. (In our program), we think leadership is an activity and your job, when you’re exercising leadership, is to mobilize other people toward the common good. And for me, service-learning is an excellent platform to practice that.

This perspective on leadership results in these instructors seeing leadership and service-learning as practically inextricable. The very idea of trying to teach leadership without incorporating service-learning along the way seemed unfathomable to Claire:

I can’t really imagine a leadership…I guess there could be a leadership studies curriculum where you just read theory, read theory, read theory, and take tests but……I think most people would agree that you’ve gotta get yourself out in the community making change, building, you know, putting people together, improving relationships. And the service-learning piece of the leadership curriculum is getting out there and making something happen, and then reflecting on that in a way that tries to incorporate some of this theory that you’ve been learning in the classroom.
Service-learning is leadership for these instructors, particularly leadership as conceptualized in the Social Change Model (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2009) and in Servant Leadership (Greenleaf, 1970). So the objective in using service-learning is not just to provide students with practical leadership experience, it is also to impart a particular perspective of leadership. Instructors want students to feel the same connection of personal and professional values that they feel. They want students to understand what it is to live this discipline, because they understand, as Anna does, that some of the best and deepest learning comes from not only experiencing but also feeling:

What does it feel like to be accountable to somebody other than yourselves? Within Chicano Studies, and that’s making huge analogizations but, coming from a place where a lot of the families and the culture is so community-based and family-based rather than individually-based, people who come from an individually-based society have no idea what it’s like. And so, you can only feel that. You can’t, you can read about it but you can only feel that when all of a sudden your accountability is to somebody other than yourselves.

What instructors value. It was clear, from my interviews, that service-learning resonated with these instructors on both a personal and professional level. Sarah explained that she does service-learning with her students and also participates in volunteer service outside of her professional role:

I’ll give back, back to that organization, and in my own community actually do work for community development. So, mine is alongside the students, but I also kinda do some independent things as well. I am just so drawn to the homeless population. I’m so drawn to trying to help make their area in which they live better, serving them, you know, …and the same goes for the (women’s shelter). I mean, these, these women are abused and battered, and I just am drawn to that! So my service work has been really kinda drawn in that area.

As a demonstration of their personal and professional values, service-learning provided these instructors with a sense of fulfillment and meaning in their work. It is a way for them to be
authentic in that it allows them to demonstrate values that are core to who they are. Theresa wanted her students to understand that:

I think initially I communicated in a way where it was like, “Oh, I have to do this.” You know, they know they still have to do it, but I think because I spend an entire class session talking about how service-learning enhances leadership, I hope that they’re getting the message that this is something that I value as an instructor as well. I’m not just doing this because the department tells me I have to.

Michelle indicated that her values were not only the impetus for using service-learning but for the class overall:

(M)y class meets a gen ed requirement for the university. And one of the reasons that I put in the proposal to get that approved was...the need for the information. . . everybody needs to hear about inclusive behaviors and what are we doing to be inclusive of everyone in our living, learning, and working environments. And what can I learn about myself that helps me understand why I act, interact, and react in the ways that I do in those environments? So a selfish reason was I thought everybody needs to hear this and be aware.

In some cases, personal values and experiences gave rise to professional choices. In others, professional choices helped to clarify what they valued. Either way, instructors seemed to see service-learning as a fulfillment of those values and evidence that they were in professional roles that aligned with their personal selves. Kevin explained it this way:

I like knowing that the university is not, or that my, my role in the university is not kind of this separate siloed thing from the community, that we’re participating with our community partners in kind of civic society. That’s my kinda secondary selfish goal. I would feel like my work’s not meaningful if it was restricted to only what occurs in a university classroom. But I think, through service-learning, our work has meaning in the community. Kind of like real, immediate, measurable meaning.

Adam concurred:

(B)eing involved in the community and giving back to the community, I mean, that cuts to some core values and beliefs that, that I hold dear. And, and so, challenging students to think about leadership beyond eight to five, in my view is very important and to me personally is very important. And providing students with an opportunity to think about
how they can give back to the community is, is something that I take a lot of pleasure from... And providing them with some opportunities to, to think beyond themselves is really meaningful... I like to challenge them to share the same vision that we have (as a department)... In part because one of the values that we hold on to as we’ve defined our undergraduate curriculum is that we want students to value leadership beyond eight to five. We want students to understand and appreciate the civic context of where leadership needs to take place. That we want students to understand that there, there are, there are challenges—whether that be on a community level, state level, national level, global level—that they really need to be a part of in order to help shape how we deal with these challenges in the future. And so we really want students to have, in a way of speaking, the blinders taken off. That it’s not just about me. It’s not just about the job I get. It’s about trying to give back in some meaningful way to make a difference in the world. That’s important, very, very important. I mean, they’ve [sigh], I mean, we, when we interact with these students for up to, you know, around four years in a curriculum, I mean, there’s no guarantees. I mean, we, we talk about it from time to time, as departmental faculty that, if at some point in the thousands of students that we interact with, that among those thousands of students that we interact with, there might be a Martin Luther King. There might be one Rosa Parks type individual. That would make all this, all these challenges worth it.

When asked why she chose to use service-learning in her courses, Anna told me that she believed “(t)he work of the student is to think. And that thinking should be done in service to others.” She shared with me a story about her mother, a child of color who grew up in a poor and disadvantaged neighborhood and who, at the age of eight, had all her teeth pulled by dental students from the big city:

(T)he dental students from a local university decided that they were going to learn how to pull teeth. And so, at age eight she had dentures up and down. And they pulled all of her teeth, and they pulled all of my grandmother’s teeth, and they pulled all of my uncle’s teeth. . . (B)eing able to say that I’ve done my best to try to not work like that and to demonstrate that it is possible, or to hope that it is possible to be able to do community engagement and community connections other than some bastards going and pulling the teeth of an eight year old because they could and because it was a poor family on the south side of the tracks... That’s just wrong. I guess (service-learning), in an ideal world, helps me to complete a circle.

When explaining what it means to live the discipline, Laura talked of losing her daughter, who was murdered in an act of domestic violence. Although Laura had been learning about and using service-learning prior to the death of her daughter, it was that experience that prompted her
and her husband to start a non-profit organization aimed at eradicating gender-based violence. To do anything else would have felt inauthentic and hypocritical:

You know, we tell young people if they see something wrong in their organizations or their communities or their whatever, they should do something about that. And we’re gonna try to help them have the tools to know how to do that. And we felt, after our daughter died, that it would be hypocritical of us to not do that as well. And so, our university’s administration actually said to us, “Well, it’s the citizens of the state who pay you, so go make this place better.” And so our university, our department, our community, everyone has been very supportive of our work.

Jennifer works in student and academic affairs. She assumed responsibility for a leadership program aimed at students in biological sciences. Intrigued by this work, she took it upon herself to actively pursue learning about service-learning. She even completed a semester-long graduate course in service-learning despite not being enrolled in a degree-seeking program:

“I was really interested in the topic itself on service-learning because I teach it and just am, you know, personally interested in it. And so I decided to just take that for my own sort of development and learning.”

Patti’s enthusiasm for service-learning was evident in our interview and, by her own admission, a pleasant surprise. She made the decision to engage service-learning as a participant before assuming her role as an instructor so that she would better understand what was expected of the students. That experience, and those connected to her subsequent instructional role were defining and life-changing for Patti:

The most exciting (experience) I’ve had is, is actually as a participant back in 2010 when I went on a(n)alternative break trip and we spent a week learning and working with the homeless population. (W)e went with a small group of about, I would say like eight people, and there was reflection built in throughout the day and in the evenings and stuff like that. So, that was my first like real dive into service-learning as a participant. That really made me like understand it and gain on those academic, civic, and personal goals that I’d never experienced that way. So I would say that’s probably the most exciting. …I had never participated in that program, and I wanted to do that before I got, I guess, too old. So I was actually a faculty member at the time; but I was still so close in age to the
students that I went on the trip and I didn’t have any faculty responsibility at all. . . I really kinda participated as a student. I would say, I mean, it’s definitely changed my career trajectory. My full-time job is actually to be an advisor and I just teach one class a semester. But it seems to, the teaching and service-learning course seems to like dominate my fulfillment [laugh] of things.

Understanding that instructors’ views on leadership strongly influence how they see service-learning and the value they place on it, and realizing that, for them, service-learning is not just professional but personal, it came as little surprise that they struggled with notions of service-learning that were (for them) overly simplistic. “I hate the word volunteer,” said Sarah, “but I guess that’s what it is.” Theresa also acknowledged a struggle with that word that doesn’t seem to do justice to the fullness of what service-learning is (or could be): “It’s not volunteerism then. Oh, I know, I know they won’t say volunteer. I’m sorry. I guess that’s not the appropriate term, but I mean, essentially that is what it is. You’re volunteering your time.” These instructors wanted service-learning to live up to its full potential, even though they understood that it didn’t always. So, for them, talking about service-learning as volunteerism was potentially inaccurate—or at least not considered to be politically correct.

Laura had a similar reaction to talking about service-learning as something that students are forced to do:

(N)obody forces them to take this class, but once they’re in this class, they’re forced. They don’t have an option. This is not a service-learning course where they get an option to do a research paper or anything else. If you’re gonna be in this class, you’re forced to do a project. (A)nd by the time students are done and they write the final reflection paper, they typically…many of them use the word forced because they figure they would never do it if it weren’t required to get this leadership certificate which they desire. And so, at first that would seem like you’re being forced, but they get to choose if they want the leadership certificate. But most of them think all departments should be using that kind of method to teach.

