

AN EXPLORATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' ESSENCES OF
PARTICIPATION IN SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES

A DISSERTATION IN

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ASHLEE ELIZABETH COCHRAN HOLMES

B.A., William Jewell College, 2004
M.A.T., University of Central Missouri, 2006
Ed. Spec., University of Central Missouri, 2009

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AN ABSTRACT IN AN EXPLORATION OF MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS'
ESSENCES OF PARTICIPATION IN SERVICE-LEARNING ACTIVITIES
A UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-KANSAS CITY DISSERTATION

Ashlee Elizabeth Cochran Holmes, Candidate for Education Doctorate Degree

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the essence of middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning. Service-learning is "a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (Learn and Serve, 2012, para. 1). For over a century, service-learning has become more widespread in schools across the United States (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012; Rocheleau, 2004; United We Serve, 2012; Wilczenski & Commey, 2007; Youth Service America, 2011).

While some empirical studies have been reported on pre-service teachers and students' experiences, this study seeks to examine the service-learning teachers' experience more closely. Phenomenology is a research paradigm in which the goal is to discover the essence of a particular experience for those who live it. For this study, a phenomenological research and analysis model defined by Moustakas (1994) was used as the methodological basis. Data for the study was generated from six in-depth interviews with middle school service-learning teachers in the Midwest. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed

according to the steps outlined by Moustakas. Each of the participants also had the opportunity to provide a narrative account of their most memorable experience with service-learning. Data for the study was also generated from two observations; data was gathered while the service-learning teachers and their students participated in service-learning events. The narrative and observation data were analyzed according to the steps defined by Miles and Huberman (1994). These steps provided a useful structure to the phenomenological research method.

From the interviews, two dominant themes provided meaning of the phenomenon of service-learning. From the narrative documents, two themes were present. The observations presented three common themes. Essences of the experience revealed through the data analysis process revealed *fostering relationships* as the copiously common dominant theme present in the phenomenological interviews, and narrative documents, and observations. The essence of fostering relationships was defined as students and teachers building relationships. The following meaning units were used to determine the essence: notations regarding the process of teachers and students getting to know each other on a deeper level, building relationships, forming close bonds, and making and sharing personal connections. Also notable, the essence of *teacher support* was prevalent in the interviews and observations, but not the narrative documents.

The results of this study support the practice of service-learning in the middle school classroom. The findings revealed implications for two key groups; the first, educational leaders and administrators and secondly, service-learning teachers, classrooms, and the community. When implemented appropriately, service-learning can have the

potential to provide a conduit for educators to address issues of social justice and cultural diversity awareness and to enhance student growth and responsibility.

The undersigned, appointed by the Dean of the School of Education, have examined a dissertation entitled "An Exploration of Middle School Teachers' Essences of Participation in Service-Learning Activities," presented by Ashlee Elizabeth Cochran Holmes, a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree, and hereby certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

Supervisory Committee

Loyce Caruthers, Ph.D., Committee Chair
Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations

Donna Davis, Ph.D., Committee Member
Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations

Jennifer Friend, Ph.D., Committee Member
Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations

Gus Jacobs, Ed.D., Committee Member
Educational Leadership, Policy, and Foundations

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The middle school service-learning teachers in the community in which I grew up were also key contributors of this research. I am proud to be from a small town community that embraces educational opportunities and additionally encourages and provides service-learning opportunities for students.

I cannot express enough gratitude to my husband, Landon Holmes, for his patience and support in my educational endeavor. He has been with me from the beginning of my doctoral journey and he smiled with open arms as my journey came to an end at commencement. I am grateful for his understanding of the sacrifices I have made to make my doctoral dream a reality.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Bobby and Ginger Cochran, for their continuous support and unconditional love. My parents have always been an inspiration to me and have instilled in me the belief in and appreciation for lifelong learning. They have always been and will continue to be my heroes.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this academic achievement to my family consisting of the Cochrans, Coopers, and Holmes. For my husband, Landon, who endured my quest for self-amelioration and continued education. For my mom, Ginger, who taught me the wisdom that knowledge is power and that children should be at the center of every educator's educational philosophy and practice. For my dad, Bobby, who instilled in me the capacity to never give up and to strive to be the best in all that I do. For my brother, Casey, who still reminds me: laughter is the best medicine. For my grandparents, Ben "Poppee" and Jeanette "Memaw" Cooper, Doll "Mawmaw" Cochran, and the late Bob "Pawpaw" Cochran, all of whom taught me the importance of a strong work ethic, learning, leadership, and God's love. I dedicate this academic achievement to each of the aforementioned special people in my life, for their unconditional love and continued support, for they are the reason I am who I am today.

PREFACE

MY SERVICE-LEARNING JOURNEY

For nearly 100 years, service-learning has become more widespread in schools across the United States. Service-learning is “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Learn and Serve, 2012, para. 1). Not only is service-learning a growing phenomenon and a topic in which I am interested, it is also a topic that I, the researcher, have had a passion for and have actively engaged in throughout my life. From high school through college and even now in my own community, service-learning has played a major role in my life.

My motivation for becoming a teacher originated from my passion for education and service. Lucky for me, service-learning combines these two passions. Service is in my blood; the Johnson County Cancer Foundation (JCCF) was created by my dad in honor of two of his closest friends—one who is currently fighting cancer and one who lost the battle to cancer. In 2010, I was part of the JCCF committee that implemented a successful cancer walk called *Fighting Cancer through the Fairways*; in its first year, the event brought in over \$12,000 for local cancer patients. This experience had a powerful impact on me as I was able to witness, firsthand, the influence of service in my own community and in the personal lives of the citizens in my hometown.

Over a decade ago, while in high school, I was highly involved in my school and community. I was president of Student Council and I was involved in various other committees including Prom and Senior Class Graduation Committee. I founded and became president of a chapter of Fellowship of Christian Athletes; an organization which is still in

existence at the high school today. I participated in cancer awareness walks, I slept outside in a cardboard box for homeless awareness, and I had the opportunity to serve with numerous other philanthropic organizations. My passion for service did not end after high school commencement; I continued to serve throughout college.

My time at William Jewell College allowed for a plethora of opportunities to learn and serve. One experience that played an important role in my experience with service-learning was my acceptance and participation in the Pryor Leadership Studies Program. This program was and is the epitome of service-learning as it focused on learning through service. Part of the Pryor Leadership Program requirements involved a 15 day Outward Bound canoeing, outdoor survival, and service experience in the Florida Everglades. I learned much about myself, leadership, teamwork, and what it means to truly serve.

Following is an excerpt from my journal from my experience:

Mahatma Gandhi testified “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.” Our group had the opportunity to lose ourselves in the service of others at Village Oaks Elementary School in Immokalee... The population at the school was extremely diverse. There were many Hispanics, Haitians, Native Americans, and African Americans; only three percent were Caucasians. That in and of itself was an experience for me. I had never been the minority in any setting. (Cochran, 2001)

An additional component of the Pryor Leadership Program entailed participating in a volunteer internship. For my internship, I spent over 50 volunteer hours of service at Marian Hall Nursing Home. As I did with all of my service experiences, I kept a journal; following is an excerpt from my time at Marian Hall:

I thoroughly enjoyed my volunteer experience because it allowed me the opportunity to see another aspect of the event planning... I feel especially lucky because I had the chance to work with the elderly; they have so much knowledge to offer and past experiences and memories to share. (Cochran, 2002)

Another significant experience that shaped my life was studying abroad in the land down under for four months. I moved to Australia as part of the International Educational Studies program without knowing a soul in the country. I survived the experience and consequently became a stronger person and leader. Throughout my time in Melbourne, I kept a journal of my experiences. One such experience was touring and volunteering at the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club—a vital part of the Koori and Shepparton communities. An excerpt from my reflection journal read, “The sense of community I witnessed at Friday night’s barbeque and all day Saturday during the competition was overwhelming. These people truly care about their culture” (Cochran, 2003).

In the Pryor Leadership Capstone class that followed the Outward Bound experience, I was an active participant in a college-level service-learning project that directly influenced the community. Together, we organized, executed, and celebrated the Save-a-Pet Extravaganza Adoption Event at William Jewell College. This was perhaps the authentic service-learning experience in which I was a participant. A portion of my written reflection of the event noted, “I learned that it is not feasible for one person to do everything; each person has individual strengths and it is important to allow those people with certain skills to utilize those skills thus enhancing their strengths” (Cochran, 2004).

I am fortunate to have been able to be a part of so many amazing learning experiences. Prior to my educational and service-learning journey, I was raised in a house full of love and encouragement. I come from a long line of leaders and educators. My parents instilled in me a heart to serve. They are my heroes and those in which I align how I live my life. Because of my parents’ unconditional love and my balanced upbringing, I am a lifelong learner and an individual who has a passion for education and service.

During my years as a middle school educator and administrator, I have had a variety of professional experiences—many of which focused on service-learning. I have been blessed to have had such amazing opportunities in the education field. All of the aforementioned experiences have shaped my values and perspective regarding life in general. The illustrious Albert Einstein expressed, “Only a life lived in the service to others is worth living” (as cited in Farber, 2003, p. 241). This is a statement in which I feel I live my life by to a considerable degree. In the previous district in which I was hired, I held the title of service-learning teacher and sponsor for three years. Also, during that time, I taught two consecutive years of summer school in which I taught a class I created called Extreme Community Makeover. Service-learning was the focal point of the class as students planned and executed a multitude of service-learning projects in the community.

Service is still a part of my life—even though it is not as prevalent as the experiences in my past. I still strive to help others, make others’ day, and go out of my way to assist people in need. My personal experiences with service and my passion to help others are my sources of inspiration for this study. The goal of this study was to share teachers’ experiences with service-learning and explore the essences of those experiences.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As you enter the service-learning classroom, you witness a small group of students excitedly engaged in a round-table discussion, other students are researching on classroom computers, another group is collaborating and brainstorming, and a few students are on the phone contacting community stakeholders. You have been informed that service-learning is “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Learn and Serve, 2012, para. 1). With this knowledge, you observe an array of life skills being fine-tuned including communication, planning, organization, problem-solving and more. You can hear the enthusiasm in the students’ voices as they clearly have ownership of their tasks. You observe the service-learning teacher supervising the students, facilitating conversations, answering students’ questions, taking pictures, and documenting achieved tasks.

As you continue to observe this scene, you see the service-learning teacher move around the room with a watchful eye, stop to question students on their progress and to determine if they need assistance. She praises students on their accomplishments, provides support and facilitates conversations on how to overcome challenges, and actively supervises each student’s role. She is a cheerleader and observant more than a participant, and a supervisor more than an administrator. She knows in her heart that the students are the true “magic-makers” in the service-learning environment. However, they could not make the magic happen without her support and direction.

This classroom is in the planning phase of a service-learning project. The students have already brainstormed, discussed, created, and prepared for every step of the service-learning project. Reflection is a keen aspect of their daily activities as they debrief and internalize each step and every decision; the service-learning teacher guides classroom discussions and personal contemplations throughout the process. Journals, class discussions, think-pair-share partners, and non-linguistic representations are all forms of reflection the service-learning teacher provides for the students.

The final product? A successful service-learning project in the community; an opportunity for the students and the service-learning teacher to truly give back to community members in need. Throughout the implementation of the final product, the service-learning teacher will ensure that every student has a specific role and responsibility. Important events throughout the day will be highlighted via photographs and videos. The benefactors will express praise and gratitude towards the students and service-learning teacher.

Following the execution of the service-learning project, the students will partake in even more reflection and debriefing activities. A well-deserved celebration event will spotlight the success of the project and the impact on the community. Students will be acknowledged and praised for their efforts. A video collage will be shown which will have captured the students in action and the impact they had on the community. A press release will also be printed highlighting the students and their efforts. The service-learning teacher, the students, the school, and the community will revel, celebrate, and praise the collaborative effort and reflect on what was gained and learned.

With these ideas in mind, I explored the experiences of middle school teachers with service-learning. To begin, a discussion of the problem grounded in the experiences of teachers with this phenomenon followed by the purpose and research questions. I introduce the topics of theoretical framework as the background knowledge of the study and an overview of the methodology. Ultimately, the significance of the study is integrated throughout with a more clearly defined research-based section related to its importance and contributions to the field.

Statement of the Problem

As a past service-learning sponsor, my students expressed to me that when I incorporated service-learning in my instructional activities, I made a difference in their lives; they were excited to be part of the changes we made in the community. I truly aspired to empower them. Service-learning incorporation allowed many of my students the opportunities to gain and experience self-confidence that they may have lacked academically. Service-learning in my classroom provided experiences for students in which their gifts and talents could truly shine.

For over a century, service-learning has become more widespread in schools across the United States (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012; Rocheleau, 2004; United We Serve, 2012; Wilczenski & Commey, 2007; Youth Service America, 2011). Over the past 15 years, service-learning has spurred new growth by congressional and presidential measures and funding including President Bill Clinton's signing of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993; President George W. Bush's creation of the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation; President Barak Obama's challenge, United We Serve; and the creation of programs such as Serve America and the

National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. With the increase in service-learning in schools, there has also been an increase in research on service-learning.

In 2000, the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, a longtime advocate of service-learning, appointed the National Commission on Service-Learning to study the current status of the practice of service-learning in schools across the United States. The Commission, overseen by former United States Senator, John Glenn, and co-sponsored by the John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy at the Ohio State University, was comprised of 18 education, government, and community leaders. These leaders spent a year reviewing research data, traveling to schools, and interviewing students, teachers, and other advocates with the intention of obtaining a better understanding of the prevalence and practice of service-learning.

Findings of the study, *Learning in Deed* (National Service-Learning Partnership, 2012), revealed service-learning reversed student disengagement from schooling by giving students responsibility for their own learning and increasing their motivation to participate in school activities. It reinforced and extended the standards-based reform movement by providing a real-life context for learning and giving students a sense of the practical importance of what they learned in school. Service-learning promoted the public purposes of education by preparing students for citizenship through involvement in citizen action. It was built on the growing willingness of students to become involved in service to their communities while adding an academic component to such service. Additionally, service-learning contributed to young people's personal and career development by reducing violence and sexual activity and increasing their sense of responsibility and workplace skills (National Service-Learning Partnership, 2012).

Through active participation, service-learning provides structured time for students to reflect by thinking, discussing and writing about their experiences; supports opportunities for students to use skills and knowledge in real-life situations; extends learning beyond the classroom and into the community; and fosters a sense of caring for others (Learn and Serve, 2012). Students have been the focus of numerous studies; however, there is a gap in the research in which service-learning teachers are the focal point (Ciaccio, 1999; Clark 2002; Krebs, 2006; Schukar, 1997). Much of the current research on service-learning focused on students in a public education setting (Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; McConnell, Clasen, Stolfi, Anderson, Markert, & Jaballas, 2010).

Even a greater amount of the literature spotlighted pre-service teachers' experiences with service-learning in a higher education setting (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Culp, Chepyator-Thomson, & Hsu, 2009; Kirtman, 2008; Lake & Jones, 2008; LaMasters, 2001; Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010; Reynolds, 2003; Swick & Rowls, 2000; Thompson, 2010; Wong, 2008). One does not have to look far to find studies about the service-learning experiences of students of all ages; however, the question remained: What are service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?

The service-learning teacher is the master of his or her craft, the director of the classroom, the facilitator, and the peacekeeper. The service-learning teacher's role allows for him or her to have a front-row seat for service-learning in action. The teacher is the first witness of every phase of service-learning activities—the service-learning teacher sees the good, the bad, and the ugly, but what does he or she truly experience?

While a great deal of research has been conducted regarding the perceived benefits for students who participate in service-learning and the outcomes of service-learning, research studies regarding the personal experiences of service-learning teachers—which requires a qualitative approach that illuminates the phenomenon—are virtually nonexistent (Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; Krebs, 2006; McConnell, Clasen, Stolfi, Anderson, Markert, & Jaballas, 2010; Mitton- Kükner, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2010; Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010; Reynolds, 2003; & Schukar, 1997; Swick & Rowls, 2000).

Several studies in middle and high school settings, have attempted to capture the experiences of teachers with service-learning, but most did not investigate the meanings of their lived experiences. Krebs (2006) explored what motivated teachers to implement service-learning; Schukar (1997) surveyed middle school teachers’ perspectives regarding the benefits of service-learning; and after investigating the use of service-learning research at the secondary level, Billig (2000) recommended more research, specifically in the secondary education sector, was needed. Teaching—any subject—requires a special and unique set of skills; service-learning teachers are required to possess not only the qualifications of a regular education classroom teacher, but in addition unique skills likened to event planning and orchestration (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Today’s teachers must use innovative approaches to engage students as thinkers and problem solvers so they may be successful global citizens and leaders of the 21st century (Zhu, Valcke, & Schellens, 2010). Ponder, VanderVeldt, & Lewis-Ferrell (2011) explored how 12 classroom teachers “used service-learning as an instructional tool to help students practice active participation in their community and beyond, while also recognizing the

relevance of academic coursework as they applied their knowledge and skills to meaningful issues and contexts beyond the four walls of the classroom” (p. 45).

The study revealed that all twelve teachers reported improved teacher dispositions and increased confidence regarding the implementation of a civics-centered curriculum. As a result of such findings, an increasing number of education programs are requiring pre-service teachers to engage in service-learning in order to acquire a unique skills set and dispositions. There is recognition that participation in service-learning can positively impact the development of pre-service teachers, professionally, culturally, and academically (Billig & Freeman, 2010).

Researchers, Chambers and Lavery (2012), at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA) used qualitative data collected from pre-service teachers to describe benefits of their experiences with service-learning units. Researchers used discourse analysis employing a symbolic interactionist lens to determine themes within the data. Six themes, detailed the experiences and reflections of the pre-service teachers; empathy, leadership, self and societal reflection, confidence, professional practice, and knowledge and skills. “There was no distinct hierarchy identified amongst themes, however, differences in responses were evident depending upon the type of service-learning undertaken by the individual (i.e. educationally-based as opposed to working within the wider community)” (Chambers & Lavery, 2012, p. 7). These themes serve to illustrate the potential importance and value of the incorporation of service-learning experiences in pre-service teacher programs; moreover, as previously mentioned, they are also qualities that current service-learning teachers must possess.

Indeed, the role of the service-learning teacher entails much more than that of a regular classroom teacher (Eyler & Giles, 1999). While students ideally do the brunt of the work during service-learning projects, the service-learning teacher is the one who ensures everything goes smoothly throughout the entire process. When service-learning teachers describe their involvement with implementing service-learning, they use such terms as powerful, inspirational, invigorating, purposeful, rewarding, encouraging, important, exciting, and essential (Ciaccio, 1999; Clark, 2002; Krebs, 2006; Schukar, 1997). While these depictions are helpful, they do not adequately address the essence of the experiences for teachers. For the purpose of this study, I defined essence as a central meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). What is the true essence of the service-learning experience for middle school teachers? Why do teachers continue to implement service-learning even when they are crunched for time, pressured by testing, and inundated with paperwork?

Essentially, increased infusion of service-learning into the curriculum is in the hands of the teachers. Thus, it was necessary to better understand why service-learning teachers continue to incorporate service-learning activities and what exactly it was that they experienced throughout the process. Qualitative research has become increasingly popular as a means of understanding not only educational factors but also a range of other human experience phenomena; however, the complex conceptual underpinnings of the paradigm remain relatively unexplored in the literature (Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Carrington & Selva, 2010; Kirtman, 2008; LaMasters, 2001; Swick & Rowls, 2007; Wong, 2008). My intent was to highlight how the conceptual dimensions underpinning qualitative research can contribute to understanding the experiences of middle school teachers with service-learning. The practical considerations which focused on service-learning teachers' essences

were and are particularly relevant for the enhancement and improvement of service-learning programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to better understand middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning at a suburban middle school consisting of 6th grade through 8th grade students. At this stage in the research, the central phenomenon of service-learning was generally defined as “an innovative teaching methodology that integrates service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities” (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002, p. 4). This phenomenological study focused on describing what all service-learning teacher participants have in common as they experienced the phenomenon of service-learning at the selected site.

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, concept, or topic for a number of individuals. Ultimately, the researcher condenses the experiences to a central meaning or the “essence” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This study was aligned with a transcendental phenomenological approach as opposed to a hermeneutical phenomenological approach as the focus was exclusively on the participants. Transcendental phenomenology, as a scientific study of the appearance of the phenomena just as it is seen and as it appears in consciousness, spotlights the participants' experiences. Essentially, the everyday considerations, perceptions, and insights are set aside, and “phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure transcendental ego” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). In the study, the service-learning

teachers utilized this method to truly ascertain the essences of their experiences with service-learning. Any phenomenon represents an appropriate starting place for phenomenological reflection. “The very appearance of something makes it a phenomenon. The challenge is to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49).

As the researcher, I set aside my personal experiences, as much as possible, in order to have an unsullied perspective of the phenomenon of service-learning (Creswell, 2007). Results from this phenomenological study can be related to and integrated with those of other phenomenologists studying service-learning. Conducting a study with a phenomenological focus is different from using phenomenology to philosophically justify the methods of qualitative inquiry as legitimate in social science research. While both contributions are important, “a phenomenological study (as opposed to a phenomenological perspective) is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

Research Questions

The central research question guiding this study asked:

What are middle school service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning?

The following sub-questions guided this study:

- What statements describe the service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning?

- What themes are identified from the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?
- What are the contexts of and thoughts about the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?
- What are the overall essences of the service-learning teachers' experience with service-learning?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework focused on the conceptual ideas of service-learning as related to this qualitative research study. A theoretical framework—also commonly referred to as a conceptual framework—is based on the beliefs and assumptions of the researcher, theories and concepts, experiential knowledge and existing literature (Maxwell, 2005). Bickman and Rog (2009) characterized it as “a model that specifies the variables of interest and the expected relationships between them” (p. 7). The conceptual ideas of the theoretical framework include a Historical Overview of Service-Learning; Service-Learning Defined; Teacher Experiences in the Contemporary Service-Learning Classroom; and Pedagogical Community through Service-Learning. These offer significant information about service-learning and consequently provide a detailed explanation of the phenomenon of service-learning and a multitude of its features including the experiences of service-learning teachers.

The concepts intertwine as they are all related to the unique facets of service-learning including the service-learning sponsor's unique role. The Historical Overview of Service-Learning illustrates an epigrammatic history of events that have influenced service-learning today. Service-Learning Defined provides a detailed description of the theory and

practice of service-learning, influenced by a history grounded in Dewey's notions of experience. *Teachers' Experiences in the Contemporary Service-Learning Classroom* offers a discussion of findings related to teachers' lived experiences in the service-learning classroom. The section on Pedagogical Community through Service-Learning provides an overview of the benefits of extending pedagogy beyond the classroom walls. For the purpose of this study, community pedagogy has been defined as an educational and collaborative relationship between the students, teachers, administrators, and community members in which all participants are empowered by their experiences. In Chapter 2, the topics of the theoretical framework are further explored to provide a more robust discussion of research related to service-learning.

Historical Overview of Service-Learning

The various resources used for the background research and literature review produced information from a wide range of researchers and existing studies, establishing a historical perspective of service-learning and service-learning's relationship to education at diverse levels. The review of the literature depicted the application of service-learning in different settings as well as service-learning's benefits in the different settings.

Understanding the foundation and development of service-learning and education offers a firm basis for continuing research.

Service-learning may appear to be a moderately new term; however, the ideas and goals of service-learning have been around for over a century. Understanding the philosophical foundation of service-learning is advisable in order to understand the study's problem and purpose as well as how the study fit within existing research. Service-learning

is said to have originated from Judeo-Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist religious traditions (Furco & Billig, 2002).

From a philosophical theory standpoint, service-learning is said to have originated with John Dewey and Jean Piaget (Billig, 2000; England & Marcinkowski, 2007). Piaget's cognitive-affective development theory has a firm psychological foundation for service-learning (England & Marcinkowski). "The idea that community service can and should be introduced as a means of instruction can be traced to progressive education and its most influential, original, and systematic theorist, John Dewey" (Rocheleau, 2004, p. 4). Dewey (1939) stated, "Education, in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience" (p. 89). Three connected philosophical underpinnings were present in Dewey's early writing: the importance of experiential learning, the need for reflection, and the benefit of reciprocal learning (Champagne, 2006). Dewey and Piaget have encouraged educators to embrace service-learning as a teaching-learning approach to improve academic achievement and build relationships between America's youth and their larger communities (Meyer, Billig, & Hofschire, 2004).

While there appears to be no evidence that the concept of service-learning was part of Dewey's formally stated philosophy of education, "his philosophy of experience is central to his early works on pedagogy and his later philosophical works concerning epistemology" (Giles, Dwight, & Eyler, 1994, p. 77). Principles of experience, inquiry, and reflection were at the root of Dewey's (1939) notions in *Experience and Education*; these same concepts are the key elements in service-learning. The central question for Dewey in developing what he called a philosophy of experience was, "how is it that experiences are educative?"

According to Dewey (1939), “The belief that all genuine education comes about through experience does not mean that all experiences are genuinely or equally educative. Experience and education cannot be directly equated to each other” (p. 25). Essentially, Dewey believed in order for experiences to be truly educational, the quality of the experience had to be both agreeable and have an effect on later experiences. Another aspect of Dewey’s philosophy that is directly aligned to the ideals of service-learning is the necessity for reflection also known as “reflective thinking”.

As stated by Dewey (1939), “Active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends, constitutes reflective thought” (p. 9). Moreover, Dewey proposed using projects as a means for producing learning from experience. In order to do so, Dewey (1939) provided four criteria necessary in order for projects to be truly educational; projects “must generate interest, must be worthwhile intrinsically, must present problems that awaken new curiosity and create demand for information, and must cover a considerable time span and be capable of fostering development over time” (p. 217-218). There is an obvious connection between Dewey’s educational philosophy and the standards of service-learning which helped to shape the definition and influence the implementation of service-learning in public schools and higher education.

Service-Learning Defined

What exactly is service-learning? As formerly stated, service-learning is “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Learn and Serve, 2012, para. 1). Service-learning has also been described as

“the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth” (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999, p. 2).

The goals of service-learning include enhancing social and academic learning; developing character and citizenship skills; learning about current issues; developing an action plan for service; engaging in meaningful service by working on a project that will make a difference (Learn and Serve, 2012).

There are a variety of types of service-learning activities that require participants to apply different skills. Direct service-learning entails person-to-person, face-to-face service projects in which the students’ service directly impacts individuals who receive the service from the students (Commey & Wilcenski, 2005). For example, tutoring other students and adults, conducting art/music/dance lessons for younger students, helping other students resolve conflict, giving performances on violence and drug prevention, or creating lessons and presenting them to younger students.

In comparison, indirect service-learning encompasses working on broad issues, environmental projects, and community development-projects that have clear benefits to the community or environment, but not necessarily to individual identified people with whom the students are working (Commey & Wilcenski, 2005). Examples include compiling a town history, restoring historic structures or building low-income housing, removing exotic plants and restoring ecosystems, preparing preserve areas for public use.

A third type of service-learning project requires gathering and presenting information on areas of interest and need—projects that find, gather, and report on information that is needed; this is referred to as research-based service-learning (Learn and Serve, 2012). Research focused projects may include writing a guide on available

community services and translating it into Spanish and other languages of new residents; conducting longitudinal studies of local bodies of water in order to achieve water testing for local residents; gathering information and creating brochures or videos for non-profit or government agencies; or conducting surveys, studies, evaluations, experiments, and interviews.

Educating others about topics of public interest—projects that aim to create awareness and action on some issue that is in the public interest is known as *advocacy service-learning* (Learn and Serve, 2012). Planning and putting on public forums on topics of interest in the community; conducting public information campaigns on topics of interest or local needs; working with elected officials to draft legislation to improve communities; and training the community in fire safety or disaster preparation are all examples of advocacy service-learning.

The definitions and descriptions of service-learning are plentiful, but they all are based on the premise of students learning through service. The numerous definitions can be narrowed down to four basic phases: preparation, service, reflection, and celebration (Fertman, 1994).

Teacher Experiences in the Contemporary Service-Learning Classroom

Service-learning is happening right now, somewhere across the country. The projects may vary, but the components do not waiver. The prevalence of service-learning across the country, including an in-depth dialogue of cognitive and affective development that resulted in the unique characteristics of the service-learning teacher, is further discussed in the literature review. Additionally, in the review of the literature, I offer a

picture of the implications of No Child Left Behind (2002), standards-based testing, and what this all means for the service-learning curriculum.

Various studies have been conducted on the proposed benefits of student participation in service-learning activities. The general opinion is that service-learning is a positive element of school systems, however, not everyone agrees. There are two-sides to every story and the literature in the field emphasizes both proclamations for and against service-learning.

Despite (or perhaps as result of) the recent propagation and development of service-learning theory and practice, there has been some uncertainty pertaining to the basic principles and goals in the service-learning literature. Butin (2003) focused on the limited community impact of service-learning, the limited empirical evidence for defining and articulating best practices that lead to meaningful and sustained student outcomes, and the difficulty of rigorous and authentic assessment of service-learning outcomes. He endeavored to clarify service-learning practice and theory by offering “four distinct conceptualizations of service-learning: technical, cultural, political, and poststructuralist” (p. 1674).

According to Butin (2003), “Service-learning has become a potent force within the rhetoric and reality of reconstituting alternative modes of teaching and learning across the K-16 educational landscape” (p. 1690). With this recent success, however, service-learning has stumbled on several complicated theoretical and practical issues such as community impact, student outcomes, and authentic assessment. “The normative framework of service learning is constituted through what I have termed a technical/cultural lens. If instead the service-learning field is understood through multiple conceptual frames—technical,

cultural, political, and poststructural—it becomes possible to uncover the specific assumptions and implications of each” (p. 1690). In so doing, Butin (2003) suggested, service-learning practitioners and researchers can move forward in developing, extending, and reconstituting diverse means and goals for service-learning. Fundamentally, Butin (2003) strongly recommended “that melding and merging contrasting lens offers the opportunity to come up with new ways of approaching service-learning theory and practice” (p. 1690).

Regardless of the assorted viewpoints on service-learning, it is evident that service-learning is ensuing in educational institutions across the country and world. Public school teachers and higher education faculties nationwide are collaborating, planning, and infusing service-learning into the curriculum.

