Service learning today: The perceptions of teachers and service-learning professionals

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Service Learning Today: The Perceptions of Teachers and Service-Learning Professionals

by

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Dedication

Ours is a world composed of parts of a whole. The sand along the ocean’s floor; the leaves on the tallest tree; the seeds of the plucky dandelion: Each wondrous whole could not exist were it not for its life-giving parts. My whole, this manuscript, could not exist were it not for the many people who helped me to breathe life into it. For my mom and my dad, whose listening ear, patience, and guidance helped me to remain grounded during my research process. And for every teacher and professor I have had in the course of my life: Each of you have, in your own way, helped me to want to learn more, and to think more, and to do more. I dedicate this manuscript to you.
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Abstract

This study explores the experience of service learning in schools today. Guiding this inquiry was the question, “How do service-learning professionals approach, implement, and perceive service learning, and to what degree do these elements affect how they collaborate with others?” To this end, I sought to learn more about how intentions and outcomes become translated by community service organizations, teachers, and students into actual service-learning experiences. Based on individual interviews, the findings indicate the need to reconcile service-learning experiences with the ideals that inform them. The process of applying service learning is most characterized by the variety of motives that inform its use and the degree of support it received. The data also indicate that the questions of motive and support are both dependent on three contextual conditions: funding, the measurement of benefits, and familiarity. These findings may better inform future service-learning experiences and the collaboration between service-learning professionals.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Education is a field that requires honed skills in judgment. Research findings, manufactured programs, and sworn-by field recommendations abound, all seeking to inform, sway, or determine the educational professional’s methodology. Administrators and teachers alike must sift through the mountains of available resources in order to consistently provide their students an education that is duly challenging, innovative, and life-preparatory. If one is too quick to adopt a specific program or approach for her school or classroom, she may find its outcomes to be unexpected, or even undesired. Service learning is one such approach. Prominent among the resources available to administrators and teachers, it is an approach that is becoming increasingly common across the United States.

For instance, as of 2008 ten states currently encourage the use of service learning in increasing student achievement and engagement, six states have policies in place to create and fund service-learning programs, and seven states include service learning in their state education standards (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brahler, 2004). School districts themselves are also increasingly likely to institute service learning as part of their graduation requirements, school focus, and curriculum (Titlebaum et al., 2004). Within my own state of California, these trends are also apparent. Operating through the California Department of Education (CDE), the CalServe Initiative supports service-learning both regionally and district-wide, with the goal of incorporating service learning into 50% of all school districts.

Service learning, then, is neither new nor rare in education. It is precisely because of service learning’s growing popularity that we must take a moment to question how it is used; for the more common an approach becomes, the easier it becomes for that approach to be understood in subtly different ways, or perhaps to be misconstrued altogether. To phrase this in another way,
the process of disseminating the service-learning approach could resemble the childhood game Telephone: As service learning spreads across the nation, the original message—that is, the grounding aims and outcomes of service learning—may over time evolve into something different from the original as the message is interpreted and passed along by each new receiver. Therefore, if service learning continues to spread nationally and within California alone, how can administrators and teachers continually and consistently ensure that the outcomes of service learning align with its intended goals, while contributing to a meaningful, challenging, and innovative education? Certainly, a first step involves understanding what, precisely, service learning is and what it seeks to accomplish.

**What is Service Learning?**

According to the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 (H.R.2010.EAS, 1993), service learning in the context of K-12 education is a teaching method that allows students to incorporate the curricular content with community service. As a result, it involves active participation, the needs of the community, civic responsibility, curricular connections, and meaningful opportunities for reflection.

However, as straightforward as this definition may appear, much of the literature on service learning calls attention to the confusion surrounding it. One source for this confusion is the frequency with which the term *service learning* is used interchangeably with the term *community service*. Yet not only is there a distinction between the two terms, but that distinction is such that if overlooked, the intended outcomes of service learning are thwarted. Most simply, service learning incorporates direct learning objectives, whereas community service does not (Rhoads, 1998). Therefore, the high school teacher who volunteers her students to rake leaves for
the elderly residents of the community is not, in fact, creating a service-learning experience, however welcomed that act of service may be by the residents.

A discussion of service learning is further complicated by the existence and propagation of a number of subtly different definitions. For instance, for Bringle and Hatcher (1995, p. 112) service learning is a credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity in such a way that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Here, the curricular connections of the service activity are the primary concern, along with the often-overlooked reflection component. Yet the definition put forth by John Eby (1998, p. 2) carries a different focus; in his view, “service should be defined by persons served and should be accountable to them in significant ways,” rather than being “a means to an end.” Thus, his understanding of service learning requires a more community-based orientation.

For the purposes of this research, service learning will be defined using both of the above definitions. Without clear curricular connections, the experiences cannot be considered service learning, but community service; moreover, without truly acknowledging and respecting the individuals being served and the outcome the activity is intended to achieve, the students will not develop as citizens within their community. Yet what exactly does all this mean? How do the above qualities of service learning translate into concrete experiences? Has service learning always been translated to create similar types of experiences?
More than a Fad: Tracing Service Learning’s Roots

The first use of the term service learning is believed to have been originated by Oak Ridge Associated Universities of Tennessee in 1966, yet the ideas behind the term can actually be traced much earlier (Learn and Serve America, 2011). Between the years 1890 and 1910, university extension programs developed as a way to allow students and farmers to work together to improve the farmers’ overall standard of living (UT Health Science Center, 2011).

Also during this time, philosophers were beginning to explore the concepts of service learning, most notably in the writings of John Dewey and William James. Dewey believed that “saturating [each student] with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction” was the means of ensuring “the deepest and best guarantee of a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious” (Dewey, 1900, p. 29). Reflected in this belief is Dewey’s vision for the strong association between society and schools, citizenship and democracy.

In a different vein, James (1906) saw the use of non-military service as a more constructive manifestation of man’s innate “war spirit.” A manifestation such as this would send young men into occupational environments like fishing fleets and skyscrapers, thus allowing them to “come back into society with healthier sympathies and soberer ideas,” having “paid their blood-tax, done their own part in the immemorial human warfare against nature” (James, 1906, para. 25). As stronger members of society, the young men would likewise become stronger fathers and teachers for future generations.

Each of the above three roots of service learning—extension programs, Dewey, and James—reflect different characteristics of what we currently conceive as service learning. Just as the early extension programs valued the element of cooperation between students and those
whom they were meant to help—the farmers—so, too, did Dewey in his vision of a harmonious society. James’s theory, meanwhile, is a somewhat different take on the purpose of service for youth, whereby it allows “gilded youths [to] be drafted off, according to their choice, to get the childishness knocked out of them” (James, 1906). Although Dewey may have agreed with James in the growth that experiences of service can offer to its participants, from his perspective the purpose of service was to achieve a brighter, more communal, and more democratic future.

The concept of service learning dates back to over one hundred years ago; however, it was not actually until 1971 that the White House Conference on Youth issued calls for the linking of service and learning (Titlebaum et al., 2004). Since then, most states have responded by either encouraging or requiring service learning through policy, state education standards, and funding (Titlebaum et al., 2004). School districts themselves are also increasingly likely to institute service learning as part of their graduation requirements, school focus, and curriculum (Titlebaum et al., 2004).

With consideration of these origins, one must recognize that service learning is hardly a fad born out of recent liberal or social reform. The United States, despite its being a relatively young country, has used a service-learning approach for approximately as long as it has used a compulsory system of education. This history is noteworthy for at least two particular reasons: 1) It illustrates the notion that the need for service transcends space and time, and 2) it recognizes the eternal capacity of American youth to use their education in ways that allow them to connect with other human beings for the sake of bettering their communities.

As the movement for service learning continues, propelled onward by each administrator and teacher who implements it, this need for service and the potential for American students’ involvement continue as well. What, then, does service learning look like in schools today? Does
its implementation reflect the elements of curriculum, community involvement, and student reflection, all for the purpose of bettering the community and the student’s transformative learning experience? Given these potential outcomes, would the service-learning approach be more effectively served if encouraged, or required, by the school? And is it possible for service learning to be implemented incorrectly, yielding negative results? These questions and more require consideration when discussing, and certainly before implementing, service learning.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of service-learning programs at the secondary level. To this end, I sought to learn more about how intentions and outcomes become translated by teachers and service-learning professionals and students into actual service-learning experiences. Ultimately, the insight of these research findings may smooth that translation process to better inform both the future dissemination of service-learning goals and the service-learning experiences themselves. Guiding this research inquiry was the question, “How do service-learning professionals approach, implement, and perceive service learning, and to what degree do these elements affect how they collaborate with each other?” As service learning continues to spread across the United States, teachers and administrators look to these service-learning professionals for guidance and support. Working with these teachers and administrators, service-learning professionals help to shape students’ concrete service-learning experiences. If we are to understand how students currently experience service learning, as well as the future of this approach, then we need to understand how service-learning professionals in particular perceive service learning, and the elements on which their perceptions are based.
Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Service Learning: From Definition to Yardstick

As alluded to in the previous chapter, the definition of service learning varies by school, state, and researcher. The implications of such variation cannot be understated, for a definition of any concept shapes not only how that concept is to be understood, but also how that concept is to be identified, implemented, and measured. When one person or entity defines the concept of service learning differently than another, the very experience of service learning alters accordingly.

The research on service learning features several sets of principles, or yardsticks, with which to identify service learning. One of these, offered by Sigmon (1990, p. 57), concisely promotes the structuring of service learning by three principles: “Those being served control the service/s provided; those being served become better able to serve and be served by their own actions; and those who serve also are learners and have significant control over what is expected to be learned.” Present in these three principles, then, is the notion of reciprocity: Each participant, whether server or the intended recipient of the service, is to learn. More than this, for Sigmon, the role of those doing the serving is not to be overpowered by those receiving the service. Indeed, two of his three principles reference the intended recipients of the service experiences—that is, the person who is not the student. Service learning that is structured and measured by these particular principles becomes an experience wherein the server and the intended recipient share in the power and decision-making, and by which both emerge from the experience with new knowledge and skills.

Sigmon (1990) is not the only advocate for a balanced relationship between students and intended recipients. Rhoads (1998), for example, pointed to the need for mutuality in service
learning, for the purpose of ensuring that both the “doer” and the “done to” benefit from their shared experience. With such mutuality, service learning results in a balanced relationship between those involved. The student server does not dictate what others need and then provides it; instead, he informs his understanding and his actions with help of the intended recipient.

More recently, Clark (2003, p. 128) shared this spirit of balance in her “3-‘I’ Model” of evaluating service learning: “1) the Initiators of the service; 2) the community service Initiative; and 3) the community Impact of the service.” Unlike Sigmon (1990) and Rhoades (1998), these three components highlight the process of service learning, spanning the early steps of decision-making and planning, to assessing the outcomes of the service experience. And the outcomes addressed by Clark’s model are those affecting the community, rather than the student. Indeed, the student is a secondary focus in Clark’s model. The student may occupy a crucial position as a collaborative agent, yet the primary focus and measure of a service-learning experience is its ability to affect positive community outcomes. The value and success of a service act can be measured by the outcomes of the service act itself. Patrizi and McMullan (as cited in Clarke, 2003, p. 128) once wrote that the question worth asking is not “What have we done?” but “What has changed?” It is the answer to that question, then, that determines the success of a service-learning program.

Organizations, along with researchers, have developed guidelines by which to identify and measure service learning. The National Service Learning Cooperative (1999) offers what it terms “essential elements.” Eleven in number and organized by levels similar to those of an assessment rubric, these elements shape a different sort of service-learning experience. Of the eleven essential elements, eight solely target the student. These regard learning outcomes, active engagement, use of assessment, voice in design and implementation, appropriate preparation for
and sensitivity awareness for the experience, reflection, and recognition of the students by the public. The remaining three elements target both student and the intended recipient: specifically, in terms of promoting meaningful consequences for both parties, embracing diversity, and encouraging the presence of direct contact and interaction (National Service Learning Cooperative, 1999). In comparison to those offered by both Sigmon (1990) and Rhoades (1998), these elements, despite their added specificity, describe an unbalanced focus between the two parties most involved in the service-learning experience: the student and the intended recipient. The service-learning program informed by these eleven elements places a higher emphasis on students: It is their voice heard in the structuring of the service experience, and it is in the interest of their measurable benefit that the learning outcomes, reflection, and public recognition are to be included. The voice of and outcomes for the intended recipient, while arguably essential, are less framed in the structure of the service-learning experience.

Even from this sampling of the literature, it becomes clear the extent to which the elements used to define or identify the service-learning approach become the yardstick by which that service learning is measured. The problem arises when one considers whose yardstick is being used. That is, by whose beliefs, values, and ideologies is the yardstick created? And in what ways do they affect how service learning is structured, understood, and what it ultimately seeks to accomplish?

A Matter of Perspective

A fundamental challenge of understanding service learning and incorporating it into one’s practice is not the act of familiarizing oneself with the service-learning approach, it is being cognizant of the value systems behind the information and research on service learning. Such value systems may be observed in the perhaps unconscious, though fundamental,
understanding of service learning noted by Butin (2003, p. 1678): Inherent in service learning is a “downward benevolence” whereby students provide unpaid service to certain populations who, despite whatever differences may exist, are not wealthy. While the students engaged in service may be neither wealthy nor well adjusted, service learning is nevertheless rooted in this assumption that there are individuals who are in need of their help and it is they, the students, who have the power to act on the behalf of those individuals (Butin, 2003).

Whether consciously done or not, researchers and practitioners frequently discuss service learning in a way that mirrors Butin’s (2003) observation. Kahne and Westheimer (1996), for example, identified two approaches to service learning: an approach of charity, and an approach of change. With charity, the intention is to develop the students’ altruism, as well as their awareness of the life experiences of others. The service act itself becomes a way to help those “in need,” or those “less fortunate.” As such, the causes of the social problems that the students may encounter, such as poverty or homelessness or hunger, may not be addressed or understood by the student during their service experience.

When service learning is approached from a focus of change, however, it becomes informed by values and goals very different from Butin’s (2003) observed “downward benevolence.” With the approach of change, there is no downward motion, only upward. The service experience is to allow students to elevate their beliefs and perceptions through a transformative learning process, while the service experience is meant to have true, observable benefits for the intended recipients of the service learning (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996).

Related to this approach of change, then, is the notion of developing the Caring Self. Described by Rhoads (1998) as individuals whose identities are entrenched in a deep concern for others and society as a whole, students who care is key. Students may choose to help, and
students may choose not to; yet it is the degree to which they invest themselves in the service learning that can take them beyond serving to think better of themselves, to serving to affect others’ lives. Students who care become the key to ensuring that the service-learning experience has true, lasting value.

Noddings (2005) not only shared Rhoads’s (1998) vision of caring students, but she went on to describe the relationship of caring in light of the current educational environment of accountability. Noting a disconnect that often exists between the goal that we as a society have for our schools, she argued that in place of acceptable test scores, the goal towards which schools should actually strive is “to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (Noddings, 2005, p. xxvi). From her view, the need for a school and its staff to develop students who are caring citizens must then inform the decisions made on how to educate students.

Other researchers approach service learning from still different perspectives. One of these is the Technical Perspective. When researched and practiced from this view, service learning becomes concerned with questions of the service-learning product: How can service learning be made most effective, efficient, sustainable, and of the highest possible quality (Butin, 2003)? Service learning is already recognized as legitimate from the Technical Perspective; it only requires tweaking.

The later work of Westheimer and Kahne (2004) broadens our understanding of the Technical Perspective. Building on their prior understanding of service learning’s value in achieving transformative education as noted above, Westheimer and Kahne (2004, p. 2) argued that the issue of citizenship is “less about different strategies educators use to get to a particular democratic destination than about the varied conceptions of the destination itself.” Every
educational program and pedagogical approach is based on decisions made by school administrators, teachers, students, and even forces outside the school building, such as politicians’ legislation and testing materials created and sold by companies. Those decisions combine to shape the type of citizen that the faculty and administrators of each school guide their students towards being. The same is true for service-learning programs; the program is meant to change some aspect of the student as a citizen. The nature of that change is itself a product of how those faculty and administrators of the school understand what it means to be a citizen.

According to Westheimer and Kahne (2004), the staff of a school generally subscribes to one of three different types of citizenship, or possibly an overlapping of two types. Their first type, the Personally Responsible Citizen, can be understood in light of this Technical Perspective. Similar to the Technical Perspective, which is concerned with maximizing the benefits of the service-learning experience, the Personally Responsible Citizen is rooted in the desire to maximize certain student outcomes. The school faculty subscribing to the Personally Responsible view of citizenship would be concerned with maximizing the outcomes that the service-learning experience had on the student’s character. Operating with this view of citizenship, a typical service experience—such as volunteering at a food drive to serve the community, or picking up litter on the school grounds—would be structured so as to help students become more responsible, honest, and otherwise stronger in character (Westheimer and Kahne, 2004). The politics and causes of the issues involved in the service activity itself are addressed by neither the Technical Perspective nor the Personally Responsible Citizen: Instead, service learning becomes a means to an end—the students.

This outcomes-based perspective, of the service experience and also of its effect on the students, may be observed in much of the literature. Astin, Sax, and Avalos’s (1999) study
investigated a total of eighteen different post-college outcomes in order to learn which outcomes may have been affected by the occurrence of undergraduate service learning. Given that thirteen of those outcomes appeared to have been affected, the researchers concluded that participation in service as an undergraduate student could continue to affect individuals’ behavior once they graduated (Astin et al., 1999).

Stravianopoulous (2008) also focused on service-learning experiences at the college level, examining how service learning within a freshman course could be used to greatest effect in meeting college freshmen’s educational needs. The researcher’s experience as the professor of this course led him to conclude that service learning could indeed be incorporated as a requirement within any course, and doing so appeared to be important to students’ academic and community engagement and their social adjustment (Stravianopoulous, 2008).