The instructors in this study realized that service-learning was messy and, consequently, imperfect; but that didn’t seem to dampen their sense of what it could and should be. They
continued to believe in the potential for service-learning to do good in society—and to create positive change for everyone involved. Adam summed it up this way:

I learned teaching service-learning by doing it and, and it’s been really neat. I mean, it’s been kind of my core being, if you will, about being involved in our communities, about dealing with issues of homelessness, poverty... that’s important to me. And I want other people to share that and, well, at least understand the depth of these challenges that we face, not only as a region, as a state, as a country, and worldwide, but that they can actually do something about it.

**Major Theme: Service-Learning Leads to Learning & Change**

Many current definitions of leadership have change, or movement toward change, as a key component. This is particularly true for the Social Change Model of Leadership Development, which is geared primarily toward college students but has the potential to be applied to other audiences. (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2009) The core elements of the leadership educators’ experiences with service-learning—messiness, focus on others, and pursuit of the common good—ultimately led to outcomes for the instructors that seemed to mirror those they aspire to for their students: learning and change. “Everyone is a learner in a service-learning project,” said Michelle. “(I)t involves both of us being learners. Yes, I’m going in to teach so I have learners in that environment, but I am the one that’s learning the most.”

**Application of course concepts in real life settings.** Learning may seem to be a given. After all, it’s in the name: service-learning. While it may not be advisable to take it for granted that learning will occur, connecting service-learning to an academic course was seen, by all instructors in this study, as a way for students to apply theoretical concepts to real life experiences. When instructors see students “get it”, this reinforces for them the effectiveness of service-learning as a teaching tool. “That’s the point,” said Theresa, “making the connection.” Laura elaborated:
When (students) start talking about, in their particular service experience, this thing happened. And then if I can help them draw that into a particular theoretical topic from their previous leadership courses, they start seeing the connection about “Wow! You know! I thought that was just a theory, but now I see because of this experience that we’ve just been dealing with, that that just happened! That’s real!

Kevin described that as very rewarding for the instructor:

You see it light up in students and it sticks with them when they actually experience the content rather than hear about the content. . . I think that’s the biggest reward is, is the reflections of the students after they experience it because I almost always read some quote (in students’ written reflections) that says “I thought I understood this, but I never really understood it until we actually did it.” That, that’s always the reward.

Conversely, when instructors sense that students are apathetic or resistant to that learning, it is frustrating. Instructors believe in the value of service-learning and are convinced that students who take it seriously will also realize that value in time, even if not immediately. Adam explained:

I have to remind myself from time to time that their learning experience from this particular class doesn’t necessarily end when I submit the final grade. That it may be a semester or two out, or even a couple years out, where they recognize, “Oh, man, I really should’ve done things differently in that experience.” And, and so-, on occasion, it doesn’t happen [laugh] as often as I’d like it to, but on occasion, I’ll have a student that comes back to me maybe a year or two later and says, “You know, I really appreciate what you did in this class. Even though we probably didn’t do what we should’ve done,” they recognize at a later point in life that, you know, we shoulda done things differently.”

Laura also told of having students who, long after their class had ended, let her know that the experience had been valuable for them:

I can’t even imagine how many students I’ve heard from two to five years later, after I had ‘em in that class, after they went through that experience, some of them whom at the time I thought were wonderful, some of them who I thought didn’t get a thing about it, I’ll get an email or they’ll come to my office or they’ll call or I’ll see ‘em somewhere. And they talk about (the class). And so I’ll have students come up to me years later and say, “You remember that project I worked on? You can’t believe how much that helped me in this or in that.” And by far, that is the most rewarding because at the time, by the end of each semester, even if it’s a project that you felt was very successful, you don’t know. Did, did they take anything from that experience after they got their grade? Did they really take skills with them that they’re gonna utilize the rest of their life? Or did they just get the grade? And so to have that type of feedback from so many students over
all these years is just invaluable. And that, that, I’m sure, is what keeps me doing this.

The most direct and explicitly desired learning outcomes for the service-learning courses taught by these instructors centered on the ability of service-learning to bring abstract and complex course concepts to life. However, that is not the only kind of learning experienced by these instructors. As service-learning helped make course content more real to everyone involved, the challenges it provided to previous experiences and prior ways of thinking also led to new ways of looking at the world and their experiences in it.

Replacing old mental models with new ideas. As a result of accumulated experiences, successes and failures, reflection, critical thinking, and experimentation, instructors believed that they had developed skills, improved their practice, expanded their networks, had a greater appreciation for others’ perspectives, and had a better understanding of complex social issues. These are all things they would hope for their students, as Anna related:

(M)y goal, and what I tell students at the end of a lot of the classes. . . is that when they are in a leadership position in the future, in some organization, and someone says, You have to do it this way,” and they say, “Well, it doesn’t make sense. Let’s try it a different way,” and they say, “No! You have to do it this way. This is the way you do it.” They will have had the personal experience of saying, “Well, I think we could try and do it a different way. . .”

Anna, and others in this study, told me about the shifts in perspective they had experienced themselves while guiding their students through the service-learning experience. Claire spoke of gradually expanding the scope of her consideration with service-learning:

(N)ow I may be looking at it from more of a systems kind of perspective. Like how can we continue to teach courses like this in a high-growth environment and still make it meaningful for the students and not burn ourselves out as instructors? . . . So I may be backing up a level. You know, when I was (first doing service-learning), I had fifteen students. And they were in three or four different teams doing different things. And I was really focused on those individual students. And then a couple years go by, and I’m teaching (this new course). And yeah, I’m interested in all the students, but I’m probably just as much interested in the community partner and how am I gonna evaluate all this. And now I’m backing up yet another level, I think, and tryin’ to look at it from a program
standpoint and like, Man, how are we gonna keep this up? Are we gonna change this stuff every year? Are we gonna always be lookin’ for relationships in the community that we can “use”? So I think my...mindset is...changing, if that makes sense.

Jennifer talked about how, early in the semester, her students have a different idea about service-learning than they do at the end of the semester:

(During) the first week of class I ask students in a sort of introduction post on our course website to define service. So basically like, “What does service mean to you?” And most of them, at this point...come in with a pretty, in my opinion, simplistic definition of what service is and based on the fact that they haven’t really thought about this before. And then at the end of semester, in their final project, I ask them to go back to their first day reflections and ask them to kinda re-reflect on. So go back to the beginning of the semester. Look at what you wrote then. What do you think about it now? And most of them have a much more nuanced definition of service and civic engagement and leadership and really understand some of the problems that come with the idea of service, and it’s not simply just helping or what some of the problems are with thinking of service as simply help or, you know, helping people who are less fortunate or all these kind of things that they said at the beginning.

She also noted that, at the beginning of her experience with service-learning, she did not perceive herself as being much more knowledgeable than her students:

I’ve definitely critiqued myself and my own service and my own engagement in the community a lot more since I’ve started teaching a service-learning class than I did previously. You know, I probably came into this experience a little bit farther ahead of where the students are in terms of experiences with service and thinking about some of the deeper issues that come with this. But definitely not to the extent that I am now, you know, having taught this class for four years or so and then taking that class on service-learning last spring. So I think I think for me, that... that has just been...you know, one of the things that I’ve gained from this experience and from teaching this over the last (few) years.

Additionally, they had become more comfortable with the ill-structured nature of service-learning and with relinquishing some control over their classes. Kevin, for example, was able to see himself as a learner and partner with his students and to let go of old mental models about what he believed a college instructor was supposed to do:

(T)here was a time...I think it was even the first semester I taught the class, and I was a little nervous about how we might connect the class content to the service we were gonna
be doing. And I was just, I don’t know, I think I was under this kinda traditional mindset of oh, I gotta stand in the front and lecture like a college professor does... I have a much better understanding of both what it takes to teach, but also what it takes to direct a non-profit or, or work with a group of university students. I’ve certainly changed in the way that I kind of design and implement these sort of projects. I think I’m better at it now than I used to be. I hope so. Yeah, and, and I think giving up the traditional model or kinda power of being in front of a room, I think that’s a big change. When I started, that’s how I approached the job with what I had experienced, which was largely listening to a professor talk. And the biggest change for me is giving up that power letting things evolve throughout the semester and experiencing what we experience together. And it’s different every semester and it’s unpredictable. So, for me, the biggest change is being okay with that unpredictability.

Another mental model that changed—for both students and instructors—as a result of experience with service-learning was the beliefs they had previously held about service-learning itself. “Like some, some students may have experienced it in the past, but it might’ve been a really poor service-learning opportunity,” explained Patti. Adam also told me that students came to his course with ideas about service-learning that weren’t always consistent with the work they would do with him: “This is a radically different class than students have ever had. I think, there are maybe three or four out of twenty-six students (in my class) that have ever had a service-learning class before or even really knew what service-learning was prior to enrolling into this class.”

Adam also recognized this shift in his own ideas about service-learning. While he did have some experience with service-learning prior to joining the faculty at his current institution, his more recent experience has caused him to realize that his prior experience was—in comparison—not the way he would want service-learning to be:

I certainly didn’t have a lot of experience to draw from when I started teaching that class. I mean, basically no service-learning experience. I mean, I knew the general idea of what it was but it’s...like leadership, it’s one thing to talk about it, a different thing to do it. I see where that (previous) experience could be enhanced quite a bit. I know there were students that took advantage of that all too often and, and you know, just being so wet behind the ears that I didn’t know how to work through that. I was pretty unprepared when I started teaching (my current) class. Actually, I signed up for this job and they
gave me two sections my first semester because I had advocating that “Yeah, I have service-learning experience.” But…yeah. If, if I would’ve understood service-learning the way it was taught here, I would’ve had to be honest and say, “You know, I don’t fully understand it.”

Sometimes, the short-term change for students was as simple as a shift in attitude. Once students wrapped their minds around the expectations of service-learning and were willing to step outside their comfort zones, what had held them back initially gave way to a shift in perspective. Students, like Laura’s, who had once been skeptical and reluctant became proponents of service-learning. Instructors had similar experiences themselves. They may have started out with very little knowledge about service-learning, like Laura, and gradually grew to understand and appreciate it more fully. Or, like Adam, they may have thought they understood what service-learning was only to have that understanding challenged by new experiences.