Pritchard and Whitehead (2004) provided a framework grounded in theory and best professional practice that middle and high school teachers, their students, and community partners can use to design, implement, and evaluate service-learning projects that address authentic community needs. Additionally, the comprehensive guide revealed ways collaborative service-learning can enhance students' intellectual development, promote their academic achievement, strengthen their citizenship skills, and accelerate the kinds of educational accountability and reform initiatives emphasized in the national educational standards movement.

Johnson, Johnson, and Shaney (2012) engaged students in leadership in teaming roles through international service-learning at the University of Alabama. In Peru, students practiced skills that met challenges of engineering in a global society and demonstrated accreditation learning outcomes not easily taught in traditional classrooms. Students

achieved first-hand experience in what engineering is ultimately about: building things that make people's lives better. Assessing the experience in a post-trip survey, students rated teaming lessons, communications, and experiential learning skills as particular strengths (Johnson, Johnson, & Shaney, 2012). According to the authors, "Learning outside the classroom box is the 'real deal,' our students continually tell us. And teaching outside that box has similar rewards for faculty" (Johnson, Johnson, & Shaney, 2012, para. 17).

Faculty members at Bellevue College validated their commitment to student development and service-learning at a recent service-learning faculty institute. "The interest of faculty and staff in service learning signals a desire on campus to invigorate student learning with real-world experience" (Green, 2012, para. 1). Bellevue College is not the only higher education organization in support of inculcating service-learning in academy courses; just to name a few, Brown University, College of the Ozarks, Duke University, Georgetown University, Michigan State University, Ohio State University, Stanford University, and the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hills also have service-learning program requirements (U.S. News & World Report, 2013).

Essentially, teachers at every level of education aim to assist students in the transition process from school to the challenges of the real world; effective teachers help students see the connection between the two. Contemporary teachers in the service-learning classroom work to extend learning to the community. Through this extension, students and communities begin an essential transformation that leads to a pedagogical community.

Pedagogical Community through Service-Learning

Is there a relationship between service-learning and social pedagogy? Can service-learning be a conduit for community education or education for sociality? Considering the

numerous benefits, service-learning can create a pedagogical community. Community pedagogy is both curricular and co-curricular. It is based on relationships and requires a commitment by both the school and community. Community pedagogy is what happens when learning extends beyond the school building into real world outside.

Community pedagogy is closely related to the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy as it “validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (Gay, 2010, p. 46). Improving communities now and in the future is dependent upon providing students with the acquisition of knowledge that connects instructive readings with community challenges, the analysis of issues that reflects upon objective as well as subjective social, political, and psychological factors, and the application of skills that encourages learners to actively employ their multiple talents.

A pedagogical community leads to the education of empowerment. Education for empowerment as a social pedagogy defines education as one place where the individual and society are constructed, a social action which can either empower or domesticate students (Shor, 1993). According to Freire’s philosophy, “Teachers pose problems derived from student life, social issues, and academic subjects in a mutually created dialogue. This pedagogy challenges teachers and students to empower themselves for social change, to advance democracy and equality as they advance their literacy and knowledge” (Shor, 1993, p. 24). Freire’s empowerment education model links the identification of issues to positive action for change and development; moreover, it invites citizens to become subjects rather than objects in their complex social lives, ideally fostering desire to take social action against problems in their communities (Shor, 1993). In the Freiren

classroom—much like a service-learning classroom—teachers “pose critical problems to students, treat them as complicated, substantial human beings, and encourage curiosity and activism about knowledge and the world” (Shor, 1993, p. 25). When this type of education for empowerment takes place, students reap the benefits.

According to Bringle, Phillips, and Hudson (2004), “The proposed benefits of service-learning appear to be significant and plentiful” (p. 5). A number of other researchers have documented the student benefits of service-learning (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee, 2000; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Eylers, Giles, Stenson, and Gray, 2001). Authors Eyler and Giles (1999) used quantitative and qualitative research evidence gleaned from the surveys of more than 1500 students together with a number of personal interviews, including problem-solving interviews completed by students before and after service-learning, and one-time interviews where other students evaluated their experiences with reflection during service-learning.

According to Eyler and Giles (1999), service-learning improved student learning outcomes and contributed to student personal and social development. In regards to knowledge, service-learning improved student academic outcomes as demonstrated through complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Students reported that they learned more and were motivated to work harder in a service-learning class than in traditionally taught classes (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Many students reported stronger faculty-student relationships than students not involved in service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). In addition, students and faculty reported that service-learning improves students' ability to apply what they've learned in the "real world" (Eyler & Giles, 1999). These findings are connected to Freire's

notion of education for empowerment and the idea of community pedagogy as the students linked the identification of issues to positive action for social change. Furthermore, the students fostered the desire to take social action against problems in their communities (Shor, 1993).

Students also experienced personal outcomes as a result of participation in service-learning. Service-learning enhanced student personal development such as sense of personal efficacy, personal identity, spiritual growth, and moral development (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Social outcomes were additionally improved as service-learning assisted in the reduction of the use of stereotypes and facilitated cultural and racial understanding (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Astin, et al. (2000) collected longitudinal data from 22,236 college undergraduates attending a national sample of baccalaureate-granting colleges and universities from 1994 through 1998. The impact of service-learning and community service was assessed on 11 different dependent measures: academic outcomes (three measures), values (two measures), self-efficacy, leadership (three measures), career plans, and plans to participate in further service after college (Astin et al., 2000). Four additional outcome measures were examined for a subsample of students for whom standardized test scores (GRE-Verbal, GRE-Quantitative, LSAT, MCAT) were available. The qualitative portion of the study involved in-depth case studies of service-learning on three different campuses. Individual and group interviews with faculty and students, together with classroom observations, were conducted at each site (Astin et al., 2000).

Findings from the study revealed that service participation showed significant positive effects (Astin et al., 2000). Both the quantitative and qualitative results suggested

that providing students with an opportunity to “process” the service experience with each other was a powerful component of both community-service and service-learning.

According to Astin et al. (2000), the single most important factor associated with a positive service-learning experience appeared to be the student’s degree of interest in the subject matter. The qualitative findings and the significance of the study suggested that both faculty and students developed a heightened sense of civic responsibility and personal effectiveness through participation in service-learning (Astin et al., 2000). This increased sense of social responsibility closely ties back into Freire’s philosophy of education for empowerment. In addition, the educators posed critical problems to students, treated them as complicated, substantial human beings, and encouraged curiosity and activism about knowledge and the world (Shor, 1993).

As previously stated, public school students and higher education students alike have been the focus of numerous studies; however, there is a gap in the research related to the experiences of public school teachers with service-learning. The study aimed to add to the literature in this area, especially in regards to a qualitative approach. The absence of literature related to the essences of teachers’ experiences required a more qualitative approach in which themes could be determined.

Overview of the Methodology

The specific study design and methods decisions surrounding this qualitative study were made within an overall strategic framework and methodology. Qualitative research is based on the study of meaning, more exclusively, the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a shared or human problem. According to Creswell (2007), “Qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a

natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (p. 37).

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, concept, or topic for a number of individuals. In accordance with Moustakas (1994), I, the researcher, condensed the experiences to a central meaning or the “essence” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The rationale for using a phenomenological approach in this study was to establish themes and patterns of the meaning of the service-learning teachers’ experiences with the phenomenon of service-learning—the ultimate goal was to learn of the essences of these experiences.

The site of the phenomenological study was an average-sized suburban middle school in the Midwest consisting of 6th grade through 8th grade students. The site was appropriate for the study because the school has implemented a service-learning curriculum for over 20 years. The service-learning program was established in 1992 with the creation of two specific service-learning courses. A service-learning coordinator position was created in 2007; since this creation, participation in the service-learning program has increased and the overall program has been enhanced. Specific steps have been taken to accurately align the program to the features of service-learning.

This study focused on six teachers of three different service-learning groups selected through purposeful sampling. Open-ended interviews, observations, and document-collection from the service-learning sponsors were utilized to gather the information-rich data. The in-depth interview questions focused on the experiences and perceptions of the service-learning teachers with service-learning activities. A complete list of the interview questions can be found in Chapter 3. Obtaining a narrative document from each participant

also aided in qualitative data collection. The document analysis included a narrative of the service-learning teachers describing their most memorable experience with service-learning. Observations served as the third data source. By observing each of the four phases of service-learning—planning, service, reflection, celebration—I ascertained the essences of the service-learning teachers.

It was my intent that the data from this qualitative study led to serendipitous findings and to new integrations. Sanguinely, the data helped me, the researcher, go beyond initial conceptions and ultimately generated and revised conceptual frameworks that undergirded the study. Phenomenological analysis aided in the interpretation of data as a means to extend the literature relative to the experiences of teachers with service-learning.

Significance of the Study

Upon entering the search term “service-learning” into a series of research databases, pages upon pages of results tattooed my computer screen. Service-learning is no doubt a well sought-after phenomenon; however, the participants and overall focus of the numerous studies varied greatly. Case study, critical theory, and mixed methods studies were predominant qualitative research approaches that converged on a range of service-learning topics. Participants of the various studies included an array of students of all ages and academic levels such as special education students to pre-medical students (Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; McConnell, Clasen, Stolfi, Anderson, Markert, & Jaballas, 2010).

Additionally, the majority of the studies focused on pre-service teachers and their attitudes towards, experiences of, and participation in service-learning activities (Culp, Chepyator-Thomson, & Hsu, 2009; Lake & Jones, 2008; LaMasters, 2001; Reynolds, 2003; Swick & Rowls, 2000; Wong, 2008). Others concentrated on the impact of service-learning

on teacher preparation programs (Kirtman, 2008; Nelson, Antayá-Moore, Badley, & Coleman, 2010). Another current topic was service-learning as a means of educating pre-service teachers about social justice and diversity (Baldwin, et al., 2007; Bell, et al., 2007; Thompson, 2010). Critical social theory and narrative theory proved to be reoccurring methods of qualitative study centered on teacher preparation programs while the phenomenological approach was not as established (Carrington & Selva, 2010; Clark, 2002; Mitton- Kükner, Nelson, & Desrochers, 2010).

The gap in the literature appeared to be the research on teachers' experiences with service-learning. Students and pre-service teachers were greatly represented in the service-learning research field; however, it was a rare occasion to find a study in which service-learning teachers were the participants. There is an evident chasm in the literature based on teachers' experiences with service-learning activities. This qualitative study buoyantly added to the gap in the research literature and, in doing so, also devoted significant attention to the expressions of service-learning teachers.

Within a complex social and political environment, service-learning is still growing in the United States. In today's social and political environment, service-learning could quite possibly be the means in which students become motivated to be more involved with societal oppositions, other people's dilemmas, and overall political dealings (Rocheleau, 2004). It is evident that serving-learning will continue to be prevalent across the country (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012; Rocheleau, 2004; United We Serve, 2012).

The findings of this phenomenological study have latent implications for educational administrators and service-learning teachers. The results from this study can

potentially be used to provide a voice to educational leaders and service-learning teachers when attempting to justify the implementation of a curriculum that incorporates service-learning activities. By developing an understanding of the essence of the experiences of service-learning teachers, the educational community now has a better understanding of what one truly attains by sponsoring service-learning activities. Moreover, the information gathered from this study provided insight to educational administrators and policymakers relative to improving teaching-learning efforts in United States classrooms. Understanding service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning in this study has the potential to also assist administrators in advancing service-learning initiatives in their schools. By studying service-learning teachers' lived experiences and perceptions regarding the value of service-learning at the middle school level, collected data revealed categories of emergent themes for translation into useful insight for administrators and policymakers possibly prompting new related studies as well as educational policies.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I described the problem, purpose, research questions, theoretical framework, overview of the methodology, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 outlines the literature review that bounds the study to the phenomenon of service-learning. Chapter 3 further explains the rationale for qualitative research and extrapolates the design and analysis elements of the study. In Chapter 4, I plan to report the findings of the study with implications of findings and recommendations for future research described in Chapter 5.

Service-learning is not simply a fad or the most recent catchphrase in the educational community; rather, it has become an effective strategy or tool for educators to

better teach students about themselves and the world, while meeting existing goals and objectives. Service-learning teachers across the world are making a difference and changing the lives of children every day; it is time to let their voices be heard.

French philosopher, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, expressed, “The most satisfying thing in life is to have been able to give a large part of oneself to others” (as cited in Mason, 2004, p. 37). Service-learning has been illustrated as a conduit in which one can give oneself to others, but the questions remain: What does one truly attain by facilitating and participating in service-learning activities? What are the essences of service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning?

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Service-learning is growing in popularity in educational institutions today—research surrounding service-learning is also on the rise. While much research has been recorded regarding the perceived benefits for students who participate in service-learning and the overall outcomes of service-learning, research regarding the personal experiences of service-learning teachers is practically nonexistent. A search of Academic Search Complete generated 338 studies on students’ experiences with service-learning and just 39 research inquiries associated with the experiences of teachers with service-learning. A search of the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) yielded 590 topics related to the experiences of students with service-learning and only 65 studies that describe the experiences of teachers with this phenomenon. There is a palpable void in qualitative phenomenological research on service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning.

The review of the literature led to my identification of related topics that helped me explore the essences of service-learning for middle school teachers. I drew on a knowledge base that considered a Historical Overview of Service-Learning, Service-Learning Defined, Teacher Experiences in the Contemporary Service-Learning Classroom, and the Pedagogical Community through Service Learning. Each concept is intertwined with the others as they are all related to the unique facets of service-learning including the service-learning sponsor’s unique role. The Historical Overview of Service-Learning illustrates a succinct history of service-learning over the past century and a half. Service-Learning Defined provides a detailed description of service-learning both in theory and practice. Teacher Experiences in the Contemporary Service-Learning Classroom highlights the need

to balance cognitive and affective instruction in today's classrooms, characteristics of a quality service-learning teacher, and tensions embedded in service-learning. I argue that the current environment of standards-based assessment with its focus on cognitive reform has diminished the subjective and affective nature of learning, including the voices and experiences of teachers in service-learning environments (Krebs, 2006; Schukar, 1997). Pedagogical Community through Service-Learning provides an overview of the position of service-learning in current society including the benefits of extending pedagogy beyond the classroom walls in order to promote the commitment to student pride, cultural competencies, and making significant contributions to the broader community (Bradford, 2005; Eyer & Giles, 1999; Farris & Kelly, 1998).

Through implementing service-learning, I found unique connections with my students, other teachers, parents, and the community. I met the personal need to serve my community and to teach the value of service to my students through a curriculum that reflected who I was as a teacher. As Cornbleth (1988) put it, how teachers conceive curriculum is important because their conceptions and ways of reasoning about curriculum reflect and shape how they “think and talk about, study, and act on the education made available to students” (p. 89). Service-learning fit my educational philosophy and my teaching style; the approach was a valuable pedagogy for me and it may be for other teachers as well. In order for the experiences of service-learning teachers, with the phenomenon of service-learning, to gain traction in today's educational environment of standards and accountability through cognitive reform, a strong and compelling rationale of its value must be supported with relevant research.

In this fashion, the rich, detailed explanations of the conceptual ideas in the literature review amalgamate to provide a comprehensive understanding of service-learning. The literature reviewed produced information from a wide range of researchers and existing studies, establishing a historical perspective of service-learning and service-learning's relationship to education at differing levels. To follow is a comprehensive examination of the theoretical, sociological, and philosophical roots of service-learning as well as influences in its evolution.

Historical Overview of Service-Learning

Service-learning may appear to be a moderately new term; however, the ideas and goals of service-learning have been around for over 150 years. In the pages to follow, the history will be revealed through the conception of service-learning, the pedagogy of service-learning, the impact of presidential ideals throughout the years, an explanation of service programs in our country, and current trends in service-learning. Addressed chronologically, these topics offer a complete synopsis of how service-learning originated and how it evolved into a global phenomenon. In the words of children's author Pratchett (2010),

It is important that we know where we come from, because if you do not know where you come from, then you don't know where you are, and if you don't know where you are, you don't know where you're going. And if you don't know where you're going, you're probably going wrong. (p. 359)

In order to truly understand what service-learning is today, it is necessary to have an awareness of the progression of the phenomenon.

Two-score and nine years ago, service-learning was born. The term, or even the practice, was not officially coined at this time; however, the ideals of service-learning can

be traced all the way back to the Lincoln administration. In 1864, the Morrill and Homestead Initiatives created land grants to establish colleges throughout the nation that focused on creating citizens who would be “educated for the betterment of society” (Brim, 2013, para. 1). The mission statement of most colleges and universities included the concept of student development through the transfer of knowledge and active service to advance civilization. Leland Stanford, founder of Stanford University, addressed this issue at the inauguration of the university on November 11, 1885, when he stated, “The objectives of the university are to qualify students for personal success and direct usefulness in life: and to promote the public welfare by exercising an influence on behalf of humanity and civilization” (Brim, 2013, para. 2).

In accordance with colleges and universities promoting and instilling humanity and civilization, in 1903, the University of Cincinnati founded the Cooperative Education movement in 1903, marking the emergence of students combining service, learning, and vocation (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2007). Despite the fact that this movement was at the forefront of many educational developments, it was surprising to find that there were no in-depth studies on the Cooperative Education movement.

The idea that community service can and should be introduced as a means of instruction can also be traced to progressive education and one of the most influential, original, and systematic education theorist, John Dewey (Rocheleau, 2004). In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1939) stated, “Education, in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience” (p. 89). As a philosopher, social reformer, and educator, Dewey changed fundamental approaches to

teaching and learning. “His ideas sprang from a philosophy of pragmatism and were central to the Progressive Movement in schooling” (Barmark, 2009, para. 1).

At a time when intelligence testing was all the rage, Dewey differed, believing that all students have an inborn curiosity that should be nurtured. Unlike earlier models of teaching, which relied on authoritarianism and rote learning, progressive education contended that curriculum should be relevant to students’ lives (Pinto, 2000, para. 2). He saw learning by doing and development of practical skills was critical to the education of children. “Some critics assumed that, under Dewey’s system, students would fail to acquire basic academic skills and knowledge. Others believed that classroom order and the teacher’s order would disappear” (Pinto, 2000, para 2). Other oppositions included the fact that his programs were expensive, demanding small classes and individual attention (Barmark, 2009).

To Dewey, education was the most powerful way of effecting not just social cohesion, but social progress. It was a momentous time for such progress with the rise of trade unions, the growth of the women’s suffrage movement, and the passing of child labor laws (Barmark, 2009). Dewey received faithful opposition from Christian fundamentalist who believed his ideas to be dangerous (Barmark, 2009). In the wake of the Great Depression, traditionalists argued for “back-to-basics, the three-R’s education” and the progressives who had gone further than Dewey had (Barmark, 2009). Ultimately, Dewey criticized both progressive and regressive extremes; “to him, the conflict between the individual and the society was a false one” (Barmark, 2009, para. 36). To him, the classroom was a democratic place where lessons had to be developed with the children as stakeholders.

A democratic classroom and the notion of democratic education suggests that young people ought to have the same power and responsibility in the schools where they spend so much of their lives. Glickman (1998) revealed that democracy in educational practice and school policies has a substantial base of support. “When a pedagogy of democracy is used in classrooms and schools, students outdistance their peers in learning content, mastering basic skills, and achieving understandings and applications” (Glickman, 1998, p. 25). A democratic theory of education focuses on ‘conscious social reproduction’—the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior of future citizens. “Democratic learning in schools is a set of purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution. It always aims for students, individually and collectively, to take on greater responsibility for their own learning” (Glickman, 1998, p. 31). Democratic education and service-learning are fused with similar foundations.

While Dewey did not coin the term “service-learning,” the pedagogical goals and methods of service-learning are evident in his educational philosophy. Similar to Dewey’s beliefs, service-learning is inherently related to constructivism in educational theory.

Author and associate professor of education at Florida A & M, Warren Hope (1999) explained,

As pedagogy, it fits into the constructivist methodology that asserts that learning is facilitated when students construct their own meaning from the environment. Constructivist teaching requires teachers to provide rich environments and opportunities for thinking and problem solving. In other words, learning entails making sense out of surroundings based upon one’s own schemata; service learning projects allow students to make their own sensory observations and conclusions, explore possibilities, and understand complexities. (p. 13)

Service-learning is both experiential and practical; moreover, it addresses the emotional and cognitive needs of adolescent learners. “Service learning is a powerful instructional method that serves students as they serve in the communities where they live” (Hope, 1999, p. 14).

Presidential Ideals and the Growth of Service-Learning

Dewey was not the only historical figure to support experiential education. A number of past presidents promoted experiential education and service-learning. President Thomas Jefferson was in favor of a basic universal and advanced education for males to help prepare them to become civic leaders and civic servants. Jefferson believed, the education of the future elite should have the aim of benefiting the state and society. The student would graduate to civil servant (Mayo, 1942). Historically, there was more of a focus on white males; yet, the foundation for service-learning and a social justice agenda embedded in the curriculum were present even in the young years of our Nation.

President Franklin Roosevelt also had a heart for service. From 1933 to 1942, millions of young people served terms of 6 to 18 months to help restore the nation’s parks, and revitalize the economy (Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, 2004). President Roosevelt revitalized the faith of the nation with several measures, one of which was the Emergency Conservation Work (ECW) Act, more commonly known as the Civilian Conservation Corps. With this action, he brought together two wasted resources, the young men and the land, in an effort to save both (Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, 2004). He proposed to recruit thousands of unemployed young men, enroll them in a peacetime army, and send them into battle against destruction and erosion of our natural resources. Before it was over, over three million young men engaged in a massive salvage operation, the most popular experiment of the New Deal (Civilian Conservation Corps Legacy, 2004.)

President Roosevelt was also responsible for signing the G.I. Bill into law. The G.I. Bill was officially and originally known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944; it was created to link service and education by offering Americans educational opportunity in return for service to their country (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). It established veterans' hospitals, provided for vocational rehabilitation, made low interest mortgages available, and granted stipends covering tuition and living expenses for veterans attending college or trade schools. From 1944 to 1949, nearly 9 million veterans received close to \$4 billion from the G.I. Bill's unemployment compensation program (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012). The education and training provisions existed until 1956, providing benefits to nearly 10 million veterans. The Veterans' Administration offered insured loans until 1962, and they totaled more than \$50 billion. The economic assistance provided by the G.I. Bill and the Veterans' Administration accelerated the postwar demand for goods and services (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012).

Service was also at the forefront of President John F. Kennedy's ideals. After a day of campaigning for the presidency, the then-Senator Kennedy arrived at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor on October 14, 1960, at 2:00 a.m. His intent was to rest and rejuvenate, not necessarily to propose the establishment of an international volunteer organization. "Members of the press had retired for the night, believing that nothing interesting would happen. But 10,000 students at the University were waiting to hear the presidential candidate speak, and it was there on the steps of the Michigan Union that a bold new experiment in public service was launched" (Peace Corps, 2012, para. 1). Kennedy challenged them by asking how many of them would be willing to serve their

country and the cause of peace by living and working in the developing world. “The reaction was both swift and enthusiastic, and since 1961, more than 45 years, 210,000+ Americans have responded to this enduring challenge. And since then, the Peace Corps has demonstrated how the power of an idea can capture the imagination of an entire nation” (Peace Corps, 2012, para. 3)

In his Inaugural Address, President John F. Kennedy (1961) again challenged Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country” (para. 25). While this directive is one of his most famous quotes, the closing remarks of his speech truly allude to Kennedy’s (1961) sentiments regarding service.

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength which we ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God’s work must truly be our own. (para. 28)

In 1964, President Kennedy’s dream was fulfilled with the creation of Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a "war on poverty" and signed the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 thus creating VISTA. The first VISTA members started in January 1965, and by the end of the year, more than 2,000 members were working in the Appalachian region, migrant worker camps in California, and poor neighborhoods in Hartford, Connecticut (AmeriCorps, 2012).

As a nation, we place no greater responsibility on any one individual than we do on the president. That being said—and regardless of what world events were taking place—the aforementioned presidents foresaw service as an important and necessary principle in society. This is evident by the programs they created and the fact that many of the programs

are still in place today; many other developments can be tied to world events and to the notion of service.

At the beginning of the 1960s, many Americans believed they were standing at the dawn of a golden age. “The sixties were the age of youth, as 70 million children from the post-war baby boom became teenagers and young adults. The movement away from the conservative fifties continued and eventually resulted in revolutionary ways of thinking and real change in the cultural fabric of American life” (Goodwin & Bradley, 1999, para. 1). Young people wanted change; these changes affected education, values, lifestyles, and entertainment. The idea of providing service opportunities and establishing service programs was also part of this change.

The civil rights movement spearheaded by Dr. Martin Luther King, the assassination of President Kennedy, a unique focus on the status of women, and a newfound concern for general health and the environment brought a fresh fervent energy to activist education by engaging youth and giving them genuine opportunities to make a difference in the world (AmeriCorps, 2012; Goodwin & Bradley, 1999). “It was during this time period that the early pioneers of the service-learning movement began to emerge and attempted to combine 'service' to 'learning' in a direct and powerful way” (AmeriCorps, 2012, para. 8).

Work-study programs were created in 1965 and are still popular today. In 1966, the term “service-learning” was used for the first time to describe the work of university students on summer-internships sponsored by Oak Ridge Associated Universities. This project linked eastern Tennessee college students with tributary development organizations in the area (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2007).

Also in 1966, another work study program—the New York City Urban Corps—was created. Since its inception, over 100,000 students from more than 100 colleges and universities have participated in the program (NYC Citywide Administrative Services, 2012). To determine what proportion of the program was a success, Nash and Nixon (1967) visited New York City agencies to conduct interviews and administer questionnaires to approximately 600 interns and their supervisors. Researchers investigated a selection of the individual interns and their experiences to establish what kind of the people the interns were, what kind of jobs they had, what factors made the job good or bad, changes amongst the interns, and good and poor agencies. The study concluded that the Urban Corps was generally a success from the participants’ point of view and exceptional students participated in the program (Nash & Nixon, 1967). A primary successful aspect was the extent to which the program was studied by insiders and outsiders and the way in which findings modified administration of the Urban Corps. Much like service-learning, the Urban Corps participants encountered factors of satisfaction, effectiveness, and changes (Nash & Nixon, 1967).

Presently, the Public Service Corps provides opportunities for Federal Work-Study and academic credit placements in a multitude of city government agencies. Public Service Corps placements are augmented by career development workshops and other enhancements designed to enrich the student internship experience (NYC Citywide Administrative Services, 2012).

The term “service-learning” was finally, and officially, coined by educators Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey in 1967. The educators were working with the Manpower Development Internship Program in Atlanta and used the term to imply a value

consideration. According to Sigmon and Ramsey, the term implies a link between authentic community service, intentional academic learning, and reflection. Additionally, the term described the combination of conscious educational growth with the accomplishment of certain tasks that met genuine human needs (Frasco, 2012).

In 1969, the Southern Regional Education Board defined service-learning as “the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth” (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999, p. 2). It was also during this time that the Southern Regional Education Board, United States Department of Health and Human Services, the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Urban Corps, Peace Corps, and VISTA met at the Atlanta Service-Learning Conference; this was one of the first formal attempts at defining the engagement between schools and community (AmeriCorps, 2012).

The late 1960s and early 1970s proved to be a growing time for volunteerism and programming. Between 1969 and 1971, the Office of Economic Opportunity established the National Student Volunteer Program—this program was a subdivision of VISTA. Later, renamed as the National Center for Service-Learning, this volunteer program was established to “encourage school-based service programs by providing small grants, workshops, conferences, and a quarterly journal” (Kenny & Gallagher, 2003, p. 76). This organization published a volunteer and service-learning based journal titled *Synergist*. Working closely with other national, state and local organizations engaged in education, service and volunteer initiatives, the National Center for Learning and Citizenship (NCLC) contributed to a collective public voice in support of service-learning and the contributions volunteers make in efforts to improve student learning. The NCLC provided leadership to

help schools make quality service-learning opportunities available to all students (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012).

In 1970, the Youth Conservation Corps engaged 38,000 people through a summer employment program for young men and women age 15 through 18, from all segments of society, who worked, learned, and earned together by doing projects on public land. Since 1970, the Youth Conservation Corps program has operated as a work-earn-learn program for youth. The impact of the Conservation and Youth Services Corps on communities and program participants was evaluated by studying eight corps programs which collectively enrolled 2,382 participants. Information collected through site visits and surveys of participants determined nearly 80 percent of program sponsors rated the quality of services provided by participants as good or excellent, and 69 percent of the program beneficiaries (including students, disadvantaged populations, senior citizens, and disabled individuals) rated the quality of work performed as good, very good, or excellent. The corps programs were found to have generally positive, albeit somewhat limited, impacts on program participants (Jastrzab, 1996). Currently, the program is administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture - Forest Service, U. S. Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife and National Park Service (Youth Conservation Corps, 2012). Likewise in 1970, VISTA merged with the Peace Corps and senior service programs to form the ACTION agency (AmeriCorps, 2012).

The report of the White House Conference on Youth called for a link between service and learning in 1971. Moreover, The National Center for Public Service Internships, the Society for Field Experience Education, and the National Student Volunteer Program

were established during this time. (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012).

In 1979, Sigmon published three principles of service-learning in the *Synergist*. Those principles revolved around service-learning in regards to those being served and those serving. The first idea is that those being served control the services provided; secondly, those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions; and thirdly, those who serve also are learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2007).

The 1980s were also a time of growth for the concept of service-learning across the United States. The National Center for Service-Learning for Early Adolescents was established in 1981 and the National Youth Leadership Council was established in 1983. In 1984, the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) was established as the first national student-led community service advocacy group (IMPACT National Conference, 2012).

In the mid-1980s, national service initiatives were commenced across the country, including the National Youth Leadership Council in 1982, which helped to prepare future leaders; the Campus Outreach Opportunity League in 1984, which helped to mobilize service programs in higher education; and the National Association of Service and Conservation Corps in 1985, which helped replicate youth corps in states and cities through which many young people were—and continue to be—given opportunities to serve (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012).

Established in 1986, Youth Service America (YSA) was formed to strengthen the effectiveness, sustainability, and scale of the youth service and service-learning fields.

“YSA supports a global culture of engaged youth committed to a lifetime of service, learning, leadership, and achievement. The impact of YSA’s work through service and service-learning is measured in student achievement, workplace readiness, and healthy communities” (Youth Service America, 2011, para. 2). YSA envisioned a powerful network of organizations committed to making service and service-learning the common expectation and common experience of all young people in the United States.

The Office of National Service and the Points of Light Foundation were created during 1989 to 1999, in order to cultivate volunteering at a national level. This paved the way for the National and Community Service Act of 1990, which was passed by Congress and signed by President George H.W. Bush (Points of Light, 2012). The legislation authorized grants for schools to support service-learning and demonstration grants for national service programs to youth corps, nonprofits, as well as colleges and universities.

