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A phenomenological study of life-changing adult learning in a two-course leadership development series

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**A phenomenological study of life-changing adult learning
in a two-course leadership development series**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Educational Leadership)

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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2013

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DEDICATION

To

my wife and best friend,

Brittany Paja,

for your love, encouragement and patience;

and

my wonderful parents,

Ron and Mary Kay Paja,

for supporting all of my endeavors.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study explored perceptions of graduate students who experienced their learning as life-changing in a two-course leadership development series. Using a phenomenological methodology, participants were former students who declared in an unprompted manner to the faculty leader, either during engagement in the series or after completing the course, that their learning was life-changing. These transformed individuals were also asked at the time they were solicited to participate whether they upheld the experience as life-changing. Only those individuals who continued to view the two-course series as transformational were interviewed for this study because the purpose was twofold: (1) to learn how students perceived and explained an experience in the two-course leadership development series as transformational; and (2) to identify and describe specific components of the classes that were perceived to contribute to making the learning experience life-changing. In other words, how did students define “life-changing” and what aspects of the class did they explain as being most significant to achieving this transformation?

Qualitative data were collected, coded, and analyzed according to a phenomenological methodology to generate findings that could be presented in an organized format. The findings are followed by discussion that extrapolates on findings and situates them within relevant literature. The findings of the study have implications for various constituencies including stakeholders of this particular two-course leadership development series (administrators, facilitators, current students, and future students) and any individual or organization that is striving to provide meaningful learning experiences—particularly in the

area of leadership development. Recommendations for future research and program stakeholders are also provided.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of Study

When seeking advice about how to select a dissertation research topic, the recommendations I received were resoundingly similar—pursue your passion. Thus, this research focused on two concepts that absolutely captivated me: learning and leadership. Moreover, the investigation centered on an experience most salient to how I make meaning of and interact with the world around me.

I have always had an interest in leadership and consider it a significant aspect of my personal identity. Likewise, teaching has been the career I aspired to pursue since before I completed high school. In fact, I recall being interviewed by the local newspaper for an “athlete of the week” profile and exclaiming that my life-plan was to teach. Consequently, I pursued social science and entered a teacher education program as an undergraduate student. During this time I started to understand the difference between teaching and learning. I realized that I did not necessarily want to teach. What I wanted to do was help others learn; and teaching was about learning—facilitating others to learn.

While I was an undergraduate student, I had the unique opportunity to work with the college president and board of trustees as a student representative to the board. The opportunity changed my plan from pursuing a role in secondary education to one in higher education. This paradigm shift came with the realization that, to accomplish my new goals, it would be imperative for me to continue my education. Thus, I decided to pursue graduate school.

It was not until I experienced a two-course series as a graduate student in a higher education master's program at Iowa State University that I began to understand the interrelated nature of leadership and learning. My experience in the series involved unfathomable learning—both how I viewed and made sense of the world around me was fundamentally altered as a result of my learning in the series. My ability not only as a leader, but also as a husband, son, brother, friend, facilitator of learning, citizen—every dimension of my identity—was enriched by my experience in this series. I experienced learning that had a profoundly positive impact on all areas of my life.

My experience was not unique. Conversations with the leader of the series revealed that there had been many other students, in the relatively brief time since this series began, who expressed the life-changing nature of their experience. The number of students who shared the impact of their learning in the courses was remarkable. Thus, in my quest to select a dissertation research focus about which I was passionate, I decided it would be ideal to conduct a study related to not one, but two concepts of particular interest to me—learning and leadership. The fact that this study explored a context I have personally experienced solidified it as the ideal research. By listening to the voices of others who experienced learning in the two-course series as life-changing, I sought to establish the shared essence of what “life-changing” means and identify the components contributing to achievement of it.

Two-course leadership and learning series

The two-course series in this study was comprised of two classes, each three credits and created in sequence drawing on the scholarship of learning and leadership development for adult students. The series is required for students who enter the master's degree program

in higher education at an emphasis in leadership and learning at Iowa State University.