Some instructors, like Patti, were transformed by their service-learning experiences:

I thought I would probably go more into like advising or leadership development. But I think through this experience and meeting some of the scholars in this field… I’ve really changed my goals and want to pursue scholarship in service-learning and civic engagement and find a lot of purpose in teaching through that way. And making sure that students are not just getting academic goals met, but the civic and personal too. So, I think it’s kind of just changed my, my passion and kind of where I wanna devote my time to in the rest of my life. (A)nytime I engage with professionals in the field (of service-learning), it always just feels really good and natural, if that makes any sense. Like when I’m around that group of people, I just feel like I, I fit and I have some peace of mind. And so, I just wanna be around those people more.

The same can also be said for students, like those that Claire and Theresa had in their classrooms. When asked about rewarding experiences with service-learning, Claire talked about feedback from students, and from one student in particular:

I think the rewarding piece comes back to the feedback that I get from individuals who find that it was so transformational in their own personal development . . . So I’m thinking (back to) one of the young women who had that hard task of helping the mentoring organization get a board of directors and establish her organization. There was a young woman who was a Political Science major. She was like a sophomore at the time. And it just, I think, hit her at the right time, and it solidified for her, “I wanna work in nonprofits for, with my life.” And
she went on, in her feedback and everything to me, “This class was amazing. This class was….” You know, and it, it wasn’t. I was just a facilitator. I wasn’t this sage on the stage or anything. It was just the fact that that framework was there for her to latch on to. She latched on to it, and now, since graduated, she’s working in a non-profit consultancy group… I really think that was a gateway class for her.

Theresa noted that, although not all of her students experience with service-learning is life-altering in terms of their personal and professional goals, she witnesses those kinds of changes more often than others might expect:

I think what was exciting for me is when a student tells me a couple of things after their service-learning experience. One is, “Oh, my gosh! I changed my major because of my experience. I realized that I don’t want to....” I work mostly with engineering students so they’ll say, “I don’t wanna be an engineer. I realized I wanna do early childhood education.” That actually just happened last semester. (I)t tends to happen, I think, at least once every semester. I think it’s pretty frequent. When that happens, I get really excited about that. Or when a student says, “I got hired on by the site (where I) was volunteering. I loved it. I did such a good job, and I wanted to stay committed to it, and they offered me a job.” And that’s actually happened quite a few times with my students. So that’s what I find exciting because that tells me that it’s more than just forced volunteerism for the class. [laugh]And it tells me that the student came to the experience with an open attitude and was willing to get out of it all that they could. And as a result, they had a personal payoff. . .So, I am always pleased and, and gain a lot by realizing the capacity to want to serve others. So on one hand, you know, you always have a handful of students who don’t wanna do it, (but) by and large, I think most of the students enjoy it and want to do it. And I’m always humbled by the ones who really make it a part of their life, kind of plan their life calling. That this is something that they’re always gonna continually do. I think that’s what I learned the most. I’m always reminded that they’re not the generalizations or the stereotypes that we (think of). They are more than that.

Accompanying these changes, both small and large, for students and instructors alike, was the ability to take on perspectives outside their own, a tendency to think about their values and beliefs, and a critical evaluation of their pedagogy, their service and engagement, and their priorities. Sarah put it this way:

I have always been one that has a lot on my plate, which I know a lotta people say, “Oh, that’s me too.” But, but really, when I think about it, it’s been things that are not good for overall mankind or whatever, you know, it’s just little peddly things that I can think about. And one of the things that service-learning and this whole process has taught me is to remove the things that are really not that important and give more of my time and energy to things that are. And that’s, that’s a hard place to be because it takes a lotta hard times lookin’ in the
mirror goin’, “You know what? That’s probably not important. That’s probably not good. Why don’t you go, you know, work here? Why don’t you…,” you know, so…that has really taught me to just remove all of the stuff that, at the end of the day, is that really important? Is that really helping somebody? Am I really gaining ground there? Is it something that I feel is a definite need? And, if not, where can I put those hours to give back?

Jennifer was able to recognize a connection between her own learning and development and the learning and development she worked for with her students. She articulated that connection well when I asked her how she had changed or evolved over time as a result of her experiences with service-learning:

I think very similarly to what I challenge my students to think about. I think I challenge myself to think about that as well. I’ve definitely critiqued myself and my own service and my own engagement in the community a lot more since I’ve started teaching a service-learning class than I did previously.

When I asked her what she had learned or gained as a result of her experiences with service-learning, Jennifer continued:

I think, as an educator, part of the thing I’ve gained a lot of is [laugh] the facilitation skills on kind of a more practical level, the, the ability to facilitate some of these conversations and discussions and think about what’s really gonna prompt that thought process, that critical thinking. So I have, I just can tell, thinking back to my first time teaching this class and how [laugh] inexperienced I was with some of these, you know, tricky conversations and how to facilitate that, that I’ve gotten much more comfortable and skilled at being able to do that. And I think even for myself, personally as well, I think even just the reflection that I ask the students to do, I’ve also gained from that as well and forcing myself to be a little bit more reflective in the work that I do, the service-learning class that I do and, you know, thinking about what works, what doesn’t work, is the course content or assignment really getting at what I really want them to be getting? So just being more reflective in my own professional and personal life as well.

As Jennifer did, other instructors talked about becoming more proficient at various aspects of their jobs, both in the classroom and with the design and implementation of service-learning projects. “I’ve certainly changed in the way that I kind of design and implement these sort of projects.” Kevin said. “I think I’m better at it now than I used to be.” Laura added that she has a better grasp on service-learning as a pedagogy now than she did earlier in her experience:
Today, I would have a much richer understanding of the skills and the competencies that I could help faculty know why they should be doing it, more than just ‘cause it’s a good thing to do service and your kids learn. I, you know, I, I think just did it so shallow at that time. So, at that, I think what I have learned more than anything is the richness of the methodology and all of the reasons why that is so.

While students may not have been able to realize the same benefits in the short-term, the growth experienced by the instructors aligns with the skill development and critical thinking they hoped for in the students. Instructors also talk about, in essence, becoming more authentic people and better citizens—again, reflecting the outcomes they desire for their students. The longer instructors had been “at it” with regard to service-learning, the more comfortable and confident they seemed with it. They articulated similar struggles and experiences whether they were early in their career or more seasoned. The difference was that those with less experience in service-learning were still figuring out how to navigate through some of the challenges that those with more experience had become accustomed to. That’s not to say that those with more experience had stopped learning. They had simply already learned some of the lessons that their more junior counterparts were still figuring out. They were farther down the path, so to speak, even though everyone was traveling essentially the same path.

Summary

Throughout my interview with Adam, he emphasized that he and his colleagues want their students to think about leadership beyond “eight to five”. In other words, leadership is not just something that happens at work. Along those same lines, instructors had come to see that the learning about leadership which emerged from service-learning was not restricted to the time frame of the class. Certainly, service-learning endeavors occur outside of regular class time. In addition to that, service-learning is an experience upon which participants reflect after it is over.
and from which they continue to make meaning and draw lessons. Instructors see evidence of this with their students, and I saw evidence of this with the instructors as well.

The instructors entered into service-learning with prior mental models about what it was and how it fit with college classes, there may have been some initial skepticism or uncertainty, and there was frustration and discomfort that stemmed from the lack of structure and the logistical challenges. Once they dug into the service-learning experience and took ownership of it, their prior mental models were deemed insufficient or inaccurate and their attitudes about service-learning became more positive. They learned from service-learning by doing it and then reflecting on the experience and experimenting with use of their new knowledge. In the process, they developed skills that were useful in their personal and professional lives, gained a better understanding of complex issues, and were better able to clarify and articulate their own values and beliefs.

**Textural Description**

Phenomenological research ends with a textural and structural description of the phenomenon. The textural description is focused on the “what” of the experience or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The instructors in this study experienced service-learning as a series of highs and lows that had the potential to impart significant learning for everyone involved and also had the potential to fail miserably or even cause harm to those it was intended to help.

Instructors dealt with logistical obstacles and challenges, students with negative attitudes and an unwillingness to engage, and community partners whose needs and timelines did not match their own. Instructors also dealt with the disappointment that occurred when others in the partnership were let down as a result of inappropriate behavior, bad decisions, or
miscommunication. They also watched as students embraced service-learning, understood its connections to their class and their lives, and exceeded the expectations instructors had for them in ways that the instructors themselves might never have imagined. They felt some degree of responsibility for all of it in one way or another—the good, the bad, the exciting, the confusing, the successes, and the failures.

Instructors also experienced an evolution in their understanding of service-learning and their role in it. They were able, as a result their experiences, to articulate their ideas about what service-learning is, what it should be, and some of the factors that make or break it. All things considered, the instructors with whom I interacted were proponents of service-learning (even if that wasn’t the term they used for the work their students did). In spite of the struggles and disappointments that were evident in their experiences—and that they knew would continue—they focused on the growth and learning that they also believed would continue. For them, the ability to have meaningful work that allowed them to live their discipline, share their values and learn with students, grow as people and professionals, and have a positive social impact was worth going through the frustrations inherent in the messiness of service-learning.

**Structural Description**

In this study, service-learning is what was experienced. How it was experienced, or the structural description of the experience (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994) is also important to understand. Service-learning was experienced, by leadership instructors, in a variety of ways. Some of them experienced service-learning as participants before becoming instructors, and others experienced service-learning first as instructors, both in and out of their classrooms—with
those experiences changing and evolving over time as they themselves developed skills and abilities or switched classes or institutions during the course of their careers.