It also created the organization Serve-America whose goal was to “distribute grants in support of service-learning in order to simultaneously enrich the education of young people, demonstrate the value of youth as assets to their communities, and stimulate service-learning as a strategy to meet unmet community needs” (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2012, para. 7).

Melchior (1995) initiated a three-year evaluation of Serve-America to determine its effects on participants, benefits, and cost-effectiveness. The evaluation included observations, document reviews, and participant and control group surveys at 13 local Serve-America program sites. The evaluation established that, as of 1993-94, approximately 434,000 school-aged youths and 90,000 nonparticipant volunteers were participating in Serve-America programs. Serve-America was having positive effects on

middle school and high school students and had created new service opportunities in 12 of the 13 intensive study sites (Melchior, 1995).

The growing support for service-learning continued throughout the 1990s with President Bill Clinton's signing of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 that provided funding for programs encouraging community service by students in schools and colleges (Sheckley & Keeton, 1997). Clinton has always had a keen interest in service and our country's youth; in his first inaugural speech he challenged a new generation of young Americans to a "season of service" (Clinton, 2001, para. 28). He encouraged youth to act on idealism by helping children in need, keeping company with the impoverished, and reconnecting broken communities. The former president declared, "There is so much to be done; enough indeed for millions of others who are still young in spirit to give of themselves in service, too" (Clinton, 2001, para. 28). Clinton challenged old and young alike to make service a priority and to incorporate philanthropy into their lives.

In August 2001, the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse was awarded to Education, Training, and Research (ETR) Associates in Scotts Valley, California. The purpose of the Clearinghouse was to collect and disseminate information and materials related to service-learning. In October 2001, the long awaited First Annual International Conference on Service-Learning Research was held in Berkeley and brought 350 researchers, policymakers and others interested in service-learning research together to share and hear about new findings, research agendas and explore research interests (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012).

Current Trends in Service-Learning

In 2003, President George W. Bush created the President's Council on Service and Civic Participation to find ways to recognize the valuable contributions volunteers are making in our nation. The council created the President's Volunteer Service Award program as a way to thank and honor Americans who, by their demonstrated commitment and example, inspire others to engage in volunteer service (Youth Service America, 2011).

Two terms after Bush's presidency, service-learning and volunteerism are still growing in the United States. Today's youth, their parents, teachers, principals, and community members are being challenged to serve. President Barak Obama "has always been a strong supporter of empowering ordinary people to do extraordinary things by improving their local communities through service" (United States Government, 2009, para. 5).

By empowering people of all ages, races, and economic status to help solve problems in their own communities, the entire nation can be transformed (United States Government, 2009). In today's social and political climate, service-learning can be the conduit in which students might become motivated to be more involved with societal challenges, the quandary of other people, and political affairs overall (Rocheleau, 2004).

President Obama's outlook was, and is, clearly aligned to the outcomes of service-learning activities in schools; it is evident that serving others is here to stay. This is apparent through his challenge United We Serve. This challenge is a nationwide service initiative that helps meet growing social needs resulting from the economic downturn. With the knowledge that ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things when given the proper tools, President Obama encouraged citizens to come together to help lay a new foundation

for growth. “This initiative aims to both expand the impact of existing organizations by engaging new volunteers in their work and encourage volunteers to develop their own “do-it-yourself” projects” (United We Serve, 2012, para. 1).

While the nation’s political leaders are highly in favor of service-learning today, the plea for service-learning stems from more than the government; school leaders are also calling for and supporting service-learning. Wilczenski and Commey (2007) revealed that many school-based mental health professionals are overwhelmed with referrals for individual counseling. “The profession needs to move beyond trying to solve problems one by one and deal with larger issues. Feelings of alienation and purposelessness expressed by young people are witnessed in the lack of youth engagement in schools and communities” (p. 16). Service-learning is a proficient, unconventional intervention that promotes student commitment and often increases personal, social, career, academic, and intellectual learning (Wilczenski & Commey, 2007).

To know where service-learning is headed, one must have an understanding of where service-learning has been. The conception of service throughout history has impacted how service-learning initiatives have developed and are continuing to grow in our country. This chronological historical overview of service in the United States of America offered a balanced account of how current service-learning trends were established and how they have affected current service-learning trends.

In establishing a historical perspective of service-learning and its relationship to education, I have illuminated a progression and evolution of the phenomenon. It is clear that its history has helped influence the various definitions of the concept and shaped what service-learning is today.

Service-Learning Defined

Community members, students, and educators everywhere are discovering that service-learning offers all its participants a chance to take part in the active education of youth while simultaneously addressing the concerns, needs, and hopes of communities (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). Before one can plan for or participate in service-learning activities or before one can consider the experiences of service-learning teachers, one first and foremost must know and understand what service-learning entails. In the subsequent pages, the definition of service-learning will be illuminated through the first-ever descriptions of service-learning and models and examples of service-learning activities. The four basic steps of all service-learning experiences will also be clarified as well as a comparison of service-learning to community service and the fundamental features of service-learning as a civic education course.

As highlighted in the historical overview, the earliest definition of service-learning was stated in the publications of the 1969 Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). SREB was established by a resolution of the Southern Governors Conference in 1948 (Giovanni, 2009). Accomplishments of this board were instrumental in the development of positions of employment within the field of human services. Major goals of this group included improving higher education in the Southern states and assisting in the development of mental health/human service programs (Giovanni, 2009). In defining and trying to establish service-learning, SREB practitioners were concerned with developing learning opportunities for students that were related to community service, community development, and social change (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz). Thus, service-learning was

defined then as “the accomplishment of tasks that meet genuine human needs in combination with conscious educational growth” (Stanton, Giles, & Cruz, 1999, p. 2).

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 defined service-learning as “a method under which students or participants learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that is conducted in and meets the needs of a community” (AmeriCorps, 1990, para. 23). Service-learning can be coordinated with an elementary school, secondary school, institution of higher education, or community service program, and with the community. When integrated into the curriculum, service-learning enhances the academic development of the students and fosters civic responsibility (AmeriCorps, 1990). Service-learning also provides structured time for the students or participants to reflect on the service experience (AmeriCorps, 1990).

In order to truly understand service-learning, it is necessary to take note of what *does not* qualify as service-learning.

Service-learning is *not* an episodic volunteer program; an add-on to an existing school or college curriculum; logging a set number of community service hours in order to graduate; compensatory service assigned as a form of punishment by the courts or by school administrators; only for high school or college students; one-sided: benefiting only students or only the community. (Eyler & Giles, 1999, pp. 183-185)

Eyler and Giles (1999) conducted two national projects including quantitative and qualitative research, one which compared models of service-learning using survey data and intensive student interviews, and the other, a project which examined students’ experience in service-learning through in-depth interviews with 67 students at seven institutions. Dialogue included problem-solving interviews completed by students before and after service-learning and one-time interviews where other students evaluated their experiences

with reflection during service-learning. “Data were analyzed using hierarchical multiple regression with controls for age, gender, minority status, family income, and other community service during college” (p. 213). The conclusions about student learning were enhanced by examining changes in the quality of problem analysis and critical thinking over the course of a semester of service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

According to Eyler and Giles (1999), service-learning experiences were positive, significant and genuine to the participants; moreover, they “involve cooperative rather than competitive experiences and thus promote skills associated with teamwork and community involvement and citizenship” (p. 183). These experiences addressed multifaceted problems in complicated settings rather than simple problems in isolation.

Service-learning activities also provided opportunities for students “to engage in problem-solving by requiring participants to gain knowledge of the specific context of their service-learning activity and community challenges, rather than only to draw upon generalized or abstract knowledge such as might come from a textbook” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 184). Such activities consistently offered impressive opportunities for students to obtain and utilize critical thinking skills; for example, students acquired the ability to distinguish key questions or issues within real-world conditions. These activities also advanced meaningful learning because the results were instantaneous and occurred naturally. Additionally, the service-learning experiences were “more likely to be personally meaningful to participants and to generate emotional consequences, to challenge values as well as ideas, and hence to support social, emotional and cognitive learning and development” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 185).

There is a multitude of possibilities when it comes to selecting a service-learning project. Service-Learning Ideas and Curricular Examples (SLICE) is a resource provided by the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse. SLICE is an easy-to-search database full of hundreds of high-quality service-learning lesson plans, syllabi, and project ideas. Lesson plans are submitted by educators and service-learning practitioners (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). The site offers literally hundreds of ideas for potential service-learning projects.

The ideas are varied; for example, elementary school students in Florida studied the consequences of natural disasters. The class designed a kit for families to use to collect their important papers in case of evacuation, which students distributed to community members. Middle school students in Pennsylvania learned about the health consequences of poor nutrition and lack of exercise, and then brought their learning to life by conducting health fairs, creating a healthy cookbook, and opening a fruit and vegetable stand for the school and community. University students in Michigan looked for ways to support struggling local non-profit organizations during difficult economic times. Graduate communication students honed their skills while providing a wide variety of public relations services with community partners, including developing press kits and managing event coordination (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012).

The definitions and descriptions of service-learning are plentiful, but they all are based on the premise of students learning through service. Genuine service-learning experiences, although nearly incessantly distinct, have some universal features. Service-learning can be narrowed down to four basic phases: preparation, service, reflection, and celebration (Fertman, 1994).

The specific features of each step of service-learning projects are outlined by Knox, Wangaard and Michaelson (2006). Finding and researching community needs, planning the project, and identifying and developing team skills are all part of step one, the preparation step. Students can do this through researching the internet, reading local papers, interviewing community stakeholders, and surveying children and adults in the community.

During step two, the service action step, students advertise and complete the project. Students may be supported and supervised by teachers, parents, administrators, and community members throughout the service project. Documentation is also an important process during the actual service project; this can come in the form of photographs, video, and writing down the comments and expressions of students for the duration of their involvement in the project.

Throughout the third step, the reflection step, students participate in journal writing, reading and discussion, talking with others, and utilizing artistic expression. “We reflect to understand where we have been, what we have experienced, and where we go from here” (Collier & Williams, 2005, p. 94). Reflection is one of the most distinctive features of service-learning. “Even if the kids have chosen the problem and the project they’re working on, service without reflection misses large opportunities for them to learn about themselves and about their world” (Medlock & Mack, 2006, p. 7). Reflection must take place prior to, throughout, and following the service-learning activity (Collier & Williams, 2005). During his time as principal of Mound Fort Middle School, Smith (1999) implemented several innovative programs—including service-learning projects—in hopes of improving reading skills and character education. Reading scores and student morale improved as a result of the implemented programs and a great deal of the success was attributed to student

reflection. Following each service activity, students would return to the school and spend some time reflecting on the event. They would write about how they felt before and after the event and about their overall learning experience. “Marvelous accounts are written about setting goals in school and their future lives. By writing these things down, students reflect on the positive nature of the service and the good it brings to them personally” (Smith, 1999, p. 54). Eyler (2001) described reflection as “the hyphen in service-learning” (p. 35). Moreover, it is portrayed as the means in which students link their experience and observations throughout their service-learning activities in the community with their academic knowledge.

Finally, during the fourth step, the celebration step, students commemorate the success of the service-learning project. Celebration comes in many forms: students may have parties, create a bulletin board display, plan assemblies, write press releases for the paper and school website, design a DVD slideshow or scrapbook, receive certificates, and write thank you cards (Knox, Wangaard, & Michaelson, 2003).

Celebrating students’ service-learning efforts is not just a way to have fun at the end of the project. Celebration also serves a range of other objectives such as “publicizing the project, saying ‘thank you’ to those who helped, developing new support for the program, and honoring and renewing the commitment of those who will continue to be involved” (Wade, 2007, p. 18). Students should be an integral part of planning and organizing the celebration event. Teachers can help facilitate students to brainstorm ways that they can share the results of their efforts. “Celebrations that bring together most or all of a project’s participants can help everyone see the impact that the program has had on the community” (Wade, 2007, p. 18).

Service-learning and community service are often used synonymously; however, they are relatively diverse. “Community service has often borne the stigma of punishment. Many people equate community service with some type of reprimand that forces a person to provide hours of service as retribution for a wrongful act” (Thomsen, 2006, p. 4).

Service is also quite different from service-learning. Service is, quite frankly, meeting some community need. “‘Service’ has no intentional relevance to classroom learning” (Medlock & Mack, 2006, p.4). As previously defined, service-learning is an educational tool that combines meaningful service to the community with curriculum-based learning. Students improve their academic and social skills by applying them to real-life situations in order to reach goals they are passionate about (Medlock & Mack, 2006, p. 4). While community service and service-learning share the attribute of service to others, only service-learning consistently incorporates the elements of reflection allowing students to consider the connection between service and the curriculum (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Thomsen, 2006).

It is evident that service-learning has several aspects; consequently, all of its features impact the end result. Each step must be carefully considered and planned before implementation of the particular service-learning activity. Several authors offer recommendations for planning successful and superlative service-learning activities. Arden Moon (1999), author and professor of education at Michigan State University, believes in an ideal service-learning program, quality and academic standards would not be jeopardized. He stated, “If service learning is structured correctly, it is academically demanding and provides opportunities to learn about social development and citizenship” (Moon, 1999, para. 1).

Service-learning activities can also be incorporated in or take the place of advisory programs. Service-learning embraces character education and the development of communication skills. Additionally, it enriches interpersonal relationships both in and out of the classroom. It is an excellent means of addressing the development of students' values. "Service learning has the potential to achieve the traditional goals of an advisory program without being viewed as 'fluff' by staff, students, and parents if it is implemented properly" (Peterson, 2001, p. 7).

Yates and Youniss (1999) outlined ten fundamental features of service-learning. The service activity must be meaningful; helping others should be emphasized; the program should be part of an articulated ideology, and activities ought to be performed as a group rather than individually. Moreover, reflective opportunities with peers must be provided; program organizers should serve as models and integrators; site supervisors need to serve as models; participants' diversity must be acknowledged; feeling a part of history needs to be encouraged; and acceptance of personal and social responsibility should be expected. Yates and Youniss (1999) also declared that these ten features assisted in making service-learning experiences successful. Additionally, the features challenged students' perceptions and encouraged them to feel ready and able to take on pressing societal problems.

As previously mentioned, service-learning is comparable to community service and volunteerism. In regards to experiential education, service-learning can also be compared to internships, seminars, work studies, and field education experiences. One of the most distinct features of service-learning is as a civic education course is that students can develop an understanding of their current and forthcoming roles in their communities (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004).

To understand the experiences of service-learning teachers, it is necessary to fully comprehend the unique features of service-learning. Grounded in research and practice, the aforementioned definitions and descriptions of service-learning offered an extensive explanation of all aspects of service-learning. Keeping these depictions in mind, as well as the consideration for service-learning teachers' experiences, it is essential to consider contemporary practices of service-learning in education.

Teacher Experiences in the Contemporary Service-Learning Classroom

Service-learning is prevalent across the globe; it comes in many forms and is put into place and experienced by people from all walks of life. In the United States, 24 percent of elementary and secondary schools have adopted service-learning programs (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). Thirty-five states have adopted some form of service-learning policy; some are mandatory, some are state-wide, and some grant districts the freedom to create their own service-learning program requirements (National Service Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). Research has been conducted across the country focusing on various perspectives of service-learning including the experiences of students of all ages and in a rare case, the experiences of teachers in regards to their motivations for implementing service-learning. A further discussion of these studies and a conscientious debate related to cognitive and affective education, the characteristics of service-learning teachers, and tensions embedded in service-learning are intended to explore teachers' experiences in the contemporary service-learning classroom.

Cognitive and Affective Development through Service

Throughout history, educational policymakers have designed educational interventions for the purpose of improving the learning of disadvantaged students and of

children with special needs. Simultaneously, the past decade has seen major advances in cognitive and affective education. Cognitive change is commonly referred to as the development that occurs in the learners' cognitive schema which relies mostly on teaching and learning whereas affective change is the positive development in student motivation and interest (Shawer, Gilmore, & Banks-Joseph, 2008). Simply stated, cognitive learning is associated with reading, writing, speaking, and listening abilities while affective learning taps into motivation and interest.

The inception and implications of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001 brought about an environment of standards-based assessment and a focus on cognitive reform. The current educational environment has diminished the need to emphasize the affective nature of learning and has decreased the importance of the voices of teachers and their lived experiences in service-learning environments. There is a real need to think more clearly about the nature of the learning that can be expected from service-learning.

Skeptics have asked whether service-learning, although popular with students, has an impact on what students learn. The few studies that have tried to measure academic learning directly were narrowly focused and primarily used grades to assess the impact of service-learning. These studies yielded mixed results; for example, service-learning did not hurt achievement, but did not always contribute to higher student grades (Sugar and Livosky, 1998; Markus, Howard, & King, 1993; Miller, 1994). The few studies that attempted to go beyond conventional measures of fact acquisition were limited to small groups or single institutions (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Eyler & Halteman, 1981). It is evident that more research is needed on teachers' experiences with service-learning

especially in regards to their perceptions on the cognitive and affective development of their students.

According to Shaver et al. (2008), “Emotion and cognition are intertwined, and involve interplay between the body and mind...Social processing and learning happen by internalizing our subjective interpretations of other people’s beliefs, goals, feelings and actions, and vicariously experiencing aspects of these as if they were our own” (p. 101). Essentially, a student’s body, brain and mind come together to produce cognition and emotion, which are subjectively intertwined as the student constructs culturally relevant knowledge and makes decisions about how to act and think (Immordino-Yang, 2011).

Does a service-learning curriculum allow for this type of learning? According to Cornbleth (1988), curriculum is not a tangible product but the actual, day-to-day interactions of students, teachers, knowledge, and milieu (Cornbleth, 1988, p. 89). Moreover, curriculum as a contextualized social process encompasses both subject matter and social structure. “Social organization, including teacher and student roles (and their rights and obligations) and patterns of interactions, provides a setting for academic activities that can extend or constrain students’ learning opportunities” (Cornbleth, 1988, p. 89). More research is needed on the teachers’ experiences with the service-learning curriculum to discern the perceived cognitive and affective influences on students.

Eyler & Giles (1999) revealed that cognitive learning and affective service are closely connected and consequently mutually reinforcing. For example, “an ‘affective’ outcome like ‘commitment to service’ also has important cognitive components” (p. xi). While educators and educational theorists typically believe that only the cognitive side of student development should be the focus of today’s curriculum and instructional activities;

it is evident that the learning process—especially in the service-learning classroom—is undeniably cognitive and affective.

Clearly, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 emphasized the importance of the measured achievement of all students. It raised the consequences of low test score results while at the same time requiring more grade levels to be tested and more detailed reporting on the performance of groups within schools (NCLB, 2002). “Although there are numerous other provisions, involving requirements for teacher quality, the use of evidence in making decisions, and so on, NCLB early became known for its emphasis on testing and accountability” (Baker, 2004, p. 1). Furthermore, NCLB requires programs to use scientifically based research to teach children cognitive and language skills. Programs must base their activities, services, and professional development on scientifically based reading research (NCLB, 2002).

NCLB (2002) has no doubt brought about an environment of standards-based assessment and a focus on cognitive reform thus devaluing the need to accentuate the affective nature of learning. The cognitive demand of NCLB, acting as the core features of reform has characteristics that “delimit optimal teaching strategies, learning experiences, and measurement design and scoring” (Baker, 2004, p. 16). Thus, the stress on standards-based assessment has tapered the importance of the voices of teachers and their lived experiences in service-learning environments. Service-learning teachers need to be heard and their experiences need to be explored and revealed. Equally important, it is necessary to consider the unique characteristics of service-learning teachers. What qualities do they possess that make them effective service-learning teachers?

Service-learning teachers seek to influence their students. They do not simply want to give information; they want to engage students' emotions and motivate them to become competent and willing citizens of society. Increasing civic responsibility while learning life skills is the goal of service-learning teachers, but how do they do this? Service-learning teachers have a variety of roles and responsibilities in their service-learning classrooms.

The primary role of service-learning teachers is to facilitate. "Facilitating does not mean allowing students to have free choices without guidelines, nor does it mean applying undue influence so students have no real responsibility" (Hemmings, 2010, p. 21). The best strategy for service-learning teachers is to be knowledgeable about service-learning and then to thoughtfully make decisions about how to design optimal service-learning experiences for the students. Initially, service-learning teachers must guide the students through assessing the community needs. "To ensure that both students and the community benefit from their service, the service activities must meet two criteria. First, the service should meet a real community need that is identified by community residents or representatives. Second, students are involved in selecting the community issue/need and planning the service in a manner that enhances their experience" (Center for Service & Learning, 2010, p. 4). Students will likely have a much richer and more rewarding experience if they have the opportunity to solve problems that concern them, and to serve people they care about, but first, service-learning teachers should be an integral part of researching meaningful and useful potential projects (Center for Service & Learning, 2010). Clearly, service-learning teachers are the masters of their craft and highly skilled with various educational qualities. Only a few researchers have focused on service-learning teachers and their experiences with service-learning.

Service-learning teachers also play a key role in establishing effective partnerships among agencies, the school, universities, businesses, government, and residents within the community. Communication and customer service skills are a must. By working together, the school and community can reach a larger population, avoid duplication of efforts, make better use of resources, and deal with issues faced by the community and their youth more effectively. “The initial step of identifying and getting to know a community partner can take time. However, once this relationship has been developed it will make future projects with the community partner much easier” (Center for Service & Learning, 2010, p. 5). It is important for service-learning teachers to take the time to meet face-to-face with potential community partners so they can learn about the organization. This process aids in the community partners development of an understanding of the educational objectives of the students. Additionally, all parties involved can develop a rapport that will allow each to comfortably address any issues or concerns that may arise during implementation of the project (Learn and Serve America, 2012).

Perhaps the most vital responsibility of service-learning teachers is to effectively lead the service-learning participants through the integral steps of the service-learning project. Throughout the project planning phase, they must exhibit organization, classroom management, and anticipation for potential challenges. In order to accomplish this, service-learning teachers must have academic integrity. All true service-learning projects must provide an obvious link between the project and course learning objectives. Service-learning teachers are responsible for identifying what state standards can be addressed through various aspects of the project. “There should be structured activities that allow students to make reflective comparisons between knowledge gained in the classroom and

knowledge gained from their service activities” (Center for Service & Learning, 2010, p. 7). The project should be developmentally appropriate for the student participants and allow for student ownership (Fertman, 1994). Another significant concern for service-learning teachers is to provide adequate supervision. They may need to enlist the help of other teachers, staff, classroom assistants, parents, and community partners so there are enough adults to supervise the students while they are engaging in activities in the community (Center for Service & Learning, 2010).

Also throughout the project planning phase, service-learning teachers must facilitate various and plentiful reflection activities (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). Reflection is the structured opportunity for students to critically think about their service experience and apply their learning in a broader academic, social, and personal context. In order to properly guide students through the reflection process, service-learning teachers should exhibit applicable questioning and listening skills (Center for Service & Learning, 2010). Possessing such skills will aid in the service-learning teacher to lead reflection activities that will provide additional opportunities for students to link academic work with service activities; for example, these activities could include discussions, writing, readings, artistic expression, and presentations (Fertman, 1994).

Financial responsibility is another skillset required of service-learning teachers (Center for Service & Learning, 2010). The search for funding is a step-by-step process that requires significant planning and follow-through. First, service-learning teachers must have a clear idea of the project or program to be funded. Second, research potential funders should be researched. Third, potential funders should be contacted. Finally, a formal application for financial support may need to be completed. Throughout the project,

service-learning teachers must oversee the use of the funds; thus requiring great responsibility and trust (Learn and Serve America, 2012).

Shortly after the project has come to fruition, service-learning teachers must spearhead the celebration festivities. Young people engaged in service often benefit from public recognition. “Recognition makes youth feel good about what they have done; it also strengthens their self-esteem and can provide closure to projects. When youth feel good about their involvement, they are motivated and likely to stay involved” (Center for Service & Learning, 2010, p. 11). In addition to individual student benefits, recognition can bring visibility to the service-learning program which can ultimately lead to new volunteers, increased community support, and even new funding opportunities.

For service-learning teachers, effective recognition and celebration takes planning. This can be achieved by involving students in designing and implementing the recognition activities, rewarding student leaders who take on more responsibility, making the activities fun and student-centered, honoring individuality, and making the recognition sincere and personal. This feat may also require avoiding doing the same recognition activities from year to year. Keeping this in mind, service-learning teachers must be creative, prepared, structured, and self-less (Center for Service & Learning, 2010).

Once the celebration and recognition activities have been completed, the job is still not quite finished. Truly effective service-learning teachers should assess and evaluate the service-learning project—this can be done formally or informally (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012). They may use a simple survey or have a discussion with participants to reflect on what went well, or what could have been better. More formal evaluations may include rubrics or formal evaluation tools that have been developed by

professionals. These tools can be used to assess students' learning and experiences; for example, the students' perceptions, willingness to participate, and suggestions for improving future service-learning projects (Center for Service & Learning, 2010).

Clearly, service-learning teachers have a multifaceted set of skills—perhaps the most important of these skills is that of motivation. Service-learning teachers must be inspired to integrate service-learning projects. While there are copious studies on students' experiences with service-learning, a particular qualitative study conducted by Krebs (2006) is perhaps the most similar study to my research as its focus was on teachers and it was phenomenological in nature. Krebs explored teacher motivations for initiating service-learning projects and activities in the classroom.

Seven K–12 teachers, who had implemented service-learning in their classrooms, were interviewed. From the research, three major themes described the essence of implementing service-learning from the K–12 teacher's perspective: (a) connections, (b) resonance in the heart of the teacher, and (c) the right fit with a teacher's philosophy and teaching style (Krebs, 2006). Teachers in this study were motivated to initiate service-learning for both personal and professional reasons. "Even though they taught in the pervasive national environment of high-stakes testing and data collection, through implementing service-learning, these teachers found unique connections with their students, with other teachers, with parents, administrators, the curriculum, and with the community" (Krebs, 2006, p. 196). They found service-learning to be particularly important for reconnecting their at-risk students with their desire to value learning.

Teachers met personal needs to serve the community and to teach that importance to their students, a need that resonates in their hearts. Finally, service-learning fit their

teaching philosophies and teaching styles, by motivating others to implement service-learning because of their own positive connections and personal feelings. It also met an important personal need to make the world a better place—a need present for both students and teachers (Krebs, 2006). While this research offered insight into teachers' experiences with and motivations for implementing service-learning, further research using similar methodologies with teachers in other settings such as in urban and rural schools would help determine if similar themes emerge.

Krebs (2006) was by and large the most similar to my study; however, a separate study researched middle school teachers' perceptions of benefits of service-learning. The project "Enhancing the Middle School Curriculum through Community Service," brought together teams of middle school science and social studies teachers from Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona. Following the implementation of model units by the selected teachers, Schukar (1997) designed a teacher impact evaluation protocol to determine the effects of participation in a Social Science Education Consortium (SSEC) service-learning teacher enhancement project on teacher instruction, collaboration with colleagues and the community, and perceptions of service-learning and its effects on student learning.

Telephone and personal interviews were conducted with 55 of the 80 teachers involved in the projects (Schukar, 1997). Some of the benefits found by teachers included enhanced student interest in, understanding of, and attitudes toward both science and social studies and strengthened community ties. In fact, "low-achieving students and 'troublemakers' got excited about the project, enjoyed the unit, and did especially well in the service learning portion of the unit" (Schukar, 1997, p.182) Additionally, teachers reported positive impact on their personal philosophies of instruction and feelings of

professionalism as well as improved collaboration with colleagues and community resources. Teachers also expressed an expanded view of the role of students in the community (Schukar, 1997).

It is unfortunate that only a few researchers have made service-learning teachers the focus of their studies. Clearly, the service-learning teacher is the one who makes the magic happen in the service-learning classroom and it is fundamental that more service-learning teachers become the focus of such studies. While the literature reports the benefits of service-learning, it is also important to consider the controversies that have evolved regarding service-learning programs and the role of service-learning teachers. In doing so, one can better ascertain the influence service-learning may have on the decisions' teachers make and experiences that result from those decisions.

Tensions Embedded in Service-Learning

Service-learning is popular, required, and celebrated in many schools; however, as with any phenomena, voices of opposition resonate as a limited number of educators and philosophers have expressed abhorrence towards service-learning. Egger (2008) blatantly argued against service-learning and all that it stands for; he expressed, "that wrapping a veneer of learning over community service conceals the promotion of a particular social agenda, that it wastes students' valuable time and other resources, and that its learning goal actually weakens students' respect for the process of social interaction that is conveyed by a good liberal education (p. 183). He stated that service-learning attempts to promote a communitarian and anti-individualistic social agenda that is educationally harmful. "By attempting to substitute emotions for reason, service-learning contravenes the purpose of

liberal education while chipping away at students' respect for the social order. Despite its name, service-learning does no service to learning" (Egger, 2008, p. 194).

Butin (2005) expressed a similar view and stated that service-learning is dangerous; "it is a teaching and thinking 'against the grain' of traditional higher education practices. It is an 'acting out' – outside of traditional departments, outside of physical classroom walls, outside of the proximity and 'safety' of the academic campus" (p. 1). Moreover, Butin (2003) described service-learning as an "acting up" against the downward transference of knowledge from teachers to students.

In the case against required service-learning, Covitt (2002) revealed, "cognitive evaluation theory posits that because students are required to engage in service, they will attribute their motivation for serving to the requirement, rather than to an intrinsic desire to serve or a personal sense of their own altruistic nature" (p. 13). In other words, when the requirement for service is taken away, students will not have incorporated a commitment to service into their personal awareness of whom they are. "Students who are required to serve will be less likely to view themselves as individuals who would choose to serve of their own volition" (Covitt, 2002, p. 14).

John W. Eby, professor of Sociology and Director of Service-Learning and Coordinator for the Agape Center for Service and Learning at Messiah College in Grantham, Pennsylvania, has published several articles on service-learning. Additionally, he has interspersed administration of service and community development programs in North America, Central America and Botswana, Africa, with teaching and academic administration. According to Eby (1998), "If done poorly service-learning can teach

inadequate conceptions of need and service, it can divert resources of service agencies and can do real harm in communities” (p.8).

One of the challenges facing service-learning is to bring to the service end of the service-learning equation the same level of rigor, expertise, and critical analysis that has been applied to learning. This challenge includes addressing the interests of all the stakeholders, following principles of good practice, developing strong college/community partnerships which reflect quality and reciprocity, teaching a sociological imagination, incorporating advocacy and community development opportunities, and developing evaluation and assessment strategies which will assure continued program improvement (Eby, 1998).