At the other end of service-learning implementation, Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) looked at the outcomes of elementary level service learning in terms of both the quality of the service-learning program and the qualities of the teacher. However, the findings of this study were far from conclusive, for the comparison group of students experienced at least the same benefit on most of the eleven outcomes as did the students who had experienced service learning. From the researchers’ view, the reason for this was the range of variance that existed across the different service-learning programs, including the characteristics of the service learning, the environment of the service learning, and degree of contact that students had with the intended recipients (Billig et al., 2005).

Hart, Donnelly, Youniss, and Atkins (2007) echoed Billig et al. (2005) in their study on the outcomes of service learning within the sphere of civic participation, concluding that the lack of uniformity across service learning in turn affected the degree to which the service learning
affected students’ future civic engagement. In a similar vein, Schmidt, Shumow, and Kackar (2007) researched service-learning outcomes in terms of how adolescent students were affected academically, behaviorally, and as citizens. Controlling for background characteristics as much as possible, the researchers concluded that regardless of the actual duration or frequency of the service learning, or whether the service learning was required or voluntary, student participation was associated with positive outcomes (Schmidt et al., 2007). Common across such outcomes-based research is the assumption that service learning is a legitimate educational approach with the potential to positively affect students in many different ways; the research simply seeks to better understand the relationship of service learning and certain student outcomes.

The Cultural Perspective is a second common lens with which to view service learning. Preoccupied with promoting students’ sense of understanding and meaning-making, this perspective recognizes that “we make sense of who we are with respect to both local and global communities,” while ultimately serving to strengthen and broaden students’ civic engagement (Butin, 2003, p. 1681). Here, the intent of service learning is to feature diverse contexts as well as direct contact with its intended recipients. By directly participating with those different from they, the students are expected to be more aware of, and better able to tolerate and engage in, society’s rich cultural diversity. Globally, service learning can help redress our fragmented and fractured, individualized and self-centered society; locally, service learning can help foster among students a sense of being invested in their surroundings (Butin, 2003). The Cultural Perspective, like the Technical Perspective, then, views service learning as a means of achieving specific, though less individualistic, goals.

Moreover, as was the case with the Technical Perspective, the work of Westheimer and Kahne (2004) may be used to understand the Cultural Perspective of service learning and, in
particular, their second type of citizenship: the Participatory Citizen. According to this understanding of citizenship, the student is encouraged to become more aware of and more engaged in his environment. True to its name, the student is guided to become a Participatory Citizen primarily in contexts that allow for direct participation and interaction at all levels of social life. A typical service-learning experience in this case may be the actual organizing of the community food drive, for the purpose of affording its student participants the opportunity to directly promote their community (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

These qualities of awareness and community may be seen in the research as well. In Lakin and Mahoney’s (2006) study, for example, a service-learning program meant to empower students and develop their connections with others was found to have promoted not only students’ social abilities, but also their intention to participate in similar service experiences in the future. Conner’s (2010) more recent investigation looked at the effects of service learning from the view of the pre-service teachers and their attitudes toward urban youth. He found that teachers could also benefit from service-learning experiences, for in feeling their own belief systems challenged, the pre-service teachers came to be more aware of how their possibly biased attitudes and expectations “significantly influence[d] the qualities of the learning opportunities they create[d] for their students” (Conner, 2010, p. 1171). Also investigating cultural awareness, Westrick (2004) researched the effects of participation in one of three different types of service-learning experiences on students’ intercultural sensitivity, finding that students only improved in intercultural sensitivity in one type of service-learning program: a humanities course required of high school freshmen. In other research, Rhoads’s (1998) qualitative study explored the use of service learning to confront any generalizations or prejudices the students had for the purpose of promoting caring and understanding within our culturally diverse society. Among his
conclusions was the association between service-learning involvement and the positive feelings one has about self: Specifically, Rhoads (1998) found that a student’s sense of self was dependent on others. Similarly, Wade explored service learning as a way to help foster greater national awareness and engagement; for she observed that “as the scale of our social and political organization has grown, the sense of our collective identity as a people with common needs and purposes has become increasingly fragmented” (Wade, 1997, p. 2). From her view, then, service learning is one way to promote students’ civic role and, in turn, our society’s future health as a nation. Common across these studies is the notion that service learning can be used to somehow connect the student with individuals, issues, or experiences outside of himself. The degree to which service learning can accomplish these outcomes appears to hinge on how the service learning is implemented.

A third and very different lens with which to understand and structure service learning is the Political Perspective. Rather than accepting the legitimacy of the service-learning approach and its ability to strengthen social and civic connections, researchers and practitioners of this perspective challenge service learning and its proposed benefits, asking: Whose voices are heard, and whose are silenced? Who makes decisions and according to what criteria? To what extent is service learning a reinforcement or revocation of the status quo? (Butin, 2003). In consideration of these questions, service learning becomes more than a means to support students’ civic education; it becomes a way to challenge traditional power distribution and the dominant deficit perspectives, so that students are able to connect the students’ individual rights with their communal obligations (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996).

Though more rarely used than the Technical and Cultural Perspectives, this understanding of the Political Perspective is also reflected in the literature on service learning.
Nearly fifteen years ago, Giles and Dwight (1998) called for a synthesis between service-learning research and practice, citing in particular the need to learn how community partnerships and students’ social roles may be more supportively structured. Eby (1998), meanwhile, explored the ways in which students understand and approach the needs of others, finding that service-learning experiences often leave them with simplistic understanding of social problems and perhaps even reinforces students’ prior deficiency beliefs. More recently, Ross and Boyle’s (2007) case study investigated the disparity between service learning as traditionally experienced at the high school level and the service learning expected at the college level. Among the researchers’ findings was their realization that students preferred to develop their current skill set, rather than develop any new perspectives on social change (Ross & Boyle, 2007). When service learning is viewed from the Political Perspective, then, the value and effects of service learning appear to be understood in a more diverse, less conclusive way.

Reflected in the Political Perspective is the third type of citizenship as discussed by Westheimer and Kahne (2004): the Justice-Oriented Citizen. Not only does the justice-oriented conception of citizenship acknowledge political issues and social problems, but it also does so head-on. The school faculty seeking to encourage this type of citizenship would therefore structure its service learning to focus on neither the student himself nor the service-learning act itself; he would focus instead on all that made the service-learning act or social issue an area of concern in the first place. Rather than accepting the problem underlying the service act—as would likely be the case of the school faculty or student identifying with the Technical/Personally Responsible Perspective or the Cultural/Participatory Perspective—the school or student adhering to a Political Perspective would be encouraged through service
learning to look beyond the surface of a specific issue to the underlying relationships, social patterns, history, and other factors so as to help change the specific issue for the better.

The work of Westheimer and Kahne (2004) is relevant here for another reason. Regardless of how differently schools may understand and encourage the idea of citizenship, the end result is that schools, with or without the assistance of service-learning programs, do help to shape the nation’s future citizens. For this reason, it is worthwhile to note the depth of citizenship that service learning can promote. As Westheimer and Kahne (2004) noted, faculty of a school seeking to instill a deeper sense of civic engagement in students would do better than to settle for achieving a Personally Responsible view of citizenship. Students cannot develop social awareness or a sense of community if the service learning is geared toward only personal, individual improvement; in this type of service learning, students are not encouraged to consider the needs of others, but only their own needs. At the other end, if the school faculty succeeds in encouraging a deeper view of citizenship than the Personally Responsible, how deeply can they hope to prepare their students as caring, invested community members?

The answer to this question is not as simple as incorporating only direct service-learning experiences, as opposed to indirect experiences. While direct service learning may promote a sense of community and caring where none existed before, it is still possible for the service learning to be conducted with a sense of charity or superiority that thwarts the possibility for any long-term social change. Wade (2003) suggested that a stronger measure of the depth of citizenship students is likely to be achieved through service learning: the degree to which the students are encouraged to engage in social action and advocacy. Yet as noted elsewhere, “[t]oo often service learning projects stop short of questioning why those needs exist in the first place,” and so “[t]wo additional elements are necessary: analyzing why the problem exists and taking
steps to change the root cause of the problem” (Wade 2010, p. 26). Both social action and advocacy may occur in service learning that is structured with a Participatory or Justice-Oriented view of citizenship. Wade would argue that the program be organized with this in mind from the start, rather than hope that students become advocates for a cause they care about simply by chance. Students must use the service experience to probe more deeply, to look at the problems and injustices involved in their service experience and become advocates for them. In this way, students may develop as aware, invested citizens who recognize the interconnectedness of community members and the power they have to effect positive and lasting social change.

Service learning may also be understood from a Poststructuralist Perspective. This perspective is concerned with how each person is constructed and co-constructed and how service learning contributes to or disrupts the construction process, as well as the perpetuation of social norms. The crux of the matter may be stated most concisely in the words used by Butin (2003, p. 1683): “If you weren’t here, they wouldn’t be here.” The process of identity construction is built on a system of boundaries, boundaries that separate “you” from “them” and that determine how students and the intended recipients each perceive the service itself. Looking past such human-made boundaries, the Poststructuralist would recognize that there are multiple, not merely one, narratives for any experience, service-learning experiences included. Therefore, researchers and practitioners with this lens recognize the power of service learning to influence identity construction and the need to ensure both student and recipient benefit from its use. Through service learning, students may evolve as citizens who see the world not in terms of “us” and “them,” but “we.”

The Poststructuralist Perspective is perhaps the rarest in the literature of all four of the perspectives discussed here. At least one reason for this is the difficulty of understanding and
implementing service learning from this perspective. More than perhaps the Technical Perspective, the Poststructuralist lens requires a significant degree of social awareness, critical analysis, and reflection. Yet when post-structuralism does appear in the service-learning literature, inevitably so do its associated difficulties. For instance, Tilley-Lubbs (2009) approached her use of service learning at the college level with a thoughtful awareness of social boundaries and the inequities that they create, an understanding acquired from greater than 30 years of experience in working with immigrants to the United States. Within her “Crossing the Border through Service Learning” program (CTB), Tilley-Lubbs facilitated interactions between her Spanish students and recently immigrated Spanish-speaking families from Mexico and Honduras. However, instead of creating experiences based in community and positive, mutual benefit, Tilley-Lubbs’s university students helped her to eventually realize that “[o]thering still seemed to occur” (Tilley-Lubbs, 2009, para. 7). This phenomenon of othering has been defined as a vehicle for white dominance over minorities and as a way to perceive these individuals as non-white—or non-American: different and inferior, unequal and unrelatable (Howard, 2006; Takaki, 2008).

For instance, Tilley-Lubbs’s (2009) program requirements of distributing donated clothing and household items to the CTB families (on the day that students first met the CTB family they would be paired with) and visiting with the families largely within their private own homes were actually helping to create a social hierarchy. As conscious as Tilley-Lubbs was of the need to blur and even eliminate the boundaries that separate groups of people, her CTB program nevertheless helped to perpetuate them through the experiences of her students.

When looking at the ideologies promoted in service learning, one notes that those involved in service learning are more likely to address the act of service learning. The literature
is full of research that evaluates or otherwise studies a specific service-learning program. Hanna (1937, p. 187) recognized this tendency over seventy years ago in his observation of the “time and energy given to such superficial betterment,” when it “could much more efficiently be spent in getting at the basic inhibiting influences which perpetuate a scarcity economy in the midst of abundance.” Hanna’s observation has been reflected elsewhere, including in Boyle’s (2008) research on the use of service learning within university business schools. Referencing the research of Jackson (1968) and his term hidden curriculum, Boyle observed that service-learning programs are part of the larger school environment and the implicit curriculum it creates. The hidden curriculum of that environment could therefore reinforce the idea that “winning is valued above all” more than it does the explicit goals of civic and moral responsibility; the result is unintended service-learning outcomes and the mis-education of students (Boyle, 2008, p. 89). The service learning in this instance becomes an act as well, one that distances itself from both the principles of service learning and the causes of social issues. Just as these university students experienced a contradictory distancing of theory and practice, of extrinsic and intrinsic considerations, so too do some students involved in K-12 service-learning programs. The service learning may be outwardly motivated by social or civic outcomes, yet the service ultimately encourages students to serve whatever values or goals are communicated by the hidden curriculum of their own school environment.

The end result of this focus, however, is stated by Kahne and Westheimer (1996, p. 2): “As is commonly the case with new policy initiatives, however, more attention has been focused on moving forward than on asking where we are headed.” The question of where service-learning use is going must be asked; however, how we ask this question, and the information we use to arrive at the answer, are equally important considerations. Butin (2003) argued that
researchers can no longer look at service learning in the same old way; it is only by recognizing and reorganizing the different perspectives, from Technical to Post-structural, that we can ever hope to ensure that the values, goals, benefits, and outcomes are both mutual and sound. Service learning can be and is understood through different lenses for the sake of serving different purposes. In order to know where service learning is headed, we need to first acknowledge the varied ways service learning is approached, and then consider how service learning’s implementation compares with the destination we envision for service learning.

**Implementing Service Learning**

As evidenced by the multiple perspectives and motives through which service learning can be understood, one implementation of service learning is not identical to the next. To begin to understand how service learning is experienced today, we need to consider the experiences of three groups centrally involved in this approach: the students, the teachers, and the service-learning professionals who advocate and educate. What does service learning look like today, and what qualities are perceived to determine its effectiveness?

**The Student Experience.** Certainly one of the primary measures of any service-learning program’s worth is the degree to which those individuals involved view it as effectively meeting its intended goals. For instance, reflecting both Eby (1998) and Ross and Boyle (2007), Stewart (2008) found that there appeared to be a gap between the intended purpose of service-learning programs and how teachers implement that purpose; specifically, she found that the students perceived the learning component of the service-learning program to be absent, even while the teachers and administrators appeared to be wholly satisfied with the program. Stewart concluded that additional teacher training could help emphasize the learning component. The fundamental
result, then, would be the empowerment of the students, or what Lakin and Mahoney (2006, p. 531) described as the way to help students “find their own voices in and out of the classroom.”

Yet what if the students who engage in high school service learning do not find their voices as a result of their experiences? What does this mean for their involvement as young adults? As Ross and Boyle (2006) found, one possible outcome is a gap between idealistic attitudes and how they are translated into action. The students appeared interested in only “safe service,” or service that would allow them to “show up and serve with their classmates in a familiar, easy manner...[without being] particularly challenging,” reflective, or rooted in theory and knowledge (Ross and Boyle, 2006, p. 61).

This raises the issue of the students’ own characteristics. To what extent do the students’ personalities, as individuals or as members of a group or generation, help to shape their service-learning experiences? In the case of Generation Y members, or those born after 1982, they were observed as students to possess so-called “Millennial” characteristics. Featured among these characteristics were an aversion to ambiguity and an aversion to political engagement—even as these students were motivated to engage in community involvement (Ross and Boyle 2006). The generation of students born after 1990, alternately labeled Generation Z or Generation C (for “Connected”), is observed to have a set of characteristics similar to those of Generation Y.

Ziegler (2007) explored these characteristics of Generation Z students in her study on the effects of the media on these students. Among her conclusions, Ziegler (2007, p. 70) found that the media in all its forms, frequently marketed directly to children who are very skilled in media usage but not usually equally skilled in media filtering, actually influences students to such a degree that these individuals ultimately contribute to society’s “culture of disrespect.” For Generation Z students, the world as they see it portrayed in the media, however more violent or
distant to their own experiences, helps to shape how they perceive their own world. Broadly speaking, then, when a student belonging to one of these generations engages in service learning, his attitude may be one of superficial caring, and his efforts may be either misinformed as far as the service that needs to be done or else erroneously perceived as futile.

The potential impact of this broad generational attitude is alarming. A central tenet of service learning is reciprocity; yet in order for the intended service-learning recipient to be recognized as an active partner who can contribute to the service-learning outcome, the student must respect the person he seeks to help. Indeed, Milton (as cited in Erickson & O’Conner, 2009, p. 62) observed, “[m]utual respect between the givers and the receivers of service is essential.” If mutual respect is absent, the service-learning act becomes informed by other motives and other goals, such as fulfilling course or graduation requirements. Milton’s observation of ulterior motives in service-learning use, then, reflects the same sense of duplicity found in Boyle’s (2007) observation of a “hidden curriculum,” and also Hanna’s (1937) observation of superficial efforts toward social improvement. Furthermore, just as generational characteristics may surface in the service-learning experiences of high school students, so too may they arise in the students’ subsequent service experiences. Given their potential for influencing students’ future definition and purpose of service and community involvement, students’ personal characteristics—generational and individual—merit consideration when structuring high school service-learning experiences.

In addition to the disparity between teacher and student perceptions of service-learning experiences, several researchers report another kind of disconnect. As discussed above, Billig, Root, and Jesse (2005) investigated the effects of the presence of service learning in social studies classes on civic engagement. Measuring the participants’ experiences against central
service-learning qualities, the researchers concluded that the differences in service-learning programs were extensive. Indeed, Billig et al. (2005, p. 2) concluded that unless the conditions of the service learning are appropriately implemented, “it is no more effective than conventional social studies classes when the conditions are not optimal.” Jones, Segar, and Gasiorski (2008) echoed these findings. They found that the very practices around which their participants’ service-learning experiences were to be based were not only unfamiliar to the participants, but also wholly unrecognizable in their experiences.

**The Teacher Experience.** There is a widely held assumption that service learning is either inherently or overwhelmingly beneficial. This assumption was particularly evident in the rise in popularity that service learning experienced in the 1990s and even later, as seen in the research of Westrick (2004) and Peters, McHugh, and Sendall (2006). In the case of the former, Westrick (2004) confronted the unwavering acceptance of service learning’s benefits despite what he viewed as a dearth of convincing, well-designed research. In the case of Peters et al. (2006), credence is given to the positive effects of service learning, in both the researchers’ approach to the topic and also in their reporting of their findings. The possible disadvantages of service learning, meanwhile, were overlooked in their entire discussion and findings save for the anecdotal, “unscientific” list of seven disadvantages to sixteen advantages made in previous research (Peters et al., 2006, p. 132). In both studies, the researchers recognized the notion that service learning is a method that results primarily in positive effects.