Some instructors learned about service-learning through conference attendance, reading the literature around service-learning, networking with others when possible, and even taking classes. All of the instructors learned by doing—their own doing and their students’ doing. They experienced service-learning with and through their students. In addition, some instructors had experience in the roles of community partners (Claire, Theresa, Anna) prior to coming to their current roles on college campuses. Some (Sarah, Laura) volunteered in their communities and outside of their professional capacities. They experienced service-learning as participants, coordinators, spectators, and equal partners. In all cases, these experiences were catalysts for reflection and critical thinking which caused instructors to make meaning of service-learning, learn from it, and use it to become better educators and better people.

**Essence**

The synthesis of the textural and structural elements of the experience form the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). In this study, the essence of instructors’ experiences with service-learning was that service-learning was an opportunity to experience and express leadership consistent with their beliefs about what leadership is or should be.

Forms of experiential education such as internships or job shadowing can provide students with the chance to work with others and address complicated ill-structured problems. Those forms of experiential education can also provide an experience of authority or responsibility in a professional setting during regular business hours—which is a leader-centered way to think about leadership (Northouse, 2013). What service-learning brings to the experience that other forms of experiential education may not is the opportunity to focus on others and
pursue the common social good. For the participants in this study, those aspects that set service-learning apart from other experiential pedagogies are the same ones that link it to leadership more strongly as well.

At its core, the experience of these instructors with service-learning was messy, about others, and focused on pursuit of the common good. The experience itself led to learning and change. In these ways, service-learning was a reflection of what the instructors believed leadership is or should be—and their experiences with service-learning were reflections of what they believed their students were also experiencing. Service-learning is a leadership education tool that allows instructors to provide students with exposure to the key elements of leadership as they understand it: complexity, a focus on others, and a goal for the common good. Service-learning allows instructors to learn and develop with and through their students in the process. As a result, the instructors aren’t only the facilitators of skill development, relationship-building, values clarification, and social awareness, they are the learners as well.

The essence of the instructor experience is similar to what we might imagine that students experience: There is frustration and uncertainty which gives way to dissonance, struggle, and an evolution of how they understand themselves, their profession, and the world around them. It is messy, frustrating, invigorating, and enlightening, and it leads them on a constant quest for adaptation and improvement.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The absence of faculty and instructor voices in the service-learning literature has prompted some scholars to conduct research focused on those particular stakeholders (Banerjee & Hausafus, 2007; Clayton & Ash, 2004; O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009; Pribbenow, 2005; Shapiro, 2012). Few, if any, of these research endeavors have been phenomenological in nature. Since the purpose of this research was to explore the experiences of instructors who use service-learning in their undergraduate leadership courses, the use of phenomenology allowed me to identify the core themes and overall essence of that experience. Better understanding the experience leadership educators have with service-learning provides insight into their experiences overall and also the way in which they think about leadership itself. There were four core themes in the instructors’ experiences with service-learning: service-learning is messy, service-learning is about others, service-learning pursues the common good, and service-learning leads to learning and change. What follows is a summation and discussion of the themes, researcher observations about the instructor experience, a discussion of the significance of findings as well as recommendations for practice, limitations, and directions for future research. Additionally, I have included my reflections about the research process overall.

Discussion of Themes

Leadership is messy. While Adam was the first—and perhaps the only—instructor I interviewed to use the word “messy”, each of the instructors spoke of experiences that were complex, abstract, ill-structured, and inherent with challenges. Instructors hoped to use the messy and challenging nature of service-learning to help students understand that leadership itself is not
an easy or uncomplicated process. So, from that perspective, it is fair to say that the instructors with whom I spoke expected service-learning to be challenging. At the same time, it is also fair to say that not all of the challenges experienced by the instructors were anticipated. In other words, the instructors knew service-learning would be challenging. Those with more experience in service-learning may have had a sense of what some of those challenges would be, but challenges often arose that instructors did not see coming. The most evident example of this was Anna’s story about the student who cleaned his feet in his host family’s clean water supply. In spite of all the work she had done to prepare her students and all of the effort she put into building relationships with the local families, it happened—and Anna didn’t find out about until six months later. This instance was so messy that it caused Anna to question the nature of her engagement work and the role she played in it.

The commonalities instructors have identified between leadership and service-learning, particularly with regard to the messiness of service-learning, echo Heifetz’s ideas about leadership and adaptive challenges (Heifetz, Grashow & Linsky, 2009). According to Heifetz and his colleagues, “Adaptive leadership is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive” (p. 14). On some level, service-learning provides adaptive challenges for the students and for the instructors. That is part of the motivation in choosing service-learning; but the instructors, while they anticipated that their students would be challenged, did not always anticipate the ways in which they themselves would be challenged. According to research on service-learning conducted by Clayton and Ash (2004), it is this messiness that ultimately leads to transformation.

While the instructors in this study were focused on teaching leadership and also believed leadership itself to be inherently messy, it is also possible that other disciplines see the
complexity of service-learning as consistent with the nature of their own fields of study and practice. For example, in their study of faculty in human sciences, Banerjee and Hausafus (2007) found that faculty saw service-learning as consistent with the aims of their profession. They also found that some of the things which made service-learning messy also deterred faculty from using it in their courses. On the one hand, the complexity of service-learning was attractive and consistent with professional values and goals. On the other hand, logistical issues, lack of resources (such as time and funding), and a faculty reward system that was not structured to include service-learning were all cited as hindrances to implementing the pedagogy.

Additionally, Banarjee and Hausafus (2007) noted a concern expressed by their participants that was echoed by Michelle and Claire in my interviews with them, “A sizable number of respondents mentioned they were unable to implement service-learning due to large class size” (p. 40). Based on my findings, this continues to be a concern—not only as a reason that instructors don’t currently use service-learning, but also as a consideration for those who do use service-learning and wonder whether they will be able to continue doing so.

**Service-learning is about others.** The most obvious way to interpret this theme is that those who are engaged in service-learning are doing something for other people—often people in the community who have some unmet need which they have not been able to effectively address on their own. Additionally, since service-learning often involves a partnership of some sort and is intended to help students learn from practical experience, the instructors in this study spoke of the “others” in service-learning as their students and the community partners. In many cases, instructors had to set aside their preconceived ideas about what college teaching should be like and how a service-learning experience should occur in an ideal situation so that they could take into consideration the needs and limitations of others who were involved in the process. This
included accurately assessing students’ readiness and the ways in which they needed to be prepared prior to engaging in service-learning, understanding their own needs as instructors and taking the initiative to make sure they themselves were prepared, and making sure that the expectations of all partners were clearly communicated among the group as a whole. It is important to note that these instructors shared that they had to get comfortable with not being able to control every aspect of their class when they used service-learning. Yet, at the same time they were adjusting to having less control, they also were feeling a greater sense of responsibility.

O’Meara and Niehaus (2009) found that service-learning does not always intentionally and explicitly consider the needs of those outside the university:

In cases where the service mission of the institution was emphasized, the discourse seemed to situate the institution as the major player and the community as the recipient of its gifts. The focus was mostly one-directional. Whether it be to fulfill a service mission or help students learn. . . the emphasis is more on what the institution needs or wants to do rather than community partner needs or goals, which may differ from those of the institution. (p. 28-29).

At the same time, it may also be true that community partners are unable or unwilling to devote their resources toward meeting the needs of those on campus. Said one participant in the Banarjee and Hausafus (2007) study, “I have never found an agency or group willing to provide the effort needed to initiate student experience effectively” (p. 41).

The ideal of service-learning as a mutually beneficial and reciprocal relationship is consistent with definitions of leadership that employ a process perspective (Rost, 1991, Northouse, 2013). Rather than viewing leadership as something hierarchical (someone in a
leadership position “does” leadership) and transactional (the positional leader leads others and they follow), leadership is instead viewed as an activity in which many people can participate and everyone has something to contribute. Therefore, leadership occurs with others and in multiple directions, similarly to the way that Patti explained it in her interview when she said, “We think leadership is an activity and your job... is to mobilize other people toward the common good”. In keeping with that perspective, it makes sense that the leadership instructors I interviewed would also see service-learning (ideally) as a process. The challenge didn’t seem to be in accepting this perspective. Rather, it was about navigating the perspective. Instructors knew what they wanted service-learning to be, even though they often saw that ideal as more easily said than done. Findings from this study provide some important considerations about service-learning, especially with regard to instructor development and the nature of the service-learning partnership, that could be used as a guide for improving service-learning overall.

Service-learning pursues the common good. Another ideal for service-learning among the instructors I interviewed was that it should achieve—or at least work toward achieving—some sort of positive social change. Whether service-learning is done from a charity or a social justice framework, there is a hope that it will somehow make life better for those involved. This is similar to the way in which Greenleaf (1970) thought of leadership in his conceptualization of servant leadership, and it is also a foundational belief of the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (HERI, 1996; Komives & Wagner, 2009). This service-learning ideal was appealing to instructors on both a personal and professional level. They recognized a consistency with the way in which they understood leadership, and they also spoke of finding satisfaction in the work and feeling good about being able to share core values and guiding principles with their students. Service-learning was particularly powerful for instructors if they and their students
could see the outcome of their work and interact with the clientele for whom they wanted to make a difference. Even though that wasn’t always possible, instructors were motivated by their values and beliefs.

Researching exemplary faculty in service-learning, O’Meara and Niehaus (2009) also found that instructors’ personal identities and their institutions played a part in service-learning work: “Faculty positioned students and courses as vehicles through which a faculty member lived out ideas and commitments and/or connected with professional networks” (p. 28). In other words, instructors who use service-learning well seem to see service-learning as an expression of themselves, both as individuals and as faculty members. The instructors in my study seemed to concur with this. Adam noted that “being involved in the community. . . cuts to some core values and beliefs that (he) hold(s) dear.”