An additional argument against required service-learning is that it violates the Constitutional rights of students. “Mandated service is ‘involuntary servitude’ that violates the Thirteenth Amendment” (Andersen & Murphy, 1999). Also according to Andersen and Murphy (1999), required service-learning violates the First Amendment right to freedom of religion “because schools are trying to impose a certain set of values or a system of nontheistic religion.”

These tensions embedded in service-learning appear to evolve more from various theorists opinions as opposed to those who have implemented service-learning in public and higher educational settings. The aforementioned oppositions were analyzed more from theoretical and philosophical perspectives versus research-based evaluations. Consequently, it is possible that opinions posing a negative view of service-learning do not apply to all service-learning scenarios and personal experiences. Because of the differences in beliefs, it

was and is all the more important to examine questions about service-learning and to further explore the experiences of those who actively engage in service-learning.

Pedagogical Community through Service-Learning

Education in service-learning classrooms extends beyond the classroom walls. The service-learning curriculum calls for community outreach and thus can be a conduit for community education. Service-learning also requires teamwork, the school and community must pull together in order for projects to be successful. The benefits of service-learning influence students, teachers, and community relationships—these benefits can consequently create pedagogical communities.

Community Pedagogy

It is evident that service-learning activities concurrently accomplish two key objectives: “The service activities (a) are beneficial to the community stakeholders (e.g., agency, clients, neighborhood residents) and (b) meet the instructor’s educational objectives” (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004, p. 5). Consequently, the students, teachers, and administrators establish a mutual relationship with the community in which everyone prevails. Successful service-learning projects no doubt result in a harmonized affiliation between the school and the community (Bringle, Phillips, & Hudson, 2004, p. 5).

Similar to Freire’s notion of education for empowerment, Fertman (1994) referred to service-learning as the “education of empowerment” (p. 7). He also described service-learning as a facet of education that increases self-esteem, generates curiosity about learning, cultivates interpersonal skills, fosters leadership development, embraces work and service ethics, and integrates real-life experiences such as career exploration. In addition to educational benefits, Fertman (1994) pointed out students will obtain life skills and learn

about outside resources through participation in service-learning activities. Students will also experience improved self-direction, enhanced workplace relationships, and superior school and community partnerships. Moreover, service-learning instigates a change in the perceptions of today's youth (Fertman, 1994).

Jacoby (1996) determined service-learning can be curricular or co-curricular. It is both a type of program and a form of pedagogy that enables participants to learn about the "historical, sociological, cultural, and political contexts of the need or issue being addressed" (Kendall, 1990, p. 20). In a recent qualitative study, researchers examined how participants in a long-term service-learning program described their understanding of and commitment to social justice, multicultural competence, and civic engagement.

Members of a university-sponsored AmeriCorps service-learning were interviewed to explore their perceptions of the effects of service-learning. The study by Einfield and Collins (2008) qualitatively examined how participants in a long-term service-learning program described their understanding of and commitment to social justice, multicultural competence, and civic engagements. The research revealed, "Several participants in the study increased their awareness of inequality, but only some adopted a commitment to social justice" (Einfield & Collins, 2008 p. 107). Participants also developed several multicultural skills while interacting with their clients, such as empathy, patience, attachment, reciprocity, trust, and respect; furthermore, "all participants expressed a commitment to continued civic engagement" (Einfield & Collins, 2008, p. 107).

Student Benefits Achieved through Service-Learning

It is evident that there are numerous benefits that support a pedagogical community; perhaps, students experience the most benefits from participating in service-learning

projects that extend beyond the four walls of the classroom. A key benefit of service-learning is the development of new relationships. Students will become acquainted with adult mentors throughout the community thus enhancing the community pedagogy. Service-learning also provides students with the opportunity to learn and practice life skills which will be essential to them in their future careers, relationships, and communities. “Those life skills include leadership, critical thinking, dealing with conflicts, making decisions, negotiating, speaking in public, working with others, honoring diverse views, taking responsibility, setting and managing goals and performing hard and committed work” (Medlock & Mack, 2006, p. 4).

Bradford (2005) also offered essential student benefits of meaningful service-learning projects. He expressed, “Project-based service learning emphasizes educational opportunities that are interdisciplinary, student-centered, collaborative, and integrated with real-world issues and practices” (p. 3). Moreover, service-learning activities allow students the opportunity to apply learned knowledge during “authentic moments in the production process” (Bradford, 2005, p. 3) as opposed to in an artificial setting. By experiencing such opportunities, students are able to relate the material to real-life and “establish connections to life outside of school” (Bradford, 2005, p. 3).

“Students who may never have had the opportunity to interact with diverse members of the community or to confront a myriad of social problems such as poverty and racism are being challenged in new and important ways” (Farris & Kelly, 1998, p. 38). Participation in service-learning activities can enhance acceptance of others and increase self-esteem. Moreover, students obtain a better awareness of personal morals. “Service-learning aims to connect the personal and intellectual, to help students acquire knowledge that is useful in

understanding the world, build critical thinking capacities, and perhaps lead to fundamental questions about learning and about society and to a commitment to improve both” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 14). Ultimately, service-learning activities aim to educate and encourage students to be active participants in their communities.

In 1997, the Wisconsin Partnership in Service-Learning was initiated as a cross-disciplinary, cross-institutional endeavor. According to Monsour (2002), the Partnership created a network throughout Wisconsin of educators from K-12 public school systems, universities, and community and technical colleges. Each of the six Partnership sites developed an interdisciplinary service-learning implementation team, provided service-learning faculty awareness initiatives, and in-services to create awareness, and steered progress in the development and integration of service-learning in academic work and student organizations. More than 400 service-learning faculty members were trained, more than 150 courses with a service-learning component were offered, and thousands of students participated on every level from kindergarten to university. “Partnership facilitators unified but did not over-manage the program, early establishing a pattern of training leaders and expecting those leaders to train others in continual outreach” (Monsour, 2002, p. 3).

Student pride, effort, and commitment highlighted these projects. New relationships between the universities, public schools, and the community brought excitement and synergy.

Expanding beyond the textbook teaching, educators gained renewed confidence in their ability to make a difference with kids, while fostering initiative, finding new ways to help kids work effectively in groups and helping kids draw the full measure of learning by taking a pause to reflect, individually and together, on what was

learned, on how the community was served, and on what it means to be of service. (Monsour, 2002, p. 7)

A very recent study in New Hampshire focused on creating new spaces for learning by fostering experiential and service-learning. “Project Period” started in a small community of a 300-student secondary school consisting of grades 9 through 12. The foci of this study were service-learning on board the newly recreated slave ship, the Amistad at the port of call in Washington D.C. and archiving priceless artifacts at the museum of African American History. “History came alive for the students with the sights and sounds of real event places in the middle of the night or broad daylight with the experienced docents” (Adeniji-Neill, 2012, p.205).

Through students’ photo artifacts analyses and anecdotes from their journals, the researcher brought to light the experience of immersion field trip and service-learning. “The projects were designed to allow students to engage with the community, foster curiosity, ignite critical thoughts, and enable students to see the world in multi-faceted dimensions” (Adeniji-Neill, 2012, p 205). Adeniji-Neill (2012) concluded that the students’ experiences were about the journey and stretching and gaining knowledge that may not have otherwise been available in its entirety had the professors remained stationary in their classrooms.

An awareness of social justice and leadership skills needed for the development of a pedagogical community were highlighted in a longitudinal quantitative study of 306 senior-level nursing students conducted by Groh, Stallwood, and Daniels (2011). The researchers used a Service-Learning Self-Evaluation Tool (SLSET) before and after the students’ service-learning experiences that spanned a six-year period. “Paired *t*-tests were calculated. Statistically significant differences were noted between pre- and post-service-learning

experience, with students rating themselves higher on leadership and social justice items after the experience. Cronbach's alpha for leadership and social justice were greater than 0.80" (Groh et.al, 2011, p. 400). Overall, Groh et.al (2011) concluded service-learning as an educational methodology that combines community service with academic learning objectives is a viable strategy.

Service-learning activities are ultimately intended to enhance student learning and understanding, but are more powerful when conducted in concert with the broader community. Students receive experientially-based learning that cultivates self-analysis and opportunities to challenge universal beliefs about what defines a successful person (Rhoads, 2000). For example, a student who worked with homeless citizens in Washington D.C., remarked, "We pass the time without really questioning our lives. The people of the streets have challenged me" (Rhoads, 2000, p. 41). Like these students, teachers can also profit authentic benefits through participation in service-learning activities.

Teacher Benefits Achieved through Service-Learning

Teachers play an essential role in making service-learning activities possible. It is probable that teachers will form cherished bonds with their students. "By working together in service learning projects, close relationships between teachers and students are enhanced. Many teachers who implemented service learning projects described more positive feelings about their students as well as increases in the importance of their roles as teachers" (Schukar, 1997, para. 11).

Service-learning projects organized, implemented, and evaluated by teachers revealed that teachers were enthusiastic about sharing their personal experiences with others. One such teacher expressed, "Engaging in service learning with our students in non-

school sites allowed all of us to reflect on the roles and functions of service providers and those who are served and on literacy learning in and out of school” (Clark, 2002, para. 3).

Ciaccio (1999), a middle school educator of 31 years, shared that service-learning allowed teachers to relate to their students on a different level. Additionally, he revealed, “There is likely to be more trust, less tension, and greater cooperation from students. Most of all, you, as the teacher, will cherish these golden moments as an anchor of personal satisfaction for the rest of your life” (para. 14).

While teacher and student collaboration is an integral part of service-learning, a more meaningful mentor relationship can develop as students and teachers work together to accomplish goals and address community needs. Furthermore, “opportunities for true mentorship become more frequent as the artificial barriers that often separate students and faculty crumble in the urgency of shared work of real significance” (Fisher & Wilson, 2003, p. 104).

Middle school Language Arts teacher and author, Pitino (2003), a firm believer of designing projects for students that enhance their skills and their minds, stated, “As teachers of such fabulous young minds, we need to create assignments that will not only build skills, but will help kids as they search for meaning in their lives. We have the power. They have the potential” (para. 9). Perhaps the greatest benefit teachers reap from service-learning is that service-learning as an educational approach is in itself an opportunity for teachers to empower students. Through service-learning, teachers are able to offer students the experiences that help them make a difference not only in their individual lives, but in their communities—which brings the idea of community pedagogy full circle.

Community, student, teacher benefits visibly outweigh the detriments of service-learning. Considering the numerous benefits for service-learning can be a conduit for community education that creates a pedagogical community that fosters social justice, multicultural competence, civic engagement, social responsibility, personal commitment, character education and more. Through service-learning, the research revealed students, teachers, and community members have experienced improved relationships and enhanced life skills.

Summary

The Historical Overview of Service-Learning demonstrated a succinct history of events that have influenced service-learning today. Service-Learning Defined distinguished the elements of service-learning through detailed descriptions and examples. Teacher Experiences in the Contemporary Service-Learning Classroom included both commendations and condemnations of service-learning as outlined by various professors and researchers. The section, Pedagogical Community through Service-Learning, provided an overview of the influence of service-learning in current society including the notion of achieving community education and responsibility through service-learning.

It is imperative to declare that service-learning is not simply a trend or the most recent buzzword in the educational community. “Service learning is rather a marvelously flexible strategy or tool for educators to better teach students about themselves and the world, while meeting existing goals and objectives. It can be used in every subject and grade level and is equally effective outside the school context” (Kaye, 2004 p. ix).

In the words of Helen Keller, “Happiness cannot come from without. It must come from within. It is not what we see and touch or that which others do for us which makes us

happy; it is that which we think and feel and do, first for the other fellow and then for ourselves” (National Commission for Service-Learning, 2012, para. 3). It is evident that there is a significant influence on those who participate in service-learning activities; to dedicate one’s time by serving others is a noteworthy act in and of itself. Through service-learning, participants not only provide a service to the community, they additionally provide a service to themselves. Still, the questions remain: What does one truly attain by participating in service-learning activities? What are the essences service-learning teachers’ experiences?

Chapter 3 provides an explanation of how the study addressed this overarching question. The components of Chapter 3 include a rationale of the appropriateness of the research method and design, the role of the researcher, an elaboration of the research procedures, data collection and analysis procedures, and limitations and ethical considerations.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature in Chapter 2 suggested that today's youth, their parents, teachers, principals, and community members are being challenged to serve. In today's social and political climate, service-learning can be the conduit through which teachers and students might become motivated to be more involved with societal challenges, the quandary of other people, and political affairs overall (Rocheleau, 2004). Service-learning is observably here to stay and service-learning teachers will continue to be at the forefront of service-learning activities.

Undoubtedly, research has been conducted regarding the perceived benefits for students who participate in service-learning and the outcomes of service-learning; unfortunately, research studies regarding the personal experiences of service-learning teachers are virtually nonexistent. Herein, lies the purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study; the resolve is to better understand middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning in a suburban middle school. The findings of this phenomenological qualitative study could have implications for educational administrators and service-learning teachers. The results can theoretically be used to provide a voice to educational leaders and service-learning teachers when attempting to justify the implementation of a curriculum that incorporates service-learning activities—especially within the current political environment of standards-based instruction and assessment.

The central research question guiding this study was:

What are middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?

The following sub-questions also guided this study:

- What statements describe the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?
- What themes are identified from the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?
- What are the contexts of and thoughts about the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?
- What are the overall essences of the service-learning teachers' experience with service-learning?

Rationale for Qualitative Research

In this section, I provide an explicit justification in favor of the need for qualitative methodology as the major research paradigm. Qualitative research is by no means a new phenomenon in and of itself. According to Bogdan & Biklen (2007), for over 200 years, researchers have utilized qualitative study in both Europe and the United States to recognize and comprehend various perspectives of people's lives. The key characteristics and single definition of qualitative research, inquiry, and study has evolved through the years and is still evolving. The development of the research design process in qualitative research, according to Creswell (2007), begins with the philosophical assumptions the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative research study. "Researchers bring their own worldviews, paradigms, or set of beliefs to the research project, and these inform

the conduct and writing of the qualitative study” (p. 15). I brought a set of assumptions about service-learning based on my own personal in-depth experiences with service-learning that have influenced both my personal and professional life. Knowing this, I needed to be conscious of these experiences as I determined the meaning of the participants’ experiences with service-learning. I was conscious of the fact that my experiences could—but through intersubjectivity, were not allowed to—overpower the experiences of the service-learning teachers in my study.

Qualitative research is centered on the study of meaning, more specifically, the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a shared or human problem. “To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is inductive and establishes patterns or themes” (Creswell, 2007, p. 37).

It has been said that in some cases, all data are qualitative; they refer to essences of people, objects, and situations (Berg, 1989). Qualitative data are, by and large, data in the form of words based on observation, interviews, or documents. As maintained by Miles and Huberman (1994), “These data collection activities typically are carried out in close proximity to a local setting for a sustained period of time” (p. 9). I adhered to these data collection considerations as I spent adequate time with the participants. Prolonged engagements allowed the development of trust and additionally allowed for me to collect data that communicated the true meanings of the participants’ experiences.

Patton (2002) unmasked that qualitative findings often have a simple, yet elegant and insightful character. “This straightforward yet nuanced framework represents a creative synthesis of years of participant observation and personal inquiry” (Patton, 2002, p. 9). Pure

description and quotations are the raw data of qualitative inquiry. The depiction is intended to transport the reader into the setting. “The data do not include judgments about whether what occurred was good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, or any other interpretative judgments. The data simply described what occurred” (Patton, 2007, p. 26-27).

Also in accordance with Patton (2002), the purpose of research and evaluation are different; thus, the criteria for judging qualitative studies can vary depending on purpose. “This point is important. It means one can’t judge the appropriateness of the methods in any study or the quality of the resulting finding without knowing the study’s purpose, agreed-on uses, and intended audiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 10).

My rationale for using a phenomenological approach in this study was to establish themes and patterns of the meaning of the service-learning teachers’ experiences with the phenomenon of service-learning. The data analysis aided in gaining a deeper understanding of the nature and meaning of the participants’ experiences. The ultimate goal was to learn of the essences of these experiences.

A phenomenological study describes the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon, concept, or topic for a number of individuals. Ultimately, the researcher condenses the experiences to a central meaning or the “essence” of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). I purposefully aligned this study with transcendental phenomenology as opposed to hermeneutical phenomenology as the focus was exclusively on the participants and the researcher’s reactions—not the researcher’s experience. According to Moustakas (1994), “Transcendental means in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time” (p. 34). As the researcher, I sought to achieve *epoché* set by setting aside my experiences, as

much as possible, in order to have an unsullied perspective of the phenomenon of service-learning (Creswell, 2007).

Husserl (1970) pointed out, in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher has to be aware of the importance of intersubjectivity in making meaning. In other words, I was required to be cognizant of my own consciousness of the phenomena before I could understand the experiences of others. He stated, “In reciprocal understanding, my experiences and experiential acquisitions enter into contact with those of others, similar to the contact between individual series of experiences within my experiential life...a unification is brought about or at least certain in advance as possibly attainable by everyone” (p. 163).

In concert with the meaning of the researcher as instrument in qualitative inquiry, I considered the challenge in reciprocal social interaction—namely in my interviews and observation—in order to discover “what is really true of the phenomena of interpersonal knowledge and experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57)

An additional feature of intersubjectivity is contained in Schutz’s (1967) contention that if one looks at the whole collection of another’s lived experiences and asks about the structures of this knowledge, then it becomes clear that everything one knows about the other’s conscious life is really based on the knowledge of his or her own lived experiences. One’s lived experiences of the other are “constituted in simultaneity or quasisimultaneity” with the other’s lived experience, “to which they are intentionally related” (p. 160).

Therefore, when one looks backward, the individual is able to “synchronize” his or her past with the other’s past (Schutz, 1967, p. 160). Discerning this, I arrived at a better understanding of my unique role as the researcher.

Role of the Researcher

I harmonized my experiences of service-learning with the experiences of the participants in order to realize the value of intersubjective truth. Bearing this in mind, Husserl (1970) cautioned that the beginning point in establishing the truth of things must be individual perception, seeing things as a solitary self. According to Husserl, no matter how much one's perceptions depart from others, it is wrong to immediately jump to transcendental intersubjectivity. "Only by starting from the ego and the system of its transcendental functions and accomplishments can one methodically exhibit transcendental intersubjectivity and its transcendental communalization" (pp. 185-186). Self-knowledge is the emphatic principle. "I am the person who gives existence its essence, the one who returns the essence to existential life" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58)

As a qualitative researcher, I aimed to share my craft. As recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994), this refers to "the explicit, systematic methods we use to draw conclusions and to test them carefully" (p. 2). With that in mind, I employed methods that were credible, dependable, and replicable in qualitative terms. Throughout this methodological process and consistent with qualitative research, I set my focus on the naturally occurring, ordinary events surrounding service-learning in natural settings, so that I could truly ascertain the meaning of the phenomenon.

I was and continue to be intimately connected with the wonder of service-learning. According to Moustakas (1994), "In a phenomenological investigation, the researcher has a personal interest in whatever she or he seeks to know; the researcher is intimately connected with the phenomenon" (p. 59). Phenomenology is entrenched in questions that give a direction and focus to meaning, and themes that support an inquiry, arouse further

interest and concern, and justify a passionate involvement in whatever is being experienced. As the researcher of this phenomenological study, I was and am more than passionate about service-learning.

In my role as researcher for this phenomenological qualitative inquiry, I engaged in disciplined and systematic efforts to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon of service-learning which was being investigated—this is referred to as the *epoché* process. My vision was to “to launch the study as far as possible free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies—to be completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to and hearing research participants describe their experience of the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22).

As the phenomenological researcher of this qualitative study, I was aware that “subject and object are integrated—what I see is interwoven with how I see it, with whom I see it, and with whom I am” (Moustakas, 1994, p.59). I realized that my perception—that which I perceived—and the experiences or actions in which I observed were interrelated. As stated by Moustakas (1994), “At all points in the investigation, intersubjective reality is part of the process, yet every perception begins with my own sense of what an issue or object or experience is and means” (p.59).

In this qualitative research inquiry, as the researcher, I was the instrument. “The credibility of qualitative methods, therefore, hinges to a great extent on the skill, competence, and rigor of the person doing the fieldwork—as well as things going on in a person’s life that might prove a distraction” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). As the instrument of qualitative methods, I utilized self-awareness as an asset in both fieldwork and analysis. According to Patton (2002), my role as the researcher ultimately entailed dealing with

issues of authenticity, reactivity, and how the observation and interview processes may have affected what was observed as well as how my background and any predispositions may have constrained what was actually observed and understood.

My role was to collect the data through observing behavior and interviewing participants. I used interview and observation protocol for collecting data; but as the research instrument, I personally gathered the information. I did not “use or rely on questionnaires or instruments developed by other researchers” (Creswell, 2007, p. 38). My research questions served as a starting point to code data to determine patterns and themes. As a former service-learning sponsor and proponent of service-learning for a number of years, I was fully prepared and able to attend to this task.

As previously mentioned, I held the title of service-learning teacher and sponsor at the site of the study; currently, my role is that of an Assistant Principal in a different building and district. My position allowed for more validity and eliminated issues of power in the study as I am no longer an active participant in the school community or the service-learning program at the participating site of inquiry.

Confidently, my overarching desire to have a better understanding of the meanings of the experiences helped me avoid making unnecessary and potentially harmful assumptions that could have affected the validity of my study. More than anything, I was genuinely excited about this topic and learning about the true essences of the service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning.

Research Procedures

According to Patton (2002), “A well-conceived strategy, by providing overall direction, provides a framework for decision making and action. It permits seemingly isolated tasks and activities to fit together, integrating separate efforts toward a common purpose” (p. 39). The specific study design and methods decisions surrounding this qualitative study was made within an overall strategic framework and methodology as described here. The research procedures including the setting, participants, sampling, data sources, and interview questions are described in the sections to follow.

Setting

The site of the phenomenological study was an average-sized suburban middle school in the Midwest consisting of 6th grade through 8th grade students. The site was appropriate for the study because the school has implemented a service-learning curriculum for over 20 years. The service-learning program was established in 1992 with the creation of the Peer Helpers and Magic Me programs. Each group serves a different objective in the building. Magic Me students build relationships with local nursing home residents and visit them on a regular basis. The Peer Helpers welcome new students to the school by introducing them to teachers and other students, giving them a tour of the school, sitting by them at lunch, and assisting them during passing period. Another group called Conflict Mediators was created in 1996. These students are responsible for facilitating conversations between students who are not getting along at school. These conversations are set up on a referral basis by students, teachers, or both.

Since 2007, the program was improved with the hiring of a new service-learning coordinator who has remained in that role since then. Careful steps have been taken to truly

align the programs to the features of service-learning. The school partners with the local university to train students in leadership skills. Additionally, the service-learning program utilizes the community to ascertain needs and eventually establishes and executes particular service-learning projects and activities. Past service-learning projects include planning benefit yard sales, volunteering at community blood drives, sponsoring a battle of the bands, making quilts for orphaned babies, donating coats to the homeless, running a stuffed-animal drive for children whose parents were deployed, and a great deal more.

Information provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012) revealed that the district selected for this study had a population of 3,307 students; the middle school in the district provided education for 742 of those students. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch included 37.1% of the total population. The attendance rate was 94.8% (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

The district demographic data for the school displayed that the district student population was 6.1% African American and 81.3% White; percentages for Asian, Hispanic, and Indian students were suppressed due to a small sample size. Students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch included 253 out of 742 (34%) students. The attendance rate was 94.8% (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

The district demographic data for the school presented that of the 224 fulltime teachers employed by the district for the 2012 to 2013 school year, 217 were Caucasian (97%); four were African American (2%); two were Hispanic (0.9%); and one was Asian (0.4%). For the middle school that was the site of inquiry, there were 47 fulltime teachers employed; 45 were Caucasian (96%) and two were African American (4%). Staffing ratios for the entire district revealed 17 students per teacher and 371 students per administrator.

Average annual teacher salary was \$42, 370 (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

Performance standards for this Midwest school on the state standardized test revealed disaggregated data for the middle schools were used to show students' comprehension of basic skills in communication arts. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) reported that 38.6% of sixth grade students, 39.0% of seventh grade students in the 34.7% of eighth grade students in the middle school earned proficient scores on the communication arts portion of the 2012 test; 20.0% of the school's sixth grade students, 13.4% of seventh grade students in the 24.8% of eighth grade students received advanced scores in communication arts (2012).

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) also reported that 35% of sixth grade students, 42.4% of seventh grade students in the 30.9% of eighth grade students in the middle school earned proficient scores on the mathematics portion of the 2012 test; 24.6% of the school's sixth grade students, 22.9% of seventh grade students and 30.9% of eighth grade students received advanced scores in mathematics (2012).

Selection of Research Participants

The six middle school service-learning sponsors selected for this study met specific criteria; hereinafter and especially in Chapter 4, when referencing the individual participants, the service-learning sponsors are referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E, and Teacher F. The service-learning sponsors were selected because they were "information rich and illuminative" (Patton, 2002, p. 40). This type of selection was chosen because the people involved offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest—in this case, service-learning.

In the words of Patton (2002), the sampling, then, “is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population” (p. 40). The logic and power of purposeful sampling in this qualitative case study stems from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of service-learning. The information-rich participants provided a great deal of information about service-learning with a direct focus on illuminating the questions of the study

The six service-learning teachers sponsor three different service-learning groups: Conflict Mediators, Magic Me, and Peer Helpers. While each service-learning group serves a specific function, all of the groups additionally coordinate a variety of service-learning activities outside of their specific purpose including some of the aforementioned projects. The service-learning teachers sponsor, supervise, and support these service-learning projects throughout the year. The specific criteria outlined for this study include the following:

- Participants must have extensive experience with service-learning; extensive experience was defined as at least two years of experience as a service-learning sponsor.
- Participants must currently hold the title of service-learning class sponsor.
- Participants must agree to be part of the study.
- Participants must have a degree in middle school education.
- Participants must have at least five years of teaching experience.

As a previous service-learning teacher at the site of inquiry, I had direct access to the participants. Additionally and because of my former employment with the district, I had

previously built rapport and respect with the current administrators and service-learning teachers.

Data Sources

As described by Patton (2002), “Qualitative data consist of quotations, observations, and excerpts from documents” (p. 46). Consistent with qualitative studies, this phenomenological study consisted of open-ended interviews and observations of service-learning sponsors who were associated with teaching and supervising students in service-learning activities.

Consistent with a phenomenological approach, the data collection procedures included open-ended questions. The in-depth interviews provided a diversity of information that aided in determining the teachers’ essences with service-learning. “The central goal of conversation analysis is the exploration, through the use of the spoken word, of the procedures which speakers use to communicate in a variety of socially mediated situations” (Grbich, 2007, p.136). According to deMarrais (2004), interviews are conversations with a purpose and qualitative interviews are used when researchers seek detailed information about experiences or phenomena.

An in-depth, open-ended interview approach was utilized as I outlined a set of questions utilized during the interview process for all participants. This guide consisted of “questions carefully worded and arranged with the intention of taking each respondent through the same sequence asking them the same questions with essentially the same words” (Patton, 2002, p. 342). The data collected was open-ended as the respondents supplied their own words, thoughts, and insights when answering the questions.

The in-depth, probing interview questions focused specifically on the experiences of the service-learning teachers. Interview questions were as follows:

1. In what ways do you support service-learning activities in your current role within the service-learning department?
2. How do you facilitate the promotion of student driven service-learning activities?
3. What do you perceive as benefits of service-learning?
4. What, if anything, have you learned about yourself through your experience as a service-learning teacher?
5. If you could have unlimited funds for your service-learning program, what would you purchase for your service-learning activities?

In addition to the interview questions, there was one narrative question. In this study, the “narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (Czarniawska, 2004, p. 17). The guiding question for the narrative documentation stated: Describe the most memorable situation or experience, if any, you have had in this position.

While my phenomenological study primarily consisted of interviews and the narrative provided by the service-learning sponsors, I also employed observations as an additional means of collecting data. “Even studies that rely mainly on interviewing as a data collection technique employ observational methods to note body language and other gestural cues that lend meaning to the words of the persons being interviewed” (Angrasino, 2005, p. 729). I scheduled two observations in which I took extensive notes; the aforementioned research question guided the structure of the observations. More

specifically, I considered common elements of the setting including the participants, what was going on, the sequence of events, the norms, how people were connected, and the day-to-day typical activities.

Effective observations require capturing the essence of the moment. In order to accomplish this goal, I recorded direct quotes of participants in addition to paraphrasing pertinent conversations and made note of relevant events and interactions within the setting. Moreover, I took note of silences and nonverbal communication. Following the observation, I analyzed my field notes using a codebook that employed enumerative and thematic coding. Using the codebook and information attained therein, I arranged descriptive pieces into a story and determined themes captured from the observation.

Data Analysis Procedures

In the candid words of Miles and Huberman (1994), “Qualitative data are sexy” (p. 1). The authors described such data as a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes in identifiable local contexts. “With qualitative data, one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations” (p. 1). The theoretical framework and research questions used to guide this study led to the illumination of the service-learning sponsors’ voices, which served as data used to identify the essences of their service-learning experiences. It was my intent that the data from this qualitative study revealed serendipitous findings and potential integrations.

True to form, the data helped me, the researcher, go beyond initial conceptions and ultimately generated and revised conceptual frameworks. “Findings from qualitative studies have a quality of ‘undeniability.’ Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have

a concrete, vivid meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader—another researcher, a policymaker, a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 1). Keeping this in mind, the following paragraphs describe in detail the steps that led to the discovery of the data.

The data analysis procedures entailed identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. I then analyzed the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and combine the statements into themes. Next, I developed a textural description of the experiences of what the participants experienced, a structural description of how they experienced what they experienced in regards to conditions, situations, and context, and finally, a combination of the textural and structural descriptions to convey an overall essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This process is described in scrupulous detail in the ensuing paragraphs.

The initial step involved reading the interview transcripts and observational notes. Miles and Huberman (1994) elucidated that as phenomenologists work with interview transcriptions, they are cautious sometimes to the point of uncertainty about summarizing or reducing the text. "They do not, for example, use coding, but assume that through continued readings of the source material and through vigilance over one's presuppositions, one can reach the 'Lebenswelt' of the informant, capturing the 'essence' of an account—what is constant in a person's life across its manifold variations" (p. 8). The purpose of this type of methodology was to guide the researcher to a practical understanding of meanings and actions.