Lakin and Mahoney’s (2006) mixed-methods study is a particularly useful example of just how erroneous that assumption is. These investigators found that the degree of positive participant outcomes—in particular the students’ sense of empowerment and sense of community—depends on how the service activity is presented and carried out. If the service
learning lacks a definite structure, then we can neither call it service learning nor even hope to achieve its intended outcomes.

Yet if teachers are discouraged from assuming service learning is beneficial all or most of the time, then how do they approach service learning? Fertman (1994, p. 35) argued that “[u]ltimately, service should not be an extra, an elective, a special project, or a mandated requirement for graduation. It should simply be part of a good education.” However, it is one thing to posit what should exist and quite another to posit what does exist. Brown (2005) learned this when he brought teacher candidates into high schools for the purpose of collaborating with host teachers to carry out various school-based service-learning projects. Even though the host teachers were aware of the elements and outcomes of service learning, they initially considered their teacher candidate collaborators as servants, at their disposal to carry out whatever task the host teachers requested. This reveals how difficult it may be for some teachers to translate awareness of service learning into their service-learning practice. The irony of this difficulty lies in the fact that Brown’s (2005) research was partially motivated by a desire to help his teacher candidates develop their knowledge base—including their service learning know-how, awareness of school politics, and ability to interact effectively with culturally diverse students and faculty—but more importantly to develop that knowledge base in such a way so as to bridge the candidates’ own knowledge and practice.

It appears, then, that prior service-learning knowledge does not necessarily and naturally lead to service-learning experiences that closely reflect this knowledge. Sipe (2001) is one of those who made this discovery. Motivated by a desire to create more authentic learning experiences for her students, Sipe developed several service-learning experiences that her students were required to complete, including volunteering at local agencies and bringing
community members into her classroom. Only later did Sipe (2001) realize the differences between the service learning she aspired to duplicate and the actual experiences she was providing for her students. Instead of each experience being motivated by the community’s needs, each succeeded only in fulfilling her students’ curricular needs. Also, instead of guiding her students towards a more reflective, transformative education, the service experiences required students to “do their time” to fulfill a curricular add-on.

While Brown (2005) and Sipe (2001) investigated the difficulties of service learning, Stater and Fotheringham (2009) investigated how precisely institutions could provide an environment most supportive to service learning. He found that the depth of integration of the service learning within the institutional environment was associated with greater positive community outcomes than when the service learning was supported by formal structures (Stater & Fotheringham, 2009). To phrase this in another way, positive service-learning experiences appeared to be most supported through the increased provision of such resources as time and funding and through the incorporation of service learning across the curriculum. The more the service learning is integrated through such resources, the closer it may be to achieving Fertman’s (1994, p. 35) vision of simply providing a “good education.” Conversely, merely establishing such controls as a service-learning office staffed with full-time facilitators was found to be less associated with positive service-learning outcomes. Although Stater and Fotheringham’s (2009) research focused primarily on the use of service learning at the university level, his findings are interesting here for one important reason: Service learning, and the community partnerships that result from it, can vary in structure and depth, depending on the decisions a school makes regarding formal structures and integration. Understanding how such community partnerships
may be supported, then, is important when implementing service learning, regardless of the age of the students with whom it is used.

Whatever mission or measures a school may have in place for promoting service learning, the teacher—rather than the school principal or the dean—is more directly involved in the actual establishment and facilitation of the service learning. Therefore, a crucial component of the service-learning experience is the teacher’s individual, personal motivation. And what motivates teachers to engage in service learning? O’Meara and Niehaus (2009) sought to answer this very question, using narratives written by faculty members: When analyzed for the images of the subject relationships, the problems, and the solutions of the service learning, what dominant discourses emerge? The researchers found that faculty frequently positioned themselves as the sole person in charge, establishing a teacher-dominant hierarchy that served to privatize the service learning, particularly when the teacher used the service learning as a way to carry out his own ideas or commitments to community partnerships (O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009). Within such a hierarchy, the students were not perceived as the teacher’s service-learning partners or colleagues, and the community partners were not viewed as a source of knowledge and skill development. Moreover, a teacher-dominant hierarchy prevented the teacher from engaging in the service learning as a co-learner with the students who perhaps were new to service learning.

Alternately, O’Meara and Niehaus’s (2009) narrative analysis indicated a second common discourse: one that placed the academic institution itself at the forefront of the service learning. In these incidences, the school’s own needs or wants superseded any needs or wants of the community that the service was meant to help fulfill. Still other factors may influence the use of service learning, including the teacher’s education philosophy, life experiences, religious
identity, civic or moral disposition, and exposure to diversity (O’Meara & Niehaus, 2009).

Absent among these dominant discourses, however, is one wherein the community partners or the students were the driving force of the service learning. Although both of these groups may have been significantly involved in some of the experiences described in the narratives, neither occupied a position that preceded both teacher and institution in terms of voice and desired outcomes.

There is one particularly important consideration in O’Meara and Niehaus’s (2009) use of these narratives: The faculty members wrote their narratives only after being nominated for a national service-learning award by the head of their school. The narrative was a requirement for being considered for the award, and the researchers used the narratives on file for their analysis after the award process was completed. Therefore, the faculty wrote their narrative for a unique audience, one that was both private and public. It would have been to the faculty member’s benefit to write his narrative in such a way as to position himself in the best possible light.

In light of the above differences in structuring service-learning experiences, how can we ensure that the outcomes of service learning are consistently and optimally positive? To be able to answer this question confidently, we must learn how the intentions and goals of service learning are disseminated to the teachers in the first place, and how that information is in turn disseminated to the students. Using this knowledge as a context, we can then explore how service-learning perceptions and experiences.

The Service-Learning Professional’s Experience. Given the prevalence of service-learning use in recent years, a number of community and national organizations have emerged for the purpose of supporting students’ service experiences. The role and involvement of these organizations may vary widely, as well as their perceptions of service learning. Some community
partners value service learning for the opportunity it allows students “to engage in further community involvement...[and] to gain employment” in the future (Birdsall, 2005). For other community partners, service learning allows them to become educational partners with the students’ schools, improving students’ overall cross-cultural understanding in order to educate “the next generation of professionals, citizens, board members, policy makers, and donors” (Worrall, 2007, p. 11). These differences in service-learning perceptions may be due to such factors as the structure of the service learning or the community environment in which the service learning is to take place.

This is not to say, however, that organizations working with schools as service-learning partners do not experience any challenges to their efforts. Through interviews conducted with community partners, Birdsall (2005) discovered that many challenges do, in fact, exist. Among these are initiating and following through with communication with service-learning students; meeting community needs despite the frequent lack of sufficient planning, assessing, and goals; and inconsistency among the various service-learning programs. An additional challenge lies in the overall service-learning approach, particularly in the degree of structure and training involved in the service learning. Birdsall (2005), and also the research of Shaffett (2002), highlighted both of these issues; the community partners perceived the service-learning collaboration as being more effective when the students, the students’ teachers, and the community partners themselves were trained or oriented to service learning.

The perceived necessity for service training cannot be understated. With appropriate training, the purpose of any service act becomes more focused and, through increased understanding of the roles each person is to fill, more tangible. Even in light of these difficulties,
then, community partners appear to agree: “The benefits to working with service-learners outweigh the challenges” (Worrall, 2007, p. 5).

**The Service-Learning Experience**

Service learning can be neither adopted nor completed thoughtlessly. Kahne and Westheimer (2004, p. 22) observed, “[t]he choices we make have consequences for the kind of society we ultimately help create.” Recognizing and evaluating the perceptions, decisions, and experiences of service learning as it exists today is an important research concern. The literature above indicates, however, that the central elements of service learning are inconsistently understood and experienced. In order to maximize its intended goals, including meeting the needs of the community and allowing students to actively and reflectively become involved, service learning must be better understood, particularly from the perspective of the one group that collaborates and communicates with teachers and administrators to support and improve the implementation of their service learning: the service-learning professionals.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

Despite the surge of research that service learning has experienced in the past twenty years, there are many who would say that service learning remains tangled in a web of ambiguity, uncorroborated outcomes, and undue generalizations. Indeed, several prominent researchers (Bringle, 2003; Billig, Root, & Jesse, 2005; Billig, 2008) cite the need for additional empirical evidence in order for service learning to be better understood and most appropriately used outside of the context of specific service-learning programs. Words are not minced on this issue: Schmidt, Shumow, and Kackar (2007), for example, argued, “[a] serious shortcoming of much of the prior research [on service learning] is that it is based on relatively small local samples of middle- or upper-middle-class students.” Largely, the reason for this is the popular use of qualitative research methods in place of quantitative. The standard modes of data collection—which include in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations, and sample analysis—are perceived as being too anecdotal, too narrow, and usually without control groups. Moreover, when service-learning research uses qualitative methods, which usually involve smaller participant samples or even a single school’s service-learning program, the ability of researchers to generalize their findings—as well as the appropriateness of doing so—is questioned. Westrick (2004) voiced such concerns when he advocated for a new approach: “Scholars in the field of service-learning are searching for convincing, empirical evidence from well-designed studies to support claims about the outcomes of service-learning” (p. 278). However, I have consciously chosen not only to follow the well-worn qualitative path associated with service-learning research, but also to embrace it, precisely because of its appreciation for what may be learned from and through people.
Service learning, regardless of how one chooses to define it, is intimately related to the study of the human experience and human change. As such, I question the assumption that quantitative methods are more suitable than any other research approach for providing sound, applicable conclusions about service learning. O’Meara and Niehaus (2009) observed that although qualitative research may not aim for generalized universals, it does have the ability to describe experiences with rich detail; the depth of this detail in turn allows the reader of the research to compare and generalize those experiences to his own. The more depth in the data, therefore, the more meaningful the findings are. This may also be thought of as providing “thick description,” Ryle’s (1971) philosophical term that Geertz (1973) adapted to ethnography. As my research focus is service learning—a field inherently rooted in the above discussed issues of caring, collaboration, relationships, and community—the experiences of service learning can most be most deeply understood by learning from those directly involved in those issues of service learning. Thus, for my own research purpose, a qualitative methodology is most able to achieve this level of depth.

Research Question

The question guiding this research inquiry was, “How do service-learning professionals approach, implement, and perceive service learning, and to what degree do these elements affect how they collaborate with others?”

Sampling Methods

In using interviews as my data collection tool, I was conscious of the need for my participants to be sufficiently aware of service learning in order to be able to discuss it. For this reason, I utilized the National Service Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC) website. A foundational resource for service-learning research, literature, and resources, the NSLC is a virtual beacon for
all educational professionals, students, parents, and researchers interested in service learning. As a way to connect these different groups, the site also features various listservs to which visitors can subscribe. I subscribed to the K-12 service learning listserv, inviting any educational professional who wished to participate to share their perspective and experiences of service learning. Any visitor who subscribes to a listserv is able to send an email to all others who are subscribed to the same listserv; therefore, I do not know how many individuals received my research invitation. I only know that as a result of my invitation, a total of eighteen initially responded with an interest to participate.

However, because I required a more focused sample, as is the norm in qualitative research, I narrowed this total of eighteen based on a few carefully chosen criteria. The first of these was the respondent’s occupation. Again, given the nature of the NSLC listserv, I was unaware of the subscribers’ personal characteristics at the time I extended my invitation to participate. I wanted to include only professionals who were either directly employed with school systems, or who were employed with service-learning organizations. Therefore, I eliminated those respondents whose occupations were on the periphery of this focus. A second criterion was the respondent’s ability to be immediately available for participation. Applying this requirement removed one of the eighteen respondents, for while he was interested in participating and while his occupation certainly lay within my intended scope, he was not available to be interviewed for one month. The third criterion was the return of a signed consent form following the respondents’ initial response. When this third criterion was applied, a total of six respondents remained. These six respondents became my purposeful participant sample.
Participants

To take a closer look at this study’s source of data, four of the six participants (or approximately 66%) were female, while two (or approximately 33%) were male. The experience of these six individuals, both professionally and with service learning, varied widely, as represented in Table 1. All six participants were currently involved in service learning at the time of their interviews, although the circumstances of their involvement, as well as the duration of their involvement, differed greatly from one another. Five participants had backgrounds in teaching, although only four of those were certified in teaching. One participant was relatively new to both education and service learning, having instead a background in manufacturing and business. Moreover, two of the participants have direct experience with outside the American K-12 school system: Blair, who previously applied service learning to her work with an adult GED prison program; and Cora, whose Danish citizenship facilitated her prior work with service learning outside the United States.

Collectively, this participant sample reflects over 26 years of experience in their current service-learning positions, encompasses national and international geographic locations, and spans school type (private, public, charter, independent) and school levels (adult education, K-12).
**Table 1**

*Professional Background of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant* (*Pseudonyms Used)</th>
<th>Current Position</th>
<th>Duration of Current Position (years)</th>
<th>Prior Teaching Experience? (Duration and level given when available)</th>
<th>Other Occupational Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>Consultant for 95 High Schools in a Midwest State, with a Non-Profit Service-Learning Organization</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes: a GED Program for Adult Prisoners</td>
<td>Social Work Various Non-Profits on Volunteer Coordination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Director of Global Education for an Independent School in a Western State</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Director of International Programming for a Western College Director of Study Abroad Programs in Africa for a U.S. University A Federally-funded Development Project in Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Dean of a College Preparation School in a Southern State</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes: Middle School, 3 years</td>
<td>Athletic Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>Service-Learning Professional with the Department of Education for a Western State</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Manufacturing Small Business Owner Business Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Director of Community Partnerships, for a Non-Profit in a Western State, with a Service-Learning Curriculum</td>
<td>5½</td>
<td>Yes: Elementary, 3 years</td>
<td>None, Outside of Teaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
<td>Director of a Southern Non-Profit Service-Learning Initiative in a Southern State</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>School Counselor An Inter-School Agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Collection

Using a qualitative approach, data was collected from service-learning professional participants through one-on-one, in-depth interviews lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. In order to remain flexible and respectful of the participants’ schedules, these interviews took place by telephone.

The interview questions I used were as open-ended and unstructured as possible. My purpose for this was twofold: to maintain the dialogic quality of qualitative interviews, and allow each participant the opportunity to share their perceptions and experiences in their own words. Common across all interviews were twelve questions, including: 1) “Tell me a little bit about your professional background”; 2) “Tell me about a time when...,” a question often found in ethnographic research and useful in encouraging the participant to use specific experiences to communicate their thoughts and perceptions; and 3) “Describe for me a recent service-learning experience that you feel strongly about or view as meaningful.” The remainder of the questions used for each participant followed the course of the conversation.

Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder and subsequently transcribed using the program Express Scribe. Each participant was given a pseudonym, and all identifying characteristics were separated from the audio files and the transcripts. All recordings and transcripts were kept confidential and secure, using locked storage areas, password-enabled computers, and secure wireless networks.

In the course of the research process, I kept a Researcher’s Journal as a way to record any areas of bias, questions and concerns, changes in methodology, interview impressions, initial thoughts of the transcripts as they were completed, and general reflections. The journal allowed me to regularly and consciously reflect on my research decisions and research process.
After all the data had been collected, I shared with each participant the transcript of his/her interview. The purpose of this was to offer each participant the opportunity to verify the data and/or offer clarifications upon reading their respective transcript. In this way, the data to be analyzed was first subjected to member checking, thereby helping to its accuracy. The participants were allowed a period of two weeks to provide feedback on their transcripts. In that time, none of the six participants indicated errors in their transcripts or offered clarifications on their comments during the interviews.

Data Analysis

The research methods used for this study were informed by the approach of grounded theory, as originally set forth by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and as used in the already discussed research of Stewart (2008). As an inductive rather than deductive methodology, grounded theory requires what is referred to as an “iterative process,” whereby data is first compared to other data (i.e. one participant interview to another); then, as theory begins to emerge, the data is then compared to theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Three levels of coding facilitate the elicitation of this theory from the data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding.

Using the first of these levels, open coding, the interviews were analyzed to answer the question of “what is this about?” The coding of my own research began with the first interview I conducted, Cora’s. A careful reading of this interview resulted in a total of 20 coded themes describing her experiences with service learning. I then coded Lisa’s interview using the same care and guiding question in my reading; the result was a total of 19 coded themes, many of which overlapped with the themes from Cora’s interview. Common themes began to form a theory by the third interview. As each subsequent interview was coded line-by-line, paragraph-
by-paragraph to answer this question, the resulting set of identified themes and phenomena then became a part of the axial coding process.

The purpose of axial coding, is to explore the overarching phenomena that may serve as the basis of the theory or storyline, and the relationships between those phenomena and the relating codes. As described by Borgatti (n.d), the codes may fall into any one of five different relationships with the central phenomenon: Causal conditions (the active variables that cause the phenomenon), context (the moderating or background variables of the phenomenon that influence the strategy used), intervening conditions (the mediating variables that influence the strategy used), strategies (the methods and activities carried out in response to both the phenomenon and the intervening conditions), or consequences (the anticipated and unanticipated outcomes of the strategies used). Axial coding thus allowed the common themes identified in open coding to tell me how they were related to the phenomenon.

The final level of coding, selective coding, results in the final determination of the phenomenon that most serves as the basis of data, as well as those categories or ideas that relate to that overarching phenomenon. Using the grounded theory approach, the data analysis process ultimately allowed the theory concealed in the data to emerge, as well as some of the components of the theory (Dick, 2005).

Additionally, I used the strategies of note taking and theoretical memoing. For the first, I wrote down key words during the data collection process. These key words were used in subsequent thematic analysis. For the second, I used theoretical memos during the open coding process. As connections and thoughts came to mind while analyzing the data, I immediately created a memo to capture them and tagged the appropriate interview selections. I used those memos later as a loose guide during the axial and selective coding processes.
Chapter 4: Results

The grounded theory approach is said to be the means by which the researcher learns what story exactly that the data is telling and how everything else helps to tell that story (Borgatti, n.d.). And what is the story told here? The answer to this question lies in Figure 1, an axial coding model inspired by Murrow and Smith’s (1995) model. Using the open and axial coding processes described above, the story that emerges from the data is one of reconciliation: the reconciliation of service-learning ideals with service-learning realities. From the participants’ experiences, we learn that several conditions, challenges, and consequences arise in the translation of service-learning ideals into concrete experiences. The combination of these surrounding elements in a given school environment may support the application of service-learning principles, or the elements may work against those principles. How closely, then, do ideals match realities? What unexpected causal and intervening conditions, challenges, and consequences typically arise in service-learning applications, and how can one respond to each? This idea of reconciliation is necessary to understand service learning as it is applied today.