Graduate students in other disciplines as well as those in education, who are not seeking the leadership and learning emphasis, can and do elect to enroll in the classes.

The two classes that comprise the series are not a formal prerequisite for any other courses, so the individual who developed this series did so with the freedom of no administrative interference. While aspects of the curriculum have evolved since the series' inception, the basic purpose for each course has not changed. The first class, *Foundations of Leadership and Learning*, focuses on foundations of learning and leadership. As stated in the course syllabi: "This course is the foundation for developing deep understanding about leadership, learning and the relationships therein and applying that understanding to professional practice" (Licklider, 2012a). The second class, *Applications of Leadership and Learning*, expands the foundation laid in the first, shifting to intentional applications of leadership and learning. In other words, "this course focuses on: (1) developing deep understandings about leadership, learning and the relationships therein; and (2) applying those understandings in professional practice" (Licklider, 2012b).

The series was "...designed to help leaders develop the knowledge and skills to best engage the collective capacity of a group to think, to learn, and to achieve important purpose" (Licklider, 2012a, b). In other words, the series was designed to help aspiring leaders in higher education develop meaningful knowledge of both learning and leadership, and employ this understanding in their personal and professional lives; to produce leaders who consistently use their minds well to do their own thinking, support their own thinking, and act purposefully according to their own thinking. Therefore, students are held accountable to achieve the following learner outcomes in the series (Licklider):

Learner outcomes

- Confront beliefs about learning, education and leadership in order to be open to new ideas;
- critically analyze current events for implications for leadership, for learning, for professional practice, and for citizenship;
- articulate connections and relationships between and among the concepts of leadership, learning and emotional and social intelligence;
- compare multiple perspectives about leadership;
- practice selected applications of the knowledge about learning as students;
- engage in leadership every day by practicing leadership from within;
- develop:
 - conflict resolution skills,
 - observational skills related to group member interactions and leadership behaviors, and
 - skills to provide effective feedback;
- develop and lead learning experiences for others including:
 - identifying the intended purpose for an experience designed to move a unit toward a common goal,
 - creating a plan to meet the purpose,
 - implementing the plan, and
 - reflecting about the results of the implementation;
- develop fundamental processes to guide self-leadership including identification of own strengths, vulnerabilities, dispositions, values, beliefs, and biases;
- develop and implement an action plan to grow and develop as a leader critically analyzing effectiveness of own leadership skills and practices;
- develop plans to apply knowledge about human resiliency development;
- discuss implications and applications of theories of learning for leadership practice and most situations of human interactions;
- apply knowledge of group dynamics in leadership practice;
- share experiences as a vehicle for more fully understanding the impact of learning-centered leadership practices;
- deliberately develop and practice these habits of mind:
 - introspection,
 - reflection,
 - listening,
 - empathy,
 - intellectual curiosity, and
 - critical thinking.

Students who complete the series are subsequently encouraged to internalize the following enduring understandings (Licklider, 2012a, b):

Enduring understandings related to leadership

- Leadership is fundamentally about learning.
- Everyone has the responsibility to do leadership.
- Leadership serves a common good.
- Leadership depends upon understanding self.
- Leadership empowers others and fosters interdependence.
- Leadership seeks multiple perspectives.
- Leadership uncovers complexity, ambiguity, and change.
- Leaders commit to and practice ethical behaviors.
- Leaders accept responsibility for continuous self-reflection and individual intellectual, technical, social, and emotional development.

Enduring understandings related to learning

- Learning is the work of the individual mind.
- Learning is fundamentally about relationships between and among phenomena and the implications thereof.
- Much learning happens through social interaction.
- Learning is strongly linked to emotion.
- Learning is based on prior learning.
- Learning is situated.
- Learning is strongly influenced by reflection and metacognition.
- Leaders control conditions that affect the learning of others.