**Service-learning leads to learning and change.** Instructors who use service-learning—in connection to leadership or any other discipline—would probably all say that they hope their students learn something from the experience. Several of the instructors in this study also shared examples of their students being significantly changed—even transformed—as a result of service-learning. Whether it was a change in attitudes, leadership behavior, or even academic major, instructors seemed especially pleased to know that service-learning had had such an effect on students. Furthermore, the instructors with whom I spoke all told me of ways in which they had learned or changed as a result of service-learning. In addition to the dissonance and need for critical thinking presented by challenges of service-learning, most of the participants in this study cited reflection as a key component of learning—both for their students and for themselves. Mezirow (1990) tells us that the very act of interpreting experience and making meaning of the experience is, in fact, learning. That is because this interpretation is often used to direct future
decisions and behaviors, which was true for the instructors in this study. Nearly all of them talked about the experience of service-learning challenging their preconceived ideas and influencing their approach to teaching. According to Mezirow:

> Critical reflection addresses the question of the justification for the very premises on which problems are posed or designed in the first place. . . By far the most significant learning experiences in adulthood involve critical self-reflection—reassessing the way we have posed problems and reassessing our own orientation to perceiving, knowing, believing, feeling, and acting. (p. 12-13)

Examining adult learning in the workplace, van Woerkom (2004) indicated that reflection can lead to improved practice—which is what instructors like Jennifer and Theresa experienced—and that reflection is often more effective when done socially rather than individually. In other words, instructors who reflect with their students (or even with other instructors and other partners in the service-learning process) will benefit more than those who reflect by themselves. Furthermore, van Woerkom maintained that “Because learning transforms who we are and what we can do, it is an experience of identity. It is not just an accumulation of skills, but also a process of becoming. . .” (p. 185). This too is consistent with the way that instructors in my study experienced service-learning and described what they gained as a result of using it.

Service-learning requires both the faculty and the students to shift their perspectives. It also facilitates that shift through experience and critical reflection, resulting in the abandonment of previous (and often more “traditional”) ideas and the adoption of new mental models (Clayton & Ash, 2004). Service-learning also leads to a reconceptualization of classroom norms and roles, an enhanced understanding of student and community needs, and even an expansion of
opportunities for scholarship (Pribbenow, 2005, p. 25). The participants in my study experienced all of these things and were able to articulate those experiences clearly. Furthermore, instructors like Theresa spoke to me about how rewarding it was to witness similar changes in their students and to have those students so clearly articulate their own perspective changes resulting from service-learning: “The most rewarding thing is when, at the end of the semester, you have students who are able to make that connection and articulate is in a way that helps us understand how they’ve framed their own values and their own opinions and beliefs. . .”

It would be remiss, in a discussion about reflection and service-learning—or any form of experiential education—not to mention that many college-level instructors rely on the work of Kolb (1984) and his colleagues to inform their pedagogy. Bearing in mind that the students and instructors are both learners in the service-learning process and in experiential education overall, and that both sets of learners operate on what they have been taught from previous experiences, Kolb and Kolb (2005) noted that “Making space for students to take control of and responsibility for their learning can greatly enhance their ability to learn from the experience” (p. 209). This was a control issue frequently cited by the participants in my study. Instructors understood that it was important for students to take ownership, but they often struggled with how to provide the best guidance and with the responsibility they felt for making sure service-learning was successful. This conundrum is also consistent with literature on youth-adult partnerships (YAPs) which tells us that adults often mistakenly believe that they must take an entirely hands-off role in order for young people to be able to demonstrate true leadership (Camino, 2005).

For the instructors with whom I spoke, the best way to determine an appropriate balance of involvement and to define their own roles in service-learning partnerships seemed to be through experience, reflection, and adjustment. Experience and reflection had the power not only
to lead to skill development and improved practice, but also to be motivational and even transformational for instructors. It helped instructors like Sarah become more conscious of her own values and priorities and even helped Patti find a passion and purpose in her career that she had not anticipated.

**An Additional Observation**

Throughout the previous and current chapters, as I have discussed the elements of the instructor experience, I have frequently noted connections and similarities to the experiences of their students. Many of them even addressed that connection explicitly in their interviews. In fact, the connection was a sub-theme in my findings. The idea that instructor and student experiences are linked is not likely to come as a surprise to those who are instructors or are familiar with other service-learning research such as that conducted by Clayton and Ash (2004), Pribbenow (2005), or O’Meara and Niehaus (2009). All of them identified ways in which the instructor experience was connected to, and even reflective of, the student experience. While I stop short of identifying this as a core theme of the instructor experience, it is an observation I would like to acknowledge and discuss further.

Instructors in this study were asked about what they learned or gained as a result of their experiences with service-learning, and they were also asked how they believed they had grown or changed as a result of their experiences with service-learning. In response to these questions, most were able to distinguish their own experiences from those of their students. At the same time, the way that they discussed their learning and change seemed to mirror the learning and change they observed in their students. (See Figure 1)
Figure 1: Similarities between student & instructor experiences with service-learning. This figure illustrates instructor experience with service-learning as a possible reflection of the student experience with service-learning.

**Uncertainty and hesitation.** Prior to engaging in it, instructors base their ideas about service-learning on observing the experiences of others or on their own experiences of something that was called service-learning but, upon reflection, is not consistent with what they believe service-learning should be. They approach it with some uncertainty about their role, and they are hesitant because they are not convinced that service-learning is something they can do well. Similarly, their students may come to class with mental models of service-learning that are not consistent with the work in which they will soon be engaging. They too may be hesitant to engage in service-learning and skeptical about whether they will learn anything from doing so. Theresa had this to say:
I couldn’t really make the connection initially either, how this really related to what we were doing as far as teaching leadership. So, I don’t think it was until after about maybe my first year of teaching it that it really started connecting with me how I could really integrate it in a way, in a class that would help me, as well, make the connection.

**Frustration.** Once they begin to engage in service-learning, instructors and their students are challenged by its ill-structured nature, complexity, and logistical challenges. The messiness of service-learning can easily lead to frustration. If all participants are not ready and adequately prepared to cope with these challenges, they may be easily overwhelmed. It may be tempting for students, in this phase, to give up or to assume that they will not be able to be successful. Instructors, due to their strong sense of responsibility to their students and other service-learning stakeholders, are likely to persist in spite of their frustration. Jennifer described such a frustration:

So it was a very different experience than that, what (the students had been hoping to do. And it was a lot harder for me, as an instructor, to help them connect that to the learning from the class. And so I think that the, on just a purely logistical level, the frustration of that organization not being able to kinda follow through with that project and also not being very communicative with the students about what was going on.

Patti also experienced something similar:

(I)t took me six weeks to get through the red tape. And so my students didn’t get the project until six weeks into the semester. And so, by that nature, and it was a really, it’s a really daunting project. It takes like a lotta time and effort. And we’d kinda already established some like norms in our class where they didn’t have to work as hard [laugh]. And then they get handed this. You know, after they’ve heard about it for six weeks of being like, “Hey, we’re gonna do this. We’re gonna do this.” And then finally we’ve got it. And they just never bought in. They just never bought in to the issue

**Understanding their role.** The complexity of service-learning and the difference between service-learning and more traditional teaching strategies may cause instructors to question their role in the process. In the same way that students may not always understand what is expected of them in service-learning, instructors must often learn by doing. Being able to see themselves as
learners and not being afraid to try new things will help students and instructors figure out what roles they can and should play in the service-learning process. Once they are able to identify a role that makes sense for them, students are likely to become more comfortable with service-learning. This is also true for instructors, as Kevin experienced:

(E)very semester influences a great deal how I would approach the next. So, that experience definitely has shown me that hands-off doesn’t necessarily mean ignorant of what’s going on. I can still let the students have a complete ownership of the partnership, but yet still be in the mix. I guess, you know, be in the conversation with them. So, I approach it a little bit more like, like I am also equally in on the project, not more so than any given student, but also not less so.

**Critical reflection.** In order to maximize learning in service-learning, reflection is key. Many of the instructors in this study spoke of the need to guide their students through intentional reflection on their service-learning work and to help them think critically about the experience. At the same time, the instructors were doing the same things themselves. During and after a service-learning experience (and prior to subsequent service-learning experiences), instructors spend time thinking about what they could be doing differently to improve the experience and increase the likelihood of success. They are also thinking about the implications of the service-learning experience for their personal and professional lives. “I think about it a lot,” Anna told me. Claire noted, during our interview, “I’m gonna teach the course in a much different way next semester. So, if we were having this interview six months from now, it might sound somewhat different.” Reflecting on a previous semester that hadn’t gone the way she hoped it would, Patti said, “I’m doing it again this semester, and we’ve changed a whole lot to make it more successful.” Sarah talked about the ways in which her experience with service-learning has helped her clarify her own values and priorities:

(B)eing part of something...awesome and not even getting paid for it, just and the whole building up someone or building up a community or giving ba-, I mean, there’s just so much reward in that. And it’s not reward for yourself. It’s reward watching others be happy and
excited or thankful or…so, it’s, it’s taught me to really get the stuff off my plate that probably isn’t the most important.

**Skill development.** As a result of their work with service-learning, it is hoped that students will be able to develop and hone useful skills that they can apply to both personal and professional contexts. In this case of leadership education, the development of leadership and interpersonal skills is a typical objective. Leadership educators find that they too are developing and improving upon their skill set. Specifically, they become more proficient at facilitating service-learning experiences for their students, navigating service-learning partnerships, and working with college students. “I think I have gained a lot more skills than when I started on how to do it. You know, you get tricks up your sleeve,” Anna told me. “I was pretty unprepared when I started teaching this class,” said Adam. “I learned service-learning by doing it.” Jennifer added, “So I have, I just can tell, thinking back to my first time teaching this class and how inexperienced I was with some of these tricky conversations and how to facilitate that, that I’ve gotten much more comfortable and skilled at being able to do that.”