This is not to say that the realities of service-learning experiences and programs are somehow deficient. To the contrary, each of the six service-learning professionals shared experiences of overcoming obstacles and environmental conditions in order to achieve a realized service-learning ideal. Obstacles still remain, these participants are all service-learning professionals who have not given up on their service-learning ideals. However, in the course of translating how the school or organization staff would like to use service learning and how service learning is used, the following main issues arise: definitions, motives, degree of support, collaboration, and the occasion for making modifications to the service learning. Each of these areas will be discussed in turn.
Figure 1. Axial Coding Model
Defining “Service Learning” in the Field

“I know the first thing I do [in my work] is ask, ‘What is your definition of service learning?’ Because they are all over the board.” —Karl

The literature review in Chapter 2 discussed the difficulty in defining the term service learning, with definitions often substantially different from one research to another. Such variability does not exist only in the research world, however. Figure 2 below represents the definitions of each participant and the relationships between them.

These six service-learning professionals described service learning according to two different main foci: service learning as pedagogy, or service learning as service and learning. The former stresses the academic concerns of service learning, while the latter highlights the connection between the two elements—service, and learning. The two categories are not mutually exclusive; Figure 2 indicates that two participants (Marianne and Lisa) are represented in both categories, and four participants (Marianne, Lisa, Karl, and Jack) are quoted more than once within the two categories. The effect then, is to lend a sense of fluidity to these definitions, even as the categories capture the subtle distinctions of the participants’ words.

First, let us look at service learning as pedagogy. The data revealed three different elements to this perspective: real learning, culturally relevant content, and experience. The participants discussed all three elements in a common way: the traditional or average classroom’s lack of it. For Marianne, Jack, and Karl, service learning is a way to incorporate into the classroom a quality it cannot innately or easily achieve on its own. Service learning may not only serve as a pedagogical vehicle for teaching classroom content, but also as a vehicle for teaching
"Service learning really is that connection between what we’re learning, the value of what we’re learning – the application of it, and...the introduction of creativity and innovation, for kids to really realize that there are solutions, that there are ways they can impact the world. So it’s real learning."

-- Marianne

"It’s a way for teachers to maximize their impact, I think, in the classroom."

-- Jack

"Service learning is inherently culturally relevant, and I believe that having culturally relevant pedagogy in schools is, crucial to lower income, urban communities, communities of color, ethnically and linguistically diverse communities."

-- Lisa

"It’s reinforcing what traditional classrooms do not. It is putting a practical space to what is being learned in the classroom."

-- Karl

"Learning without action is never going to transform the world. And this is what brings it all together."

-- Marianne

"Well, to me, service learning is really service and learning. And you combine... It’s very much an active, learning relationship with a community that often is very different from the community you come from."

-- Cora

"I do see that service learning is a way of meeting the academic standards that are already set forth and at the same time, having that community transformation. I think if done well, that that can happen – both of those things can happen in tandem."

-- Lisa

"To create life-long givers...There has to be a five-step process to service learning. There have to be investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and demonstration. And without those five steps, it’s really hard to be reciprocal, and it's really hard for students to understand why [they do service learning]."

-- Blair

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Figure 2. How Service-Learning Professionals Define Service Learning
that content to students in personally meaningful and practical applications. Service learning in
this case provides both the mode of travel and the destination. Teachers and students
may be able to experience such outcomes without service learning, but for these participants,
service learning is a powerful approach to ensure real, culturally relevant and practical learning
experiences are not the exception to the rule—but the rule itself.

Service learning was also described in terms of the connection between its two chief
elements, service and learning. This particular category is particularly important, for it addresses
the tenuous balance between the curriculum and service. Depending on where that fulcrum is
placed, the service learning may become a curricular add-on, or community service. This first
possibility was noted by Lisa, when she described her experience as a consultant with teachers
who enter into service learning with the attitude of “[o]h, yeah—I think I can find an odd hour at
the end of the day to do service learning,” wherein the curricular ties are faint if present at all.
Marianne, meanwhile, was clear to draw the distinction between service learning and community
service: “Service learning is more measurable; it’s intentional.” For her, the separation of service
learning from community service is achieved with the use of reflection as an evaluation tool,
with which teachers can measure content, but also “those soft skills that will never come out in
standardized tests.” Reflection, then, becomes a way to achieve a meaningful balance between
the service acts students engage in and the academic and personal connections they are to have
made in the process.

Similarly, Blair described the balance between service and learning as being achieved
through a strong foundation of reflection, but also reciprocity and understanding. The students
should not be the only group involved in the service-learning experience that learns; nor should
they be the only group involved that acts. Conversely, the recipients of the service-learning
experience should not be the ones who experience a positive result. Instead, both groups should learn, act, and benefit, as the students are meant to learn and work with the intended recipients. Reflection is necessary not only to achieve this balance, but also to ensure that the students have the opportunity to internalize the experience so as to understand the motivation behind this kind of learning.

For Marianne, the academic learning is important, but even more important is the connection between that learning with the surrounding communities and the world at large. The learning that is meant to occur in service learning does not stand alone as an isolated segment or an afterthought; students must learn through their minds, but also their hearts and hands. That is, the learning should have lasting meaning not only for the students, but also the world. Lisa echoed Marianne’s perspective, for both refer to the ability of service learning to elevate an environment into something better: Marianne pointed to the connection between learning and action to “transform the world,” while Lisa noted that service learning at its most effective has the ability to result in a “community transformation.” If the learning component of service learning were absent, however, then the likelihood of achieving that transformation through action is threatened or dashed entirely.

Cora shared Marianne, Lisa, and Blair’s concern with the learning component of service learning. As she said, “[s]ervice-learning does not take place in a vacuum; it has to have goal-to-goal factors from the community.” Therefore, the students should be learning more than the curricular content; they should be learning about the cultures and communities they work with, as well as from the individuals with whom they directly interact. Cora used the phrase “active learning relationship” to describe this view of service learning, in which students’ lives are intersected with “a group of people who look very differently, and who maybe talk very
differently, communicate differently, but are working on a common thing.” For Cora, the learning aspect of service learning is certainly present, but this learning must be positioned in a way that reflects a connection with other people and a sense of shared purpose.

From the definitions offered by these six service-learning professionals, one can see that the learning component of service learning spans the two main categories. Learning is as much a primary focus for those who associated service learning with pedagogy as it was for those who described service learning in terms of the relationship between service and learning. Yet as discussed above, the nature of this learning changes from one category to the other. Understood from the pedagogy perspective, service learning was seen to facilitate the learning that students were already expected to achieve in their K-12 education. From the service and learning perspective, service learning was seen to facilitate the learning that took place in the classroom and out, of the academic content and of the life experiences of others.

The definitions offered by these six service-learning professionals are reflective of their beliefs, education, and experiences. These factors may not be wholly identical from one person to the next, yet common among the definitions are concerns of learning, collaboration with intended recipients, and transformation. At the same time, to define a term is to speak in abstract ideas and ideals. How, then, does one approach the task of applying a definition of service learning? What process of translation takes place to intersect ideals with realities?

Applying definitions of service learning. “So how do you...how do we do that? If we think [service learning is] such an effective learning strategy, what can we do to use it in places in which it is not familiar? So I think that...that's a challenge.” —Cora
Before service learning can be applied to an existing environment, the service-learning professional must ensure that the necessary individuals understand what service learning actually is. This early hurdle to the application of service learning may surface in unexpected ways.

Consider a high school teacher who incorporates service learning into her classroom for the first time. Naturally, she must prepare for the experience by familiarizing herself with the literature and research on service learning and by networking with service-learning professionals or other teachers who have used service learning. Yet this is not enough. Before the students can begin to experience service learning, the teacher must ensure several other groups understand the ideas of service learning and how she hopes to implement them in her classroom. Neglecting to do so may not only complicate the teacher’s application of service learning, but also impede it in lasting and unimaginable ways.

Blair recounted two such experiences in her work as a consultant of service learning with high school teachers.

In some schools, when you send a letter home to parents and say, ‘We’re going to do a service-learning class,’ the parents’ feedback could be, ‘Why are you teaching my kids about the armed forces?’ So ‘service’ as the Marine Corps, ‘service’ as going into the armed forces. That’s a common misconception depending on what kind of school...One [misconception] I just got two weeks ago, actually, in a service class with young women, was a parent called and said, ‘Why are you talking to my daughter about only aspiring to be in the service profession?’ As being in trash collection, a maid...blue collar work as ‘service.’...It’s how you define [service learning] with parents, too. It’s really important that, for your teachers and your administrators, to understand that service in different
cultures—and depending on where you are geographically—it means very different things.

As these two actual experiences illustrate, the teacher or service-learning professional cannot assume that the students’ parents will already be familiar with the concepts of service learning. The word “service” may have different connotations for some parents than it does for others. This is particularly likely if the parents have not encountered service learning in their own life or work experiences. And where there is a risk for misunderstanding, there is also a risk for an added challenge for the teacher using service learning for the first time: pushback from parents. If over the course of the service-learning experience, these parents do develop an understanding of the ideas of service learning, then the teacher may feel inspired to continue her use of service learning. This was the case for the teacher in Blair’s example who used service learning in a class of young women: “As we’re winding down the class, parents have seen an absolute shift in their girls’ understanding of what it means to be a young woman...We’ve been getting letters from parents, now—and almost apology letters [laughing]—saying, ‘I’m sorry I was so harsh on you!’” Yet if that turnaround never comes, then any pushback from parents may persuade the teacher to forego using service learning in the future.

Indeed, for Blair, this issue of familiarizing others with the term service learning is a constant concern in her work as a consultant: “I think the biggest challenge is defining what service is. Because depending on the demographic.... This is the real fascinating part of this position, that I feel like a whole dissertation could be written about [laughs]—is what does ‘service’ mean?”

Blair’s observation is especially evident in Cora’s comments on this issue, as well. As mentioned above, Cora—unlike the other participants—is Danish by birth and works with
specifically with global service learning. Her experiences with the term *service learning* include not only familiarizing the students and staff at her own school, but also the community partners, hosts, and organizers involved in each international service-learning site—whether that site is located in China, Africa, the Dominican Republic, or elsewhere. This component of her service-learning work is complicated, ironically enough, by the very term *service learning*. Cora explained, “I don’t think we even have the term in Denmark...Yeah, service learning is definitely...a term that probably originated here in the U.S. And that we cannot—we should not expect it as actually a global term that is well understood.” The months spent researching, networking, planning, and preparing for these international service-learning trips hinges on the term *service learning* being understood by all parties involved. In light of the difficulty in translating the term beyond American borders, Cora admitted:

...one of my concerns when I, when I assign these global service-learning trips [is] that we have to be careful about imposing this concept of service learning in other cultures—when they may not be familiar with it, or may not be a part of their culture. This risk for imposition could affect the delicate balance involved in service learning, or what Cora previously referred to as an “active learning relationship.” Instead of acting *with* the intended recipients, the students may end up acting on their behalf, and instead of the students and the intended recipients learning *from* and *with* one another, the learning that could actually result may be significantly more limited or one-sided.

With regard to parents specifically, Cora’s experiences indicate another dimension of possible parent response toward service learning. Cora explained:

I have a lot of parent questions with sending kids overseas. And that’s also a very common thing I do, especially when we have applications that are due for programs and
then your students are not accepted, you know, we have to deal with the parents, and that is a very common thing.

The application of service learning in this environment is supported wholeheartedly by the parents, as evidenced by their interest and involvement in the application process to the different global service-learning programs available at this school. Moreover, the service-learning opportunities offered by Cora’s school are ones that the parents most ardently desire their own children to be able to experience.

In other environments, however, the response of parents to service learning may be less an issue of misunderstanding than one of simple disagreement. Jack found this to be the case with some of his students’ parents: “I mean, we’ve had some parents who, who’ve said, ‘This is one more thing.... You know, we’ve got other things to focus on.’” Here, parents neither question the term service learning nor argue against its use with their children; instead, these parents do not share the priority given to service learning by the school.

Yet it is possible for the response of parents to vary widely within a single environment. For although Jack heard the negative feedback from some of his students’ parents, he has found that he hears positive comments more often. Indeed, Jack has “received plenty of emails where parents say thank you for, kind of the push in the right direction. You know, ‘our family is starting to, started doing service projects as a family. It’s really brought us closer together.’” The majority of parents at his school, however unfamiliar they may have been with service learning previously, have embraced it as a way to broaden their families’ awareness and experiences.

In addition to parents and international communities, there is another group that must be well informed of service-learning ideas if their application is to be successful: the school staff.
Teachers, principals, and school boards are likely to have varying levels of understanding of and appreciation for service learning, and these differences can determine teachers’ individual service-learning applications and also the future of service learning at that school. Blair found in her work as a consultant that the teachers learn about service learning as they go.

I think the action part they’re very familiar with—‘Let’s just go do a volunteer project and call it service learning.’—It’s, it’s the bookends of preparation and reflection that I talk with teachers about the most…. As two very important elements that are most often missing from what a teacher thinks they’re doing with service learning.

Had Blair not been a consultant to teachers with this conception of service learning and therefore able to redirect them in this way, the service learning that would have resulted would resemble community service more than service learning. And if that conception of service learning were left to perpetuate through the years, then other teachers, students, and community members may come to adopt a similar understanding of service learning.

There may also be teachers who unknowing already incorporate service learning into their classrooms. Marianne and Karl both spoke of this phenomenon. Marianne taught for twenty years before realizing she was using service-learning concepts in her practice. As she explained, “[w]e didn’t have a name for it. We just knew that it was more than just experiential learning…. It was something we were doing on our own back then.” Now, Marianne is currently the director of a service-learning initiative, which currently supports strong community involvement in 74 schools. This echoed Karl’s comments of a service-learning coordinator who has collaborated with his state’s Department of Education:

We have a district coordinator—a service-learning coordinator—that taught it for eleven years, and didn’t even know the term ‘service learning,’ but knew that it worked so well
into the curriculum, that the students learned and retained so much better. Now that
individual works in a district that is very high in the state on all their tests.

In both of these cases, the term *service learning* was decidedly absent from its implementation; nevertheless, its central tenets thrived, and the experiences created as a result were meaningful for both teacher and student.

Yet as Marianne reflected, “[t]hat was 20, 25 years ago, you know.” In the current educational climate, the service-learning professional may occasionally make compromises to his or her definition of service learning. Blair noted, “[w]e have a quite liberal definition of service learning through my program...it doesn’t have to be curriculum-based, because it’s so difficult to infuse service learning into a high school curriculum, because of some of the barriers.” As discussed previously, Blair’s consultations with teachers emphasize the need for reciprocity, reflection, preparation, and ensuring student understanding of why they are engaging in service learning. Such emphases need not be mutually exclusive to a curriculum-based service-learning experience; however, Blair has found in her consultation experiences that the environmental challenges of particular schools may be so great as to prevent the incorporation of service learning into the curriculum. In those cases, rather than abandon service learning entirely, Blair collaborates with the teacher to create the most meaningful and reflective service-learning experience possible for everyone involved. “Liberal” though her organization’s definition of service learning may be, it appears to be a direct response to the obstacles that may otherwise impede its application.

**The Perceptions of Service Learning**

Together, these definitions help to answer the research question of how service-learning professionals perceive service learning. Represented in each are the participant’s prior
knowledge, work experiences, and belief systems. A service-learning definition is more than an isolated set of ideals, for at some point, that definition will be translated from abstract ideals into practice. And as we have seen, that process of translation may be smooth or bumpy, depending on the understanding of service learning that others—parents, teachers, community partners, and even other service-learning professionals—bring to the table. However, once at that table, how do these different groups collaborate to apply those definitions? What motivations lie behind their service-learning applications? And can these applications of service learning be reconciled with the ideals behind them?

**Motives**

“Service learning—one of the things that excites me about it, is it has no walls. So it applies to kindergarten through twelfth grade. It applies to the special ed. kids. It applies to honors students. It applies to—all, all students. And it applies in all classrooms.”—Karl

This comment from Karl reflects a sense of limitless application. Walls of any kind—classroom walls, school walls, socioeconomic barriers, barriers to learning—none can obstruct the application of service learning in any environment, with any set of students, with any teacher. Karl was not alone in this sentiment. Marianne, whose service-learning initiative originally worked with kindergarten through eighth-grade students, encountered skepticism from others. To those who would say “[g]osh, kindergarteners can’t do service learning!,” Marianne was able to say “...but they really do! [The kindergarteners]...they’re pretty amazing. Now, their level of student ownership, of student voice, is going to be more limited than middle school kids or high school kids, obviously.” Both Jack and Cora work in high schools whose middle schools also incorporate service learning into the curriculum; therefore, by the time those middle-school
students reach high school, they would have already been engaged in service learning for several years. Marianne spoke of another dimension of service-learning application:

And you see non-traditional student learners actually succeed more academically, socially, interpersonally...than you would maybe you ‘A+,’ straight-arrow, type ‘A’ student. So the reason that I’m bringing that up is because we do believe that every child has something to give. It’s not just a few.

Students of all social and learning abilities may be affected by service learning, rather than only those students who are traditionally encouraged to engage in service through organizations such as the National Honors Society.

Why, then, do some teachers choose to use service learning, while others do not? What motivates certain teachers to familiarize themselves with service learning and to apply its ideas in their own classrooms? Similarly, what motivates certain schools to incorporate service learning, while others may not? This question of motive is affected by the definition of service learning used, and it affects the service-learning realities that are subsequently created. In this way, the motive acts as a sieve in each classroom, and in each school, where service learning is consciously adopted.