To ensure that students who complete the series uncover and practice these enduring understandings, the classes promote high expectations and individual accountability for student learning (Leach, 2001; Schilling & Schilling, 1999) utilizing experiential learning in community (Taylor, Marienau, Fiddler, 2000) and emphasizing learning about learning, learning about self, and developing other critical skill sets associated with leadership such as critical thinking, interpersonal interaction, and collaboration (Rezak, 2011; Swartz, Costa, Beyer, Reagan, & Kallick, 2010; Wiersema & Licklider, 2007). The courses in the series

challenge students to take responsibility for their own learning and to lead learning for their peers—empowering them as an interdependent community of autonomous learners. The series develops leaders who think critically and understand how to facilitate learning for others.

A brief explanation of the faculty leader who developed and subsequently facilitates the courses is provided next. It completes the overview of the two-course series in this study.

Faculty leader

This section provides a perspective of the series by offering a brief look into the background of the unique individual who created and leads it: Dr. Barb Licklider (hereafter referred to as “Licklider” or “Barb” in the participants’ quotes). Licklider is an experienced leader of learning in many kinds of learning contexts. Licklider is an accomplished scholar who is vital to the context of this study.

As an undergraduate student, Licklider studied science education and worked as a residence hall advisor. Upon graduation, she taught junior and senior high school science, coached volleyball, basketball, and track, and served as the county youth conservation corps director. After a few years, Licklider left teaching to direct a residential conservation corps program for young adults and soon became the director of all young adult conservation core programs statewide. She later decided to pursue a master’s degree, followed by a PhD in Educational Administration with a research focus on adult learning and professional learning. While completing her graduate studies, Licklider had additional unique work experiences for the county fire and rescue squad, as the first female lake patrol officer in the state, and as the first female city council member in the town where she resided at the time.

Upon completion of her doctorate, Licklider served as a junior and senior high school principal in a rural district and then as principal of a large junior high school in an urban school district. During this time period, she taught courses on principal preparation at a state university in the summertime. Licklider eventually left her role as a principal for a university faculty position leading principal preparation and development programs. While in this role, Licklider served as the Faculty Athletics Representative, Director of Education Student Services, Director of Teacher Education, and led middle-level, school improvement, as well as parent education courses statewide. During her tenure as a professor, Licklider also started a successful faculty development program that helps educators at colleges and universities around the United States understand more about learning and enhancing their teaching. This faculty development program continues today, nearly 20 years after being established. Licklider was eventually asked to design and lead a college teaching course based on her work with the faculty development program and varied experiences as a leader of learning.

Through her diverse aforementioned experiences, Licklider learned, “...*an awful lot about learning, about teaching, and about helping people grow and develop—and an awful lot about leadership.*” She developed the two-course leadership and learning series (that was the focus of this study) as a culmination of her experiences. In her words, the series is, “*A lot of practical things I wish I had known when I went out into leadership positions to try to give everybody a head start and not have to make all of the mistakes that I made. That’s really what I was trying to do.*” Licklider acquired a broad understanding of learning and leadership across personal and professional contexts as a result of many related experiences throughout her life. Her rich background of experiences provides a voluminous library of

real stories that enable her to connect meaningfully with different individuals from all backgrounds, circumstances, and professions.

Rationale

Statement of the problem

Wiersema (2006) posited, “Meeting the challenges of tomorrow increasingly will require citizens who interact effectively with others and engage in life-long learning that goes far beyond the technical content of most college courses” (p. 68). Wiersema expressed there is a need for learning-savvy leaders in all sectors of our society and went on to implicate higher education as a major factor in whether or not this need will be met. Similarly, Harvey (2000) stated, “The primary role of higher education is increasingly to transform students by enhancing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities while simultaneously empowering them as lifelong critical, reflective learners” and explained, “Transformed (enhanced and empowered) graduates play a key role as transformative agents in society” (p. 1).