At this point, I aimed to reach ‘Lebenswelt’ as I deciphered the data. I proceeded to “‘fracture’ the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96). This process has also been referred to as horizontalization (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2007) recommended, “Building on the data from the research questions, data analysts go through the data (e.g. interview transcriptions) and highlight ‘significant statements,’ sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon” (p. 61).

Using horizontalization, I sorted the data into clusters of meaning, common themes, and possible patterns and then composed a textural description of what the participants experienced. A structural description was also produced to describe the context or setting that may have influenced how the participants experienced the phenomenon. According to VanManen (1990), “From a phenomenological point of view, we are less interested in the factual status of particular instances: whether something happened, how often it tends to happen, or how the occurrence of an experience is related to the prevalence of other conditions or events” (p. 10). As the researcher, I was more interested in determining the nature or essences of the service-learning experiences.

Using the textural and structural descriptions, I constructed a composite description that presented the essences of the phenomenon. This method is known as the “essential, invariant structure or essence” and chiefly focused on the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). From this passage, a sense of meaning of the service-learning teachers’ experiences was ascertained.

Another major task was to compose a group report reflecting what all participants experienced. This entailed writing a group composite textural description outlining what happened, a structural description revealing how it happened, and finally combining the elements of the textural and structural group reports to generate a group textural-structural description (Creswell, 2007).

The use of narrative has already shown to be a powerful tool for exploration and discovery of deeper meaning and interpretation (Denzin, 2001; Irving & Klenke, 2004; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). Maxwell (2005) noted that observation is also a great tool for obtaining aspects of the participants' perspective that they are reluctant to directly state in interviews. The documents and observations were coded using the process described by Miles and Huberman (1994). I coded the documents and observations by sorting the data into codes, categories, and then concepts. Miles and Huberman (1994) defined codes as "tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p. 56). Miles and Huberman (1994) also identified three classes of codes: descriptive, interpretive, and pattern codes. They described descriptive and interpretive codes as attributing a class of phenomena to a segment of text and pattern codes as being inferential and explanatory.

Pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994), used to analyze the documents and observations, resulted in the identification of relevant themes. The process consisted of labeling context as descriptive and interpretive codes to form themes. When analyzing the documents and observations, I considered the connections I had made with the informants during the in-depth interviews. This process proved beneficial and allowed me to relate familiarly to their experiences. As a result of the phenomenological process, I am still

astonished as to how this process allowed me to genuinely uncover the essences of what the phenomenon truly signified to the service-learning teachers. Moreover, I believe this complete analysis process and the results have the potential to provide further information about service-learning in schools across the nation and perhaps even the world.

It is of great importance to bear in mind, “The essences of any experience are never totally exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at a particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100). In deriving this scientific evidence in the phenomenological investigation, I ultimately established and carried out a series of methods and procedures that satisfied the requirements of an organized, disciplined, and systematic study.

Limitations and Ethical Considerations

My prior connections to the topic, people, and setting studied included the reality that I once was a service-learning sponsor and I worked and collaborated with most of the service-learning sponsors at the site of the study. The assumptions I had about service-learning included my personal experiences with service-learning which yielded positive results for the community, for me personally, and the students who planned and participated in the projects.

The assumption that all service-learning projects are positive in nature could have affected my study in that I might have presumed the experiences and essences of the participants were optimistic and constructive. I trusted that my overarching desire to have a better understanding of the meanings of the experiences helped me avoid making unnecessary and potentially harmful assumptions that could have affected the validity of

my study. More than anything, I was genuinely excited about this topic and learning about the true essences of the service-learning teachers' experiences.

Although the interview data allowed for considerable depth of analysis, a limitation was the fact that all service-learning sponsors in this particular school were Caucasian females. Expanding the study to include male service-learning teachers' experiences of a different ethnicity would improve validity. The design of this study allowed for transferability to schools in other districts across the country. Transferability refers to the extent to which the working hypothesis can be adapted and applied, or transferred, to other settings or groups (Patton, 2002). While quantitative studies tend to focus on replicating studies on a broader scale, qualitative studies tend to address the issue of transferability and focus on the idea of replicating the study in a similar setting.

The nature of the service-learning activities in each of the six classes was different and thus may have had an effect on the experiences of participants. The common elements of service-learning were evident in each class; however, the culminating projects produced by the three groups were different. Prior knowledge and experience could also have had an impact on participant perceptions. Finally, this study focused on only service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning; expanding the research to include the experiences of the students, administrators, parents, community stakeholders, and benefactors of service-learning activities could provide multiple views of the same phenomenon.

This study acknowledged the phenomenological assumption that the general structural description provides an accurate portrait of the common features and the structural connections that were manifested in the examples collected (Creswell, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews, “an extension of constructions developed by the inquirer” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 185), the narrative documentation, and field observations verified emerging themes in the data, contributing to inter-coder reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Self-reflection also guided the maintenance of validity; as the researcher, I asked myself the following reflection questions:

1. Did I influence the contents of the participants’ descriptions in such a way that the descriptions do not truly reflect the participants’ actual experience?
2. Is the transcription accurate, and does it convey the meaning of the oral presentation in the interview?
3. In the analysis of the transcriptions, were there conclusions other than those in which I offered that could have been derived? Have I identified those alternatives?
4. Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?
5. Is the structural description situation specific, or does it hold in general for the experience in other situations? (Polkinghorne, 1989)

Throughout all phases of this phenomenological study, I remained sensitive to ethical considerations. As I worked with individual participants, I respected them as unique individuals. I maintained confidentiality as I did not use their names or personal information that could have revealed the details of their lives. I steered clear of stereotyping and used the guidelines for nondiscriminatory language found in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. I sought and attained consent from the

participants, the district superintendent, and the building administrator. Additionally, I avoided the conundrum of deception and protected the anonymity of individuals with whom I interviewed. Finally, I made a conscious effort to be sensitive to vulnerable populations, imbalanced power relations, and the safety of the participants. The ultimate goal was for my descriptions to resonate with the participants' experiences and to reveal an accurate reflection of what they said.

This study incorporated a variety of safeguards to ensure the highest degree of accuracy, authenticity, and trustworthiness in the final analysis and interpretation. I utilized reflective listening techniques during the interviews to determine the accuracy of understanding of the participants' responses.

This phenomenological study adhered to the ethical review protocol at the University of Missouri – Kansas City as outlined by the Social Sciences Institutional Review Board (SSIRB). The fundamental responsibility of the SSIRB is to assure that all ethical issues have been fully addressed in the protection of human subjects who volunteer to participate in research study. The SSIRB is guided by three overriding principles which include protecting the autonomy of the subjects, ensuring beneficence, and promoting fair procedures in the selection of subjects. Keeping these principles in mind for this phenomenological qualitative study, I considered the risks to the subjects, the anticipated benefits to the subjects and others, the importance of the knowledge gained, and the informed consent process in which I employed.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided specific information regarding the explicit methodology of the study which included the rationale for qualitative research, the role of the researcher,

itemized research procedures, and limitations and ethical considerations. The research procedures particularly noted the setting, selection of research participants, and data sources. I also included exact data analysis procedures; this step in the study proved to be meticulous and precise.

Results from this phenomenological study can be related to and integrated with those of other phenomenologists studying service-learning. Conducting a study with a phenomenological focus is different from using phenomenology to philosophically justify the methods of qualitative inquiry as legitimate in social science research. While both contributions are important, “a phenomenological study (as opposed to a phenomenological perspective) is one that focuses on descriptions of what people experience and how it is that they experience what they experience” (Patton, 2002, p. 107).

The findings of this phenomenological qualitative study had implications for educational administrators and service-learning teachers. The results from this study can potentially be used to provide a voice to educational leaders and service-learning teachers when attempting to justify the implementation of a curriculum that incorporates service-learning activities. By developing an understanding of the essence of the experiences of service-learning teachers, the educational community procured insight as to what teachers’ truly attain by sponsoring service-learning activities.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The intent of this phenomenological study was to better understand middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning at a suburban middle school in the Midwest consisting of 6th grade through 8th grade students. At this stage in the research, the central phenomenon of service-learning was generally defined as “an innovative teaching methodology that integrates service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities” (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002, p. 4). This phenomenological study focused on describing what all service-learning teacher participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon of service-learning at the selected site. A qualitative phenomenological research method and design were appropriate to the study because the open-ended questions in the interviews and narrative writing opportunity posed examined service-learning teachers' perceptions regarding the four phases of service-learning based on their lived experiences. I wanted to make sure that their voices were at the center of the investigation instead of designing a quantitative study that would not support meaning-making.

In identification of the themes, I constantly referred to the central research question: What are middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning? I also referred to the subquestions guiding the study:

- What statements describe the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?
- What themes are identified from the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?

- What are the contexts of and thoughts about the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?
- What are the overall essences of the service-learning teachers' experience with service-learning?

The specific study design and methods decisions surrounding this qualitative study were made within an overall strategic framework and methodology as described in explicit detail in Chapter 3. The setting of the phenomenological study was an average-sized suburban middle school in the Midwest consisting of 6th grade through 8th grade students. The site was appropriate for the study because the school has implemented a service-learning curriculum for over 20 years. The service-learning program was established in 1992 with the creation of the Peer Helpers and Magic Me programs; Conflict Mediators was added four years later.

I selected six middle school service-learning teachers for this study. All nine service-learning sponsors were invited to participate; however, only six chose to do so. In order to protect the confidentiality of the participants, the service-learning teachers have been will be referred to as Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E, and Teacher F. The suburban-middle school where the study was conducted has a predominantly Caucasian teaching staff as noted in Chapter 3. In the service learning department, all nine teachers and the service-learning director were Caucasian. Each of the selected participants met the criteria as defined in Chapter 3. All of the participants agreed to be part of the study, they have been teaching for more than 5 years, and they all had degrees in middle school education. Table 1 represents the number of years of service-

learning experience of each participant and the title he or she holds in the service-learning department.

Table 1

Service-Learning Teachers' Years of Experience and Titles

Teacher	Years of Service-Learning Experience	Service-Learning Sponsor's Title
A	6	Magic Me Sponsor
B	2	Peer Helpers Sponsor
C	3	Magic Me Sponsor
D	6	Magic Me Sponsor
E	5	Conflict Mediators Sponsor
F	4	Conflict Mediators Sponsor

The service-learning teachers were selected because they were “information rich and illuminative” (Patton, 2002, p. 40). This type of selection was chosen because the people involved offered useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest—in this case, service-learning. The six service-learning teachers sponsor three different service-learning groups: Conflict Mediators, Magic Me, and Peer Helpers. While each service-learning group serves a specific function, all of the groups additionally coordinate a variety of service-learning activities outside of their specific service-learning purpose. The service-learning teachers sponsor, supervise, and support these service-learning projects throughout the year.

Consistent with a phenomenological approach, the major data collection procedure was in-depth interviews. The interviews provided a diversity of information that aided in determining the teachers' essences with service-learning. The respondents supplied their own words, thoughts, and insights when answering the questions. I was keenly aware that in transcendental phenomenology, I had to be aware of the importance of intersubjectivity in making meaning (Husserl, 1970). In keeping with the concept of intersubjectivity, I was aware of the importance of being cognizant of my own consciousness of the phenomena before I could understand the experience of others.

During the interview session, participants also responded to a narrative question which allowed them to write about their most memorable situation or experience pertaining to service-learning. Their responses—similar to an online blog—are considered as documents generated by the participants. These were analyzed using a generic coding process that consisted of enumerative and thematic coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Grbich, 2007).

I also employed two observations as an additional means of gaining insight into the phenomenon of service-learning. During observations, I considered common elements of the setting including participants, what was going on, the sequence of events, the norms, how people were connected, and the typical activities. Effective observations require capturing the essence of the moment. In order to accomplish this goal, I recorded direct quotes of participants in addition to paraphrasing pertinent conversations, relevant events, and interactions within the setting. Moreover, I took note of silences and other forms of nonverbal communication.

Establishing Rapport with Participants

The data collection and interpretation phase took place over a six month period from January 2013 to June 2013. As a previous service-learning teacher at the site of inquiry, I had direct access to the participants. I have built rapport and respect with the current administrators and service-learning teachers. For sake of convenience and in order to be considerate of the service-learning teachers' time, I scheduled the interviews on the same days as the observations. The in-depth interviews lasted at least 60 to 90 minutes each—with 30 to 40 minutes devoted to the actual interview portion. Following the interviews, I provided the participants with the narrative question. I requested for them to put their typed narrative responses in a folder in the main office. I collected the folder containing all six responses on the last day of school. I observed two service-learning events hosted by the teachers and students at the site-of-inquiry. The first observation took place at the local university and lasted approximately four hours. The second observation took place at the site of inquiry and last approximately three hours.

During the remaining time and following the interviews, I took copious notes about their responses and my reactions. I also posed any follow-up questions during this time. This gave me the opportunity to go back and clarify the responses. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to write a narrative surrounding their most memorable experience with service-learning. All interviews were held at the site of inquiry in the individual teacher's classrooms as these rooms served as a quiet place, free from distractions (Creswell, 2007). More details regarding the number of students and other adult volunteers noted during the observations are outlined in the observation sections found later in this chapter.

As I began this research journey, I aimed to harmonize my experiences of service-learning with the experiences of the participants in order to realize the value of intersubjective truth. As a qualitative researcher, I aimed to share my craft; I endeavored to employ methods that were credible, dependable, and replicable in qualitative terms. Throughout this methodological process and consistent with qualitative research, I set my attention on the naturally occurring, ordinary events surrounding service-learning in natural settings, so that I could truly ascertain the meaning of the phenomenon.

In general, I found the interviews, narratives, and observations to be insightful regarding the unit of analysis. The teachers were open to examining their experiences with service-learning and offered candid, intuitive responses throughout the interview process. The apprehension of their most memorable experiences provided additional meaning about their perceptions of service-learning. The observations transported me into their worlds which gave me the opportunity to observe first-hand interactions between teachers and students, the application of the tenets of service-learning, and what they viewed as important.

As I formerly mentioned, I am intimately connected with the wonder of service-learning. I began this process with the realization that my perceptions—that which I perceived—and the experiences or actions in which I observed are interrelated. As the instrument of qualitative methods, I utilized self-awareness as an asset in both fieldwork and data analysis. My role as the researcher ultimately entailed dealing with issues of authenticity, reactivity, and noting how the observations, narratives, and interview processes may have affected and expanded my understanding. Moreover, it was necessary

to be aware of how my background and any predispositions may have constrained my interaction with the data (Patton, 2002). Knowing this, I was able to note and digest data collected in conjunction with my own personal experiences.

Although I was a former service-learning teacher and sponsor at the site of the study; currently, my role is that of an Assistant Principal in a different building and district. This new role truly did allow for more validity and eliminate issues of power in the study as I am no longer an active participant in the service-learning program at the participating site of inquiry. My previous experiences at the site and with the participants only aided in my understanding of the setting and informants; without this prior knowledge, I would not have been as likely to have such open access to the building and employees. My purpose at the beginning of this study was to have a better understanding of the meanings of the experiences of the service-learning teachers; this purpose did not change during the course of the data collection phase and analysis.

According to Brayboy and Deyle (2000), “Qualitative researchers must continually be aware of how those we study view us as well as how we view them” (p. 163). As previously mentioned, I formerly worked with all six participants. Not only had we orchestrated many service-learning projects together, we had also collaborated in other areas of the curriculum and participated in a wide range of professional learning community activities during faculty meetings. This is perhaps the only special circumstance or contextual issue that may have influenced the study; however, knowing the teachers beforehand may have allowed them to feel more comfortable as they openly communicated their perceptions of the phenomenon. I sense this would not have happened as easily had I been an outsider;

I deemed this to be a fortunate happenstance considering Brayboy and Deyhle's (2000) notion, "Outsiders are, of course, plagued by failing to see nuances from the perspectives of the informants (p.165). Moreover, seeing me watching the service-learning events during my observation was not out of the ordinary for the informants as I had been part of the events just a few short years ago.

The fact that the research topic was not a sensitive issues and moreover an issue that the teachers were comfortable with, helped everyone remain relaxed and open. My relationships with the participants did not change; many of them were genuinely excited that I was doing my study on service-learning and they were eager to learn about the findings.

Reflections on Validity and Reliability

This study acknowledges the phenomenological assumption that the general structural description provided an accurate portrait of the common features and the structural connections that are manifested in the examples collected (Creswell, 2007). Creswell, Hanson, Clark-Plano, and Morales (2007) recommended applying at least two of the following strategies for securing validity and reliability: triangulation, peer review/external auditing, document coding, member checking, and thick and rich descriptions of participants' responses. Employment of triangulation, document coding, thick and rich descriptions of participants' responses, and external auditing increased my study's reliability and validity. Triangulation is a method of employing two or more theories, data sources, methods, or researchers during study of a particular topic (Williamson, 2005). The interviews, the narrative documentation, and field observations led to contributing to data triangulation.

External auditing also proved to be beneficial for increasing reliability and validity; I was fortunate to have the careful eye of my professor and advisor, Dr. Loyce Caruthers. Her suggestions and ideas were extremely valuable to the study. Another way in which I aimed to achieve true reliability and validity was when participants were informed that they could have direct access to review their transcripts and the findings; however, none wished to do so.

A goal of effective, solid research is to have reliable measures or observations (Creswell, 2005). Absolute reliability and validity in research are nearly unachievable, but as with all researchers, I attempted to assure reliability and validity to the highest possible extent. Based on the research design for the study, the appropriate means for ensuring validity and reliability of the instrument was providing all participants with the same list of questions for the interview and the narrative documentation. Reliability in qualitative research refers to the consistency of collected data. As the qualitative researcher, validity meant ensuring authenticity with regard to information collected, so the information was an honest, accurate representation of the social issue—service-learning—under exploration (Neuman, 2005). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), "Since there can be no validity without reliability, a demonstration of the former [validity] is sufficient to establish the latter [reliability]" (p. 316). Essentially, if the study is valid, it is assumed to be reliable.

The study necessitated abiding by the central principle of validity: truth (Neuman, 2005). I made a compelling attempt to generate a secure match between my knowledge, perceptions, constructs, and statements about the phenomenon of service-learning and what was occurring relative to the phenomenon of service-learning. Additionally, I strove for internal validity by avoiding errors internal to the research design

(Neuman 2005); for instance, I emphasized accuracy in revealing the lived experiences of the participants through carefully recording their responses and probing for clarification. In all cases, I carefully aligned data collection to the research appropriate data analysis procedures.

I further ensured validity and reliability as effectively as possible by providing identical questions to all participants, maintaining honesty and integrity throughout the research process, and attempting to match collected data with actualities in the field of middle level education and relative to service-learning. Applying research methods and designs to ensure data collection was accurate and data interpretations were empirical constituted the primary forms of increasing validity and reliability for the study (Franklin & Ballan, 2005); these approaches were appropriate for the problem and purpose of the study. In summary, determining internal validity involved the credibility of the research methodology, design, and data collection and interpretation. Establishing external validity meant the research results were dependable based on the applied methodology, design, and data collection and interpretation efforts.

As the only researcher of this study, I realized that I was an active participant within the research process—not simply an observer or scribe. Through personal accounting, I attempted to be consciously aware of how my own positions and interests were and are imposed at all stages of the research process (1996). I spent time pondering how my current status as an Assistant Principal (albeit in a different district, 35 miles away) may have affected the participants; yet, before, during, and after the interviews, all participants displayed complete comfort and were able to converse with ease. This process is referred to as the practice of reflexivity. “Reflexivity, then, is ubiquitous. It permeates every aspect of the research

process challenging us to be more fully conscious of the ideology, culture, and politics of those we study and those whom we select as our audience” (Hertz, 1996, p. 5).

According to Hertz (1996), reflexivity encompasses voice; nevertheless, voice focuses more upon the process of representation and writing as opposed to the process of problem formation and data gathering. “Voice is how the author expresses herself within an ethnography” (Hertz, 1996, p. 7). When considering how to utilize voice in the process of engaging the data and extracting the findings, I first deliberated the multiple dimensions of voice: my voice (as the author), the presentation of the voices of my participants within the text, and the third dimension which appears when the self is the subject of the inquiry—for example, during my discussion of transcendental phenomenology (Hertz, 1996). Reflexivity is demonstrated and reflected in all three dimensions of voice throughout the remainder of Chapter 4 in the findings section and furthermore in Chapter 5 as I reveal implications of the research and recommendations for future studies. The subsequent section includes findings related to the three data sets and the conclusion which outlines a synthesis of the findings through revealing dominant themes identified in an analysis of the findings in relation to the research questions.

Qualitative Findings

Phenomenological Interviews

This phenomenological study primarily consisted of in-depth interviews of the six service-learning teachers who were associated with teaching and supervising students in service-learning activities. The interviews led to a great deal of information needed in order to determine the teachers’ essences with service-learning. According to deMarrais (2004), interviews are defined as conversations with a purpose and phenomenological qualitative

interviews are used when researchers seek detailed information about experiences or phenomena. “The central goal of conversation analysis is the exploration, through the use of the spoken word, of the procedures which speakers use to communicate in a variety of socially mediated situations” (Grbich, 2007, p.136).

Prior to beginning the official interviews, I spent a couple of minutes catching up and engaging in small talk with the participants. As former colleagues, we spent a few minutes touching base on normal life happenings and then when a natural transition allowed, we began the official interview. This process involved creating an atmosphere in which the participant became the focus of the interview; essentially, I, the researcher, guided the process, however, the participants directed the interview as individuals who had experienced the phenomenon of service-learning.

I began each interview with the same question: In what ways do you support service-learning activities in your current role within the service-learning department? This question produced several conventional responses surrounding service-learning and the participants’ experiences—especially in regards to years of service and which service-learning group they currently sponsor. Subsequent questions were asked in the same order for each participant; however, some participants elaborated on certain questions while other expounded on others—consistent with the nature of semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were as follows: How do you facilitate the promotion of student driven service-learning activities? What do you perceive as benefits of service-learning? What, if anything, have you learned about yourself through your experience as a service-learning teacher? If you could have unlimited funds for your service-learning program, what would you purchase for your service-learning activities? These contextualized interviews

supported the explorations of the experiences that allowed participants to authentically examine their lived experiences.

The interview data were analyzed using the Moustakas (1994) phenomenological data analysis method which was explained in-depth in Chapter 3: Methodology. The first step was to analyze the data by reducing the information to significant statements or quotes and to combine them into themes. Also referred to as “horizontalization,” I “fractured” the data and rearrange them into categories that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2005; Moustakas, 1994). Using the aforementioned technique, I sorted the data into clusters of meaning, common themes, and possible patterns and then wrote a textural description of what the participants experienced; a structural description of how they experienced the phenomenon; and a composite description of both the textural and structural pieces.

To demonstrate the interview data analysis process, I present the findings from each step: Individual Textural Structural (Teacher A), Individual Structural Description (Teacher F), and Individual Textural-Structural (Teacher B). I opted to use this structure to illustrate both the process and to bring the experiences of the participants to the forefront of the analysis. The composite textural description and composite structural description for the six participants resulted in the culminating essences of the experience for the group, the composite textural-structural description. Throughout the process of reporting, I applied the actual words of the participants, even if grammatically incorrect. In qualitative research, the goal was to focus not on my experiences but to authentically illuminate the experiences of the participants. Proficient qualitative authors bring in the voice of participants by using ample quotes from the respondents (Creswell, 2007).

Individual Textural Description

To begin, the textural description describes what actually took place for the participant (Creswell, 1998). The description attempts to conceptualize “what happened” during the experience from the participant’s point of view. The sample textural description used here is from Teacher A.

Research participant, Teacher A, is a veteran Caucasian, female teacher in her mid-forties. She has sponsored the Magic Me service-learning group for the past six years. Teacher A’s description of her experience was very optimistic and student-focused. It was evident from her comments that she prided herself on serving not only as a sponsor and teacher of the service-learning group, but as more of a facilitator. “My current role within the service-learning department would be a facilitator. It is my responsibility to guide the students into their positions as friends with their seniors.” Teacher A felt that serving as a service-learning sponsor has impacted her role as a regular classroom teacher; she sees her students in a different environment. “It has been my experience that these students reach a different depth of maturity and therefore I can see more potential in each of my students.” Her explanation highlighted the theme of student growth and responsibility.

Students who participate in her specific service learning are “pulled out of their comfort zone” as they are required to visit with senior citizens on a regular basis. Teacher A has learned that her students have more sides to their personalities. They are also more open and accepting of others. According to Teacher A, “They have more patience than most adults.”

Teacher A has experienced a few challenges in her position. For example, she stated, “When you have students for a three year period, it is challenging to help them grow

as they are more comfortable with you than other adults.” Even still, Teacher A believed that having the same students for three years “allows more time to build relationships with the students.” This comment supported the theme of fostering relationships which depicted students and teachers building relationships. Relationships were fostered through processes of teachers and students getting to know each other on a deeper level, building relationships, forming close bonds, and making and sharing personal connections. In her experience, having more time outside the classroom has allowed for more discussions that are not related to the curriculum. Teacher A explained that these students, who are with each sponsor for three years do not have to redevelop relationships. The instructors are aware of the students’ strengths and weaknesses from the beginning of the second year. This helps to focus on improving the vulnerabilities and promoting the strengths.

Throughout the years, Teacher A has supervised students at annual and bi-annual leadership training seminars at the local university. She felt these opportunities provided yet another avenue for discussion with her students. Furthermore, in the words of Teacher A, “I believe that students who participate in the service learning arena are more confident in themselves. They are provided more time/opportunities for personal growth.”

With regards to communication, Teacher A felt that the Magic Me service-learning opportunity places the students in a position that is, again, outside their norm. She shared that in the beginning, the students are very hesitant in communicating with their seniors. Once the initial visiting is over, the students and seniors become friends. To add to this, the students become more confident in relating to other seniors in the nursing home facility. Teacher A further shared, “I have noticed that the communication within the group has

become increasingly clearer. I have also begun to see some of the members beginning to take leadership (in communication) roles within the school itself.”

Teacher A has also noted that her students are typically more service-oriented. For example, when the group has collected food or clothing for local charities, the students were very much engaged in helping those who in need. She noted, “It is ironic that some of my students are in a very low socioeconomic class and they are the more generous with others.” Teacher A stated, “I have observed very positive results in the student’s connections to the community.” Community members who are visiting the nursing home during the students’ time with the seniors often state they are impressed by the students’ receptiveness and inclination to communicate with their seniors. According to Teacher A, the students also seem to be more aware that they are in “the public eye,” when not in school settings. She revealed, “I believe that they try harder to make a positive impression when they are out.”

Teacher A briefly spoke of diversity; she stated, “The awareness of diversity that I have observed would be in our seniors.” She went on to explain that the students are aware that some of the seniors are more coherent than others. The students adjust their responses to the seniors and have become more mature in this aspect. Teacher A shared that her service-learning group has a wide range of social skills. Something to note, she has seen a very positive result in students’ abilities to be more accepting of each other. “They have also ‘forced’ the more immature students to look at themselves and make changes.” Finally, if Teacher A had unlimited funds for her service-learning program, she indicated she would use the funds for transportation for their visits to the nursing home—this would eliminate the need to cancel the visit due to inclement weather.

Individual Structural Description

Following the creation of the textural description, is the composition of a structural description. The purpose of this description is to describe the same report from a different perspective. The structural descriptions describe how the event took place (Creswell, 1998). According to Moustakas (1994), “The individual structural description provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience” (p. 135). The structural description used here is from Teacher F.

Research participant, Teacher F is a veteran, female, Caucasian teacher in her fourth year as service-learning sponsor of the Conflict Mediator group. Teacher F views her role within the service-learning department as that of a facilitator. Her responses reflected the theme of teacher support. The theme of teacher support depicts the idea of teachers providing various forms of support to their students including facilitating, advising, sponsoring, assisting, teaching, supervising, encouraging, and helping students. She expressed, “I have grown from being in charge of my service-learning projects and group to being a facilitator.”

Teacher F facilitates the promotion of student-driven service-learning activities in several ways. At the beginning of the year, she guided her students through an assessment process in which they evaluated the projects they completed the previous year. She encouraged them to consider the amount of work and dedication that was necessary to complete the activities. Following the evaluation process, Teacher F stated, “I hit my group with a bomb shell. I told them that I would be there to support and approve their projects, but I would not be doing much of the work.” This explanation resonated the theme of student growth and responsibility. After the initial surprise subsided, she facilitated the

group through making a list of projects they wanted to sponsor for the year. “They had to decide which students would lead each project and which students would be the worker bees.” Finally, Teacher F and her students created a contract for the year. This contract was signed by both students and their parents “to solidify their roles.”

Teacher F’s approach with her service-learning group is an example of a democratic classroom. The notion of democratic education suggests that young people ought to have the same power and responsibility in the schools where they spend so much of their lives. “When a pedagogy of democracy is used in classrooms and schools, students outdistance their peers in learning content, mastering basic skills, and achieving understandings and applications” (Glickman, 1998, p. 25). A democratic theory of education focuses on “conscious social reproduction”—the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior of future citizens. “Democratic learning in schools is a set of purposeful activities, always building toward increasing student activity, choice, participation, connection, and contribution.” (Glickman, 1998, p. 31). Democratic education and service-learning—especially in Teacher F’s classroom—are welded with similar foundations; the theme of student growth and responsibility was perceptible. Student growth and responsibility as a theme revolved around students being responsible for specific roles and responsibilities in the service-learning classroom and growing through service which included obtaining accountability and experiencing success in the service-learning program.

Teacher F felt this was the first year she actually set into motion the true practice of service-learning. In order to truly understand service-learning, it is important to take pause and consider what *does not* qualify as service-learning.

Service-learning is *not* an episodic volunteer program; an add-on to an existing school or college curriculum; logging a set number of community service hours in order to graduate; compensatory service assigned as a form of punishment by the courts or by school administrators; only for high school or college students; one-sided: benefiting only students or only the community. (Eyler & Giles, 1999, pp. 183-185)

Consistent with true service-learning, Teacher F shared, “Instead of taking on the bulk of the responsibilities, my students were expected to become active members and participants in their events.” Teacher F revealed that the students who took on these responsibilities succeeded in their endeavors. However, the students, who waited for her to make their decisions or get the ball rolling, failed their quest. “It was a great learning experience even though some of these students became frustrated and wanted to quit. The service-learning program has rounded out my true service-learning leaders.”