**Flexibility.** One motive for service-learning use as indicated by the service-learning professionals is certainly its inherent flexibility. Table 2 is a summary of the service-learning experiences recounted by the participants. The table also indicates that the specific characteristics of these experiences rarely overlap from one to the next, yet each experience was designed to adhere to the ideas of service learning as understood by the classroom teacher or school.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared By</th>
<th>Service-Learning Activity</th>
<th>Community Partner/s</th>
<th>Available Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Jack      | Persuasive Essay: Awareness and Fundraiser | Local Non-Profits | • Middle School Classroom  
• Duration: School Year  
• Application: the Last Few Years |
| Jack      | 9/11 Anniversary Festival: Awareness, Appreciation, Community Needs | Local Non-Profits  
Community Firefighters and Policemen | • Predominantly Student-Designed |
| Jack      | Activities of the School’s Leadership Institute | Local Non-Profits | • 24 Students; 1 Adult Mentor  
• Student-Led  
• Example: Non-Profit Fair to Raise Awareness and Involvement |
| Jack      | Project Ignition: Teen Safe Driving | State Farm Insurance | • School Wide |
| Jack      | Veteran’s Day Appreciation | Students’ Relatives  
Community Veterans | • Duration: Week-long Curriculum |
| Jack      | Trout in the Classroom: Raising/Releasing Trout to Boost Depleted Native Population | State Wildlife Commission | • Classroom-Based  
• Duration: from August to Spring  
• Application: the last 2-3 years |
| Cora      | Working in an Orchard | Local Migrant Workers,  
An Organization that Works in the Dominican Republic | • A mutually supportive, shared experience |
| Cora      | Global Service-Learning Trip with a Poverty Focus | An Organization that Works in the Dominican Republic | • 12 Students, 3 Adults  
• First 7 Days on Site Campus: Conduct Research, Bond, Reflect  
• Stay with Host Families; No Internet, Phones  
• Application: New Program |
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<th>Shared By</th>
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<th>Community Partner/s</th>
<th>Available Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cora</td>
<td>Global Service-Learning Trip</td>
<td>An Organization in China</td>
<td>• 12 Students, 3 Adults</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|           | Global Service-Learning Trip | Partners in Kaloo Ford, South Africa | • 12 Students, 3 Adults  
|           |                           |                      | • Application: New Program in Development |
| Lisa      | Multi-School Service-Learning Collaboration, with Issues Related to an Area River | 7 Schools: Public, Private, Charter; 6 from Lower-Income Communities  
|           |                           | 7-10 Community Partners | • Each School Paired with One Primary Partner  
|           |                           |                      | • Duration: School Year  
|           |                           |                      | • Integrated into Every Content Area  
|           |                           |                      | • Application: Designed as a Sustainable Program |
|          | School Cafeteria Nutrition: Research, Awareness, and Advocacy | Not Given | • Fifth-Grade Class  
|          |                           |                      | • Student Presentation to Administration and Public Officials  
|          |                           |                      | • Student Presentation to Teachers/Principals Interested in Service Learning |
|          | After-School Program | Not Given | • 25 Students |
| Marianne | Shelter Boxes | Community Rotary Clubs  
|           |                   | Relief Organizations in Haiti | • Multiple Schools  
|           |                   |                      | • Integrated into Curriculum  
|           |                   |                      | • Experiences and Student Voice Varied  
|           |                   |                      | • Examples: Fourth Grade Read-a-thon |
|          | Advocating Literacy: Book Drive | Local Women’s Center | • Students with Special Needs  
|          |                   | A Second Local Agency | • Student-Led  
|          |                   |                      | • Integrated into the Curriculum: Language Arts and Math  
<p>|          |                   |                      | • Presented to Board on Closed Access T.V. |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shared By</th>
<th>Service-Learning Activity</th>
<th>Community Partner/s</th>
<th>Available Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marianne</td>
<td>Capstone Project</td>
<td>Not Given</td>
<td>• Eighth-Grade Students&lt;br&gt;• Student-Initiated; Substitute Teacher Facilitated&lt;br&gt;• Integrated into the Curriculum: Language Arts, Social Studies&lt;br&gt;• Application: Annually</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Community Health</td>
<td>Local Emergency Shelter</td>
<td>• Integrated into Curriculum: Health, Math, Social Issues&lt;br&gt;• Plan/Provide Shelter’s Menu for One Week</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Vegetable Garden: From Planting to Preparing Meals for Community Homeless</td>
<td>Local Food Bank, Local Shelter</td>
<td>• Integrated into Curriculum: Math, Science, History, Social Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karl</td>
<td>Creation of Art Pieces to Benefit Community</td>
<td>Not Given</td>
<td>• Students with Special Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blair</td>
<td>“Life of a Tanzania Child” Project and Fundraiser</td>
<td>A Local Non-Profit</td>
<td>• Duration: One Week&lt;br&gt;• Integrated into Curriculum: Research of Needs Informs Action&lt;br&gt;• Application: Began with one High School; Becoming a City-Wide Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Young Women in History” class</td>
<td>Area Public Schools</td>
<td>• Inmates Obtaining their GED&lt;br&gt;• Students Researched/Identified Recipients&lt;br&gt;• Integrated into the Curriculum: Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Algebraic Flashcards</td>
<td>Not Given</td>
<td>• Urban Public School, Female Students&lt;br&gt;• Integrated into the Curriculum: Social Issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Clearly, service learning is a method that may be applied to any number of student populations, schools, and communities. This flexibility may help service learning to seem approachable to the first-time user. Yet how does this characteristic work in conjunction with other motives for incorporating service learning? Can the ideals of service learning ever be flexed too far, resulting in activities that may not reflect the service-learning ideals that inspired them? Can this “no walls” quality ever widen the gap between service-learning ideals and actual service-learning experiences? To begin to answer these questions, let us look at some other motives for using service learning.

**Standards.** A primary concern for many schools today is the fulfillment of state and federal standards. Every curricular decision made, by teachers and by administrators, is intended to support the mastery of the content and skills deemed of value to students as they prepare to continue their lives into adulthood. The relationship between these standards and service learning is therefore a valuable starting point.

Of the six participants, five—Marianne, Lisa, Jack, Blair, and Karl—pointed to the ability of service learning to address some form of these curricular standards. Cora’s current work experiences, as the director of a global service-learning program at an independent school, do not concern state and federal curricular standards. The standards for the five other participants take different names and forms depending on geographic location. For Marianne, these are the Common Core Standards. All but five of the fifty states have adopted the Common Core Standards since they were released in June of 2010 (Common Core Standards Initiative, 2012). And it appears these standards will not only continue to shape the future of education, but also the future of service learning. Marianne refers to this relationship between the standards and service learning when she commented, “[w]ell, with the Common Standards, it’s a natural fit.”
For Marianne, service learning is intended to be curriculum-based, and when that curriculum is formed around the Common Standards, then the use of the one to fulfill the other seems logical.

Lisa and Jack, meanwhile, specifically referred to the 21st Century Skills, or skills recognized by certain states as being necessary for students in an increasingly complex and dynamic world. These skills include global awareness; civic, environmental, and health literacy; creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving; communication and collaboration; initiative and self-direction; social and cross-cultural skills; and leadership and responsibility (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2012). In her years of service-learning consultation with teachers and schools, Lisa spoke of the difficulty she had in the past in responding to those educators and administrators who expected to see direct correlations between service learning and academic achievement:

And the question we had for years and years and years was, well, ‘Don’t you evaluate academic achievement?’ And so people kind of brush us off, because they’re like, ‘Well, you don’t—I can’t—’ We can’t say doing our program is going to increase academic achievement. Because it’s so adaptable, and we don’t know what content area, what grade level, what district, it’s going to be integrated into.

Lisa and her organization could not explicitly guarantee achievement in academic outcomes due to the sheer flexibility of service-learning application. Since the 21st Century Skills were adopted as part of the new academic standards, however, Lisa has observed a reversal in teachers and administrators’ view the service-learning program of Lisa’s organization.

There aren’t a whole host of programs that currently evaluate 21st Century Skills. There just aren’t as many. And so that has actually become a value [laughs] for us, now.... All of our programs for the most part would increase 21st Century Skills; it’s sort of inherent
in the service-learning process. And I think the ability to sort of capture that, and tie it to
the accountability at school districts, will be important, too.
In Lisa’s experience, the relationship between standards and service learning has been defined by
the current understanding of the phrase “academic standards.” Service learning itself was not
redefined or changed. And so even if service learning would have offered teachers and
administrators a way to promote both academic and 21st Century Skills, only the advent of the
latter prompted many of them to consider service learning as a way to evaluate those standards.
Jack also pointed to the connection between service learning and 21st Century Skills. His
experiences with service learning have shown him that “service learning really speaks to all the
standards really...really well. And it, it’s just very impactful.” Teachers and administrators who
seek to help students develop these skills can choose to use service learning. Jack does go on to
clarify his comments slightly:
So, it’s kind of teaching our...teachers with how to develop critical thinking and
those...21st Century Skills. I think that’s really important, because if we go into a service-
learning situation with it...with the whole scenario planned out, then it will never be
good—as good as it can be if we truly have youth voice and if we have...buy-in from
everybody that’s involved.
Teachers and administrators may choose to use service learning as a way to develop students’
21st Century Skills. However, if those skills are to be developed to the potential that service
learning can offer, then teachers must allow students the appropriate space and voice to do so.
Meanwhile, Blair pointed to another source of legislation: a recent Senate Bill for her
state that requires public schools to provide some sort of experiential learning to students. The
language used in the bill does not use the term service learning, but instead describes these
opportunities as “interdisciplinary, project-based, real-world opportunities” (S.B. 316 § 3301.079, 2011). Still, Blair has already seen this as a source of motivation for some schools: “That is one way, though, that a lot of schools are saying, ‘Ah! What is this service-learning stuff? Maybe we’ll check this out and see if we can offer it within our school system.’” The state legislation does not actually use the require schools to use service learning specifically, yet schools have seen the connection between service-learning and this standard, choosing to turn to service learning when perhaps they would not have otherwise.

As an employee with his state’s department of education, Karl’s perspective of curricular standards is different from those of the other service-learning professionals. His state has also adopted the Common Core Standards that Marianne spoke of, yet Karl never specifically mentioned them. Instead, he called attention to what he sees as a common myth among teachers who are considering using service learning:

It’s hard for them to see that it’s not going to be more work. That, at the end of the day, if they do this, they will be teaching. Well, the one teacher that we have now doing a lot of our seminar presentations—and they ask her in the sessions, you know, ‘Well, you’re not teaching to the standards, then, are you?’ She says, ‘I’ve never taught to the standards.’ [The audience replies,] ‘Whaat?!’ [And the teacher continues,] ‘And my students have never not met or exceeded standards.’ So it’s that...you get that mindset reaction because ‘Oh, you’ve got to teach the standards, that’s—that’s a requirement, you know. We’ve gotta, gotta, gotta, gotta.

Karl neither disputed the value of the standards, nor argued against their place in the classroom. However, he did note a limitation of adhering too closely to the standards; doing so can dissuade teachers from incorporating practices that would actually facilitate achievement.
There are two elements to Karl’s experiences with service learning and standards that illustrate their complexity. First, Karl is employed with the service-learning office of his state’s department of education; second, the teacher who leads these seminar presentations does so on behalf of this same department of education. Still, both Karl and this teacher he have attempted to broaden others’ conceptions of how curricular standards may be translated into practice. Service learning need not be thought of as a distraction from those standards.

The standards discussed by Marianne, Lisa, Jack, Blair, and Jack differ in form, terminology, and specificity; yet each of these service-learning professionals noted a connection between the standards of their state and service-learning use. To break down the question of motive further, what other factors lead to service-learning application?

**Teachers and students.** “They would also, you know, say things to me, like ‘I—I don’t understand. How come we’re the only class that gets to do [service learning]?’ I mean, [the students] saw it as, like, a privilege. And I saw it as good teaching!”—Blair

The service-learning professionals also shared experiences wherein both teachers and students separately chose to incorporate service learning. Both groups are centrally involved in the service learning, yet the way in which each approaches the experience may differ. The above comment from Blair reflects two perspectives to a single service-learning experience: Blair, as the teacher, and her fifth-grade students. For this first attempt to use service learning with her students, Blair found and partnered with an organization with a service-learning curriculum—the same organization for which she now works. Using service learning as a teacher allowed her the “opportunity to engage young people in a way that they actually feel like they’re meaningful contributors.” At the time, however, Blair was the only teacher in her school who chose to
incorporate service learning, and for this reason her students approached service learning as a special opportunity that their peers were denied.

The other service-learning professionals revealed that Blair is not the only teacher to have turned to service learning on her own. In Marianne’s experiences with the 74 K-12 schools her organizations works with, she has found that teachers or students usually initiate the service-learning application:

I would say it can be either, or both. Often times, the teachers initiate it. I would say the majority of the time, the teachers initiate it at the elementary level. The more we have been involved with schools...I would say within the last four or five years, it has been more student-initiated.... That’s always our goal.

This comment reveals two transitions. First, whereas teachers traditionally made the decision to engage their students in service learning, students are now making that decision for themselves. Second, the motive for service-learning use also appears to have shifted. When the teachers were the initiators, they were influenced by one set of responsibilities; when the students were the initiators, they were influenced by another set of concerns. There is certainly the opportunity for overlap between their motives. However, teachers are more likely to be motivated by questions of curriculum and mastery, and students by concerns of whether the content is relevant and interesting.

This issue of relevant content can be seen in the comments of the other participants as well. As Karl noted, service-learning application “looks like students that are engaged in the classroom because they know there is an application. I think all of us have said at one time or another, ‘What am I ever going to use this for?’” The ability for students to not only know on an
abstract level that their learning has real-world application, but also to see and carry out that application appears to be a strong motivator for students to want to use service learning.

The idea of engagement appears to be one area of overlap between teacher and student motives for using service learning. Here, Karl pointed to engagement as a motivator for teachers to use service learning:

A teacher said to me, ‘Before I started using service learning, when the bell rang, I said ‘Okay, kids. It’s time to settle down now. Take your seats, let’s get your books out.’ He said, ‘After I started using service learning, the bell rang, and I started walking around to those who were already working—because they were engaged in their service-learning project in their curriculum.’ Walking around to help them with what the curriculum was, because they were already engaged. And I think that’s certainly a word that we overuse, but a terribly important one. The students are engaged, they see the reason for what they are doing, they find a sense of community that is terribly missing in most places across our region... They meet people they never would have crossed paths with. And the end result, they have a stronger understanding of their curriculum that they’re learning in the classroom.

Students want to be engaged in the content and the tasks they are asked to do, and teachers want to see their students engaged in their learning. Karl also illustrated a powerful reinforcement for teachers and students who use service learning. When teachers incorporate it into their curriculum, and when they see this degree of change in their students’ focus and involvement, those teachers will be more inclined to use service learning again. Students will share this inclination because service learning provides a ready answer to the question, “When am I ever going to use this?”
Cora also spoke of the conscious desire students have to participate in service learning. Indeed, the students’ eagerness is so strong that it becomes a deciding factor in one of the most important life choices the students make at that point in their life: the decision to attend the independent school for which Cora works. Cora explained the connection in this way:

It’s something the students want to do. And actually—I attend all of these open house events we have, and prospective students and families, and we get—I’m surprised how many we get that say they want to come [to our school], that they’re excited because of these global programs in service learning.

In fact, so many students are interested in participating in a global service-learning trip that the school is not able to accommodate them all in a given school year, even though each student is limited to one trip during their time at the school. Students are instead encouraged to “apply the following year. And then we can try to get them first. So even though there have been students that have applied more than once, or who [have] gone once and applied again, we just can’t take them.” These students are drawn to the service-learning opportunities offered by Cora’s school, before they are even students of this school and in many cases after they have already experienced their one allotted global trip.

The element of international travel may be especially appealing to these adolescent students. Cora alluded to this possibility when describing the students who attend her school: “It’s so easy for them to be absorbed in their own little world here. And that is what I’ve seen; bringing them outside this little cocoon here is really the best way to make them sort of...realize how big the world is.” Whether or not the students themselves feel cocooned is uncertain, yet the opportunity to experience the world in the form of a school-sponsored trip certainly appears to have an appeal.
The motives that separately prompt teacher and student to experience service learning may differ, overlap, or may be very similar to one another indeed. Leading these motives are the issues of pedagogical values and content relevance, engagement and broadened life experiences. Working in conjunction with one another, the motives of teacher and student to engage in service learning shape the experiences that result. And yet, still another group may have its own motives for choosing to engage in service learning, yielding its own affect on the service-learning experiences it helps to create.

Administrators. “That was probably the biggest part of why we started our—our service-learning program...is to—is to give our kids an additional they thing can brag about on their college applications.”—Jack

School administrators tend to experience service learning from a different vantage point than other groups. Teachers and students are directly involved in the daily application of a service-learning experience, whereas administrators do not typically share that level of involvement. Likewise, administrators may also experience a separate set of concerns or motives when approaching service learning. The above comment from Jack is an indication of one such concern.

As the dean of a college preparatory school, Jack must think of his students’ future once they leave his school: Will these students be accepted into the college or university of their choice, and how successful will they be in their undergraduate years and beyond? These questions and their answers are necessary if the school is to provide to its students the quality education necessary for university. Service learning has become a way to help achieve these goals, a way for students to stand apart from other college applicants. Jack said it in this way: “On their transcripts, when they applied to—to colleges, [students would] be able to—they’d be
able to kind of, you know, market themselves with, “I have six-hundred service hours...in my time at [high school].” The students market themselves with service learning, yet the school ultimately facilitates this through a required range of service-learning hours for each grade level. At its lowest, “K-5, they have a five-hour requirement” and at its highest, “[t]he seniors have the 50-hour requirement.” This idea of requiring and documenting service learning as a way to market students presents a motive not exhibited by the teacher or student groups.