The future of our society is contingent on the preparation of students to be leaders. In order for higher education to produce graduates who are capable leaders for society, higher education must have its own leaders who interact effectively with others as critical reflective life-long learners. Thus, it was warranted to conduct a study of individuals who experienced profound learning in a specific graduate-level program that focuses on preparing leaders for higher education to think critically and help others learn. Such a study has implications for adult learning as well as the future leadership of higher education and, subsequently, the larger society.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of former graduate students who experienced life-changing learning in a two-course leadership development series. By uncovering the essence of this phenomenon and identifying the key contributing factors, educators can enhance the likelihood that future students in this program experience the same degree of learning. Additionally, this study may inform similar programs as well as the facilitation of and scholarship on adult learning and leadership development.

Research Questions

The following research question guided the study: How do students who reported learning in a two-course leadership development series as “life-changing” make meaning of this phenomenon?

The following sub-questions were used to help answer the overarching question:

1. What are the background experiences of participants and how do they relate these to their life-changing learning in the series?
2. What factors or components of the experience do participants identify as most significant to their life-changing learning in the series?
3. How did the life-changing learning influence participants’ personal and professional lives at the time and in the time since?

Audience(s) for the Study

This research is the first systematic study that has focused specifically on the perceptions of students who experienced the phenomenon of life-changing learning in this particular two-course series; therefore, detailed information were provided about students

who gained the most by completing the series. Audiences for the study include: (a) stakeholders (administrators, faculty, as well as former, current, and future students) involved with the specific leadership development series for this study; (b) practitioners facilitating similar leadership development curriculum for adult learners; (c) those facilitating adult learning in any discipline or context; and (d) scholars interested in leadership development and meaningful adult learning therein. The study may be useful to administrators who are stakeholders for the series in this study, as they can gain a better scope of the impact the two classes can have. The information is important to those faculty members facilitating the courses in the series, as they can gain valuable insight regarding the components of the curriculum or class environment most important for truly meaningful student learning.

The results of this study are most pertinent to future students, as it will inform administrative decisions and teaching practice resulting in curriculum/facilitation enhancement. The study may be interesting to students currently enrolled and those who previously completed the series, as it may validate what they have or may be experiencing. The findings also provide insights for those educators facilitating similar curriculum elsewhere, as lessons learned easily transfer to these contexts. Furthermore, what has been learned through participating in this study regarding vital components of environments where meaningful adult learning occurs also helps to inform facilitation of learning in dissimilar disciplines. Finally, scholars of learning and/or leadership development may also take interest in the results of this endeavor, given the context and focus of the investigation.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for a study has been explained as, “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (Maxwell, 2013, p. 39). This amalgamation, “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied – the key factors, concepts, or variables – and the presumed relationships among them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 18). Therefore, a researcher typically utilizes personal experience, prior research and theory, pilot studies, and thought experiments as the four major potential sources of a conceptual framework for a study (Maxwell). This study utilized all four sources in the establishment of the conceptual framework. The Researcher Positionality section that appears later in this chapter will describe and explain my personal experiences as they relate to this study, what I consider to be a pilot study, and my thinking in approaching this study (i.e. thought experiments). Chapter 2 presents the literature review, which includes examination of selected theories of adult learning. These theories inform the research design (Maxwell).

To provide context for understanding participants’ experiences, the literature review examines basic fundamentals of all human learning, selected adult learning theories, and the notion of learning in community. Learning in community is the foundation for student learning in the two-course leadership development series. An overview of cooperative and collaborative approaches to learning is also included in the review of learning in community. Andragogy and self-directed learning theory, experiential learning theory, and transformative learning theory were utilized as the theoretical influences contributing to the overall conceptual framework for the study for two reasons: (a) participants experienced learning in the series as adults; and (b) these particular adult learning theories serve as the theoretical

guiding posts for facilitation of the classes in the series. Thus, these models formed an appropriate theoretical basis for the conceptual framework in this study.

Overview of Related Literature

To situate the study, Chapter 2 will provide a summary of the relevant literature. As previously stated, the purpose of this study was to understand a life-changing learning experience of higher education master's students in a two-course leadership development series. In the following sections the literature most relevant to understanding this phenomenon will be highlighted.