Teacher F has witnessed her students come out of their shells and become more effective communicators. She stated,

My students are not afraid to contact [the local university], community leaders, school administrators, teachers etc. via email or phone calls. They have learned how to successfully communicate with people to promote a program or project. Most importantly, they have learned to take a project from ground zero and follow it through to the end.

Self-actualization has also been part of Teacher F’s service-learning experience. She shared, “I have learned how to give up control of situations or projects to allow students to grow. I have learned that leaders’ failures can teach as much as students’ successes.” Moreover, if and when given the opportunity to achieve great things, her students have surpassed her “wildest dreams.” She shared, “I feel that I have become an inspiration to a handful of my students in this group.”

If Teacher F could have unlimited funds for her service-learning program, she stated she would use the financial means to advertise events and purchase all materials necessary to host events or complete projects. This way, students would be able to use all monies raised to support the organizations verses having to spend a portion of the funds on advertising and materials. “Getting donations for our projects is an important learning process for the students; however, having unlimited funds would allow students to support more organizations.”

Individual Textural-Structural Description

The textural-structural description is the final step for the individual data sets. This description combines features of both the individual textural and the individual structural description. The example textural-structural description used here is from Teacher B.

Teacher B is an intermediate teacher in her second year as service-learning sponsor for the Peer Helpers group. She is a Caucasian, female who teaches Social Studies. As a graduate from the district of inquiry, Teacher B was well-aware of the service-learning program. Her current role in the service-learning department is to advise the 8th Grade Peer Helpers in their endeavors to help new students have a successful experience at the site of inquiry. She also facilitates the various service-learning projects that her students undertake. Teacher B shared, “I have learned that I too still enjoy doing community service projects and I get just as excited about it as the kids.”

When considering challenges as a service-learning sponsor, Teacher B admitted, “One challenge is keeping the students interested in doing projects and another is the extra time commitment. There are a lot of outside of school commitments.” In terms of

resources, she revealed, “We don’t need any technology or specific items to do what we have been doing.”

Themes in Teacher B’s description of her experience consisted of the following:

1. Teacher Support
2. Fostering Relationships
3. Communication Development

Teacher support. The theme of *teacher support* depicts the idea of teachers providing various forms of support to their students. The meaning units for teacher support included instances of the teacher facilitating, advising, sponsoring, assisting, teaching, supervising, encouraging, and helping students. Teacher B sees herself as the facilitator of her service-learning group. She is not the boss, the manager, or dictator—she guides students through preparation, decision making, and execution of their activities. Teacher B felt as though her role is that of a catalyst. She expressed,

I believe that this position has impacted my role as a regular classroom teacher because I am more likely to encourage positive peer relationships within the school. I think I have become more aware of students who need a positive peer influence and am more likely to actively do something about it.

Part of being a supportive teacher to Teacher also involved having high expectations of students. Teacher B noted,

I think that my students feel a need to achieve good grades because there are guidelines for being in the program. However, I think that most of my students would achieve good grades either way because of the nature of their personality and ability. We have discussed that working hard in class is one way to show their character and that in their Peer Helpers role, I expect them to set a good example for their classmates.

Teacher B has served as a teacher support system as she guided her students through various steps of their service-learning projects. For example, she required all students to

make phone calls to local businesses. She also assigned them the task of writing letters and sending emails in order to enhance their communication skills. Teacher B took pride in seeing her students become more confident after a single phone call. Teacher B has learned through supporting her students that she still enjoys participating in doing community service projects. “It makes me realize as an adult, I should be doing more in the community.”

Fostering relationships. While teacher and student collaboration is an integral part of service-learning, a more meaningful mentor relationship can develop as students and teachers work together to accomplish goals and address community needs; this is also known as the concept of fostering relationships. “Opportunities for true mentorship become more frequent as the artificial barriers that often separate students and faculty crumble in the urgency of shared work of real significance” (Fisher & Wilson, 2003, p. 104). Teacher B shared, “I think students begin to feel like you are a trustworthy adult and because of the time spent with them and the nature of the activities, we get to know much more about each other.”

The role of the Peer Helper at the site of inquiry is to help new students to get acclimated to their new school. According to Teacher B, her students give tours to new students, sit with them at lunch, and try to help them make friends. She noted,

I think that the students have drawn their own conclusions about socioeconomic classes and how this can affect students in school through working with new students as they come into the building... I have heard comments from students that make me realize that they are seeing that students who have less money typically have a harder time making friends and sometimes doing well in school. Unfortunately, I think they are judging these students based on their clothes (which is a pretty common 8th grade thing to do). However, I have heard one girl say, “Oh, she’s cool...she’ll be fine” when talking about a new student and their experiences

at WMS so far. I am afraid “cool” meant that she had nice clothes. This is an interesting subject to think about.

According to Teacher B, part of the mission of the Peer Helpers is to help new students have a positive experience at the site of inquiry. “This means accepting all students as they are and trying to help them forge relationships and become vested here.” The service-learning and advisory curriculum also “helps to have students embrace student differences.” When asked how she would utilize unlimited funds for her service-learning program, Teacher B’s response was based on fostering relationships; she replied, “I am not sure! I guess I would like money to take the students to do some team building activities in a fun place (as a reward).”

Communication development. Woven throughout Teacher B’s description of her service-learning experience were more than five references to communication. The theme of communication development is defined as students and teachers utilizing and thus developing their communication skills. The meaning units used for communication development include notations regarding the process of practicing the use of effective communication outlets in order to develop and improve overall communication skills. These meaningful statements included but were not limited to students and teachers making phone calls, having personal conversations, creating written communications, or telling stories. For example, Teacher B indicated that her students were required to make phone calls to local business to request donations for an upcoming service-learning project.

Teacher B disclosed,

This got them out of their comfort zone and provided them an opportunity to have a conversation with adults. I think that experience has been very helpful in fostering good communication skills. In addition, we have written letters, sent emails, etc. that would help to give them positive communication experiences. The result is that

the students realized that they can have those conversations and many of them became much more confident in doing this after just one phone call. At first, many were hesitant, but eventually they ALL enjoyed doing it.

Teacher B noted that the students felt more connected to the community because of the event they held where they raised money for the local food pantry. “Students called and got donations, put up flyers, invited neighbors, and promoted the event at church, dance class, etc. They really got ‘out there’ and pushed the event. It was a really positive experience.”

Composite Textural Description

The composite textural description is the next step in the Moustakas (1994) phenomenological data analysis procedure; this description brings the data together to move toward synthesis of the experience. The composite textural description combines the elements of the textural description from each of the participants. To follow is the composite textural description for this study.

For the purpose of this study, service-learning is defined as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Learn and Serve, 2012, para. 1). The site of inquiry and the participants involved have authentically embraced the phenomenon of service-learning and all of its parts. The six participants have assisted their students by helping them fine-tune an array of life skills including communication, planning, organization, problem-solving and community commitment. The service-learning teachers are also responsible for supervising the students, facilitating conversations, answering students’ questions, taking pictures, and documenting achieved tasks.

Each participant explained her particular role within the department; for example, if she sponsored Conflict Mediators, Magic Me, or Peer Helpers. All participants explained the purpose of her specific service-learning group. Teacher E defined the role of the Conflict Mediators service-learning group, “My students are responsible for facilitating conversations between students who are not getting along at school.” These conversations are set up on a referral basis by students, teachers, or both. Of the Magic Me program, Teacher D expounded,

The Magic Me program (the only service learning project I have been involved with) involves students of 6th, 7th and 8th grade who travel to local nursing homes and visit with the elderly residents once a month. We play games, make crafts, decorate cookies, sing/play music and simply just talk to one another, sharing stories of both the past and present.

Teacher B described the role of the Peer Helpers service-learning group, “Part of our mission is to help students have a positive experience here at [site of inquiry]. This means accepting all students as they are and trying to help them forge relationships and become vested here at [site of inquiry].”

All of the service-learning teachers interviewed for this study have participated—along with their students—in multiple leadership training seminars at the local university. Cooperation between the site of inquiry and the local university served two purposes: Business management students learn by conducting the training exercises and the middle school students have the opportunity to learn about leadership through the activities. According to the service-learning director at the site of inquiry, the effort is for the students to learn more about how to help others and simultaneously learn more about themselves. Teacher E commented, “The students enjoy the day!” These training events also allow them the opportunity to interact with the other service-learning groups from their school. Teacher

A noted, “The time spent at the leadership classes also provides another avenue of discussion.”

In addition to sponsoring their specific service-learning groups and attending the leadership training seminars, all participants led their service learning groups through the four phases of service-learning—preparing, serving, reflecting, and celebrating—for their annual service-learning projects. Teacher E elaborated on one of her group’s projects,

As a group, we decide which activities we would like to do to help our school and our community. This year, a student in my class has an aunt with breast cancer. He wanted to just give her some money, but his mom suggested he (which I turned into we) do a fundraiser. So, he thought of selling popsicles at lunch. We bought the liquid type from Wal-mart and sold them at two 6th grade lunch shifts for 25 cents each. We did this for four days, and we raised \$52.00!

The other participants shared their various service-learning projects including orchestrating a 5K to benefit the local food pantry (Teacher B), organizing a triathlon to benefit the Little Thunder organization (Teacher F), participating and raising funds for a local cancer walk (Teacher E), planning a dodge ball tournament to benefit the American Heart Association (Teacher F), and collecting food and clothing for local charities (Teacher A).

As a composite group, the participants feel they have learned something of value about themselves as a result of their roles as service-learning sponsors. Teacher D revealed, “I have become a more compassionate teacher and have come to appreciate both generations.” Teacher C candidly admitted,

I am capable of leading a group of students in an area that initially wasn’t of big importance to me. Now I feel as though I owe it to my students and community to ‘reunite teens and seniors.’ That is our motto.

Composite Structural Description

Following the creation of the composite textural description is the construction of the composite structural description. According to Moustakas (1994), “The aim is to arrive at structural descriptions of experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced” (p. 98). The composite structural description strives to express the essence of “how” the phenomenon was experienced by all participants. The following section is the composite structural description for this study.

Six service-learning teachers were interviewed in an effort to understand, from their perspective, their experiences with the phenomenon of service-learning. All of the participants were Caucasian, female teachers with at least two years of service-learning experience, five years of teaching experience, and all held middle school teaching certificates.

All of the participants described themselves as facilitators or sponsors; in fact, their titles at the site of inquiry include that of “service-learning sponsor.” Teacher D shared that she guides her students when necessary and purchases materials required for their activities. She stated, “I also organize and set the dates of our visits.” All of the participants have provided support for their students either in the form of facilitating classroom discussions and decision-making processes, supervising students throughout the various phases of the service-learning projects, or training students how to communicate with adults when seeking donations via the phone or internet.

Participants felt a strong sense of community within their classrooms and the town where the site of inquiry resides. According to Bringle, Phillips, and Hudson (2004), “Successful service-learning projects no doubt result in a harmonized affiliation between

the school and the community” (p. 5). Moreover, the students, teachers, and administrators have attempted to establish a mutual relationship with the community in which everyone prevails. Teacher B stated, “The students definitely feel more connected to the community because of the event that we did last year where we raised money for the local food pantry.” Teacher A shared that she has also observed service-learning influencing the students’ connections to the community. “Community members who are visiting the nursing home during our time with seniors state they are impressed by the students’ responsiveness and willingness to share with the seniors.”

Participants also felt challenged during different junctures of their service-learning experiences. These challenges varied; for example, not having transportation during inclement weather and thus being required to cancel the nursing home visit. Teacher A spoke of the challenge of her students becoming almost too comfortable with her over the three-year span. She stated, “It is challenging to help them grow as they are more comfortable with you than other adults.” Teacher C implied that a challenge of sorts was that her students were not as exposed to diverse cultures as she would prefer. She noted, “All of our senior friends are white American men or women. They don’t work with many different ethnicities during senior home visits.” She did share, however, that the service-learning and advisory curriculum emphasizes the importance of understanding others and coexistence. Teacher E spoke of a personal challenge that helped her grow as a person; she revealed, “I have had to come out of my comfort zone.” Teacher B stated, “One challenge is keeping the students interested in doing projects and another is the extra time commitment. There are a lot of outside of school commitments.” While these challenges

were not always easy to overcome, the participants felt that they had experienced self-actualization in some form of another as a result of their lived experiences.

In regards to how they would allocate unlimited funds for their service-learning programs, several said it would be helpful to have transportation provided for their off-campus service-learning activities—especially when there is inclement weather which has caused them to have to postpone or even cancel their activities (Teacher A and Teacher E). Teacher C divulged, “It would be nice if we could help build a bigger common area at [the senior nursing home]. It is pretty cramped when we are there.” Teacher D and Teacher F stated they would purchase supplies for advertising or necessary materials for carrying out their activities—this way all of the monies raised could go directly to the philanthropic organizations. Teacher B shared that as a reward for her students, she would use the funds to take her students to a fun place to participate in team building activities.

Composite Textural-Structural Description: Essences of the Experience

The final step in the Moustakas (1994) phenomenological data analysis process is to provide a synthesis of the data and expose the essences of the experience through the construction of a composite textural-structural description. Using the textural and structural descriptions, I created a composite description that presents the essences of the phenomenon. This method is known as the “essential, invariant structure or essence” and chiefly focused on the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 62).

For the purpose of this study, I define essence as a central meaning of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The challenge in this research process was “to explicate the phenomenon in terms of its constituents and possible meanings, thus discerning the features

of consciousness and arriving at an understanding of the essences of the experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 49).

I made every attempt to harmonize my personal experiences of service-learning with the experiences of the participants in order to realize the value of intersubjective truth. I heeded Husserl’s (1970) cautions that the beginning point in establishing the truth of things must be individual perception, seeing things as a solitary self. According to Husserl, no matter how much one’s discernments deviate from others, it is erroneous to instantaneously jump to transcendental intersubjectivity. “Only by starting from the ego and the system of its transcendental functions and accomplishments can one methodically exhibit transcendental intersubjectivity and its transcendental communalization” (pp. 185-186). Throughout this phenomenological data analysis process, self-knowledge was the emphatic principle (Moustakas, 1994).

Essences of the experience. By following the phenomenological reduction process outlined by Moustakas, I determined the essences of the experience—see Table 2: Essences of the Experience. This procedure resulted in the determination of one dominant theme of experience of the research participants to be the essence of their experience—*teacher support*. This theme was established throughout all six interviews. The essence of *fostering relationships* was also established as five of the six participants had this essence in common. Although not as prevalent, three of the six service-learning teachers found *community pedagogy* and *student growth and responsibility* to be of importance throughout their experiences. Table 2 illustrates the essences revealed through data analysis for each participant.

Table 2

	Communication Development	Community Pedagogy	Fostering Relationships	Student Growth & Responsibility	Teacher Support
Teacher A		X	X	X	X
Teacher B	X		X		X
Teacher C		X	X		X
Teacher D			X	X	X
Teacher E		X	X		X
Teacher F	X			X	X

The following is the composite textural-structural description.

Teacher support. The essence of *teacher support* depicts the idea of teachers providing various forms of support to their students. The meaning units used to determine the essence of teacher support included notations of the teacher facilitating, advising, sponsoring, assisting, teaching, supervising, encouraging, and helping students. Facilitator is perhaps the most common term associated with teacher support. The role of the facilitator is to “guide the learner through a process of knowledge construction, manage a collaborative learning environment and foster self-directed learning” (Williams, 2012, p. 238).

As revealed in Chapter 2, service-learning teachers have a variety of roles and responsibilities in their service-learning classrooms. The primary role of service-learning teachers is to facilitate (Hemmings, 2010). This task entails effectively leading the service-

learning participants through the integral steps of the service-learning project. Teacher E explained she facilitated service-learning by letting the students propose ideas to the class. After the ideas were propositioned, the students had to come to an agreement on which projects to pursue. Teacher D led her students through a similar process,

The students of the Magic Me program come up with the activity ideas each time we visit the nursing home. They gather supplies and do the prep work for the activities. I will guide them when necessary and purchase things they might need for the activities.

She shared that while the students conducted the majority of the work, she is the one who organized and set the dates of their visits.

Students' classroom engagement depends partially on the supportive quality of the classroom climate in which they learn. "According to the dialectical framework within self-determination theory, students possess inner motivational resources that classroom conditions can either support or frustrate" (Reeve, 2006, p. 208). When teachers find ways to nurture these inner resources—such as through facilitation—they adopt an "autonomy-supportive motivating style." (p. 208). Teacher A viewed herself as a facilitator, she noted, "It is my responsibility to guide the students into their positions as friends with their seniors. It is also my goal to help the students take a leadership role within the school."

Also in regards to providing teacher support, Teacher C stated, "I am in charge of this year's 8th grade Magic Me group. As the sponsor of this group, I lead the students to organize monthly visits to our assigned senior home." She went on to explain that she also implemented the advisory and service-learning curriculum at the site of inquiry. Teacher F admitted that she has gone from being in charge of her group to being a facilitator. She explained the process, through which this transformation took place,

First, at the beginning of the year, my peer helpers evaluated the projects we sponsored in 6th grade, and the amount of work and dedication necessary to complete the activities. Second, I hit my group with a bomb shell. I told them that I would be there to support and approve their projects, but I would not be doing much of the work. Third, I had the students create a list of projects they wanted to sponsor for the year. They had to decide which students would lead each project and which students would be the worker bees. Fourth, we created a contract that was signed by their parents and themselves to solidify their roles.

According to the Center for Service and Learning (2010), students will likely have a much richer and more rewarding experience if they have the opportunity to solve problems that concern them, and to serve people they care about. All of the participants made references in regards to facilitating the process of allowing students to determine their service-learning project or projects. Teacher E noted a personal learning event that took place during this process,

I have had to come out of my comfort zone. Sometimes, the ideas the students pitch are not what I had in mind, but I let them guide discussions. I would not have chosen the Popsicle sale (especially in November!), but it was totally a hit.

Teacher C also remarked on a similar situation, “I am capable of leading a group of students in an area that initially wasn’t of big importance to me.” Teacher B additionally shared two instances of self-actualization. First, she explained, “I think I have become more aware of students who need a positive peer influence and am more likely to actively do something about it.” Then, she stated, “I have learned that I too still enjoy doing community service projects and I get just as excited about it as the kids. It makes me realize as an adult, I should be doing more in the community.” Teacher F also went through a paradigm shift. She revealed,

I have learned how to give up control of situations or projects to allow students to grow. I have learned that leaders’ failures can teach as much as students’ successes. If given the opportunity to achieve great things, students can surpass our wildest

dreams. I feel that I have become an inspiration to a handful of my students in this group.

An additional conduit for providing teacher support is through setting expectations for students. According to Bernard (2004), setting clear expectations means “creating a sense of structure and safety through rules and disciplinary approaches that are not only perceived as fair by young people but that include youth in their creation” (p. 45). The service-learning program at the site of inquiry also has high expectations of the students involved—for example, guidelines for proficient grades. Teacher B recognized,

I think that my students feel a need to achieve good grades because there are guidelines for being in the program. However, I think that most of my students would achieve good grades either way because of the nature of their personality and ability. We have discussed that working hard in class is one way to show their character and that in their Peer Helpers role, I expect them to set a good example for their classmates.

Teacher B was not the only participant who acknowledged setting expectations and holding students accountable as a form of teacher support. Teacher F admitted, “Instead of taking on the bulk of the responsibilities, my students were expected to become active members and participants in their events.”

Teacher A noted that her students have expectations of each other; she explained that the students seem to be more aware that they are in the “public eye” when they are at the nursing home visiting or on the local campus for the leadership training seminars. She shared, “I have seen a very positive result in student’s ability to be more accepting of each other. They have also ‘forced’ the more immature students to look at themselves and make changes.” Participation in service-learning activities can enhance acceptance of others and increase self-esteem. According to Eyler and Giles (1999),

Service-learning aims to connect the personal and intellectual, to help students acquire knowledge that is useful in understanding the world, build critical thinking capacities, and perhaps lead to fundamental questions about learning and about society and to a commitment to improve both. (p. 14)

The essence of teacher support resonated throughout all six interviews. Through providing teacher support, several of the participants also learned something of value about themselves. In the ensuing section, I go into detail about the essence of *fostering relationships*. Although not as prevalent as only five of the six participants experienced the essence, it still deems worthy of elaboration.

Fostering relationships. The essence of *fostering relationships* depicts the essence of students and teachers building relationships. The following meaning units were used to determine the essence of fostering relationships: notations regarding the process of teachers and students getting to know each other on a deeper level, building relationships, forming close bonds, and making and sharing personal connections. According to Morgan and Streb (1999), positive relationships between students and adults are enhanced through service-learning activities (Morgan and Streb 1999). Healthy school environments result from the trust that service-learning programs can build between students and teachers. (Education Commission of the States, 1999). Building and fostering relationships is no small feat. It takes time, patience, understanding, compassion, and empathy.

Good teachers do not reject what students see and feel but rather work with what is presently seen and felt to build a stronger position for each student. To do this effectively requires the creation and maintenance of a trusting relationship. (Noddings, 2005, p. 107)

Teacher B pronounced, “I think students begin to feel like you are a trustworthy adult and because of the time spent with them and the nature of the activities, we get to know much more about each other.” The notion of spending an elongated period of time

with the same students was likewise declared by Teacher A, “One positive result is that the students are with me for three years as opposed to one year. This gives us more time to build a relationship.” Teacher C also spoke of her experience with the process of fostering relationships with her students,

Over the past 3 years, the students in my Magic Me group and I have struggled to form close knit bonds like the program is designed for. Once the students hit 8th grade, and after many discussions about teamwork, it all turned around, and we are enjoying the tight knit group we have become. I wish it had happened sooner, but I am glad it happened at all.

According to Rimm-Kaugman (2013), improving students' relationships with teachers has important, positive and long-lasting implications for students' academic and social development.

If a student feels a personal connection to a teacher, experiences frequent communication with a teacher, and receives more guidance and praise than criticism from the teacher, then the student is likely to become more trustful of that teacher, show more engagement in the academic content presented, display better classroom behavior, and achieve at higher levels academically. (para.1)

When the content material of the class is engaging and age appropriate, positive teacher-student relationships draw students into the process of learning and promote their desire to learn. Nurturing rapport was also evident in Teacher B’s account of her experience,

I think we build close bonds. Last year was my third and final year with my second group. The first group I only had for 8th grade. Last year, on the last day of school, we had a tear-fest in my classroom. I was truly dreading the last day of school, because they would be moving to the high school, or as in one case, moving out of state. I truly enjoyed that group of students and we had a great connection.

As indicated by Schukar (1997), “By working together in service learning projects, close relationships between teachers and students are enhanced” (para. 11). Teacher A explained an added benefit of having the same students from year-to-year, “I believe these students, who are with each sponsor for three years do not have to redevelop relationships.”

She expounded that the sponsors are already aware of the area or areas in which the students need to improve at the beginning of the second year. She illuminated, “This helps to focus shortening up the weaknesses and promoting the strengths.”

One of the unique features of the Magic Me program is that students plan and attend monthly visiting sessions with senior citizen residents at a local nursing home located within walking distance from the site of inquiry. The students and Magic Me service-learning sponsors recurrently develop relationships with the seniors; these relationships are fostered with each visit. According to Teacher D, “The Magic Me students always look forward to our visits to the nursing home. In fact, they would like to go more often. They develop cross generational bonds with their residents and create lifelong relationships.” She continued to explain that many of her students prolong to visit their senior friends even when they transition to the high school. Teacher D smiled and stated, “It is such a joy to see the excitement, joy and happiness in the eyes of both the middle school students and the residents during our visits...They feel a sense of belonging to the group since they stay together for all three years of middle school.”

Narrative Findings

According to Czarniawska (2004), “The narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected” (p. 17). The use of narrative document analysis is a powerful tool for exploration and discovery of deeper meaning and interpretation (Denzin, 2001; Irving & Klenke, 2004; Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001). The exploration of documents of text can provide the researcher with a different point of view in regards to the research topic. Document analysis, also referred to as content analysis, allows the researcher to “unobtrusively

explore large amounts of textual information in order to ascertain the trends and patterns of words used, their frequency, their relationships, and the structures and discourses of communication” (Grbich, 2007, p. 112).

The document used for this phenomenological data analysis was a brief narrative of the service-learning teachers’ description of their most memorable experience with service-learning. Hand-typed and personally transcribed narratives were collected from each of the six participants. All narratives averaged one-quarter to one-half typed, double-spaced page. The documents were coded using the process described by Miles and Huberman (1994). I utilized enumerative and thematic coding. Miles and Huberman defined codes as “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 56). To report the meaning of the documents, I first present the actual narratives for all six participants: Teacher A, Teacher B, Teacher C, Teacher D, Teacher E, and Teacher F. I then report the meaning of the documents for the six participants by defining and elucidating the common themes for all narratives.

Teacher A wrote:

There are many, but the most memorable experience was when my student Andrew, an eighth grader at the time, was visiting his senior. His senior was an extremely deaf man and as I went about my normal routine, I happened to catch a view of the two of them leaned closely together talking to each other. They must have been having quite a conversation as it seemed they were in their own little world. The expressions on their faces captivated me so much that I took a picture and sent it to Andrew’s mom. Her response was, it brought her to tears.

Teacher B put in writing:

My most memorable moments would be watching the students make phone calls to local business people to ask for donations for our 5k, Chasing Down Hunger. They were all so nervous, but did awesome and got so excited when they received donations. It became a contest to see who could get the most! It was so great to see them working with adults for a good cause!

Teacher C recorded the following:

The most memorable situation/experience for me is our last visit every year with our senior friends. The kids are more energetic with them and each other. Perhaps because they know they won't see one another for 2-3 months, or even if they'll see their senior friend the following year. It's so bittersweet.

Teacher D wrote:

Probably the most memorable situation would have to be the final visit to the nursing home for my 8th graders. After being with their residents for three years, it was quite the celebration. We put together a slide show of pictures that were taken over the three years. It was amazing to see how much the students had changed. We enjoyed a brunch together with our residents and presented them with gifts. It was a very special day and sincerely touched the hearts of all involved.

Teacher E composed:

Two moments: My very first Life 101 class went to Service Learning Day at the capitol in Jefferson City. It was an awesome experience. My students were so well-behaved, respectful and participants at the capitol. Senator Pearce and Representative Hoskins talked with them on the capitol steps.

Next: Last year, I had to miss three weeks of school because of health. I was very concerned about my 8th graders, because I had missed so much school. When I got back, they had planned a welcome back party! While I was away, they sent home cards and I even had some of their parents call me at home.

Teacher F expounded:

One of my groups came up with the idea of hosting a triathlon to sponsor an organization called, A Little Thunder. One of my students attends church with the family who founded the organization after losing their newborn. Because of the close connection, the emotional story presented to my students, and the weekly meetings we held with the founders, the triathlon became more than a fund raiser. We became a family. I believe that the key to service learning is having a thorough understanding of why a project is being conducted. Hosting events is one thing, but having the connection to the recipients is what motivates the students.

Report on Findings from Narratives

Coding the narrative documents revealed two major themes: *communication development* and *fostering relationships*.

Communication development. The theme of *communication development* is defined as students and teachers utilizing and thus developing their communication skills. The interpretive codes included actions of communication development, the use of effective communication outlets, and improvement of overall communication skills. These interpretive codes and actions included but were not limited to students and teachers making phone calls, having personal conversations, creating written communications, or

telling stories. Communication development was referenced in all of the narrative documents.

Teacher A wrote, “I happened to catch a view of the two of them leaned closely together talking to each other. They must have been having quite a conversation as it seemed they were in their own little world.” This event took place while Teacher A was monitoring her students visiting with their seniors. As it happened, the student was talking to a man who was hard-of-hearing; he used his communication skills to “lean in closely” so that he could truly listen and thus converse with the elderly man.

Teachers C and D both noted a instances of communication development much like Teacher A. For example, Teacher C stated, “The most memorable situation/experience for me is our last visit every year with our senior friends.” A similar experience rang true for Teacher D, “Probably the most memorable situation would have to be the final visit to the nursing home for my 8th graders. After being with their residents for three years, it was quite the celebration.” Visiting, conversing, utilizing words of salutation, and hosting celebration events were all evident forms of communication development.

According to Teacher B, her most memorable moment was watching her students make phone calls to local businesses to seek donations for the 5K they planned. She noted, “They were all so nervous, but did awesome and got so excited when they received donations.” Conversing with adults and seeking charitable contributions was definitely in the realm of communication development.

Teacher E shared two memorable experiences; both of which alluded to the theme of communication development. Her first example revealed that during her service-learning group’s visit to Jefferson City for Service-Learning Day, her students had the opportunity to

talk with Senator Pearce and Representative Hopkins on the capitol steps. Another form of communication, while Teacher E had was out of school for three weeks due to her health, her students sent her cards wishing her to get-well soon. She also shared that some of the students and their parents called her at home.

Teacher F wrote about the process her service-learning group went through in order to decide on their service-learning event. The emotional story presented to the group by one of the students aided in their decision to host a triathlon. Teacher F stated, “I believe that the key to service-learning is having a thorough understanding of why a project is being conducted.”

Fostering relationships. The theme of *fostering relationships* was evident throughout all narrative documents. Fostering relationships is by no means a new theme in education and service-learning. In fact, Dewey and Piaget have encouraged educators to embrace service-learning as a teaching-learning approach to improve academic achievement and build relationships between America’s youth and their larger communities (Meyer, Billig, & Hofschire, 2004).

Teacher F noted, “Because of the close connection, the emotional story presented to my students, and the weekly meetings we held with the founders, the triathlon became more than a fundraiser. We became a family.” Fostering relationships entails spending time together, having meaningful conversations, and working toward a common goal. Relationships can include student-student, student-teacher, student-community, or student-benefactor/recipient. According to Teacher F, “Hosting events is one thing, but having the connection to the recipients is what motivates the students.”

Teacher E was concerned about her students because she had missed three weeks of school due to health issues. Much to her surprise, the relationship had not been offputtingly affected upon her return. “When I got back, they had planned a welcome back party!”

Teacher D wrote of another form of celebration and relationship building. Her students put together a slideshow for their senior residents using pictures they had taken over the past three years. “It was amazing to see how much the students had changed.” She noted they also shared a brunch together and the students presented their senior residents with gifts.

Teacher E shared, “It was a very special day and sincerely touched the hearts of all involved.”