At the same time, Jack’s incorporation of service learning appears to be guided by a second motive: the sincere desire to promote service-learning ideals and encourage their application. Consider Jack’s explanation of his service-learning beginnings: “[I] started getting involved in service learning during my second year.... Attended...the National Youth Leadership Conference...and I have attended every year since. But that was really the big impetus for...for me personally and for the school.” Prior to this, then, neither Jack nor his school had a developed definition or understanding of service learning. Since then Jack has worked to promote service-learning ideals among his staff and students:

I see my role and the role of our...kind of a core group of teachers that really are strong in the service-learning kind of principles and whatnot...of modeling what service learning does for a teacher and how it can make you have more of an impact...I see it as kind of my job and the—the job of the people around me to sort of really properly portray exactly what [service learning] is, and explain what it is, and educate our teachers so they can use it in an effective way.

The language of this passage is very different from Jack’s previous description of service learning as a marketing tool. Here, he internalizes his school’s service-learning program by using the word “I” and by describing his “role” in service-learning application. Jack also emphasizes
the “principles” of service learning and the need to model, “explain,” and “educate” so that service-learning experiences align with service-learning ideals. This indicates a sincere belief in the benefits and value of service learning. Service learning at this school may be one way for students to distinguish themselves from other college applicants. Yet it appears that for Jack, the deeper motivation is to create a culture of service learning within the school.

Cora’s comments indicated a similar motivation for her school’s use of service learning. In addition to the students’ own desire to participate in service learning, these experiences also give Cora’s school an edge above other schools in the area.

There’s a lot of private schools here...and [our global service-learning program is] one of the things that a lot of people definitely pick out for us...that they know about it, and they want to do it.... So we are quite well known for that.

Consider the structure of this program: It features a separate global service-learning office, a senior administration staff of “three other people” besides Cora who strategize “about global education and how you would infuse that into the curriculum,” “about 27 adult leaders who lead programs in the summer,” and “a large budget.” An independent school that voluntarily takes the initiative to fund and staff a global service-learning office and its programs is certainly guided by a strong belief in the contribution of service learning to students’ education. Still, just as service learning distinguishes Jack’s students from other college applicants, so too does service learning distinguish Cora’s school from other private schools. In both cases, service learning is seen to sustain the future of the school.

Marianne described the motivation of some administrators as creating a different kind of driving force. As she explained, “[s]ometimes, [service learning is used] because the principal said, ‘We are using this method. We’re going to do it, and I expect that at some point during the
year, all of you [will] have integrated a service-learning experience into one of your units.” The message communicated by administrators who take this approach is one of unyielding and imposed requirement. Any deeper motivation on behalf of the administrators to adopt service learning appears not to be shared with the staff. This contrasts with the “culture of service” that Jack has worked to create in his own school, wherein service learning is supported through the broader dissemination and promotion of service-learning ideals and concepts.

In other cases, the administrator’s motivation to incorporate service learning may actually be a compromise with a teacher’s own motivation. Lisa found this to be the case in her work with one southern school: “One teacher did [service learning] as an after-school program because their principal didn’t want them to do it during the school day.” Whatever this administrator’s prior knowledge of service learning may have been, he did not perceive service learning as being so central to the curriculum as to merit the use of class time. The teacher disagreed; yet she would not have been able to use service learning at all had the principal denied his permission. The form in which the principal allowed service learning not only shaped this particular teacher’s service-learning program, but also clearly communicated to other teachers the place of service learning within their school.

The motives for school administrators to implement service learning in their schools may vary widely, as seen in the comments and experiences of the service-learning professionals. From concerns of students’ current and future academic success, to the administrator’s personal beliefs and experiences, service-learning application in schools may be initiated in different ways and incorporated to varying degrees.

**Community betterment.** “...To create young people who understand community needs and feel...like they can contribute to making a difference in those community needs.”—Blair
In contrast to the motives of standards, teachers and students, and administrators, the service-learning professionals also indicated a motive that differs from the others in one important way: It lies outside of the school. The motive to better the community *outside* the school acknowledges the intended recipients of the service learning and the intended outcomes of the service learning. The above quote from Blair illustrates this awareness of community concerns, community needs, and the ability of service learning to minimize those needs. The students may still occupy a central position in the service-learning experiences, but the purpose of that position extends beyond the their own academic and personal growth: The students are able to occupy the position of members of their community, from which they can collaborate, advocate, and act.

The idea of community betterment may be in alignment with the ideals of service learning, yet the manifestation of this idea into a realized motive is not the norm. Blair has found this to be the case in many of her consultations with teachers:

When [teachers] contact *me*, most of the time, it’s a subject area—that they need a project to match a subject area. So an English teacher will call me and say, ‘I’d like to do a service-learning project, and we’re learning about women in history.’ So I say most projects start from a curriculum focus.

However, once teachers contact Blair, there is an opportunity for the motivation to shift. Blair even went so far as to identify this shift as part of her job description:

And my job is really helping teachers think that, ‘That’s great! Now, let’s also make this meet a community need at the same time, so you’re doing *with* the community and not doing *to* the community.’ That’s—that’s a big conversation to have with the teacher, to help them think differently about their project motivation.
The idea of balance that emerged in the discussion of service-learning definitions is also reflected in this passage. The balance between service and learning may be askew or entirely absent, depending on the definition of service learning used. Teachers, as the co-creators, communicators, and assessors of curriculum, may naturally approach service learning with more of a “learning” focus. Blair finds that she must help teachers readjust their perceptions of service learning, so that the experiences they help create are informed by the teacher’s learning outcomes for her students, but also informed by the needs of the community. The distinction between “with” and “to” is an important one. When service learning is initiated and experienced “with” the community, the motive for incorporating service learning is for students to become part of something larger than themselves.

Cora reflected a similar sentiment. When leading students in service experiences in Tanzania early in her career, she, too, realized the distinction between service projects done “with” or “to” the community:

And the first time, we just kind of did what they had done before, and I realized, ‘Oh, that’s not what the community wanted.’ So the next—the next semester, I would go ahead and try to speak with the community about what they really wanted us to do as our community project.

At this early point in Cora’s career, she did not realize at the time that the service experiences she facilitated were not “true service learning,” but instead “more of the—some of the community kind, built something for the community.” It was only after Cora developed her understanding of service learning through reading, networking, and additional experiences that she learned to distinguish between the two kinds of service. Still, regardless of whether the experiences take on a community service or a service-learning approach, Cora found that service
“to” the community is not well received. Communication with the intended recipients of the service learning must take place in the planning stages and through the entire experience. Otherwise, the goals that may be achieved by the service learning will almost certainly not be those of the community.

Cora also spoke of the idea of community betterment in another way: a connection of cultures. As someone with many years of international service-learning experience, Cora admitted, “I hardly ever travel as a tourist...I just find that it is more shallow, and I really question how much do you truly learn about a place when you’re just sort of, you know, going to see the sights.” Service learning, then, has become her preferred mode of travel and the one that she sees as most valuable for the students of her school, as well. These international experiences become a way to bring people with very different life experiences closer together, developing mutual understanding and respect between them. Indeed, Cora has found:

It’s like cross-cultural exchange...So I think in that way, i—it takes it down to a different level, and I think that is really healthy.... So there are the more tangible benefits, but I think it has a lot to do with the—the development of people and understanding different cultures that we serve a lot as well.

Used with this goal in mind, service learning becomes a way to bring our world communities closer together.

On the other hand, the term community may refer closer to home. Marianne and Lisa both found service learning to be motivated by the interests of the community that the students called home. In Marianne’s case, the very initiative for which she works originated from a larger community effort that sought to identify the qualities of city it hoped to be by 2015 and then work towards achieving those goals. For this city, service learning became a way to achieve the
objective of “children and adults who are involved in their community, who are invested in it—through civic engagement.” These 2015 goals were established seven years ago, and in that time, Marianne’s service-learning organization has “grown from 19 K-8 schools to now we have 74 schools in our initiative.” Each of these schools has developed service-learning experiences and programs, often spanning years in duration. Lisa has also found that the motive of community betterment may support service learning. In her work with schools on a pollution-focused service-learning experience, she learned that the city had an initiative to encourage community members to come out and experience its river and the riverfront. The service-learning projects so aligned with this focus, that the city “gave each school field trip money, to get out on the river and do some activities along with their [community] partners.” Had the schools not received these funds, many of those field trips likely would not have been possible. In both Marianne and Lisa’s experiences, the goals of service learning and the goals of the city in which that service learning was to take place were compatible and mutually supported through a concern for their shared community.

The word “community” can refer to a local population, a population perhaps thousands of miles away, a segment of people in either type of environment, or even our shared world community. A service-learning application motivated by one understanding of community may therefore look very different from an application motivated by another understanding of community. Two qualities are common across all forms of community, however: the consideration of needs other than the students’, and a spirit of collaboration. With both of these qualities in place, the student and community become equals working toward a common purpose.
A question of motive. The experiences shared by the service-learning professionals help to answer the research question of how service learning is approached. Held by teacher, student, or administrator, the motive may concern the flexibility of service learning, the fulfillment of state standards, the preparation of students for college, or the betterment of the community. These motives, and the definitions of service learning that inform these motives, shape not only students’ education, but also the type of citizen they are guided toward being. By looking at the type of service experiences shared by the participants, the conception of citizenship as understood by the faculty and administrators becomes evident. Predominantly, the programs reflected two of the four service-learning perspectives identified in the literature: the Technical Perspective and its associated Personally Responsible Citizen; and also the Cultural Perspective and its associated Participatory Citizen (Butin, 2003; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The Technical Perspective’s acceptance of the service-learning approach was echoed by many of the experiences shared by the six participants, as was its concern with maximizing the student benefits of the service-learning experience. Any pedagogical strategy will encounter at least some measure of resistance; service learning appears to be no exception. However, among many of those teachers and administrators who do support service learning, their motive for doing so is a solid belief in its principles and intended outcomes. For these individuals, the application of service learning may require continued evaluation or modifications, but the appropriateness of using service learning itself is unquestioned. Not only did all six participants personally exhibit this perspective in their service-learning definitions and experiences, so too did many of the service-learning facilitators they have encountered. For example, Blair’s acceptance of service learning inspired her to overcome any obstacles in being the only teacher of her school to incorporate it into the classroom. Similarly, Marianne discussed
how the teachers who collaborated with her organization have traditionally initiated the service learning, collaborations which likely would not have begun or continued over the years if the teachers had not accepted the value of service learning in the classroom. The service learning at Cora’s school, meanwhile, was accepted to such a degree that the school’s very reputation became intertwined with it.

Once these service-learning facilitators, whether teachers or administrators, accepted service learning, the outcomes they desired for its applications were invariably focused more on the students than on the intended recipients of the service. This reflects both the Technical Perspective and the Personally Responsible Citizen. Jack shared several service-learning examples from his own school, yet the outcomes of these experiences and the measures by which they were evaluated appeared to be limited to those effects on the students. An outcomes-based perspective is also observed in the connection between service learning and state standards. The application of service learning became a way to help students develop the outcomes already in place for students, and the evaluation and modification of the application were meant to increase its effectiveness and quality so as to better fulfill those outcomes.

Butin’s (2003) Cultural Perspective and the closely related Participatory Citizen (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) also emerged in the participants’ experiences. Here, the focus is on direct engagement, and service learning is understood to develop students’ understanding of their immediate community and the world community. While the service-learning goals are still connected to the students, the goals and the students themselves become the medium through which awareness and a sense of community are achieved. This particular blend of approaching service learning was seen in Cora’s emphasis on cross-cultural exchange through direct contact and shared purpose; in Blair’s efforts to distinguish between service learning done to community
members and service learning done with community members; and also in the community outcomes that Marianne’s organization was created to support. Based on the experiences shared by the participants, service learning was frequently applied to increase students’ engagement and connectedness in their own community and beyond.

A single service-learning application may also be motivated by both the Technical/Personally Responsible perspective and the Cultural/Participatory perspective. Cora and Jack’s schools are examples of this dual motivation. It is possible, then, for a single service-learning application to be initiated by a blend of these motives, held by a combination of teacher, administrator, and student. The question of motive extends beyond what brings about service-learning application in schools; it goes on to shape the service-learning process and result, as well as the future applications of service learning. Now that we have explored why teachers and administrators approach service learning, let us turn now to the issue that either facilitates or impedes these motives for service-learning application: the degree of support in the service-learning process.

Support

“...Ultimately, we were not created as a service-learning school...You know, we have goals that we have to follow, and...you know—that are board-mandated, that are, that are very important to the culture, to the foundation of the school. And service learning can get ‘em there—part of the way to perpetuate something is to make it a part of your culture.” —Jack

Imagine you are a service-learning consultant. You are charged with taking one of the service-learning definitions from Figure 2 and translating its ideas into meaningful experiences within two very different high schools. One high school is an independent, affluent high school, and the other is a public high school with students from families hovering around the poverty
line. What would be your guiding purpose for each school? Whose support would you need in order to achieve your purpose? To what degree would the environmental conditions of each school influence your decisions?

These questions and more are necessary considerations when attempting to implement abstract ideas in pre-existing environments to create service-learning experiences. Service-learning professionals are not allowed the opportunity to create the foundation on which the service-learning experience may be built. Rather, the person who attempts to incorporate service learning arrives not only after the school’s foundation has been poured, but also after it has hardened and weathered. If a single service-learning definition were to be applied in two separate high schools, the process of applying that definition—if not the experiences themselves—would likely differ depending on the conditions of each school environment.

One of the most important of these environmental conditions, as revealed by the data, is the degree of support in the service-learning process. Whose support is needed in order for the experience to be successful? And what does the presence or lack of that support mean for the service-learning process?

**Teachers.** “Because the basis of service learning is that you engage kids in something they want to do, and therefore it’s a great process for them. And I think you can say the same thing about adults: If they don’t want to do it...I just don’t think it will be as high quality”—Lisa

A crucial question in the translation of service-learning ideals into actual experiences is captured in Lisa’s comment: Does the teacher want to do it? For as important as it is for students to be engaged in the classroom, their teachers must be equally engaged. What do teachers who support service learning look like? The service-learning professionals revealed several issues
related to teacher support, including enthusiasm, organization, time, and the available support network.

**When teachers support service learning.** All of the service-learning professionals included in this study were able to speak of meaningful service-learning experiences that took place in their school or in collaboration with their service-learning organization. One key to the success of each of these experiences was the teacher who facilitated them. Indeed, Lisa found her most successful service-learning consultations resulted from a certain juxtaposition of people:

These are teachers that I, again, had very little to no contact with outside of providing a training. So I think, to me, it really speaks to the model of engaging, kind of, the right group of invested people on the ground, and coming together for a particular purpose.

Lisa uses decisive term here to describe the type of person needed to carry out service learning: “invested.” Teachers who choose to incorporate service learning must invest in its principles, process, and overall application; this extends far deeper than a casual familiarity with service learning. Moreover, Lisa refers to the bringing together of the “right group” of invested people. This particular statement is revealing, for it indicates that the most successful service-learning experiences in Lisa’s consultations have involved more than one “invested” person; the teacher must be invested, but so, too, must the teacher’s students and the community partners with whom the teacher and students collaborate. When the teacher approaches service learning with this degree of commitment, and is then able to inspire or facilitate similar commitment in these other groups, the service experience that results can strengthen the teacher’s resolve to continue using service learning.

Where does this initial teacher support for service learning come from? Karl proposed one theory in the form of percentages:
Basically, we see 20% of the teachers...are slam-dunks. They’re service-based themselves, they’ve been involved in service personally. They get it, so to speak. And if they haven’t heard about it or haven’t already been using it, all you got to do—they get a whiff of it, and they’re in—‘Let me in, Coach.’

This notion of some innate quality in the teacher connects to Lisa’s view of bringing together not just people to do service learning, but the “right group” of invested people.

Similarly, Marianne found initial teacher support of service learning to be a matter of resourcefulness. “I think it takes a lot of initiative, too, for people to read up—there’s so much out there! There’s so much that we can learn, and that we can get easily. There’s really no reason anybody couldn’t utilize service-learning principles.” Service learning does not just happen. The teacher needs to make the decision to first investigate service learning and its principles, and then make the decision to apply those service-learning principles in the classroom. When this happens, the service-learning experience gains a crucial source of support—the teacher. Yet what of the teacher who is less “invested” in service learning—the teacher who, when they “get a whiff of it,” balks?

*When teachers need convincing.* “The hardest ones to promote [service learning] to are the teachers.” –Karl

Given the degree of contact teachers have with their students, one may assume that teachers would be the least likely group to resist service learning. However, the theme of encouraging teachers to support service learning emerged from all six participant interviews. Consider Karl’s percentage estimations; he has found that besides the 20% of teachers who do support service learning, another 20% “you’re never going to get. They don’t care enough, or whatever is going on in their life...it’s just not going to happen.” The remaining 60% of teachers
may be open to service learning, but certain obstacles stand in the way of their support. Karl
noted the ambivalence of these teachers:

...teachers who *want* to do a very good job, but...they’ve got their hands tied in different
ways...they’re overworked...they haven’t heard about it...etcetera, etcetera. And...but
when you approach them [about service learning], *because* the administration has a...all
the testing things they have to do that *isn’t* teaching.... That’s going to beat them down,
and they’re getting a little cynical. And they’re saying, “Yeah, what we need to do is take
on something new. We need a new project—sure, that’s what they need.”

A number of potential obstacles to service learning are referenced in this passage, including the
standards and beliefs of the teacher’s particular administration, testing requirements, time, and
being overwhelmed. The presence and intensity of these issues are dependent on the particular
environmental conditions in which the teachers are working—as well as the teachers themselves.

It appears, though, that teachers are more like to experience these issues than not.

For instance, both Marianne and Jack noted the particular issue of time when convincing
teachers to incorporate service learning. Marianne even identified time as the “biggest thing, the
challenge or complaint we hear from teachers,” for the very reason that “teachers are forever
being given more things to do, but no one ever takes anything off their plate.” Jack echoed this
very thought, noting that many teachers of his school think of service learning as “one more
thing to do” that they “can’t squeeze this in.” The teachers that both Marianne and Jack speak of
share a difficulty noted by Karl: “And it’s hard for [teachers] to see it’s not going to be more
work.” How, then, can teachers be convinced to incorporate service learning, in the face of this
most crushing obstacle of all?
One factor with the power to sway doubtful teachers toward service-learning application is opportunity to observe the applications of others. Marianne found this to be the case in her experiences:

I think they kind of have to see success. But if they can see it in action, then I think that’s the best way for them to get it. Because I’ve seen people have negative attitudes, have it turn around when they saw it in action.