**Changed perspective.** Pushing students to see things from different perspectives is one of the ways that instructors help them to cope with the complexity of service-learning and to understand the complexity of real world issues. Taking on new and different perspectives can be both a strategy and an outcome of service-learning. Instructors have found that they also are pushed to take on different perspectives as part of their service-learning experience. The service-learning experience also allows them to better understand perspectives outside of their own. Ultimately, this has the potential to impact their mental models, their ideas about service-learning, their understanding of social problems, and even their sense of themselves, their values, and their beliefs. When asked what she learned or gained from her service-learning experience, In addition to learning more about local community and social issues, Michelle said, “I gain
perspectives of others unlike me.” Kevin agreed. “I have a much better understanding of, of both what it takes to teach, but also what it takes to direct a non-profit or, or work with a group of university students,” he said. Laura relayed that her perspective on service-learning itself has changed as a result of her experiences with it: “I would have a much richer understanding of the skills and the competencies that I could help faculty know why they should be doing it, more than just ‘cause it’s a good thing to do service and your kids learn. I think I just did it so shallow at that time.”

**Philosophical Considerations**

It is important to remember, at this point, that the purpose of phenomenological research is to explore and describe a phenomenon as others experience it. What this means, ultimately, is that the themes emerging from my research describe how my participants experienced service-learning relative to their leadership classes. That’s not the same thing as describing or explaining service-learning itself. My participants told me how they experienced service-learning and also what they believed service-learning should be. There was an acknowledgement that service-learning does not always live up to these instructors’ ideals and also an expressed belief that the potential for good out of service-learning justifies the risk that it may not work out—or, worse yet, do harm. While all participants seemed to experience some dissonance or concern about this, Anna (who identified herself as a critical theorist) was the one who experienced it most strongly and who overtly discussed issues of power, privilege, and a concern that service-learning may perpetuate social imbalance in those areas.

In reviewing the themes and experiences of these instructors, it is important to make the distinction that the findings relate to their experiences. It may also be equally important, from a
philosophical and pedagogical perspective, to ask the questions, “Do these themes, which describe the instructors’ experiences, accurately reflect what service-learning is? And, if not, what is service-learning really, and how or why might that differ from the way it is experienced?”

**Significance of Findings**

Although instructors are identified as important to the use and success of service-learning, their voice is rarely included in the service-learning literature. Research focused on faculty and service-learning is more recent and not yet robust. The research I conducted and discussed here attempts to advance the overall body of knowledge in both service-learning and leadership education. What is unique about this research, compared to other research that has been done on faculty in connection to service-learning, is the use of the phenomenological approach. Conducting a phenomenology, as opposed to a survey or an analysis of artifacts and written work alone, allowed me to explore the faculty perspective in greater depth. I was able to learn about the instructors and the courses they teach, to hear the critical pieces of their service-learning stories, and to ask for clarification and elaboration in real time. Phenomenology also allowed for more breadth than a case study might. I was not operating under the parameters of a particular institution, organization, discipline, or program. As a consequence, my co-researchers in this study came from a variety of academic homes, personal and professional backgrounds, and geographic location. Even though qualitative research is not able to be generalized, the diversity among participants and the rich thick descriptions used to describe their experiences increases the potential that other instructors may be able to identify with my findings.

Furthermore, the current study includes commonalities and differences with prior research,
which will be noted in the recommendations that follow, thereby providing some support for other studies while simultaneously introducing a greater variety of perspectives into the overall literature.

The contribution made by this study to the scholarship in the field comes from its unique approach. A phenomenological study, which had not been done before to explore instructor experiences with service-learning, provides a greater depth of knowledge about those experiences than currently exists. While the current study does not necessarily challenge or refute existing literature, it does add to its diversity and to our overall understanding of the phenomenon. Consequently, it has great practical application and consideration for leadership educators and also for others who use service-learning or want to know more about it.

**Recommendations for Practice**

Other scholars who have researched service-learning have made recommendations regarding faculty that my research supports and advances. In my interviews with these ten participants, there are two things that struck me most as potential avenues for improving the service-learning experience—for faculty and also for everyone else involved. The first is the preparation and readiness of instructors, and the second is the clear communication of expectations across the service-learning partnership.

Of course, saying that instructors should be prepared, have what they need to engage in truly reciprocal relationships, and be able to help their students navigate the complexity of service-learning is perhaps more easily said than done. Pribbenow (2005) advocated for “more comprehensive and reflective faculty preparation and development”. He believed that “Faculty development...begins with preparation, continues through implementation, and includes
evaluation that cycles around to further preparation” (p. 35). While this cycle of learning was evident in my research, not all instructors felt as prepared at the outset as the might have wished they were. Most instructors spoke, as Adam did, of learning by doing. Jennifer elected to take a graduate class about service-learning because of her interest, Laura spoke of learning about service-learning by attending conferences and interacting with more experienced colleagues, and Patti made the decision to participate—the way a student would—in service-learning before she assumed the role of an instructor. She did this so that she would feel more prepared. She would know what her students were going to experience and would be better able to help them learn from the experience, she believed, if she had had the experience herself.

Upon reflection, Patti found that her initial foray into service-learning served the purpose she had intended. While Patti sought out this experience for herself, it is not so hard to imagine that other instructors could have the same opportunity. Given that so much of instructors’ learning in service-learning happens by doing service-learning, that instructors with little or no service-learning experience often do not feel like they know more about it than their students, and that the instructor experience seems to mirror that of the student, the research I conducted supports Pribbenow’s call for comprehensive and reflective faculty development. What better way to do this than to have instructors experience service-learning first as students?

In institutions with a strong culture of service-learning and an expectation that faculty use the pedagogy more frequently, it should not be difficult for more experienced instructors to help design and facilitate a service-learning experience (perhaps over the summer or as a faculty/staff only alternative break experience) for newer and less experienced instructors. In institutions where service-learning is not as prominent, there may be more challenges to creating service-learning experiences for instructors, but it is not impossible. If the experience cannot happen at
one’s home campus or in one’s local community, perhaps it can happen at a nearby campus or as part of a professional conference. I would strongly urge proponents of service-learning to consider the possibilities that exist—or could exist—to engage instructors in service-learning prior to asking them to use it in their classrooms. This experience should at minimum include preparation, the service itself, and guided reflection; and it should be implemented by educators who are familiar with service-learning and thus better able to help those with less familiarity.

Most of the instructors who participated in this project talked about the importance of relationships in service-learning—and perhaps none more so than Anna who, from the very first seconds of her interview, was conflicted between the way she believed service-learning should be (a reciprocal relationship that is mutually beneficial) and the way she believed it usually was (a charity-based pedagogy that focuses on the students and their learning without considering the needs and rights of others). The building and sustaining of service-learning partnerships requires a great degree of intentionality, as with most any relationship. There are also many potential obstacles that could prevent instructors and other partners from being as intentional as they would like to be. Do the partners in service-learning—and especially the instructors—believe that they have the time necessary to devote to creating and maintaining a mutual and reciprocal relationship? How far removed are instructors from other service-learning partners? Are they across town from one another? Across the state? In different parts of the world? In addition to limitations on time and other resources, physical and geographic distance could also pose barriers to the development of a strong relationship. Differences in organizational, institutional, and community cultures (not to mention larger cultural considerations such as nationality, ethnicity, and religion) may also play a role. Also included in this mix are the students as partners. Do they understand what is expected of them—by their instructors and the community
partners, beyond simply the number of hours required and the tasks assigned to them? To some extent, these challenges and considerations are part of the desirable complexity of service-learning. At the same time, they may also be barriers to ownership, effectiveness, and the maintenance of critical relationships.

The idea that expectations should be clearly communicated is perhaps self-evident. But what is the extent to which this occurs, or should occur, in service-learning? Experiences like the one Kevin shared from his class on leadership in non-profit organizations demonstrate that those who are engaged in service-learning partnerships may frequently overlook the obvious. This is not to say that everyone involved in service-learning will have the same expectations—or even that they should. But there is clearly value in understanding what the various partners hope to gain or achieve as a result of their participation in the endeavor. If students understand what their instructors expect and what the community partner expects, they will have stronger information on which to base their own actions and decisions. If instructors understand what students expect and what community partners expect, they will be better able to guide students through the service-learning process. If community partners understand what instructors and students expect, they will have a better sense of how they can support student learning while still having their own needs met.

It is fair to say that, even without an initial discussion about expectations at the beginning, an understanding of expectations can evolve throughout the service-learning experience—and that that, in and of itself, is a valuable part of the learning that occurs. So, to play devil’s advocate, is it possible that a deliberate and explicit discussion of expectations could actually dilute the effectiveness of service-learning by introducing too much structure? Why not just leave it alone and let expectations be shared in their own time? Based on the research
discussed herein, I would have to conclude that expectations can be both an intentional initial
discussion and an ongoing discovery throughout the service-learning process—and that they
should be both. Coming together around the table (whether metaphorically or literally) as
partners to discuss the aims of service-learning and the motives for being involved in the
partnership is one of many ways throughout the process for individuals to learn about the
perspectives of others. Such a discussion does not eliminate all of the challenges inherent in
service-learning, so it does not take away from its valuable messiness. It could, however, go a
long way toward maintaining important relationships, achieving higher levels of learning for
everyone involved, and overcoming barriers to participation. Mezirow (1990) sums it up well in
his discussion of communicative learning:

Not all learning involves learning to do. Of even greater significance to most adult
learning is understanding the meaning of what others communicate concerning values,
ideals, feelings, moral decisions and such concepts as freedom, justice, love, labor,
autonomy, commitment, and democracy. . . Communicative learning focuses on
achieving coherence rather than on exercising more effective control over the cause-
effect relationship to improve performance. (p. 8)

In essence, the discussion of expectations at the outset of service-learning—among all
partners—is part of the cultural education of those involved. It is critical not just for the sake of
doing service-learning work well but also for the development of understanding and the building
of important relationships. Therefore, an intentional discussion of expectations among service-
learning partners at the outset of the experience is strongly recommended. This discussion should
go beyond surface facts such as how many participants will be involved and for how many
hours. The overall purposes of the course in which the students are enrolled and the agencies
with which students and instructors will be partnered should be addressed. If possible, students should be part of this discussion. At a bare minimum, instructors and community partners should be having this discussion with one another. In situations where someone other than the instructor is overseeing and facilitating community partnerships, the instructor’s participation in a discussion of expectations is not precluded. In fact, it is all the more essential. While a central coordinating individual or office can certainly accelerate the efficiency and expediency of establishing service-learning partnerships, the instructor is still the person with the greatest knowledge about his or her course and the most direct access to students enrolled in that course. Therefore, they have an invaluable perspective to contribute to that discussion.