Chapter 2 begins by addressing fundamentals of all human learning. Topics addressed include: (a) brain basics and memory, (b) prior knowledge, (c) transfer, (d) individual cognitive processing, (e) social interactions and learning, (f) and emotions and learning. These components are significant to this study because they were the foundation for understanding learning and therefore embedded in theories of learning. Not surprisingly then, the literature review next examines selected adult learning theories.

The participants in this study experienced the phenomenon under investigation after having completed bachelor's degrees. All participants were 21 years of age or older at the time of their participation in the series. Individuals in this age range are considered adults in the United States. Consequently, theories of adult learning are discussed. The theories explored in this research were: (a) andragogy and self-directed learning, (b) experiential learning theory, and (c) transformative learning theory. These theories were important to include as they underlie the educational philosophy of the series and subsequently help to understand learning therein.

Chapter 2 concludes with an exploration of “learning in community”. The role of others in the individual meaning-making process is fundamental aspect of learning and a common thread in the aforementioned adult learning theories. This role is encapsulated in the community of learners format espoused by the series participants completed; therefore the chapter concludes by discussing learning in community and explaining how this format influences meaningful learning. Information on cooperative and collaborative approaches to learning is included within the context of learning in community, as these approaches contribute to how the classes in the series for this study are facilitated.

Theoretical Influences

As previously mentioned, the theoretical framework integrates theory into the conceptual framework for the study. Utilizing existing theory to establish the lens for the researcher in the study adds to the goodness and trustworthiness of the endeavor. While there are potential drawbacks if theoretical lenses are used improperly, when used correctly they can help provide a framework for understanding what is seen in the research and bring attention to relationships that could otherwise be overlooked or misconstrued (Maxwell, 2013). This study incorporated Knowles’ (1970, 1984) andragogy and self-directed learning theory, Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory, and Mezirow’s (1991, 2000) transformative learning theory. These adult learning theories were used to better understand the meaning-making process of participants who experienced life-changing learning as adult learners in the two-course leadership development series. Chapter 2 provides more detailed explanation of each theory.

Summary of Research Approach and Design

Merriam (2002) stated, “The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world” (p. 3). As the researcher in this study, I assert Merriam’s belief that meaning is a social construct. Thus, this study employed a qualitative design to understand what former graduate students who experienced their learning in a two-course leadership development series as life-changing meant by this depiction. There are four major tenets of any qualitative study that establish flexible scaffolding for the endeavor: (a) epistemology, (b) theoretical perspective, (c) methodology, and (d) methods (Crotty, 1998). The epistemological foundation for this study was constructivism because the meaning of life-changing learning in the series was constructed between the participants, their experiences, and their interactions with me as the researcher (Crotty). An interpretivist theoretical perspective was applied because I made sense of (interpreted) the meanings that participants had constructed about their experiences (Creswell, 2007). Flowing out of the interpretivist theoretical perspective, the methodology used to guide this study was phenomenology. Phenomenology was an appropriate methodological choice because it derives universal meaning (the essence) of a phenomenon from individually constructed definitions of experience (Moustakas, 1994). Consequently, the essence of the phenomenon in this study—experiencing the sequence as life-changing, emerged directly from the participants (Creswell). Phenomenology guided the methods employed to collect and analyze data.

In-depth interviews are often the most common method for data collection utilized in phenomenological research (Creswell, 2009). Thus, the primary source for data collection was in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a purposeful sample of six individuals who

experienced learning in the two-course leadership development series that they defined as life-changing (Creswell; Esterberg, 2002). In addition to individual interviews, two focus groups were conducted with six additional participants. Focus groups are helpful when research seeks to understand the role of group processes in shaping individual experiences and interpretations of those experiences (Esterberg). Utilizing focus groups in this study was especially warranted because of the social nature of the learning in community environment for the series in this study, where the phenomenon occurred. Field notes of key words or phrases and details about interactions with the participants served as a secondary data source for this study. Field notes were written minimally during interactions with participants to avoid disrupting the flow of interviews (Esterberg). Instead, field notes were recorded as much as possible immediately following interactions with participants. In addition to the focus groups, in-depth individual interviews, and field notes, document analysis provided further context for analysis. All interactions with participants were recorded, transcribed verbatim by the researcher, read for accuracy, and loaded into QSR NVivo 10 (a qualitative data analysis software program) for qualitative data analysis.