The power of observation, wherein the doubtful teacher is able to see the process from start to finish, makes service learning seem more possible—and its intended outcomes more tangible. Karl came to this same conclusion, musing that “the best way to reach the 60% is through other teachers that...that have walked those paths, and that have used service learning now, and see the benefits.” Provided a teacher new to service learning does have the opportunity to observe its application in this way, will that teacher then become a solid source of support for service learning? The participants revealed that opportunity to observe others apply service learning might not always be enough to convince the hesitant teacher.

Instead, these teachers will only truly overcome their hesitance if their first service-learning application is met with relative success and support. Blair explained the importance of this first attempt:

If it goes right the first time, a teacher is onboard—because they see the difference it makes in the students. It’s just the challenge is just that—the first time is difficult, or if the administration didn’t support, or if the faculty kickback was negative—it’s really hard to get the teacher to stay engaged.

Just as service learning requires the support of teachers, so too do teachers require the support of their faculty and colleagues. A teacher’s first experience with service learning can become the
deciding factor in whether there is ever to be a second experience. At the same time, a teacher’s first application of any approach or technique will be the most uncertain and the most susceptible to unexpected obstacles. Service learning is no exception.

Regardless of whether service learning is being applied for the first time or for the tenth, the question of logistics appears to remain a constant challenge in service-learning applications: The teacher merely becomes more skilled in anticipating and responding to any logistical challenges. However, for the teacher who gives service learning a try for the first time, the issue of logistics may be crippling. Blair has encountered this problem in her consultations with teachers:

So the logistics of having kids leave the classroom, logistics of transportation.... It’s the very first hurdle that, working with teachers, we have to get through. I think particularly in the high school realm, the logistical piece is often forgotten, and first-year teachers, it’s kind of their “Oh, shit!” moment! [laughs] They’re going, “I didn’t realize this!” ‘Cause you go in with the best of intentions, and then I think there are more walls that are up than teachers are expecting.

The issue of logistics in any service-learning application illustrates the ability of specific environmental conditions to influence and mold the experiences that result. If the school administrators do not give consent, then the students may not be able to visit a service site during the school day. If consent is given to visit service sites, yet the students are not legally able to drive themselves, or the school rules forbid their doing so, then arrangements will have to be made for school buses. If the school budget does not allow for such arrangements, then alterations may have to be made to the service-learning experience. Logistics can cripple a teacher’s first service-learning attempt if such questions are not anticipated ahead of time.
Related to this, the participants have found that teachers may be convinced of service learning’s value provided they have a network of support themselves—or even one other person. This is important for the teacher’s first application attempt, but also for the teacher’s continued applications. Karl considered this kind of network as critical:

If you are one of 37, and nobody else [in your school] is doing anything...it’s tough.

You—you don’t have anybody to float ideas and think out loud with, and what have you...and—and give support. Now, can you do it? Yes. Do they do it? All the time. But—but that would be a concern.

Indeed, Blair found when she meets teachers outside of her own Midwest city, they share in this concern, saying, “I wish there was a resource, someone to just bounce ideas off of, in my own home community.” Teaching can be either a social profession or an isolating one. For teachers new to service learning’s principles and challenges, it would appear they especially benefit from a solid source of advice and guidance.

The issue of support in service learning is multi-faceted. One teacher alone cannot incorporate service learning. Teachers must support their own service-learning applications, yet their support may only be garnered through the support of others. In addition to their own colleagues, this support must come from their own administrators, as well as relevant groups outside of the school.

**Administrators.** “One of the biggest challenges is...getting...teachers, principals, district superintendents...the state department of education, and the superintendent, and the legislators to understand its value. Because it’s hard to quantify. It sounds potentially easy, and I think we’re making progress in that area, but it is...getting the kind of studies that need—to be able to put it into numbers.” —Karl
Whatever motive may bring administrators to service learning, the degree of support they then lend to its application directly shapes the experiences of the teachers and students of their school. What does this support look like? As revealed by the service-learning participants revealed, administrators—like teachers—also approach service learning in the midst of pre-existing environmental conditions. The applications that result from a particular blending of administrative support and existing school conditions may therefore be very different indeed.

Some administrators, like Jack, may themselves be the driving force behind the use of service learning at their school. Yet he hints at the difficulty he has experienced in this role: “It’s great to be gung-ho, and try to start programs, and it’s easy to get really enthusiastic at the beginning...but the kind of perpetuation, and making something a consistent...a consistent benefit is always challenging.” Administrators who support service learning may choose to express their support in different ways depending on their own set of challenges, and those expressions of support can in turn have a lasting impact on the school, its students, and the way in which service learning is understood.

The service-learning professionals found that administrative support most often took the form of regulating the service learning. This was primarily achieved in one of two ways: by either instituting a requirement of service-learning use, or by creating a culture wherein service-learning use was strongly encouraged. Both Jack and Cora spoke to these two methods. For Jack, students from kindergarten to twelfth grade are required to meet a minimum number of service-learning hours. Initially, these hours were allowed to be purely community service, rather than service learning, hours; there has since been a shift toward strengthening the sort of experiences that may be considered service learning. Jack now feels “every student is involved in service learning on our campus...to some degree—some more than others, depending on who their
teachers are, and depending on how vocal the kids are.” The difficulty in ensuring all students are able to engage in service learning rests with teachers’ openness to service learning. As Jack explained,

We have teachers that really have not, you know, have not bought-in...like we would like them to. And that’s—that’s part of the natural, kind of...matriculation of teachers, is that they...will, you know—if you have a teacher that’s trying to use the same lesson plans that they’ve been using for the past thirty years, then you have a problem. And if they, you know—if somebody is unwilling to...to look at the possibility or be open-minded to...using service learning, or let go of the reins a little bit, then you may well have a problem.

Jack, a school administrator himself, supports service learning. He has found, though, that not all of the teachers of his school share in this support. Rather than institute a requirement on his teachers to use service learning, the school has instead responded by instituting the aforementioned requirement on students to increasingly develop their service-learning experience over the course of their school career. The principles of service learning are encouraged elsewhere as much as possible.

Cora and her school also have worked to create a culture of service learning as an expression of their acknowledgement of its value. Students from both their middle school and high school are required to engage in service learning. However, Cora’s school has structured their service learning slightly differently than Jack’s school. First, at their middle school, four school days are dedicated every year for every grade to engaging in service learning related to a particular topic. On those days, “there is no classroom teaching;” but for example, “the whole fifth grade—with teachers—they go out and do their service project...And then in sixth grade, it
is a different topic.” These service-learning days, which are required of teachers, may occur in addition to individual teachers’ own service-learning applications throughout a school year. Cora’s school is also able to express their support of service learning in still another way: the funding and staffing of their global service-learning office. Students are not required to participate in a global trip, yet their extreme interest in doing so may speak to the overall learning environment that the school has created. Together, these different forms of requirement and encouragement are all expressions of the school’s mission to promote service with its students.

Offering another perspective to administrators’ support of service learning, Marianne and Blair both discussed their experiences of working with teachers who try to accommodate whatever expressions of support for service learning that their administrators give. Both agreed, however, that requirements in service-learning applications might complicate the value of students’ experiences. For Blair,

What we’re missing with requiring service hours is that—that conversation of why we do this. Kids just go do it because it’s a requirement. Or they fake it because [chuckles] it’s a requirement. And they get away with it. So the—to create a culture of service, that’s not happening. We’re creating another thing for kids to check off a list...as opposed to something where they can really develop their passions and explore their strengths through a real service-learning experience.

The risk addressed here is a lack of focus and direction, which may create foster in students an unintended attitude toward service learning: service learning as an item on a checklist, as opposed to a broader mindset or culture.
Marianne echoed this concern of Blair’s for requiring service learning, though for another reason. From her experiences, the larger risk such mandates is their effect on the teachers’ attitude:

I hesitate for anything to be required, because I’ve said it to principals and to teachers, I would back any teacher that said, “I don’t like it. I don’t want to do it. I don’t believe in this.”.... Anyone walking in with a negative attitude or expectations of failure—most likely going to fail! [laughs] I would rather they not try it.

This perspective, of one methodology or approach not necessarily being suited for every teacher, appears to run counter to the notion of requiring service learning.

The question of how administrators should support service learning is complicated by a number of factors outside of the administrators’ immediate control. The most common methods, as revealed by the participants, involve either requiring service-learning experiences of teachers and/or students, or encouraging a culture of service learning as much as possible. Yet as Blair and Marianne indicated, service-learning principles are best encouraged when such requirements are absent.

**The Sum of Support.** “One of the biggest challenges is...getting teachers, principals, district superintendents...the state department of education...and the legislators to understand its value.... Each one of those groups pretty much is a different market. And each one has a different need that they are trying to fulfill.” – Karl

Support for service learning is informed by how service learning itself is understood and the purpose it is meant to serve. As the participants shared, however, the contextual conditions of an application affect the development of both of these elements. For this reason, the issue of
support may operate as a key strategy by which the service learning becomes possible, or it may also operate as an intervening condition to the translation of service-learning ideals into realities.

The participants’ experiences and the literature help to explain at least two environments in which support may function as an intervening condition to service learning. First, the type of school in question was shown to impact service-learning application. The literature supports this: almost 80% of private schools have been found to incorporate service learning, compared with approximately 50% of public schools that use service learning (Billig et al., 2005). This difference may be related to the different sources of financial support that each school type receives; public school funding is tied to federally given according to pupil count, and private school funding is derived from tuition. Public schools located in urban communities, for example, may be more likely to experience decreasing populations. With fewer people living in their communities, these public schools will experience a similar decline in their student population and in the funding they receive. Urban public schools have also been found to experience significant learning gaps along both geographic and racial divides (Wang, 1995; Vannerman, Hamilton, Baldwin Anderson, & Rahman, 2009). These gaps, combined with student-based funding, time constraints, accountability, and standardized tests, may mean that public schools may be less able to use service learning than private schools. The desire to use service learning may be in place, as Blair shared in her experiences, but the intervening conditions of the school environment may ultimately determine whether this desire may be fulfilled.

Support of service learning was also found to act as an intervening condition in an environment with a hidden curriculum. Reflecting the research of Hanna (1937) and Boyle (2004), participants indicated that when support for service learning was expressed as some sort
of school mandate—through a required course or a required number of service hours—both the attitude toward the service learning and also the actual service experiences did not always reflect the identified principles and outcomes of service learning. This was the case in Blair’s experiences with students, for whom service learning became simply another requirement to meet; this was also the case in Marianne’s experiences with teachers, for whom service learning became an imposition that did not necessarily align with their own teaching practices. When teachers or students are required to give their support to service learning, even though they may not understand or agree with its principles or its intended outcomes, then the possibility for their service-learning experiences to reflect other concerns and outcomes becomes greater.

As a result of—or in spite of—the degree of support garnered in a given school environment, service-learning professionals still manage to implement it in different school types and conditions. Each application also helps to tell the story of how varying sources and degrees of support shape the overall implementation process. The participants revealed that both teachers and administrators often respond to service learning in different and possibly conflicting ways. When one or the other of these groups does not support service learning, the students’ attitudes, understanding, and experiences of service learning are affected. One source of support is enough to promote service-learning experiences. However, when support comes from several sources, including the teachers and the administrators, then those service-learning experiences appear more likely to become incorporated into the culture of the school and the students’ lives.

**The Need for Reconciliation**

The themes that emerged from the participants’ experiences illustrate the process by which service learning is translated from ideals into concrete experiences. Figure 3 below offers a visual representation of this process.
Figure 3. The Reconciliation of Service-Learning Ideals and Experiences

Whose motives inform service learning definitions? The community’s? The students’? The school’s? If the needs for each group are not identical, then whose take precedence?


What knowledge, prior experience, and belief system of service learning do teacher, students, and administrators bring to the table?

Service Learning = Pedagogy

Service Learning = Service + Learning

How do the combinations of support that arise in the implementation process affect the experiences that result?

Administrators and Outside Agencies

Teachers and Administrators

Teachers Only

Administrators Only
Acting as a causal condition of this process, the service-learning definitions held by teachers, administrators, and other professionals helped prompt or prohibit service-learning applications in schools. As Figure 3 shows, the theme of service-learning motives worked in conjunction with those definitions to cause or obstruct the incorporation of service learning. As the participants revealed, the most common of motives for using service learning were those that reflected either a Technical/Personally Responsible Perspective of service learning, or a Cultural/Participatory Perspective. Under the former perspective lie the specific motives of service learning’s flexibility, the fulfillment of state standards, and distinction of either student or school from others; under the latter perspective lie the specific motives of community betterment, and the development of students’ awareness and understanding of the world. The theme of support, meanwhile, was found to act as either an intervening condition to the translation process or as a strategy used to overcome obstacles and more closely translate service-learning principles. Together, these three themes describe the key points of the translation process: the perceptions (definitions) of service learning, how those perceptions inform how service learning is approached (motives), and finally the resulting implementation of service learning (support). However, as the participants’ experiences also indicated, the process by which service-learning principles are applied in the classroom may vary greatly, depending on the particular blend of definition, motive, and support used to frame the application. For this reason, at the center of the themes, perspectives, and conditions represented in Figure 3 is the need for reconciliation. Once we understand how these different themes interrelate and shape the application process of service-learning facilitators, we can take steps to smooth this process for the future.
Chapter 5: Reconciling Service-Learning Ideals and Realities

As varied as the experiences and perspectives of the service-learning professionals are, from them emerge several commonalities. First, the nuances of how they each understood the term service learning illustrate the complexity of its principles. All six participants acknowledged both a “service” element and a “learning” element to the term, but the “and” connecting them appeared to exist as a sliding fulcrum which then determined the balance of the two elements. With the participants’ definition of service learning in consideration, the data illustrated how the participants have sought to translate their definitions along the lines of motive and support. The participants’ experiences in this process reveal that compromises are indeed made, and so the ideals contained in service-learning definitions are not entirely translated into the realities of students’ service-learning experiences. The compromises were found to exist largely in consideration of the causal and intervening conditions in which the service learning was applied, and with the degree and form of support that could be garnered in that environment.

The sources of support, and the ways in which that support was expressed, were found to either inhibit or facilitate the translation between service-learning ideals and service-learning realities. When support was withheld or even limited by the conditions of the environment, the service-learning ideals and their realities were more disconnected. Figure 4 below summarizes the sources of service-learning support as revealed by the participants, the considerations that inform each individual source of support, and the possible impact that the combination of any two sources will have on the service-learning experience. The common areas of the Venn diagram represent those environments in which these challenges do not interfere with each group’s support.
Figure 4. The Sources and Challenges of Service Learning
The most potentially inhibiting challenges of service learning are those that were found to occur within more than one source of support. As Figure 4 indicates, the issues of funding, measurable benefits, and familiarity were the most challenging for the service-learning professionals and the service-learning experiences they helped to create.

**Funding**

“The schools that I work with are public schools that would love to do service learning. The cost factor for transportation is prohibitive. So it becomes very difficult...So they’d love to do it; they just can’t afford it. You have to forfeit, you have to...keep the kids within the school, if they’re doing a service-learning class—which some schools find a way to do it.”—Blair

The financial considerations necessary to facilitate service learning are not well defined. A logistical element not obviously a part of either “service” or “learning,” the issue of funding nevertheless raises questions: How much money is required to facilitate the translation of service-learning ideals into service-learning experiences? Can this translation take place without the provision of funding? Blair observed above that funding is frequently absent, prompting some teachers to “forfeit” either the type of service-learning experience they were inspired to facilitate, or service learning altogether. Figure 3 illustrates that this occurs when both the school administrators and the outside sources of support are unable or unwilling to provide funding. For example, when school administrators believe in the value of service learning, yet cannot afford to pay for the buses that would take students to service sites, the service-learning experiences must involve compromise.

On the other hand, when outside agencies such Marianne or Blair’s are able to use their limited funds to help pay for the cost of transportation, funding becomes an issue that they can overcome together through the school administrator and agency’s mutual support. The funding
may also be awarded to the school by the city as Lisa found in her experiences, by community partnerships or businesses as Marianne and Karl discussed, or in the form of grants as Jack and his school discovered.

Whether provided or withheld, funding for service learning defines both the service-learning experiences themselves and also the place occupied by service learning within a given school. Stater and Fotheringham (2009) and Fertman (1994), agreed: Each found that the more funding and other resources were allocated to service learning, the more the service learning helped to define the curriculum and the “good education” the school staff sought to provide.

What, then, of those public schools that Blair spoke of? These schools’ administrators and teachers may support service learning, but their inability to finance their service-learning intentions becomes the deciding factor in their fruition.

This difficulty in K-12 service-learning application echoes the research of Abes, Jackson, and Jones (2002) with college faculty. They found that funding was among the most often identified deterrents, along with time and logistics, to motivating college faculty to implement service learning. Teachers and administrators who are incorporating service learning for the first time may feel particularly daunted by such a deterrent, for they will not have had the personal experiences of confronting and overcoming this obstacle.

The service-learning professionals shared how the funding component of service learning may be recognized as a deciding factor for the existence of some service-learning experiences and as the outline that gives shape to many other service-learning experiences. Yet there is still one other aspect to the funding issue that bears discussion here: its relationship with measurable benefits.
Celio and Durlak (2009), for example, pointed out the consideration that funding agents give to the measurement of the service-learning experience in their decision to award grants. The more precise this evaluation of aims, outcomes, and benefits is, then the more likely a project is to be awarded the funds identified as necessary. Therefore, funding is also connected to the ability of the service-learning facilitator provide concrete data or evidence of the value of the service-learning application. If the evidence presented is not enough to convince the funding agents, then the service-learning program will not be awarded funding. In many ways, then, the funding issue comes down to the relationship between convincing and measuring: Convincing agencies to fund service learning because of the evidence presented; and convincing administrators and teachers to do service learning because it is of value to whatever motivation they may have. At the same time, the ability to know the outcomes of the service learning—to measure or observe its effects—is what convinces many of those groups to provide resources like funding.