Limitations of Results

In addition to the previously discussed concerns regarding phenomenological research, such as the inability to generalize results, there are also limitations to this particular research project. First, the pool of participants is not as diverse as might be considered ideal. Participants were predominantly women (eight of ten participants were female), predominantly White (only two of ten participants could be considered people of color, both were women), and all from public institutions. While there were no discernible differences in the essence of the experience or its core themes (messy, about others, pursues the common good, leads to learning and change) based on gender or race, it is possible that leadership educators who are male, non-White, and/or at non-public institutions may not see themselves reflected in the experiences of my participants. It is also worthy of note that Anna, who was the only participant to identify herself a critical theorist and the one who spoke most overtly about issues of social justice, was one of the women of color in this study.
In addition to those aspects of diversity, this study also focused intentionally on instructors who teach leadership courses at the undergraduate level. Although leadership was broadly defined in order to capture its complex and interdisciplinary nature, and a variety of disciplines are represented, it is possible that instructors who use service-learning in classes where leadership learning is not an explicit goal would describe their experiences differently. Furthermore, it is also possible that instructors of graduate and professional level courses, both inside and outside of the field of leadership, would describe their experiences differently than my participants did.

Finally, all of the participants in this study chose to use service-learning. Whether they initiated its use on their own or willingly accepted instructor roles knowing that service-learning would be part of the responsibility, each of these instructors presented themselves as proponents of service-learning—or, at the very least, willing to continue using it in their classes despite acknowledged concerns because of the potential for student learning. It’s fair to say that these are instructors who have managed to overcome obstacles and learn from challenges. Their experiences may not be representative of those instructors who, as a result of negative service-learning experiences or seemingly insurmountable obstacles, have chosen not to continue using service-learning.

**Directions for Future Research**

Future research into the faculty perspective on service-learning could be used to address the limitations presented above. For example, it would be of interest to explore the experiences of instructors who use service-learning in courses with graduate and professional students. It would also be useful to explore the service-learning experiences of instructors at different types
of institutions and in disciplinary fields other than leadership studies. Kolb, Boyatzis, and Mainemelis (2001) noted that different professions may attract individuals with different personality preferences and learning styles. It is reasonable, therefore, to expect that instructors in other disciplines (even though they may still fall into the overall category of college educators) may have different personalities and learning styles which influence their interpretations of their service-learning experiences.

Perhaps the most valuable direction for future research, based on what I learned from my participants, would be an examination of community partner perspectives. Given that the bulk of service-learning research to date has focused on students and that the faculty perspective is beginning to be explored, it would follow that understanding the perspectives of other service-learning stakeholders—community agencies and organizations in particular—would go a long way toward providing a more complete picture of service-learning.

**Researcher Reflections**

My own proclivity toward qualitative research is, I believe, motivated by my interest in other people and their stories. Consequently, I found this phenomenology to be interesting and motivating. Having conducted a narrative inquiry for a different project prior to beginning my dissertation work, I knew that I would enjoy my interactions with the participants in this study; and I looked forward to hearing what they had to share. In some ways, my greatest challenge was in maintaining my objectivity. The bracketing process was helpful, as was the fact that I did not have firm convictions about service-learning one way or the other prior to beginning my research. It’s true that I saw value in it, and it’s also true that I had misgivings about it; but it
would be inaccurate to say that I was strictly either a proponent or opponent of service-learning in the leadership classroom.

As I proceeded with my interviews, I knew that it was important for me to let the participants tell their stories and not co-mingle their stories with my own. Again, this is a place where bracketing was useful. It was challenging, however, to walk the fine line between interview and conversation—especially at first. I have a natural tendency to relate to others. So, as my participants would tell their stories, it would spark thoughts of my own similar experiences, and I would find myself sharing. In a couple of cases, where I knew my participants well and had relationships with them prior to the research, this felt very normal and natural. As the interviews continued, and I spoke with participants I had not known previously, I think I got better at using my own story and assumptions to prompt clarifying questions rather than jumping into a conversation mode where I shared my stories in addition to theirs.

Perhaps the biggest struggle I had with the interviews was my belief that, in order to remain objective as an interviewer, I had to be non-reactive to my participants and their stories. This notion is supported by Creswell (2013), and I understand its legitimacy. At the same time, it felt inauthentic and even troubling to me. How could I possibly not react when I listened to Michelle crying on the other end of the line as she spoke about the emotional impact of service-learning, when Sarah told me about how moved the women at the soup kitchen were when she asked about their lives, when Adam told me about the excited reactions of little kids who benefitted from his students’ service-learning, when Patti spoke about the ways in which service-learning had inspired her, when Anna revealed that her mother and other family members were subjected to having all their healthy teeth pulled just so dental students could learn how to do it, or when Laura described the circumstances of her daughter’s murder? Perhaps it would have
been somewhat different if all of these interviews had been face-to-face as Anna’s was. After all, participants on the other end of a phone line needed at least some confirmation that they were heard. But, even in person, I felt strongly that it was important to acknowledge that participants were heard and understood—and that I recognized how important and personal these stories were. If I had it to do over, I’m sure my interviewing skills would improve; but I don’t think I would sacrifice the human connections that were made. My participants trusted me with their stories. They needed to know that their stories were important to me and that I comprehended their power. Otherwise, how could they be comfortable enough to be honest and not hold back?

As a leadership educator and an instructor of undergraduate leadership courses, I was able to identify with my participants. As a researcher, I had to set aside my own perspective and focus on their perspectives. In the end, I believe that doing so helped me to clarify my own beliefs and attitudes about service-learning. Having heard and learned from my participants’ experiences, I am better able to articulate the value I find in service-learning, particularly with regard to its similarities to the concept of leadership. I am also able to better articulate my reservations about service-learning. I have a clearer understanding of my bias toward “service with” over “service for” and also of my preference for reciprocal relationships and mutual benefit in the service-learning partnership. I understand that I feel more engaged in service-learning and am better able to assist my students when I have a relationship with community partners and a clear understanding of their needs; and I feel less engaged and less helpful (to all involved) when that direct relationship to community partners does not exist. I have also always had reservations about whether service-learning was truly helpful in the community or whether it just created more work and more stress for community agencies—or even caused problems—in the name of student learning. Until I interviewed instructors like Anna and Claire, who presented
themselves as community advocates and articulated those same concerns, I had worried that questioning service-learning in this way would cause me to be seen as someone who was failing to toe the party line and not a team player.

That’s not to say that I discount service-learning experiences different from those I just described. However, understanding my own preferences allows me to better articulate my service-learning perspective. Knowing that that perspective has some similarity to the perspectives of other leadership educators is also helpful. Instead of wondering if I am overly optimistic or pessimistic or if maybe I am not doing service-learning “right”, I know that I am not alone in my experiences. This is my participants’ story, and I now understand that it is also mine. I can see myself in my participants—not in everything, but in many things—and that reflection has helped me to better understand myself. This is our service-learning story.

For me, the most powerful part of this research wasn’t what I learned about leadership or service-learning—although I did learn about both. For me, the impact I felt most deeply was in the continued shaping of my identity as a researcher. The moments when I had to pick my jaw up off the floor, when I choked up or had to fight back my own tears, the struggle—at times—to strike the “right” balance between connected human being and objective scholarly researcher, and the humility I felt at being allowed into my participants’ lives in this way were all moments of learning and empowerment for me. Each time I heard a powerful or unexpected story from a participant, I was struck by it—both by the story itself and by the responsibility I felt to earn it and care for it. Even after ten interviews. My respect and affinity for qualitative research were deepened as a result of this process. I became inspired with new research questions and motivated to continue improving as a researcher so that I can be deserving of such stories.
Conclusion

The instructors in this study experienced service-learning in a way that was consistent with—and perhaps even inextricable from—their notions of leadership: messy, about others, and in pursuit of the common good. They also found that their service-learning experiences were catalysts for learning and change—much as they believed effective leadership should be. For all its inherent challenges and risks, these leadership educators chose to use service-learning because of their belief that it was a powerful tool for student learning. The learning in service-learning was not restricted to basic leadership skills or even better understanding of complex social problems. Service-learning, for these instructors, was also a way to share their personal values and the values of the profession (leadership educators) with students. It was an enculturation and also a way to help mold responsible engaged citizens in keeping with the aims of higher education.