A two-cycle coding process utilizing NVivo comprised the data analysis for the study. This analysis began with first cycle initial and in vivo coding to depict subthemes in the raw data (Saldaña, 2009). Sub-themes were then organized through second cycle focused and axial coding to make connections between a category and its subcategories and develop main themes (Creswell, 2007; Saldaña). By employing this analysis process, I sought out the essence of participants' lived experiences in the series. Examination of various types of written data from diverse sources created rich descriptions of the participants' experiences. Chapter 3 provides a more thorough description of the research elements and design.

Researcher Positionality

My motivation for pursuit of this research was twofold: (a) a keen interest in the field of leadership development; and (b) having personally experienced the phenomenon I now seek to better understand. As a master's student I experienced learning in the two-course leadership development series for this study as what can be described as "life-changing". My observations and conversations with classmates at the time and since led me to believe that others had similar experiences.

Once I completed the series I made the decision that, upon completion of my master's studies, I would continue on to pursue my doctorate. In many ways this decision was a direct result of the transformation I experienced in the series. Knowing I would need to find a dissertation topic, I sought out the advice of my major professor—the leader of the series who had already so greatly impacted my life. Through our discussions, I came to understand that my assumptions had validity regarding other students who completed the series and also experienced learning that was "life-changing". My major professor shared with me that many of the students in the classes had reached out to her to express their transformative experience in the series. I began to wonder if what they perceived as "life-changing" was similar to my experience. This caused me to engage in additional reflection on how I understood my own experience as a student in the series.

For me, the life-changing effect of series was that it fundamentally altered my "frames of reference" or "deep meaning" for how I make meaning of my life and the world around me (Mezirow, 2000; Caine & Caine, 1997). During the series I became critically reflective of the many assumptions and beliefs I had about the world, as well as of those held by others around me. These assumptions predicate our habits of mind and resulting points of

view (Mezirow, 2000). Thus, this awareness forced me to engage in meaningful and often difficult reconsideration of the fundamental understandings I held about life, society, and my role therein. The impact of this transformation on my development as a leader and as a human being was profound. The questions still remained: Was this how others (who stated that the experience changed their life for the better) understand their experience? What did “life-changing” mean in this context and what caused it? These would be the questions I sought answers for. This would be the topic of my dissertation research.

I spent the entirety of my time as a PhD student preparing myself to study this topic. I expended considerable effort reflecting on my experiences in the series to develop my interpretation of “life-changing”. I also studied the curriculum and instructional methods employed in the series and sought out additional experiences to engage myself as fully as possible. These experiences included spending a semester as an assistant facilitator in the second class of a similar two-course leadership development series at the same institution—but for undergraduate students instead of graduate students. Then I designed and completed my capstone study that focused on understanding the perceptions of students who completed the undergraduate two-course leadership development series.

While gaining these practical experiences, I also took numerous classes that helped me learn how to ethically conduct quality research. Thus, while my positionality transformed me to an insider in many ways. I had learned how to consciously acknowledge my assumptions and beliefs in the process of “Epoche” (Moustakas, 1994) that enabled me to bracket my biases. In this way, the essence of what “life-changing” learning means along with the components of the series contributing to it could emerge directly from the words of the participants. To ensure Epoche was maintained throughout the research process, I

utilized a reflexive research journal to manage my beliefs as the researcher, and remain true to the voices of the participants. By uncovering the essence of what made student learning in this series “life-changing” as well as the aspects contributing to this phenomenon, the findings of this study can be used to enhance the series for future participants while also contributing to the literature on meaningful learning, particularly in a leadership development context.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined for use in this research:

Epoche: A process of bracketing one’s personal beliefs and bias as a researcher in phenomenological research. Moustakas (1994) defined Epoche as “a process of setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time” (p. 85). Merriam (2002) clarified the benefit of Epoche in a phenomenological research endeavor, “With belief temporarily suspended, consciousness itself becomes heightened, allowing the researcher to intuit or see the essence of the phenomenon” (p. 7).