The relationship between convincing and measuring extends beyond funding agents into the world of service-learning research. Karl, an employee in his state’s service-learning department, observed:

There have been a number of attempts made, but it needs to be...something that...people can believe in. A large enough study, and—you know, be a legitimate.... There’s too much of it right now: “Well, I think this is a good idea.” Well, why do you think? “Well, the kids do good, they’re engaged and stuff, and you know...” And it’s—that’s hard to sell to the politicians. So there’s no money to support it, and then we say very quickly, “It doesn’t take money to do service learning; it takes money to teach service learning.”
The principles of service learning may be traced to the ideas of John Dewey and William James over one hundred years ago, with these principles seeing a resurgence in popularity in the last twenty years. Karl’s observation illustrates the difficulties that service-learning applications continue to face even today. Those who have never experienced service learning—as a facilitator, student, administrator, or observer—may still have the power to award or deny funding for service learning. Therefore, if the evidence presented to convince these individuals of service learning’s value is perceived as being too imprecise, then the hurdle of funding becomes more challenging and perhaps more of a deterrent.

**Measurable benefits**

“One of the things that’s important for us, is that we continue to have school board support..... [So] a study—or several studies—that say those kids who are involved in service learning get into college, are successful in college, make more money...so that if it ever comes to [it]...we can whip those out and say, ‘Hey, wait a minute.... This is a big part of why we’re as successful as we are, and this is one of the last things that we should be talking about cutting.’” —Jack

The question of measuring the benefits of service learning has long been a concern for service-learning facilitators and service-learning researchers, and the service-learning professionals that were a part of this study are certainly no exception. These groups are very cognizant of the need to evaluate service-learning experiences and programs in order to not only ensure the experiences are accurate reflections of service-learning ideals, but also to prove to their institutions that service learning is not “curricular fluff” (Kiely, 2005). The outcomes of service learning are certainly a valid concern, but such a concern “runs the risk of being misguided as it ends up focusing precision at a level that is impossible in the context of the real world” (Ziegert & McGoldrick, 2004, p. 32).
Service learning is a variably understood, flexibly applied approach. As became clear from the participants, service learning is equally adaptable to an English classroom as it is a science classroom, with kindergarteners as with high school seniors. What is more, a single service-learning application may involve any combination of students, teacher facilitators, and partnerships with local or international schools, community organizations, and business partners. Quantitative methods do not lend themselves easily to so social and variable a process. The level of precision that may be possible in other areas of education, therefore, becomes especially challenging to achieve with service learning.

Still, concrete evidence of service learning’s outcomes will likely continue to determine whether a group or individual is convinced of the service learning’s value. If a teacher remains unconvinced, then he may not attempt service learning unless he is required to by his administration. If a school administrator or school board remains unconvinced, then service learning will not be integrated into their students’ education. If politicians, such as those that Karl spoke of, remain unconvinced, then the schools and communities they represent may receive neither encouragement nor funding. The risks are high. The service-learning professionals of this study may attest to this, for each of these instances emerge from their own experiences.

As much as each of the participants themselves sought to understand and measure the outcomes of service learning, they seemed to do so in the spirit of Ziegert and McGoldrick (2004). Multiple measures were used, including third-party surveys, student feedback and reflections, discussions with teachers and community partners, observations throughout the experiences, and students’ academic data. The data gleaned from these sources included knowledge of the outcomes, but also knowledge of the overall service-learning process. This
knowledge may point to the strengths or weaknesses of an experience or program, which in turn allows its facilitator to make modifications to more closely align the experience with the ideals and needs that informed it.

Kiely (2005) noted the importance of a broader understanding of service learning in his research on students’ transformational learning experiences. He found that the effects of blending learning with service become apparent in ways other than reflection, namely five other learning processes: contextual border crossing, dissonance, personalizing, processing, and connecting (Kiely, 2005). The benefit to these five processes is that they describe the service-learning application with detail and in relation to its social and contextual influences—both of which may not always be represented when reflection or outcomes alone become the measure of service learning.

Service-learning experiences and programs are about more than precise outcomes, for to identify an outcome is to identify an ending. Service learning does not always have endings. When integrated into a curriculum, the service learning becomes an ongoing part of the students’ lives; and when the service-learning experience is continually modified and improved, it becomes an ongoing part of the academic and community environments. Service learning is a process, a process that exists between the students’ world and the so-called “real world.” Outcomes are important, but they do not encompass all that may be learned from service learning. Instead, our focus must widen to include the entire process, for only then is our understanding of service learning complete, accurate, and able to convince others.

**Familiarity**

“There are a lot of universities using service learning now...I’m experiencing more teachers who say, ‘Oh, yeah! I did this as part of my university studies, you know, in my human resource class,”
or in my English class, or whatever.’ So I think the direction for them is the more teachers experience it as students, and then...translate, they become professionals, they’re more comfortable integrating that into their own practice.”—Marianne

The third challenge to service learning is familiarity. More fundamental than either funding or the measuring of benefits, the issue of familiarity may facilitate or hinder service learning from any of the groups involved in the experience or program. Teachers, school administrators, and outside groups such as politicians, community partners, and parents will each have a different knowledge and skill set of service learning. As the participants of this study learned, differences in familiarity is what underscores the need to convince others, the pressure to measure the service-learning experiences as wholly and accurately as possible, and the ease with which ideals and principles become translated into concrete experiences.

Complicating the issue further is the fact that there appears to be no standard mode of introduction to service learning. The participants of this study themselves encountered service learning in varied, often accidental, ways: from attending a national conference (Jack), to being recruited for a state position and deciding on one in the state’s service-learning office (Karl), to their own conscious use of it as teachers (Cora and Blair), to their own experiences as teachers wherein they used service-learning principles with the help of a third party (Lisa) or as an unconscious extension of their own teaching philosophies (Marianne). No common introduction exists within even these six participants, and from their experiences we learned that no such common introduction exists for their colleagues or the service-learning facilitators they encounter in their work.

This conclusion is echoed in the research as well. Birdsall (2005) and Shaffett (2002) both identified training in service learning as a prerequisite for its application. However,
providing the opportunity to meet this prerequisite has proven difficult in the field: The context in which the service learning is applied creates other demands on the time, professional development, and budget of its staff—demands more pressing than perhaps the still unfamiliar principles of service learning may seem to them.

The data indicated a second difficulty with service-learning familiarity: the lack of it. Consider Marianne’s experiences with principals who required service-learning use by all their teachers. If a teacher never experienced service learning as a student, then she may be unsure of how to approach incorporating its principles and process into her own classroom. Service learning is indeed adaptable to a wide range of conditions, but researchers have found that certain elements of service learning should be provided for in all conditions. Lakin and Mahoney (2006) and Billig et al. (2005) observed that when service-learning applications lack a definite structure, it becomes difficult to regard it as service learning and to achieve whatever outcomes it was intended to fulfill. In such situations, the lack of a solid understanding of service-learning principles and process results in a diluted experience with little if any benefit to those involved.

Likewise, a teacher new to service learning will be unprepared for the contextual and logistical challenges that will likely arise and therefore perhaps less successful in overcoming those challenges. We learned from the participants, though, how crucial the first service-learning experience could be for its future implementation. A teacher will be less inclined to attempt another service-learning project if the first was not successful. What is more, a teacher who is unenthusiastic or uncomfortable in using service learning communicates those feelings to her students, affecting their interest and attitude toward the experience. Jones et al. (2008) discovered this in their research of undergraduate students in Maryland, where students are required to complete 75 hours of service learning in order to graduate high school. The teachers
of their study set the tone for the students’ attitude toward service learning: Students regularly received hours without knowing why, signed and documented by teachers who either did not understand what service learning was or who were not willing to incorporate it into the curriculum. The students quickly learned within this environment that service learning was a requirement to endure; only in their college years did they learn what service learning really was and its potential benefit (Jones et al., 2008). Without prior knowledge or experience, a teacher’s incorporation of service learning may ultimately cause more harm than good.

Familiarity is not a finished product that a teacher brings to the first service-learning application. Like any other aspect of a teacher’s profession, knowledge of what works and what doesn’t—and the skills to make modifications as needed—develops with practice and time. Familiarity with service learning’s principles and process will grow the more a teacher uses it. This is apparent throughout the literature: when Tilly-Lubbs (2009) discovered that her service-learning program was responsible for developing in students an othering mentality; when Sipe (2001) realized that her early service-learning applications could not be termed true service learning because they were not informed by the community’s needs; and when Brown (2005) learned that the teachers with whom his college students were meant to collaborate instead viewed them as servants at their disposal. Both Marianne and Cora also discussed their own developing understanding of service learning, identifying in their early applications elements of experiential learning or community service instead. In each of these cases, the service-learning facilitator and those involved in the service experience entered with one level of comprehension and were able to deepen it to better understand what “true” service learning is. Their new comprehension informed their subsequent applications of service learning, making modifications to their process as appropriate. However, if the facilitator does not have enough understanding of
service learning to prepare and guide them through their first attempt, there will not likely be a second.

Service learning’s flexibility may be beneficial in the diversity of its application, yet it cannot extend into the realm of how the various groups involved in service learning come to develop an understanding of it. Any efforts made toward understanding and promoting the translation of service-learning principles—including researching, measuring, and funding—will be wasted if equal or greater efforts are not also made toward understanding and promoting a developing familiarity of those principles.

**Implications**

As this research has helped confirm, the definition of service learning used and the motives in place that prompt its use—including engagement of students, fulfillment of standards, the marketing of either students or school, and community betterment—help structure the service-learning experiences that follow. Definition and motive are also themselves affected, and possibly compromised, by the conditions encountered in the translation process. Issues of flexibility, diverse motives, and varying degrees of support and familiarity complicate the alignment of service-learning experiences with the ideals that inspired them. This is not to say that the service-learning experiences described by the participants are any less valuable; each is an example of confronting and—where possible, overcoming—obstacles outside of the service-learning professional’s immediate control. Rather, the sheer variability of all these issues means that we have to be careful about how service learning is translated, understood, and measured.

No service-learning experience should ever have the potential to widen the divide between students and their collaborators. A solid understanding of service learning and of the process involved in applying its principles will go far preventing this. When service learning is
applied thoughtfully, with the support of all the groups involved and with a conscious awareness of the motives and needs that the experience or program is meant to serve, the alignment between service-learning ideals and service-learning realities is attainable.

**Limitations**

Despite my efforts to the contrary, this study is not without its limitations. The perspective of service-learning professionals is valuable and often overlooked in the research; for this reason, a larger sample would have added more depth to their experiences in applying service learning in the field.

The findings of this study may also be limited by my sole reliance on self-reported data. As appropriate as interviews were in consideration of my research question, they nevertheless forced me to accept at face value the words and experiences of the participants. Participants made choices in what they shared (i.e. examples of service learning) and how they shared it (i.e. word choices, tone of voice). At the same time, each of those choices could have been influenced by the individuals’ memory, their own position as a service-learning supporter, the rapport of the interview, and even the time of day the interview took place. The interviews allowed participants to share their own perspective of their experiences; however, by relying on their interviews alone, I had no means to verify the data.

**Next Steps**

The contextual elements of funding, measurement of benefits, and familiarity may inform, define, and challenge service-learning applications, but they are not insurmountable. If service learning is to survive into the future, these elements and their relationships with motives and support for service learning must be more than acknowledged; they must be creatively addressed.
A call for a different graduation requirement. Consider that most fundamental of service-learning challenges: familiarity. Service learning is not used by a handful of schools; approximately 80% of private schools and 50% of public schools are estimated to incorporate service learning into their curriculum (Billig et al., 2005). The participants, too, described how school administrators may mandate service learning in the form of a graduation requirement. It follows that service learning should exist as a mandated element of teacher education programs, becoming another pedagogical practice and philosophy that teacher candidates learn in preparation for their own classrooms. Service-learning professionals in the field agree: both Marianne and Karl identified teacher education programs as the logical environment in which all future teachers could encounter and practice service learning. This is not currently the case, however, depending on the state’s teaching requirements and the philosophy of the university.

Mandated implementation in teacher programs would ensure that all teachers enter their particular K-12 classroom with a solid footing in service-learning principles; whether the teachers applied those principles later in their professional life would remain their choice. Moreover, as Garcia, Arias, Harris-Murri, and Serna (2010) observed, a mandate such as this would allow even those teachers who may never implement service learning to become more informed of social issues and more culturally responsive.

An obvious difficulty in implementing a national requirement is the need to convince particular groups that such a requirement is, in fact, necessary. This study’s findings have indicated that the ability to convince others of service learning’s place in education often depends on the ability to measure its benefits. Clearly, additional research is needed if this requirement is ever to be realized.
A call for further research. Just as service-learning programs are developed with consideration of recent research, so too must future service-learning research be developed with an awareness of service-learning application today. The next segment of service-learning research must therefore explore the questions that arise in the field.

One question raised by Jack and Karl in particular addresses the long-term effects of service learning. Longitudinal studies of students and their service-learning experiences during their K-12 experiences would do much to illuminate the reality of several of service-learning’s central tenets: Service learning facilitates students’ academic mastery, develops their social awareness, and engages them in their communities. Each of these tenets are accepted as outcomes of service learning, yet each requires data that can only be obtained in an extended period of time. Longitudinal studies may also allow for comparisons of service learning between different contextual factors, such as the number of years students are engaged in service learning, the level of integration into the curriculum, and the relationships between K-12 service learning and students’ future life choices. From another perspective, longitudinal studies may reveal enough data to determine the long-term relationship between the students’ service-learning experiences and the communities with whom they collaborate.

Future research must also include additional studies on a national scale and which use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The K-12 experience in general is not identical from state to state; it follow, then, that the way in which service learning is understood and translated may not be, either. National studies, representing students and community partners of all ages and from all socioeconomic environments and cultural backgrounds, can help develop a fuller understanding of service-learning application. A blend of research methods, meanwhile, will simultaneously speak to the human experience of service learning—as I sought to do in my
use of participant interviews—as well as the broader perspective of service-learning application in schools. There is still much of service learning that is unknown, but with these methods, researchers can take the next step to understanding the service-learning experiences of today and of tomorrow.

Final Words

Service learning is neither new nor rare in education. As service-learning principles become increasingly translated into concrete experiences, we must understand the relationships between how those principles are used, the motives they are meant to fulfill, and the inhibitive or facilitative influence of contextual elements during the translation process. Service-learning professionals may promote the alignment between principles and experiences through a shared familiarity of service learning in the face of convincing others, through a supportive network and environment in the face of doubt and resistance, and through enthusiasm and innovation in the face of challenges. In this way, the principles of service learning may remain intact and a guiding focus of service-learning applications well into the future.
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Appendix A: Letter Approving Use of Human Subjects

EASTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Master’s Thesis PROPOSAL

Approval Form

Student Name: Kaitina Fredericks
Program of Study: Education Psychology

Date of Meeting: ID#: E-0979675

TENTATIVE TITLE OF PROPOSED THESIS

Service Learning Today: The Experiences of High School Students and Teachers

COMMITTEE REPORT ON THESIS PROPOSAL

After review of the thesis proposal, the Thesis Committee certifies that:

☐ The proposal is satisfactory and the candidate may proceed.

☐ The proposed research does NOT involve the use of human subjects OR

☐ The proposed research involves human subjects and will be submitted to the College Human Subjects Review Committee prior to data collection.

☐ The proposal is not satisfactory and the following deficiencies must be corrected:

Description of deficiencies

COMMITTEE SIGNATURES

Chair Name: Alan Stark, PhD
Member Name: Joe Bishop, PhD
Member Name: Selma Jones, PhD
Member Name: Pat Penley, PhD

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF PROPOSAL APPROVAL

Date: ____________________ Program Coordinator/Dept. Head: _____________________

Signed original form remains in the student’s departmental program file.

Figure 1. Thesis proposal approval form. Note: some departments use a slightly different form, changing the titles for the persons who will sign the document (e.g., English, Psychology).
### Appendix B: Resources for the Service-Learning Facilitator

#### Table A1

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<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Available</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Uses</th>
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| Youth Service America                 | http://www.servenet.org         | Connecting students aged 5-25, the YSA seeks to educate students and the public about the power of youth engagement, while leading campaigns, offering grants and awards to service-learning applications, and offering webinars and individual support. | Teachers and Administrators interested in:  
  - Applying for grants  
  - Joining the Global Youth Service Network  
  - Accessing Service-learning Toolkits  

| Go To Service Learning                | GoToServiceLearning.org         | A program of Youth Service America, this resource is a database of K-12 service-learning experiences and lesson to help inspire new applications.                                                                  | Teachers new to service learning want to:  
  - Learn how service learning is applied by other teachers  
  - Learn of applications in different settings and academic areas  
  - Share their own service-learning experiences with other teachers  

| Learn and Serve America               | www.learnandserve.gov           | Learn and Serve America provides direct and indirect support to K-12 teachers, higher education teachers and organizations that engage in service learning. LSA offers grants and training, and also promotes understanding and effective practice through research and public recognition. | Teachers who want to:  
  - Learn more about service learning and available programs  
  - Apply for grants  
  - Access current research and news  

| National Service-Learning Clearing-house | www.servicelearning.org         | NSLC supports K-12 service learning, as well as programs for any person or group approaching service learning for the first time or seeking to develop their familiarity.                                   | Service-learning facilitators who want to:  
  - Access past and current research  
  - Join an email discussion list targeted to your service-learning applications  
  - Learn of events and webinars  
  - Access success stories, and more  

| Resource Center                       | http://www.nationalservicesources.org/ | An accessible resource of service-learning tools, including a free online library, conference materials, online courses, email discussion lists, and more                                                                 | Teachers who want to:  
  - Connect with other facilitators  
  - Develop their knowledge |