Teacher C also spoke of students’ last visit of the year with their seniors. She noted that the students were more “energetic with their seniors” and with one another. She suggested, “Perhaps because they know they won’t see each other for another 2-3 months, or even if they’ll see their senior friend the following year. It’s so bittersweet.” Another aspect of fostering relationships entails considering the loss of the person with whom one has built a relationship. It has not been uncommon for the middle school students to experience the death of their senior resident. This is a completely different aspect of fostering relationships—one that is not always easy for students and teachers to handle.

Teacher B reflected on her students calling for financial contributions for their upcoming 5K. She noted, “It was so great to see them working with adults for a good cause.” Teacher A recalled a cherished conversation between one of her students and his senior friend. She noted, “The expressions on their faces captivated me so much that I took a picture.” She sent the picture to the student’s mother and Teacher A revealed, “It brought her to tears.”

Findings from Observations

For this study, I scheduled two observations in which I took extensive notes. More specifically, I considered common elements of the setting including participants, what was going on, the sequence of events, the norms, how people were connected, and the typical activities.

The first observation took place during one of the service-learning events sponsored and executed by one of the 7th grade service-learning groups; the event was called the Little Thunder Triathlon. This yearlong project was adopted by the group after one of the students learned about the Little Thunder organization. According to the Little Thunder website (2013), the organization was established by a local couple in memory of their son who was born still at 20 weeks and 5 days. It is their hope that Little Thunder will allow his memory and life to live on for many years to come. The organization provides Comfort Boxes to families who experience a loss before, during or shortly after birth. They currently donate boxes to the hospital where their son was stillborn. They are also just beginning to offer them through the mail to those who request and donate to their organization. In addition, they are in the process of reaching out to a few rural hospitals in the Midwest and hope to continue to expand as funding becomes available. They started the organization because leaving the hospital with empty arms after the birth of a child was so painful. Having experienced multiple miscarriages and the stillbirth, the couple felt a great need to offer some kind of comfort to the moms and dads who leave the hospital with empty arms. The contents of each Comfort Box have been carefully thought out and tailored to the needs of the grieving parents (Little Thunder, 2013).

The Little Thunder Triathlon included two races for participants to choose from: the “Mega” which included a 150 meter swim, 6 mile bike, and 3 mile run with a \$30 registration fee and the “Mini” which included a 75 meter swim, 3 mile bike, and 1.5 mile run with a \$20 registration fee. There were 30 participants in the event which raised \$2300, but \$1500 after expenses. All proceeds were donated to the Little Thunder organization. I was able to observe the event in its entirety.

The second observation took place in May at the site of inquiry. This particular service-learning group hosted four service-learning events throughout the year and all of the proceeds benefited the American Heart Association (AHA). They raised approximately \$700 this school year. The service-learning event I observed was their fourth quarterly event of the school year; it was a dodge ball tournament. Students planned the entire tournament. They advertised by making posters and announcements. They developed the rules, registration, and format for the tournament. They also determined the cost to participate: \$3 per person/\$24 per team. The event raised a total of \$115 for the AHA. The teachers’ role was to collect the money and registration forms, reserve the gym for the date, referee the tournament, and supervise the students. This observation lasted the duration of the tournament followed by time spent noting the researcher’s reaction to the event.

Both observations were coded using the process described by Miles and Huberman (1994). Much like the narrative document, I began coding my field notes by sorting the data into interpretive codes, categories, and then concepts or themes. Three themes dominated the observations—*teacher support*, *fostering relationships*, and *student growth and responsibility*.

Teacher support. The theme of *teacher support* involved the interpretive codes of the teacher facilitating, advising, sponsoring, assisting, teaching, supervising, encouraging, and helping students. Middle school Language Arts teacher and author, Donna Pitino (2003), grasped the notion of teacher support when she stated, “As teachers of such fabulous young minds, we need to create assignments that will not only build skills, but will help kids as they search for meaning in their lives. We have the power. They have the potential” (para. 9).

Teacher support was evident throughout both observations. During the first observation, I noted, “The service-learning sponsors and adult volunteers supervised students as they counted money, interacted with participants and assigned the participants numbers.” Throughout the event, I also noticed students and teachers standing on corners at important intersections to help assist the participants to stay on the correct route. Conversations were easy among teachers as students; it was evident that relationships had been formed prior to the event. When I inquired about certain aspects of the planning phase, the service-learning teachers always turned to the students and waited for them to answer—instead of jumping in and telling me about the details. When I spoke with the service-learning director at the event, she bragged on both the students and teachers. She stated, “I have been and continue to be in awe of what the students can accomplish with minimal adult assistance.” Towards the end of the event, I noticed another form of teacher support as several of the service-learning sponsors drove students from various sections of the course back to the finish-line area for the awards ceremony.

The theme of teacher support was also evident throughout the second observation. There were only two adults and approximately 50 students present in the gymnasium for the

event. The adults facilitated the tournament by keeping track of wins and losses and refereeing each competition. It was apparent that the students had been prepped for the execution of the event—they each knew their roles and responsibilities and acted accordingly.

According to Hemmings (2010), the primary role of service-learning teachers is to facilitate. “Facilitating does not mean allowing students to have free choices without guidelines, nor does it mean applying undue influence so students have no real responsibility” (p. 21). The preeminent strategy for service-learning teachers is for them to be knowledgeable about service-learning and then to thoughtfully make decisions about how to design optimal service-learning experiences for the students.

Fostering relationships. As described in the narrative document analysis section, the theme of *fostering relationships* depicts the interpretive codes that include the process of teachers and students getting to know each other on a deeper level. This theme was evident in both the triathlon event and dodge ball tournament observations.

During the first observation, it was evident to me that there were strong relationships between the students and service-learning teachers hosting the event. As the triathlon began with the swimming event, students and their service-learning teachers cheered on participants together. The atmosphere was competitive yet encouraging by both participants and spectators. Following the swimming event, participants took part in the bicycle event; students helped guide them in the correct direction and continued to applaud their efforts. I witnessed a lot of interaction between the service-learning teachers and students as we all watched the triathlon unfold. Exchanges were relaxed; relationships had obviously been fostered prior to this event.

I made note upon arrival to my second observation, the dodge ball tournament, that the students were well-behaved as they cheered each other on and socialized. I learned during the tournament that one of the service-learning teachers, whose group had helped coordinate the event, was unable to attend the tournament due to a family emergency—yet, the event still ran smoothly. This indicated to me that strong bonds had been formed with the group prior to the event. Throughout the entire tournament, all students were engaged in watching the event, cheering, selling concessions, working the game clock, taking pictures, or socializing with other peers. All of the students exhibited good sportsmanship and positive attitudes. These observations were all indications that positive relationships had been formed prior to the event and that, through the event itself, those relationships were being fostered.

Effective middle-level teachers are skilled at establishing and cultivating constructive human relationships. “Such relationships are developed in classroom environments in which discourse is grounded in trust, mutual respect, and constructive dialogue” (Virtue, 2007, p. 243). By working together in service learning projects, close relationships between teachers and students were notably enhanced. This was also evident in a study conducted by Schukar (1997), “Many teachers who implemented service learning projects described more positive feelings about their students as well as increases in the importance of their roles as teachers” (para. 11).

Student growth and responsibility. The theme of *student growth and responsibility* included notations revolving around the students being responsible for specific roles and responsibilities in the service-learning classroom and growing through service. Interpretive codes surrounding students obtaining accountability and experiencing

success in the service-learning program were evident. These interpretive codes included but were not limited to determining the community's need for service, planning for the service-learning event, communicating with each other, the teacher, and/or the community, performing multiple tasks throughout the execution of the event, taking ownership of the project, and providing encouragement to other students and benefactors.

The notion of student growth and responsibility is embedded in the definition of service-learning: Service-learning is “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities” (Learn and Serve, 2012, para. 1). Furthermore, when integrated into the curriculum, service-learning enhances the academic development of the students and fosters civic responsibility (AmeriCorps, 1990).

At the triathlon event, I learned prior to the race, students were in charge of helping participants complete their registration by collecting late-registration fees and assigning numbers to be affixed to their outfits. During the observation, I noticed students were responsible for counting money and interacting with the participants. Other students were standing on corners at intersections to provide water to participants and to help them stay on the correct path. It was a genuine service-learning event as students were in control the entire time.

I was informed that the students planned every aspect of the event—even down to coordinating the biking and running routes. In the early planning stages of the event, the students took time after school to meet with the local law enforcement and traffic officials to determine the safest, most effective courses. Perhaps the largest indication of student

growth and responsibility took place at the conclusion of the event as the student who initiated the charity event served as the spokesperson for the awards ceremony. She graciously thanked everyone for attending and shared that she was touched when she heard the “Little Thunder” story and that she “wanted to do more” especially in regards to raising awareness. As she announced the top three winners in the “mega” and the “mini” races, the other student volunteers handed out the medals and shook the hands of the participants.

Student responsibility was also manifested throughout the second observation. It was exciting and extraordinary to see so much trust given to students with various aspects of the event. A small group of students was selling concessions and keeping track of the money earned. Another small group of students was running the clock and adding on three minutes every time a new team entered the court. One student was responsible for taking pictures using the school’s iPad. The remainder of the students were either participating in the dodge ball competition or sitting on the bleachers and stage as spectators. Almost everyone was encouraging the participants throughout each competition. The students were well-behaved as they cheered each other on and socialized.

Transcendental Phenomenology through Observation

Bearing in mind the importance of intersubjectivity, I documented my personal reactions to the observations. For the triathlon event, I noted that my reaction to the event—like the narratives and observations—gleaned of the theme of teacher support as I logged,

Seeing the impact the students had on the community and the Little Thunder organization inspired me to get more involved in my own community. It also made me consider attempting to implement a service-learning curriculum into my current school and district. While I am unsure how feasible or realistic this task may be, seeing the ownership of the students and the sponsors’ pride of the students certainly was moving.

During the second observation at the dodge ball tournament, I could not help but notice how well-behaved and respectful the students were of each other as they watched the event unfold and as they participated in the tournament. Furthermore, the vast responsibility given to the students was incredible. Even my reaction aligned to the theme of student growth and responsibility as I wrote,

It made me think that perhaps we sometimes “baby” students too much; we need to allow them the opportunity to earn trust and then let that trust grow. Providing students with opportunities to be responsible can be a genuine learning experience for both the students and teachers. I think all schools/teachers would benefit by entrusting students with more opportunities for them to prove that they are accountable.

Synthesis of Findings

This has been an extensive, but worthwhile research journey exploring the meanings behind the phenomenon of service-learning and teachers’ essences. Considering triangulation, three data sources were employed: phenomenological interviews, narrative documents, and observations.

As indicated in Table 3: Themes from All Three Data Sources, from the interviews, two dominant themes provided meaning of the phenomenon of service-learning. From the narrative documents, two themes were present. The observations presented three common themes. The data analysis revealed *fostering relationships* as the copiously common dominant theme present in the phenomenological interviews, and narrative documents, and observations. Notably, *teacher support* was prevalent in the interviews and observations, but not the narrative documents.

Table 3

	Phenomenological Interviews	Narrative Documents	Observations
Communication Development		X	
Community Pedagogy			
Fostering Relationships	X	X	X
Student Growth & Responsibility			X
Teacher Support	X		X

The central research question guiding this study was: *What are middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?* Four sub-questions were posed to address the overarching central research question. The first sub-question was: *What statements describe the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?* The intent of the question was to determine the terms and expressions used by the participants throughout the phenomenological interviews, the narrative documents, and the observations.

The interview questions solicited worthwhile data from the teacher participants relative to the sub-question. One example from Teacher A's interview revealed, "I believe [service-learning] has impacted me as a regular classroom teacher by allowing me to see the students in a different environment." Teacher B commented, "I have learned that I still enjoy doing community service projects and I get just as excited about it as the kids. It makes me realize as an adult, I should be doing more in the community. Teacher C's statement also referred to her personal experience with service-learning, "I am capable of

leading a group of students in an area that initially wasn't of big importance to me. Now I feel as though I owe it to my students and community to 'reunite teens and seniors.'"

According to Teacher D, "I have become a more compassionate teacher and have come to appreciate both generations." Teacher E admitted, "I have had to come out of my comfort zone. Sometimes, the ideas the students pitch are not what I had in mind, but I let them guide discussions." Last but not least, Teacher F also shared her experience, "I have had to learn how to give up control of situations or projects to allow students to grow...I feel that I have become an inspiration to a handful of my students in this group."

The narrative documents also gleaned statements apropos of the service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning. As part of her narrative description, Teacher A reflected, "The expressions on their faces captivated me so much that I took a picture and sent it to [the student's] mom. Her response was, it brought her to tears." Teacher B noted, "It was so great to see [the students] working with adults for a good cause!" Teacher C described her experience as poignant,

The most memorable situation/experience for me is our last visit every year with our senior friends. The kids are more energetic with them and each other. Perhaps because they know they won't see one another for 2-3 months, or even if they'll see their senior friend the following year. It's so bittersweet.

Teacher D remarked, "It was amazing to see how much the students had changed...It was a very special day and sincerely touched the hearts of all involved." A visit to the state capitol was one of Teacher E's most memorable experiences with service-learning. The students and sponsors traveled to Jefferson City for a statewide Service-Learning Day event. Teacher E reminisced, "It was an awesome experience. My students were so well-behaved, respectful, and participants at the capitol." For Teacher F, planning and

orchestrating a philanthropic triathlon was most memorable. She shared, “We became a family.”

During the observations, I also took note of statements that described the participants’ service-learning experiences. During the first observation—the Little Thunder Triathlon—I had the opportunity to observe the service-learning director in action and was additionally able to have a personal conversation with her. From my field notes, “When I spoke with the service-learning director, she bragged on both the students and teachers—she was and continues to be in awe of what the students can accomplish with minimal adult assistance.” Another statement from my observation that related to the teachers’ experiences with service-learning was when I saw the interface between the teachers and students. I noted, “I witnessed a lot of interaction between the service-learning teachers and students as we all watched the triathlon unfold. When I inquired about certain aspects of the planning phase, I saw firsthand elements of true service-learning unfold before my eyes. “The service-learning teachers always turned to the students and waited for them to answer (instead of jumping in and telling me about the details).”

Although not as prevalent, statements from the second observation also concerned the teachers’ experiences with service-learning. Perhaps the most obvious observation was the fact that one of the service-learning sponsors, whose group had help plan the dodge ball fundraising event, was unable to attend due to a family emergency. The fact that the event was able to still take place successfully is evidence that authentic service-learning had occurred at the site of inquiry. The students were in charge and ran the event without flaw, “All students were engaged in watching the event, cheering, selling concessions, working the game clock, taking pictures, or socializing with other peers. All of the students

exhibited good sportsmanship and positive attitudes.” In regards to the teacher’s actual experience during the observation, I noted, “One of the teachers was the group’s sponsor and the other teacher was a volunteer who kept track of wins and losses.” Both teachers facilitated the dodge ball tournament by refereeing the competitions while simultaneously supervising students in the gymnasium.

The second sub-question was: *What themes are identified from the service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning?* The purpose of this question was to determine the themes that were revealed throughout the research process. Throughout the data analysis process, four themes were evident in at least one of each of the data sources. These themes included *communication development, fostering relationships, student growth and responsibility, and teacher support.*

The theme of *communication development* was predominately found in the narrative documents and was dominant in the interviews for Teacher B and Teacher F. For example, Teacher B specified that her students were required to make phone calls to local businesses to request donations for an upcoming service-learning project. She disclosed, “This got them out of their comfort zone and provided them an opportunity to have a conversation with adults. I think the experience has been very helpful in fostering good communication skills.” Teacher B also compelled her students to write letters, send emails, and engage in other interactive activities that influenced their communication experiences. Teacher B indicated the final result was the students recognized they were capable of having successful conversations. She also noticed many of the students became more confident in communicating with adults often after just one phone conversation. She shared, “At first, many were hesitant, but eventually they ALL enjoyed doing it.”

Communication development was also a common theme in the narrative document analysis. Teacher E revealed that she was out of school for three weeks due to her health. During her recovery, her students sent her cards wishing her to get-well soon. She also shared that some of the students and their parents called her at home.

The theme of *fostering relationships* was evident in the phenomenological interviews, the narrative documents, and the observations. During the interview, Teacher B recounted her experience,

I think we build close bonds. Last year was my third and final year with my second group. The first group I only had for 8th grade. Last year, on the last day of school, we had a tear-fest in my classroom. I was truly dreading the last day of school, because they would be moving to the high school, or as in one case, moving out of state. I truly enjoyed that group of students and we had a great connection.

The theme of fostering relationships was also established in the narrative documents. Teacher D reflected, “Probably the most memorable experience would have to be the final visit to the nursing home for my 8th graders. After being with their residents for three years, it was quite the celebration.” I additionally noticed the theme of fostering relationships during the observations. For example, during the triathlon event, I noted, “Conversations were easy; relationships had obviously been formed prior to this event.”

Thirdly, the theme of *student growth and responsibility* was primarily exposed during the phenomenological interviews and observations. During the first observation, I learned that the students planned every aspect of the triathlon event—even down to coordinating the biking and running routes. Several months prior to the event, the students used personal time after school to meet with the local law enforcement and traffic officials to determine the safest, most effective courses. During the second observation, I witnessed students in action running the dodge ball tournament. My field notes indicated,

A small group of students were selling concessions; another smaller group of students was running the clock adding on 3 minutes every time a new team entered the court. One student was even responsible for taking pictures with the school's iPad. The remainder of the students were either participating in the dodge ball competition or sitting on the bleachers and stage as spectators.

Student growth and responsibility was also evident throughout the interview analysis. During the interview, Teacher A shared, "I believe that students who participate in the service learning arena are more confident in themselves. They are provided more time/opportunities for personal growth." Additional statements depicting the theme of student growth and responsibility were illuminated in Teacher F's interview. At the beginning of the year, she guided her students through an evaluation process in which they assessed the projects they had completed the previous year. Following the evaluation process, Teacher F stated, "I hit my group with a bomb shell. I told them that I would be there to support and approve their projects, but I would not be doing much of the work." After the shock wore off, she facilitated the group through creating a list of projects they desired to sponsor. "They had to decide which students would lead each project and which students would be the worker bees." Lastly, Teacher F and her students created a contract for the year. This contract was signed by both students and their parents "to solidify their roles."

Finally, the theme of *teacher support* was manifested in two of the three data sources—the interviews and observations. Teacher B revealed that her position as service-learning impacted her role as a regular classroom teacher because she is now more likely to encourage positive peer relationships within the school. She stated, "I think I have become more aware of students who need a positive peer influence and am more likely to actively do something about it."

While not dominant in the narrative documents, the theme of teacher support was uncovered throughout the observations. During the first observation, I noted, “The service-learning sponsors and adult volunteers supervised students as they counted money, interacted with participants and assigned the participants numbers.” Conversations were easy among teachers as students; it was unmistakable that relationships had been formed prior to the event. When I inquired about certain aspects of the preparation phase, the service-learning teachers always turned to the students and waited for them to answer—an indication of genuine service-learning. During the dodge ball tournament observation, I noted there were approximately 50 students present in the gymnasium for the event. Meanwhile, there were only two adults present; they facilitated the tournament by keeping track of wins and losses, refereeing each competition, and supervising the students. It was ostensible that the students had been prepped for the implementation of the event as they were all aware of their roles and responsibilities and acted accordingly.

The third sub-question was: *What are the contexts of and thoughts about the service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning?* In order to abundantly address this sub-question, I considered my role as the researcher in this transcendental phenomenological process. According to Husserl (1970) the researcher has to be aware of the importance of intersubjectivity in making meaning. Taking into consideration this obligation, I was required to be cognizant of my own consciousness of the phenomena before I could understand the experiences of others. Thus, the contexts of and thoughts about the service-learning teachers’ experiences with service-learning were derived my personal reactions to the phenomenon.

The in-depth interviews served as an appropriate starting point for my research mission. Through the interviews, I was able to reconnect with the participants on a personal level. It had been nearly two years since I had interacted with the majority of the participants; I remain in close contact with one of the teachers, so it had only been a few months since I had been in touch with her. After several minutes of small-talk and catching up, the interviews proceeded with ease. I took enjoyment in seeing the faces of the participants figuratively light up as they embellished on their experiences as service-learning sponsors. I noticed their eyes smiling as they reminisced about their experiences of personal growth when I asked the question I was most nervous about inquiring: What, if anything, have you learned about yourself through your experience as a service-learning teacher? For the majority, personal growth was a dominant response. Many of the participants felt they had become better regular classroom teachers because of their role as service-learning sponsor. What I noticed most, all participants were genuinely excited about sharing their stories. They took great pride in their roles and relished in the opportunity to share their anecdotes.

The narratives also proved to be beneficial artifacts for establishing the contexts of and thoughts about the teachers' experiences with service-learning. By and large, all narrative documents had at least one thing in common—they were student-focused. Regardless of the intricate details of their most memorable experience, all participants' recollections had something or another to do with students. The experiences with students varied from seeing them grow, mature, and change to witnessing the students' interactions with their senior residents. Students were at the forefront of every narrative. This alone

contextualized that these teachers are implementing a true service-learning curriculum at the site of inquiry.

The observations were nostalgic for me. As the researcher, I knew I had to focus on writing copious observation notes in order to recount what was taking place; however, I also found myself ruminating on my past experiences as a service-learning sponsor. I mulled over the pure joy I encapsulated by participating in and leading my students through various service-learning projects. I felt regret and guilt for not integrating service-learning into my current school and district. Additionally, I pondered what my previous service-learning students were doing with their lives. I wondered if they continued to serve the community. Did they continue to progress the skills they had learn as service-learning participants? Do they have favorable memories of the service-learning projects we completed? Obviously and eventually, I was able to overcome my nostalgia and attend to the task at hand. The contexts of and thoughts about the teachers' experiences with service-learning during the observations were certainly the relationships that had been fostered and the responsibility that was entrusted to the students as a result of those relationships.

The fourth and final sub-question was: *What are the overall essences of the service-learning teachers' experience with service-learning?* The purpose of this question was to reveal the essences of the experience for the participants. The predominant essence associated with this sub-question was *fostering relationships*. This essence was evident in the phenomenological interviews, the narrative documents, and the observations. A second theme worthy of mention, but noticeably not as prevalent, was *teacher support*. This essence was ubiquitous in the interviews and observations, but not the narrative documents.

The essence of fostering relationships resonated throughout the three data sources.

The service-learning program at the site of inquiry was designed in such a manner that the service-learning teachers sponsor the same group of students in their specific service-learning group for the three years the students are in middle school. In the beginning, relationships are in the developmental phase and over time have the potential to foster into a close bond. Teacher A's comment substantiated this process, "One positive result is that the students are with me for three years as opposed to one year. This gives us more time to build a relationship."

Teacher B also alluded to the notion of fostering relationships over time. She avowed, "I think students begin to feel like you are a trustworthy adult and because of the time spent with them and the nature of the activities, we get to know much more about each other." Teacher C also asserted her experience with the process of fostering relationships with her students,

Over the past 3 years, the students in my Magic Me group and I have struggled to form close knit bonds like the program is designed for. Once the students hit 8th grade, and after many discussions about teamwork, it all turned around, and we are enjoying the tight knit group we have become. I wish it had happened sooner, but I am glad it happened at all.

The essence of fostering relationships was also apparent in the narrative documents. Teacher D described her experience with the essence as she wrote about the final celebration event of the students' three years with their seniors. She explained that her students put together a slideshow for their senior residents using pictures they had taken over the past three years. "It was amazing to see how much the students had changed." After the slideshow, the students, teacher, and residents shared a brunch together. To show their appreciation for the relationship that had been established, the students presented their

senior residents with gifts. Teacher D pronounced, “It was a very special day and sincerely touched the hearts of all involved.”

Teacher C additionally transcribed her students’ last visit of the year with their seniors. She noted that the students were more energetic with their seniors and with each other. She wrote, “Perhaps because they know they won’t see each other for another 2-3 months, or even if they’ll see their senior friend the following year. It’s so bittersweet.” Another aspect of fostering relationships is considering the loss of the person with whom one has built a relationship. I learned it has not been uncommon for the middle school students to experience the death of their senior resident. This type of situation is no doubt a difficult experience for the students and teachers.

The observations also yielded evidence of the essence of fostering relationships. During the Little Thunder Triathlon, my first observation, it was marked there were fervent relationships between the students and service-learning teachers hosting the event. They interacted with ease as they cheered on participants together. As we all watched the triathlon unfold, I beheld many exchanges between the service-learning teachers and students that were friendly and respectful. Conversations were affluent; relationships had demonstrably been fostered preceding the event.

The second observation generated analogous evidence of the essence of fostering relationships. Perhaps the leading indication of the essence was the fact that one of the service-learning teachers, whose group had helped coordinate the event, was unable to attend the tournament due to a family emergency. Even in her absence, the event was executed without flaw. Throughout the observation, I notice great trust had been imparted upon the students. The students were fundamentally running the event. For example,

students were watching the event, cheering, selling concessions, working the game clock, taking pictures, or socializing with other peers. These observations were indicative that relationships built on the foundation of trust and respect had been formed prior to the event and those relationships continued to be cultivated through the event itself.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate teachers' lived experiences with the phenomenon of service-learning. A phenomenological research method proved to be appropriate as the purpose was to examine the essences of the experience (Moustakas, 1994). The in-depth interviews, narrative documents, and observations generated data that helped established the essences of the service-learning teachers' experiences with service learning. In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the findings, implications of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

As this research expedition comes to its final stages, I am inclined to reflect back over not only my research journey, but also my personal journey through service-learning. Pondering my role as a past service-learning sponsor, I am confident that the service-learning in my former classroom aimed to provide experiences for students in which their gifts and talents could truly shine. I know this to be true as my students have expressed to me that when I incorporated service-learning in my instructional activities, I made a difference in their lives. More often than not, they were excited to be part of the changes we made in the community. I aspired to truly empower them as I had been empowered by my service-learning teachers, professors, and facilitators.

For the purpose of this study, the central phenomenon of service-learning was generally defined as “an innovative teaching methodology that integrates service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities” (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002, p. 4). For over a century, service-learning has become more widespread in schools across the United States (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2012; Rocheleau, 2004; United We Serve, 2012; Wilczenski & Commey, 2007; Youth Service America, 2011). Over the past several decades, service-learning has hastened new growth by congressional and presidential measures and funding including President Bill Clinton’s signing of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993; President George W. Bush’s creation of the President’s Council on Service and Civic Participation; President Barak Obama’s

challenge, United We Serve. With the increase in service-learning in schools, there has also been an increase in research on service-learning, hence the motivation for this study.

Chapter 5 is a summary of the interpretation of data findings presented in Chapter 4 followed by a discussion of the connections and implications which surface from the review of literature and the data analysis. Chapter 5 concludes with recommendations for future research based on emergent themes, study limitations, and significance.

Interpretations

The purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of service-learning teachers at a Midwestern middle school. The aspiration was to identify the essences of the teachers' experiences with service-learning. In order to remain within a postmodern perspective that centered on creating meaning from the participants' experiences, I utilized a phenomenological approach to incorporate the voices of the participants to reveal the themes and essences of the study (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). In the ensuing section, I describe the interpretation of the dominant essence of all three data sources.

Interpretation of the Findings

The central research question guiding this study was: *What are middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning?* The predominant essence of experience connected to the research question was *fostering relationships*. A second theme worthy of mention, but distinctively not as established, was *teacher support*. This essence was ubiquitous in the interviews and observations, but not the narrative documents. Meanwhile, the essence of fostering relationships resonated throughout the three data sources.

It was astonishing to distinguish the resemblances between the participants' essences of the experience and the references from the literature reviewed in this study. Themes confirmed findings from prior literature; each of the five themes revealed in the study are mentioned recurrently in illustrations from previous and current service-learning practice, empirical studies, and theoretical articles. Each of the five themes of the participants' experience—communication development, community pedagogy, fostering relationships, student growth and responsibility, and teacher support—has been emphasized by numerous authors and researchers. In order to better ascertain the link between the findings and foundation literature that undergird this study, the following subsections provide an explanation of the connections between the themes revealed in the study and the theories and concepts from the relevant research.

Communication development. The theme of *communication development* was defined as students and teachers utilizing and thus developing their communication skills. I defined the theme of communication development as the process of practicing the use of effective communication outlets in order to develop and improve overall communication skills. These actions may have included making phone calls, having personal conversations, creating written communications, or telling stories.

Throughout all four steps of the service-learning process—preparation, service, reflection, and celebration—students and teachers are required to use communication skills. During the preparation phase, students and teachers collaborate to create a list of potential service-learning projects. Part of this process requires students to find and research community needs. Students can do this through researching the internet, reading local papers, interviewing community stakeholders, and surveying children and adults in the

community—all activities that require proficient communication skills (Knox, Wangaard, & Michaelson, 2006).

During step two, the service action step, students and teachers also use communication skills as they advertise and complete the project. Documenting the service-learning project is also an important process that compels the use of effective communication; this can come in the form of conducting verbal interviews with the benefactors and writing down the comments and expressions they overhear (Knox, Wangaard, & Michaelson, 2006).

Throughout the third step, the reflection step, communication development comes to fruition as students participate in journal writing, reading and discussion, talking with others, and utilizing artistic expression. According to Collier and Williams (2005), “We reflect to understand where we have been, what we have experienced, and where we go from here” (p. 94). Reflection is one of the most distinctive features of service-learning. “Even if the kids have chosen the problem and the project they’re working on, service without reflection misses large opportunities for them to learn about themselves and about their world” (Medlock & Mack, 2006, p. 7). One principal even implemented several innovative programs—including service-learning projects—in hopes of improving reading skills and character education. Reading scores and student morale improved as a result of the implemented programs and a great deal of the success was attributed to student reflection (Smith, 1999).

Another opportunity for communication development materializes during the celebration step. During this final phase of the project, students commemorate the success of the service-learning project. Celebration comes in many forms; students may have

parties, create a bulletin board display, plan assemblies, write press releases for the paper and school website, design a DVD slideshow or scrapbook, receive certificates, and write thank you cards (Knox, Wangaard, & Michaelson, 2003). Nearly all of the aforementioned forms of celebration include means in which communication development can occur.

Students and teachers recognize the opportunity for communication development through service-learning. During an international service-learning project and research study in Peru, students practiced skills that met challenges of engineering in a global society and demonstrated accreditation learning outcomes not easily taught in traditional classrooms. Assessing the experience in a post-trip survey, students rated teaming lessons, communications, and experiential learning skills as particular strengths (Johnson, Johnson, & Shaney, 2012).