Life-Changing Learning: Meaningful learning that resulted in profoundly positive outcomes on a learner’s academic, professional, and personal life.

Summary

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the perceptions of graduate students who experienced their learning in a two-course leadership development series as life-changing. This is the first systematic study that focused on the perceptions of students who experienced the phenomenon of life-changing learning in this particular series.

Therefore, it provides detailed information about students who gained the most by completing the series and provides valuable insight for stakeholders and researchers in the areas of learning theory and leadership development, as well as facilitators of learning everywhere.

This dissertation is comprised of five chapters: introduction, literature review, research design and methods, results, and discussion. Chapter 2 provides a thorough explanation of literature that contributed to the conceptual framework for the study. Presenting a review of the relevant literature helped to situate this study by providing important context for understanding the phenomenon investigated. The scholarship discussed pertains to fundamentals of learning, selected adult learning theories, and the notion of learning in community. Chapter 3 outlines the blueprint that guided the study from beginning to end. The components that comprised the scaffolding for the study (epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods) are explained in greater detail in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 presents the participant profiles and themes emerging in the data. The dissertation concludes with Chapter 5, wherein the broader impacts of the research findings and recommendations for future research endeavors are discussed.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this research was to understand the life-changing learning experiences of the participants. Therefore, it was important to intimately understand learning for this study. The sheer volume of available literature on this concept is staggering, thus it was necessary to limit the scope of this review. Since participants for this study experienced learning as graduate students taking a specific two-course leadership development series in a higher education master's program, only the relevant literature was addressed that positions the concept of learning within this context.

As previously stated, the phenomenon under investigation was the life-changing learning students experienced in a series focused on helping them learn how people learn, how they themselves learn, and learning about leadership. In the course syllabi, Licklider (2012a, b) stated, "Knowledge about the brain and human intelligence has significant implications for leadership practice" (p. 1). Therefore, effective leaders are those who know how to help others learn (Licklider). In order to help others learn, one must understand how people learn. Thus, this literature review includes an overview of learning, adult learning theories, and the context most effective for facilitation thereof (in community).

In the following sections, the literature most relevant to creating the necessary conditions for achieving the powerful learning that participants in this study experienced is highlighted. First, I identify and present selected fundamental aspects of all learning. Topics addressed include: (a) brain basics and memory; (b) prior knowledge; (c) transfer; (d) individual cognitive processing; (e) social interactions and learning; (f) and emotions and learning. These components are embedded in various learning theories and are the

foundation for understanding meaningful learning. Next, because the purpose of this study was to explore a life-changing learning experience that participants had as adults, selected theories of adult learning are addressed, including: (a) andragogy and self-directed learning; (b) experiential learning theory; and (c) transformative learning theory. This leads to an examination of the role of others in the individual meaning-making process. Finally, the literature review concludes with an exploration of the notion of learning in community. An overview of cooperative and collaborative approaches to learning is subsequently embedded in the discussion of learning in community.

Fundamentals of Learning

The literature review begins with a discussion of key facets of learning that provides context for the phenomenon in this investigation (life-changing learning). The following components of human learning are addressed: (a) brain basics and memory; (b) prior knowledge; (c) transfer; (d) individual cognitive processing; (e) social interactions and learning; and (f) emotions and learning. Exploration of these fundamentals provides a broader understanding of learning, which is the main focus of this study.

Brain basics and memory

When researching the fundamentals of learning, it seems most appropriate to begin with the brain. “Learning changes the physical structure of the brain” (National Research Council, 2000, p. 115) as meaning is constructed within the mind of the learner. Brains function as an interstate system under constant and continuous construction, paving and repaving routes on the basis of inputs (Sousa, 2011). Thus, focus should be made on components that make this rewiring possible and, in general, how it occurs.