The service-learning experiences of instructors was linked to, and even mirrored, the service-learning experiences of their students. Instructors learned about service-learning—forming their beliefs about what it is and isn’t, what it should and shouldn’t be—by doing it. As instructors gained experience with service-learning, their perspectives on it and their roles within it evolved. Sometimes their beliefs about it held up, and sometimes their beliefs were challenged and changed as a result of different experiences. Each of them had key experiences that were part of their service-learning stories and influenced their views on service-learning. Some of these key experiences were positive, and some were negative. Some of these experiences happened directly related to service-learning, and some of them were part of the instructors’ overall life stories—indirectly influencing service-learning because of their impact on individual values, identities, and priorities.
Understanding faculty and instructor perspectives on service-learning is critical to developing a better and more comprehensive understanding of the pedagogy overall. Examination of student outcomes alone sheds light on only one set of stakeholders in the process. As with any complex process, all pieces should be examined. Instructors and community partners are also key stakeholders, and their experiences have the potential to affect (and be affected by) students. The current study sheds light on instructors—acknowledged as a critical piece of the service-learning puzzle, but heretofore unexamined. Instructor perspectives should continue to be explored, particularly with consideration for elements of individual, disciplinary, and institutional diversity. The same can also be said for other partners and stakeholders in the service-learning process. Until we can understand the various perspectives around service-learning, we will not be able to truly know its impact—for better, for worse, or somewhere in between.
References


Appendix A: IRB Approval
November 20, 2013

Marianne Lorensen
Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication

Gina Matkin
Agricultural Leadership, Education and Communication
300 AGH, UNL, 68583-0709

IRB Number: 20131113914 EX
Project ID: 13914
Project Title: Instructor Perspectives on Service-Learning in the Leadership Classroom

Dear Marianne:

This letter is to officially notify you of the certification of exemption of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46) and has been classified as Exempt Category 2.

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Exemption Determination: 11/20/2013.

1. The stamped and approved informed consent document has been uploaded to NUgrant (file with -Approved.pdf in the file name). Please use this document to distribute to participants. If you need to make changes to the document, please submit the revised document to the IRB for review and approval prior to using it.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This project should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the IRB Guidelines and you should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that may
affect the exempt status of your research project. You should report any unanticipated problems involving risks to the participants or others to the Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Becky R. Freeman, CIP
for the IRB
Appendix B: Instructor Survey
Instructor Perspectives on Service-Learning in the Leadership Classroom

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this project!

Prior to scheduling and conducting your one-on-one interview with the researcher (anticipated for December or January at a time of your convenience), please complete this short survey.

The survey will serve as the first point of data collection in this study, and your completion of the survey will be an indication of informed consent.

If you have questions or need clarification about anything in this survey, please do not hesitate to contact Marianne Lorensen (mlorensen2@unl.edu).

Please return the survey by January 31, 2014.

*************

1. Name:

2. Title:

3. Institution:

(Responses to the above questions will be confidential. This information will not be shared unless you choose to share it.)

4. Please indicate your primary role at your institution. (Asst./Assoc. Professor, Lecturer, Adjunct Faculty, Staff Member, Graduate Assistant, etc.)

5. Please list below the course numbers and titles for those leadership courses you teach which include service-learning.

6. Please indicate your primary role in the courses listed above. (Instructor, Co-Instructor, Lecturer, Faculty of Record, etc.)
7. Please indicate the number of times (or terms, semesters, quarters) you have taught each of the courses listed above.

8. Please provide (for each course listed above) syllabi, service-learning expectations, and any other materials which speak to the learning outcomes and the overall nature of the course/service-learning experience.

(If you would prefer to share the survey and associated materials in a Dropbox folder rather than returning them via e-mail, please let Marianne know so that she can create a shared folder.)
Appendix C: Interview Protocol


**Interview Questions**

1. What is service-learning? / How would you explain or describe it?

2. Tell me about your experiences with service-learning.
   a. Tell me about a really exciting experience with service-learning.
   b. Tell me about a really disappointing or frustrating experience with service-learning.
   c. Tell me about the biggest challenge you’ve experienced with service-learning.
   d. Tell me the most rewarding thing you’ve experienced with service-learning.

3. How have you changed or evolved over time as a result of your experiences with service-learning?

4. What do you learn or gain as a result of using service-learning in your classes?

5. Why do you use service-learning in your leadership classes?
Appendix D: Informed Consent Information
Informed Consent

Title of Research: Instructor Perspectives on Service-Learning in the Leadership Classroom

Investigators: Marianne Lorensen (doctoral candidate), Gina Matkis (faculty)

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read the following explanation of this study. This statement describes the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality of the study.

Explanation of Procedures

This research study is designed to gain insight to your experiences as an instructor who uses service-learning in undergraduate leadership courses.

Marianne Lorensen, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, is conducting this phenomenological study to learn more about the experiences and perceptions of instructors who use service-learning in undergraduate leadership courses since instructor experiences are largely absent from the existing literature on service-learning.

Participation in the study involves completion of a brief survey (approximately 30 minutes to complete) which includes providing syllabi from your class and other materials you may deem relevant to understanding the expectations and anticipated outcomes of the class and the service-learning experience. These may vary by participant but are likely to include explanations of the expectations and procedures for the service-learning experience as well as any artifacts that speak to the achievement of student learning outcomes. You will be asked to remove any information from these additional materials which might individually identify a student, community partner, or other individual who is not associated with this project.

Additionally, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interview is likely to take place over the phone or a comparable technology such as Skype or Google+ unless an opportunity for a face-to-face interview is available and mutually convenient. The interview will take place with the researcher and participant in private locations of their choosing, such as a campus or home office. The primary consideration for the selection of locations will be the privacy of the participant. The interview will be audio-recorded by the researcher and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The time allotted for the interview is two hours. The interview may not take that entire time. The interview may continue beyond that time frame if you wish it to.
Statement of Risks & Benefits

There are no perceived risks to participation in this study above and beyond those that occur in everyday life.

The anticipated benefit of this study to you includes the opportunity to share your experiences and perspectives, thereby providing for reflection on those experiences and on your pedagogy. Broader benefits are anticipated in terms of providing additional knowledge to the field of research.

Confidentiality

The audio recordings and other materials gathered during this study will remain confidential in a locked office during this project. Only the researchers, the transcriptionist, and University of Nebraska – Lincoln IRB will have access to the study data and information. There will not be any identifying information on the recordings or transcripts. All data will be maintained for no more than three years after the completion of the project. The results of the research will be part of Marianne Lorenzen’s dissertation and could potentially be published in the form of a poster, conference session, or journal article. Your name will not be used in any dissemination of results. The information will help leadership educators, and others to better understand instructor experiences with service-learning.

Additional Information

For additional information, or to express any concerns or complaints about this study, please contact Dr. Gina Matkin at 402-472-2807 or via e-mail at gmatkin1@uni.edu. Dr. Matkin will not be directly involved in data collection, but she is the academic advisor for the primary researcher, and she will serve as a supervisor for this particular project. The PI for this study is Marianne Lorenzen, who can also be reached at 402-472-2807. She can also be reached via e-mail at mllorensen2@uni.edu.

Institutional Review Board

If you have any concerns about this study or questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Institutional Review Board and the Office of Research Responsibility at 402-472-6965 or via e-mail at irb@uni.edu.

Agreement

You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or your institution. Completion and submission of the instructor survey will be considered an indication of your informed consent. Please retain a copy of this e-mail for your personal records.
Appendix E: Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement
Transcriptionist Confidentiality Agreement

Title of Research: Instructor Perspectives on Service-Learning in the Leadership Classroom

Investigators: Marianne Lorensen (doctoral candidate), Gina Matkin (faculty)

Before agreeing to transcribe the recordings in this research study, it is important that you read the following explanation of this study. This statement describes the purpose, procedures, and confidentiality of the study.

Explanation of Procedures

Marianne Lorensen, a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska – Lincoln, is conducting this phenomenological study to learn more about the experiences and perceptions of instructors who use service-learning in undergraduate leadership courses since instructor experiences are largely absent from the existing literature on service-learning.

Participation in the study involves completion of a brief survey and participation in a one-on-one semi-structured interview with the researcher. The interview will be audio-recorded by the researcher and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis. The time allotted for the interview is two hours. The interview may not take that entire time. The interview may continue beyond that time frame if the participant wishes it to.

Statement of Risks & Benefits
There are no perceived risks to participation in this study above and beyond those that occur in everyday life. There are no anticipated risks to you as the transcriptionist.

The anticipated benefit of this study to you includes compensation for your work in an amount to be agreed upon by you and the researcher.

Confidentiality
The audio recordings gathered during this study will remain confidential in a locked office and/or on a computer under password protection during this project. Aside from the researchers and University of Nebraska – Lincoln IRB, you as the transcriptionist will be the only person to have access to the audio recordings. Your access to the recordings is for the purposes...
of transcription ONLY, and the transcripts should not be shared with anyone other than the researchers and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln IRB. At the conclusion of the project, all recordings and transcripts should be returned to Marianne Lorensen. Copies should be destroyed.

Additional Information
For additional information, or to express any concerns or complaints about this study, please contact Dr. Gina Matkin at 402-472-2807 or via e-mail at gmatkin1@uni.edu. The PI for this study is Marianne Lorensen, who can also be reached at 402-472-2807. She can also be reached via e-mail at mlorensen2@uni.edu.

Institutional Review Board
If you have any questions about this study or your rights and responsibilities as a transcriptionist, please contact the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Institutional Review Board and the Office of Research Responsibility at 402-472-6965 or via e-mail at irb@uni.edu.

Agreement
This agreement states that you have received a copy of this confidentiality agreement. Your signature below indicates that you agree to the terms and expectations and that you understand the importance of confidentiality in this case.

☐ I certify, by the signature below, that I am the sole transcriptionist of the audio recordings for this research project and that I agree to maintain confidentiality of the participant as outlined in the research protocol.

Signature of Transcriptionist  
Date  

Glenda Hinz  
Transcriptionist Name (printed)

Signature of Researcher  
Date  

Marianne Lorensen  
Researcher Name (printed)

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