Community pedagogy. The theme of *community pedagogy* was defined as an educational and collaborative relationship between the students, teachers, administrators, and community members in which all participants are empowered by their experiences. According to the literature, service-learning teachers and their students play a key role in establishing effective partnerships among agencies, the school, universities, businesses, government, and residents within the community. Communication and customer service skills are required. By working together, the school and community can reach a larger population, avoid duplication of efforts, make better use of resources, and deal with issues faced by the community and their youth more effectively. “The initial step of identifying and getting to know a community partner can take time. However, once this relationship has been developed it will make future projects with the community partner much easier” (Center for Service & Learning, 2010, p. 5).

According to Learn and Serve America (2012), it is imperative for service-learning teachers and students to take the time to meet in person with potential community partners so they can learn about the organization. This process aids in the community partner's development of an understanding of the educational objectives of the students. Additionally, all parties involved can develop a rapport that will allow each to comfortably address any issues or concerns that may arise during implementation of the project.

Once projects have been established, students and teachers can also embrace community pedagogy during the actual serving phase. Service-learning activities are ultimately intended to enhance student learning and understanding, but are more powerful when conducted in concert with the broader community. Students receive experientially-based learning that cultivates self-analysis and opportunities to challenge universal beliefs about what defines a successful person (Rhoads, 2000). For instance, a student who worked with homeless citizens in Washington D.C., remarked, "We pass the time without really questioning our lives. The people of the streets have challenged me" (Rhoads, 2000, p. 41).

Community pedagogy can also emerge during celebration activities. Celebration serves a range of other objectives such as "publicizing the project, saying 'thank you' to those who helped, developing new support for the program, and honoring and renewing the commitment of those who will continue to be involved" (Wade, 2007, p. 18). Celebration festivities that combine the majority of a project's participants—including students, teachers, volunteers, financial sponsors, and benefactors—can help everyone see the impact that the program has had on the community (Wade, 2007). Celebrations can also bring visibility to the service-learning program which can ultimately lead to new volunteers,

increased community support, and even new funding opportunities—all of which promotes community pedagogy.

Fostering relationships. The theme of *fostering relationships* represented the notion of students and teachers building relationships. I further defined the theme of fostering relationships as the process of teachers and students getting to know each other on a deeper level. The notion of fostering relationships was perhaps first advocated by Dewey and Piaget as they encouraged educators to embrace service-learning as a teaching-learning approach to improve academic achievement and build relationships between America's youth and their larger communities (Meyer, Billig, & Hofschire, 2004).

According to Eyler and Giles (1999), many students reported stronger faculty-student relationships than students not involved in service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Likewise, Shuckar (1997) avowed that by working together in service learning projects, close relationships and cherished bonds between teachers and students were enhanced. “Many teachers who implemented service learning projects described more positive feelings about their students as well as increases in the importance of their roles as teachers” (Schukar, 1997, para. 11).

While many of the teacher-student and student-student relationships are formed and fostered during the preparation and service phases, another opportunity for fostering relationships emerges during the celebration phase. Teachers can aid in fostering relationships by providing student recognition for their accomplishments. “Recognition makes youth feel good about what they have done; it also strengthens their self-esteem and can provide closure to projects. When youth feel good about their involvement, they are motivated and likely to stay involved” (Center for Service & Learning, 2010, p. 11).

A true middle school concept integrates advisory time into the daily schedule; the purpose of the advisory period is so that every student can potentially have at least one adult in the building with whom he or she has formed a relationship. According to the literature service-learning activities can be incorporated in or take the place of advisory programs. “Service learning has the potential to achieve the traditional goals of an advisory program without being viewed as ‘fluff’ by staff, students, and parents if it is implemented properly” (Peterson, 2001, p. 7). Service-learning embraces character education and enriches intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships both in and out of the classroom.

Student growth and responsibility. The theme of *student growth and responsibility* portrayed the theme of students being responsible for specific roles and responsibilities in the service-learning classroom and growing through service. According to Eyler and Giles (1999), students and faculty reported that service-learning improves students' ability to apply what they've learned in the "real world.” Service-learning also provides students with the opportunity to learn and practice life skills which will be essential to them in their future careers, relationships, and communities. “Those life skills include leadership, critical thinking, dealing with conflicts, making decisions, negotiating, speaking in public, working with others, honoring diverse views, taking responsibility, setting and managing goals and performing hard and committed work” (Medlock & Mack, 2006, p. 4).

As stated by Bradford (2005) “Project-based service learning emphasizes educational opportunities that are interdisciplinary, student-centered, collaborative, and integrated with real-world issues and practices” (p. 3). Moreover, service-learning activities allow students the opportunity to apply learned knowledge during “authentic moments in

the production process” as opposed to in an artificial setting. By experiencing such opportunities, students are able to relate the material to real-life and “establish connections to life outside of school” (Bradford, 2005).

Participation in service-learning has also improved student learning outcomes and contributed to student personal and social development (Eyler & Giles, 1999). In regards to knowledge, service-learning improved student academic outcomes as demonstrated through complexity of understanding, problem analysis, critical thinking, and cognitive development (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Students reported that they learned more and were motivated to work harder in a service-learning class than in traditionally taught classes (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Another aspect of student growth and responsibility occurs when students exhibit acceptance of others. “Students who may never have had the opportunity to interact with diverse members of the community or to confront a myriad of social problems such as poverty and racism are being challenged in new and important ways” (Farris & Kelly, 1998, p. 38). Participation in service-learning activities can enhance acceptance of others and increase self-esteem. Moreover, students obtain a better awareness of personal morals. “Service-learning aims to connect the personal and intellectual, to help students acquire knowledge that is useful in understanding the world, build critical thinking capacities, and perhaps lead to fundamental questions about learning and about society and to a commitment to improve both” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 14).

Teacher support. The theme of *teacher support* depicted the idea of teachers providing various forms of support to their students. Service-learning projects organized, implemented, and evaluated by teachers revealed that teachers were enthusiastic about

sharing their personal experiences with others. One such teacher expressed, “Engaging in service learning with our students in non-school sites allowed all of us to reflect on the roles and functions of service providers and those who are served and on literacy learning in and out of school” (Clark, 2002, para. 3).

As indicated by the three data sources, facilitation was a chief way in which the participants provided support to their students. Throughout the various phases of service-learning, teachers must exhibit organization, classroom management, and anticipation for potential challenges. In order to accomplish this, they must exude academic integrity. All true service-learning projects must provide an obvious link between the project and course learning objectives. Service-learning teachers provide support by identifying what state standards can be addressed through various aspects of certain projects. “There should be structured activities that allow students to make reflective comparisons between knowledge gained in the classroom and knowledge gained from their service activities” (Center for Service & Learning, 2010, p. 7).

Comparable to the participants, a veteran teacher expressed that service-learning allowed teachers to relate to their students on a different level. He revealed, “There is likely to be more trust, less tension, and greater cooperation from students. Most of all, you, as the teacher, will cherish these golden moments as an anchor of personal satisfaction for the rest of your life” (Ciaccio, 1999, para. 14).

Implications of the Research

While the nation’s political leaders are highly in favor of service-learning, the plea for service-learning stems from more than the government; school leaders are also calling for and supporting service-learning. Wilczenski and Commey (2007) revealed that many

mental health professionals in schools are inundated with referrals for individual counseling. “The profession needs to move beyond trying to solve problems one by one and deal with larger issues. Feelings of alienation and purposelessness expressed by young people are witnessed in the lack of youth engagement in schools and communities” (p. 16). Simply stated, “service-learning is a proficient, unconventional intervention” that promotes student commitment and often increases personal, social, career, academic, and intellectual learning (Wilczenski & Commey, 2007). Implementing more service-learning programs nationwide has implications for students, teachers, and communities.

The voices of the participants in this phenomenological study revealed five themes: communication development, community pedagogy, fostering relationships, student growth and responsibility, and teacher support. These findings have implications for two key groups; the first group is comprised educational leaders and administrators. The second group includes service-learning teachers, classrooms, and the community.

Implications for Educational Leaders and School Administrators

Today, more than ever, schools are becoming more diverse in regards to race, socioeconomic status or class, religion, and sexual orientation. As these forms of diversity increase, so does the call for meeting the needs of all students—educational leaders are called to find innovative ways to meet those needs. Traditional curriculum and expectations are no longer sufficient. It is vital for educational leaders to look past raising academic test scores to embrace transformational leadership.

A transformational approach enables students to consider concepts, issues, and problems from several different cultural perspectives rather than from only the dominant culture’s perspective (Glickman, Gordan, & Ross-Gordon, 2007, p.395). Educational

leaders of today must “embrace a new cultural politics of difference. This political orientation is equity oriented and it involves being a cultural worker who views demographic change and cultural difference as being enriching and educative, not threatening or deviant” (Cooper, 2009, p.719-720).

Service-learning and school reform. Service-learning has the potential to accelerate school reform. The Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) is a federal initiative integrated in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. “This initiative offers incentives to schools to create and carry out reform programs that involve the school, parents, and the community in designing and delivering teaching and learning approaches that are grounded in research and proven practice” (Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004, p. 9). School reformers who utilized service-learning noted that there were several key elements of service-learning that supported school reform; for example, one such element is the teachers’ use of a variety of learning materials. Affording students with opportunities to apply knowledge and skills to real-life situations and problems and providing time for student reflection in journal entries and classroom dialogue was also crucial. Using alternative assessments such as portfolios, presentations, rubrics, and instructional methods that include project-based learning, interdisciplinary team teaching and experiential learning were also key elements. Other key elements include utilizing flexible time arrangements such as block-scheduling, implementing curriculum that addresses specific local community needs, and students playing a role in planning curricular activities (Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004).

Furthermore, reformers remarked that service-learning is a powerful tool for reaching both the academic and social objectives of education. “It has the potential to reinvigorate the education reform movement by encouraging the creation of a caring

community of students to improve the school's culture and positively impact our world" (Pritchard & Whitehead, 2004, p. 10).

Another important feature of service-learning is that it provides real-world experiences for students. "One frequently heard criticism of today's public education efforts is that they are not relevant to contemporary problems. Service-learning, with its community orientation, is one way to help build in that desired relevance" (Payne, 2000, p. 4). Additionally, by providing "real-life" experiences, service-learning is liable to create student enthusiasm more so than traditional text-based methods (Payne, 2000, p. 4).

Social justice through service-learning. Educational leaders of today have the obligation to promote social justice in order to celebrate and embrace diversity in schools. The concept of social justice can have a multitude of meanings; one such definition is social justice as "an optimal belief system that emphasizes equal recognition of all groups and individuals along with redistribution to address social inequity, while emphasizing virtues such as liberation, empowerment, and uplift" (Beauchum, 2008, p. 60).

According to Shields (2004), transformative educational leaders should work to create school communities in which educators take seriously their accountability for advancing the "value ends" which include the following: enhancing equity, social justice, and the quality of life; expanding access and opportunity; encouraging respect for difference and diversity; strengthening democracy, civic life, and civic responsibility; and promoting cultural enrichment, creative expression, intellectual honesty, the advancement of knowledge and personal freedom coupled with responsibility (p.113).

The promotion of social justice in schools by transformative educational leaders "requires leaders not only to understand and name unjust practices that deprive individuals

of their rights and dignity but also necessitates they take action to change the structures that perpetuate the injustices” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 48). The leader is central to the success of the promotion of social justice. Everyone observes leaders in schools; every action is scrutinized and examined. “Educational philosophy, teaching reputation, demeanor, communication style, and other characteristics are important signals that will be read by members of the culture in a variety of ways” (Deal & Peterson, 2007, p.201). The actions—or sometimes lack thereof—of leaders symbolize their values and beliefs. Ultimately, “leaders are cultural ‘teachers’ in the best sense of the word. Actions of leaders communicate meaning, value, and focus” (Deal & Peterson, 2007, p.201).

According to Marshall and Oliva (2010), educational leaders lay the foundation of social justice by making “the issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically and currently marginalizing conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision” (p.23). This promotion of social justice can be planned and executed in a variety of methods; yet, with the increasing diversity of student populations, the methods often have to be more innovative and unique than those used in the past. A predominant suggestion is to step away from current curriculum practices and delve more deeply into the aforementioned issues. “We must move beyond classroom discussions that treat these issues in a theoretical and abstract manner to providing experiences that enable students to recognize and combat the inequities that permeate the very systems and institutions in which they work” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p.132). One means in which transformative educational leaders can provide these experiences to students is through the implementation of service-learning activities to promote social justice.

Transformative educational leadership that promotes social justice is built on the foundation of moral and ethical standards in a societal milieu. “In the midst of demographic change, students need leaders and advocates who are prepared to be cultural change agents—educators armed with the knowledge, strategies, support, and courage to make curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and family partnerships culturally responsive” (Cooper, 2009, p.695).

According to Davies (2009), the current dominant paradigm in education is that of transformational leadership. As indicated by Leithwood and Jantzi (2009), “All transformational approaches to leadership emphasize emotions and values, and share in common the fundamental aim of fostering capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals on the part of leaders’ colleagues” (p. 38). The studies by Leithwood and Jantzi (2009) provide an advanced model of transformational leadership in a school context. Their model has three categories of leadership practices that are very much aligned with the components of promoting social justice in schools. The categories include setting directions by articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals and creating high-performance cultures; developing people through high-quality interpersonal relationships; and redesigning the organization through organizational learning and professional learning communities (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009).

There are a variety of reasons why leaders should promote social justice and service-learning through transformational leadership. According to Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2007), one reason is students from non-dominant cultures are not likely to reach their learning potential if the curriculum ignores their culture (p. 394). Secondly, “a society cannot offer democracy, equal opportunity, and justice for all unless it experience,

understands, and respects the variety of cultures that make up that society” (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2007, p.394). Additionally, communities that recognize the value of diversity and invite citizens from different cultures to participate in their development experience more educational, economic, and social success. “The quality of life for all citizens improves” (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2007, p.395).

Service-learning is not a destination, but a journey towards the promotion of social justice. Service-learning activities can quite possibly lead to social justice; however, educational leaders cannot make these activities and social justice happen by their fervor and spirit alone. “The huge shifts in cultural understandings and societal and school expectations will happen only with the shared values, coalitions, networking, and mutual support that come with the power of enlarging groups or people in a social movements, which results in the building of social capital and, eventually, political power” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 14).

Educational leaders should move from passive dialogue to passionate, moral dialogue including “conscious, deliberate, and proactive practice in educational leadership that will produce socially just outcomes for all children” (Marshall & Oliva, 2010, p. 31). Principal Peggy Bryan at Sherman Oaks Charter School encourages educational leaders, “Passion and commitment, if cultivated and nurtured, will ultimately override exhaustion, confusion, and inertia. A journey that energizes and empowers every single staff member and maintains every single student in our line of sight will endure” (Lambert & Walker, 2001, p. 163).

Implications for the Service-Learning Teacher, Classroom, and Community

Teachers are at the forefront of service-learning—without teachers, students would not have the opportunity to be guided through each of the four steps. Through the preparation, service, reflection, and celebration phases, teachers lead their classrooms every step of the way. The subsequent section outlines implications for the service-learning teacher, the service-learning classroom, and the community.

Awareness of socioeconomic class differences. Today's youth have been referred to as the "Me Generation". According to hooks (2000), "Today's youth culture is centered around consumption. Whether it's wearing designer clothes or cruising in luxury cars, materialism becomes the basis of all transactions. For young people, the world is their marketplace" (p. 81). The reverence of wealth by the youth culture arises in part from the fact that it is easier to obtain money and possessions than it is to find meaningful values and ethics, to know who you are and what you want to become, to make and sustain friends, and to know love. hooks (2000) persisted, "It is easier for the nation to talk about the luxury cars they drove rather than to talk about the emotional emptiness and nihilism that permeates their psyches. If their worship of death is linked solely to too much luxury, to many material possessions, then the fantasy that cutting back on these items will remedy what ails them and their peers can prevail" (hooks, 2000, p. 85).

Through service-learning, teachers can educate today's youth culture and enlighten them about class differences. "Without education for critical consciousness that begins when children are entering the world of consumer capitalism, there will never be a set of basic values that can ward off the politics of predatory greed" (hooks, 2000, p. 88). There is an obvious need for a unique curriculum that will open students' eyes to the world around

them and teach them to be change agents who promote social justice; service-learning has the potential to satisfy this need.

Awareness of cultural diversity. The issues of diversity such as race, gender, age or religion among students and districts is one example of a social justice challenge that academic communities need to address. According to Marshall and Oliva (2010), educators must work hard to increase knowledge especially with recent immigrants and culturally diverse students. Shields (2004) encouraged educational leaders and teachers to acknowledge that students have a wide range of common lived experiences. Cultural diversity in the classroom enriches discussion and increases the quality of the educational process (Rowney, 2008). Teachers are called to provide contexts for affirming diversity, promoting problem solving and enhancing learning (Kingsley, 2007).

Service-learning could be the context in which diversity is addressed. According to Farris and Kelly (1998), “Students who may never have had the opportunity to interact with diverse members of the community or to confront a myriad of social problems such as poverty and racism are being challenged in new and important ways” (p. 38). Participation in service-learning activities can enhance acceptance of others. Service-learning also provides students with the opportunity to learn and practice life skills which will be essential to them in their future careers, relationships, and communities. “Those life skills include leadership, critical thinking, dealing with conflicts, making decisions, negotiating, speaking in public, working with others, honoring diverse views, taking responsibility, setting and managing goals and performing hard and committed work” (Medlock & Mack, 2006, p. 4).

Through service-learning, teachers can impart a culturally responsive pedagogy which “validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (Gay, 2010, p. 46). Educating today’s youth through service-learning has the potential to impart knowledge, awareness, and possibly even keen appreciation for diverse cultures.

Service-learning and the Common Core Standards. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare students across the United States for college and the workforce (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Additionally, the standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning. To follow is the mission statement of the Common Core State Standards,

The Common Core State Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn, so teachers and parents know what they need to do to help them. The standards are designed to be robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers. With American students fully prepared for the future, our communities will be best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

According to the NGA Center (2010), the standards were informed by the highest, most effective models from states across the country and countries around the world. They provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected

to learn. Additionally, students are provided an equal opportunity for an education, regardless of where they live. “The Common Core State Standards will not prevent different levels of achievement among students, but they will ensure more consistent exposure to materials and learning experiences through curriculum, instruction, and teacher preparation among other supports for student learning” (para. 44).

The Common Core State Standards incorporate both content and skills and require certain critical content for all students. For example, in mathematics, the standards lay a solid foundation in the following: whole numbers, addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, fractions, and decimals. Combined, these elements support a student’s ability to learn and apply more demanding math concepts and procedures. “The middle school and high school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real world issues and challenges; they prepare students to think and reason mathematically” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010, para. 65).

While the standards establish what students need to learn, they do not dictate how teachers should teach. Teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the individual needs of the students in their classrooms. As with any contemporary education reform, the Common Core State Standards challenges some teachers because they are required to discover effective means of implementation for the new standards. “As fate would have it, service-learning’s project-based design provides an ideal framework for integrating the Common Core in that service-learning encourages collaboration, critical thinking, problem-solving, and other deeper learning skills” (Guilfoile, 2013, para. 3). An

additional advantage of accurate integration of service-learning and the Common Core is the refinement of students' civic skills and dispositions (Guilfoile, 2013).

Priming young people for life beyond secondary school; promoting the use of inquiry and analysis in order to solve problems; and developing students' understanding of real-world issues are all features of the Common Core State Standards. Analogously, these instructional methods are elements of true service-learning activities. According to Connolly (2012), the Common Core State Standards focus on career and college readiness; however, "we must make sure that as we work with our students toward this readiness, we also guide them in the development of strong character" (para. 1). It is favorably necessary to alter our approach to character education as we modify our educational standards.

As teachers implement service-learning in their classroom, they may notice students designing their own learning around the causes that matter most to them. Students' interpretation of school may become a place where they can go to make changes in the community and world. This purposeful view of learning has the potential and power to lead to enhanced academic and character development for students. According to Kaye (2010), the type of practical thinking needed for service learning "answers the question, 'why am I learning this?' which illuminates purpose" (p. 13). When engrossed in service-learning, students will no longer need to ask why they are fostering a particular skill, because they will be able to see how that skill better enables them to take action (Kaye, 2010).

Service-learning has evolved over the years from an instructional concept into a proven pedagogy that has been shown to lead to greater student success and achievement. This evolution took time and, for many practitioners, a leap of faith as it required them to expand their ideas about what quality teaching and deeper learning looked like in practice

(Guilfoile, 2013). The implications of this study call for service-learning teachers and communities to address the Common Core State Standards through successful implementation of service-learning activities in order to for students to flourish in the college and the workforce.

Recommendations for Future Research

Upon the publication of the study, the site of inquiry will receive copies of the findings and interpretations for the school district's information and application. As the chief researcher, I will offer district administrators and service-learning teachers (including participants) the opportunity for a presentation of the research findings. It is my aspiration that the findings and interpretations of this study will result in journal articles to reveal the information to educational leaders, policy makers, and classroom teachers as well as teacher-educators at the university level.

To conclude Chapter 5, I provide recommendations for future research based on emergent themes, study limitations, and significance. The intent is for the recommendations to benefit educational leaders and practitioners.

- **Expand the Setting of the Study**

Using transferability, replicating this study at another site of inquiry would be thought-provoking. Employing the same methodology and research question, the setting of the study could be expanded by including schools in urban and rural areas. Conducting a study involving schools and educators in multiple regions throughout the United States using the study results here as baseline data could be interesting. More specifically, it would be captivating to include schools with diverse demographics consisting of students who exhibit different socioeconomic statuses, races, ethnicities, and performance levels.

- **Expand the Diversity of Participants**

Using the same methodology and research question, the study could be expanded by pursuing service-learning teachers of different races, genders, and levels of service-learning experience could additionally enhance the study. For example, by including male perspectives, a study may reveal different essences of the experience. The study could also be expanded to include the experiences of students, administrators, parents, community stakeholders, and benefactors of service-learning activities; doing so could provide multiple views of the same phenomenon.

- **Expand or Alter the Methodology**

Using the same basic phenomenological research method and the same research question, the study could be expanded to a mixed-method, quantitative research study. Incorporating personality tests, using surveys with Likert-scale responses, and analyzing participating teachers' standardized test scores could also yield noteworthy results. Altering the methodology completely could also generate interesting results; for example, a heuristic approach or case study methodology could be utilized.

- **Repeat the Study in Several Years**

It would also be fascinating to replicate the same study with the same methodology, research question, and participants three to six years from now. Over a three to six year time period, the service-learning sponsors would have at least one different group—maybe even two different groups—of students as part of their service-learning class. It would be curious to see if the study yielded similar results or if the teachers' essences of the experience changed over time with a different set of students.

- **Alter the Research Question to Include School Leaders and Administrators**

Lastly, a final future study recommendation would be to explore the perceptions of school leaders and administrators relative to service-learning value and implementation. Knowledge and understanding of the perceptions of educational leaders and administrators combined with the findings of the study of teachers' essences could address perceived gaps between the two educator groups. The findings from the recommended study may result in the ability to develop a broader picture regarding service-learning practices and beliefs and allow for enhanced implementation of service-learning within district and individual buildings.

APPENDIX

IRB INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Consent for Participation in a Research Study

*An Exploration of Middle School Teachers'
Essences of Participation in Service-Learning Activities*

Ashlee Cochran Holmes, BA, MAT, Ed. Spec.

Request to Participate

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This study is being conducted at Warrensburg Middle School, 640 East Gay Street, Warrensburg, Missouri, 64093.

The researcher in charge of this study is Ashlee Cochran Holmes. While the study will be run by her, other persons who work with her may act for her.

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you have experience with and currently teach service-learning. Research studies only include people who choose to take part. This document is called a consent form. Please read this consent form carefully and take your time making your decision. The researcher or study staff will go over this consent form with you. Ask her to explain anything that you do not understand. Think about it and talk it over with your family and friends before you decide if you want to take part in this research study. This consent form explains what to expect: the risks, discomforts, and benefits, if any, if you consent to be in the study.

Background

The study team is asking you to take part in this research study because you are currently a service-learning teacher who sponsors one of the three different service-learning groups: *Conflict Mediators*, *Magic Me*, and *Peer Helpers* at Warrensburg Middle School.

You have specifically been chosen for this study because of the specific criteria outlined below:

- Participants must have extensive experience with service-learning; extensive experience is defined as at least two years of experience as a service-learning sponsor.
- Participants must currently hold the title of service-learning class sponsor.
- Participants must agree to be part of the study.
- Participants must have a degree in middle school education.
- Participants must have at least five years of teaching experience.

You will be one of 6 subjects in the study at Warrensburg Middle School.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to better understand middle school service-learning teachers' experiences with service-learning at a suburban middle school consisting of 6th grade through 8th grade. At this stage in the research, the central phenomenon of

service-learning will be generally defined as “an innovative teaching methodology that integrates service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities” (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002, p. 4). This phenomenological study will focus on describing what all service-learning teacher participants have in common as they experience the phenomenon of service-learning at the selected site.

Source: National Commission on Service-Learning. (2002). *Learning in deed—the power of service-learning for american schools*. Newton, MA: Educational Development Center. Retrieved December 6, 2010, from <http://www.learningindeed.org>

Procedures

If you choose to participate, the researcher will set up an interview that will take approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour to complete. The interview will be comprised of 5 open-ended questions that will read as follows:

6. *In what ways do you support service-learning activities in your current role within the service-learning department?*
7. *How do you facilitate the promotion of student driven service-learning activities?*
8. *What do you perceive as benefits of service-learning?*
9. *What, if anything, have you learned about yourself through your experience as a service-learning teacher?*
10. *If you could have unlimited funds for your service-learning program, what would you purchase for your service-learning activities?*

Following the interview, you will be asked to write a brief narrative answering the following question: *Describe the most memorable situation or experience, if any, you have had in this position.* The narrative should be no more than 1 page in length.

In addition to the interview and narrative, the researcher will set up 2 observations in which she will observe service-learning activities taking place at the site. These observations will be set up ahead of time and will last approximately 2 to 4 hours; however, the researcher will observe your particular class for approximately 30 minutes of that time. During the visit, she will take copious notes outlining observations in regards to the service-learning activities, verbal and non-verbal communication taking place, student and teacher behaviors, and interactions with community members (if the opportunity presents itself).

Example:

Visit 1

- Interview 3 teachers
- Collect narratives of 3 teachers
- Observe for 1.5 hours

Visit 2

- Interview 3 teachers
- Collect narratives of 3 teachers
- Observe for 1.5 hours

Audio-taping and video-taping will not be used.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be involved in this study for approximately 2 hours—this includes the amount of time necessary for the interview, narrative, and observation. Follow-up information may be collected via email, but on a case-by-case basis and will last no longer than 1 month following the visit.

When you are done taking part in this study, you will still have access to contact the researcher if need be.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Subjects may refuse to participate in certain activities or answer certain questions. If you choose not to participate in any part of the observation or interview, you can notify the researcher at that time.

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks of taking part in this research study are not expected to be more than the risks in your daily life. There are no other known risks to you if you choose to take part in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits accruing to the subjects during the study; however, educational administrators and service-learning teachers can indirectly benefit from this study in the future. The results from this study can potentially be used to provide a voice to educational leaders and service-learning teachers when attempting to justify the implementation of a curriculum that incorporates service-learning activities. By developing an understanding of the essence of the experiences of service-learning teachers, the educational community will have a better understanding of what teachers' truly attain by sponsoring service-learning activities.

Other people may benefit in the future from the information about service-learning that comes from this study.

Fees and Expenses

There are no monetary costs to the research participants.

Compensation

The research participants will not receive compensation for taking part in this study.

Alternatives to Study Participation

The alternative is to not take part in the study.

Confidentiality

While we will do our best to keep the information you share with us confidential, it cannot be absolutely guaranteed. Individuals from the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies), Research Protections Program, and Federal regulatory agencies may look at records related to this study to make sure we are doing proper, safe research and protecting human subjects. The results of this research may be published or presented to others. You will not be named in any reports of the results. Your privacy and confidentiality will be protected as the researcher will keep interview transcriptions, your narrative, and field notes from the observation in a secure file on her personal laptop. The file and laptop will both be password protected.

Contacts for Questions about the Study

You should contact the Office of UMKC’s Social Sciences Institutional Review Board at 816-235-5927 if you have any questions, concerns or complaints about your rights as a research subject. You may call the researcher Ashlee Cochran Holmes at (816) 830-5781 if you have any questions about this study. You may also call her if any problems come up.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this research study is voluntary. If you choose to be in the study, you are free to stop participating at any time and for any reason. If you choose not to be in the study or decide to stop participating, your decision will not affect any care or benefits you are entitled to.

You have read this Consent Form or it has been read to you. You have been told why this research is being done and what will happen if you take part in the study, including the risks and benefits. You have had the chance to ask questions, and you may ask questions at any time in the future by calling Ashlee Cochran Holmes at (816) 830-5781. By signing this consent form, you volunteer and consent to take part in this research study. Study staff will give you a copy of this consent form.

Signature (Volunteer Subject)

Date

Printed Name (Volunteer Subject)

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

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VITA

Ashlee Elizabeth Cochran Holmes was born on November 24, 1981, in Independence, Missouri. She was educated in local public schools and graduated from Warrensburg High School as school president in 2000. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Organizational Communication in 2004 from William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri. She also obtained a minor in Sports Recreation and Management at that time.

While working as a graduate assistant at the University of Central Missouri in Warrensburg, Missouri, Holmes began a master's program in teaching with a focus on communication arts education. She was awarded the Masters of Arts degree in Teaching in August, 2006. Also during this time, in 2005, Holmes assumed a communication arts teaching position at Grain Valley Middle School in Grain Valley, Missouri. In 2007, she accepted a teaching position in reading at Warrensburg Middle School in Warrensburg, Missouri and began work toward her Education Specialist degree. She completed this degree in Secondary School Administration in December, 2009.

Holmes began work toward her Education Doctorate in January, 2010. In 2011, she accepted an English language arts position at Moreland Ridge Middle School in Blue Springs, Missouri. The following year, she became an Assistant Principal at Brittany Hill Middle School in Blue Springs, Missouri. She completed her doctorate in K-12 Administration in August, 2013 and plans to continue her career as an administrator in the Blue Springs School District. Holmes is a member of the Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals and the Missouri State Teachers Association.