The brain is made up of two known types of cells: nerve cells called *neurons* and *glial* cells that act as glue holding the neurons together (National Research Council, 2000; Sousa, 2011). Neurons are the functioning core for the brain and learning. Glial cells nourish the neurons, act as regulators for neural signaling, and protect neurons from potentially harmful substances. A normal human brain will contain about a trillion cells, with roughly ten percent, or 100 billion, of them being neurons (Sousa; Zull, 2002).

Each neuron has tens of thousands of small branches that serve as connection sites, called *dendrites* (Sousa, 2011; Zull, 2002). The average human brain has approximately one thousand trillion dendrite connections (Zull). These connections receive electrical impulses from other neurons and transmit them down a long fiber called an *axon* (Sousa, Zull). Like an insulated water pipe in a house, these axons are shielded by a layer called the myelin sheath. The sheath protects the axon and allows the impulse to transmit more quickly through the axon to other neurons. Neurons do not have direct contact with each other. Instead, between each axon and the dendrites of neighboring neurons is a *synapse* (Sousa, Zull). A synapse is a small gap. Chemicals called *neurotransmitters* are used to traverse the impulse from the axon of one neuron, to the dendrite of the next (National Research Council, 2000; Sousa). These pathways in the brain are how information is processed and memory formation occurs—from a purely biological perspective.

The pathways in the brain are strengthened through use, but decay when not used. Learning is, therefore, the creation of new connections, or the strengthening or weakening of existing ones needed for understanding (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2002). Just as muscles improve with exercise, learning increases the size, branches, and

overall ability of brain cells to form ever more complex networks (see next section on Prior knowledge). The brain wires or rewires itself in the formation of memories.

The concepts of learning and memory are closely related but not synonymous. Sousa (2011) explained, “Learning is the process by which we acquire new knowledge and skills; memory is the process by which we retain the knowledge and skills for the future” (p. 83). The difference between learning and memory was emphasized by Uttal (2011), who explained: “Memory refers to the states, conditions, images, or traces produced by the learning protocol that record what was learned. The word memory may also refer to the medium or place in which the new experiential information is actually stored” (p. 177). Biologically speaking, the “states, conditions, images, or traces” (p. 177) register as stimuli that send impulses down one neuron to neighboring neurons. The chemicals released to send the impulse across the synapse (neurotransmitters) spark electrochemical reactions. The electrochemical reactions, in turn, cause the neighboring neuron to fire, resulting in that neuron doing the same, and so on. This creates a pathway of neuronal connections firing together. The simultaneous firing only lasts for a short window of time and then decays if it is not otherwise repeated during the window (Uttal). If these networks of neurons firing together are activated enough through rehearsal or practice, they are bounded together so that when one fires they all will. This process consolidates and retains the memory, making it easily retrievable. These memories are stored in pieces throughout different areas of the brain, allowing multiple possible ways to retrieve the memory.

There are three stages of memory: (1) sensory/immediate memory; (2) working memory; and (3) long-term memory (Sousa, 2011). However, these three stages are

commonly presented as two types of memory: (a) short-term or temporary memory, and (b) long-term or permanent memory.

Sensory/immediate and working memory comprise short-term memory.

Sensory/immediate memory unconsciously puts information from environmental stimuli in our brains for a brief period while we decide how to dispose of it. If it is determined that the memory is unimportant it is released out of the system. Like sensory/immediate memory, working memory is also impermanent. Working memory consciously processes information. Information in working memory is either that deemed important by sensory/immediate memory, or from long-term memories.

Some of the information processed in short-term memory (sensory/immediate and working) is eventually transferred to long-term memory sites. Uttal (2011) explained that: “Long-term memory refers to information that may have been stored for decades if not a lifetime” (2011, p. 189). In this transfer process the structure of the neurons is changed so these memories can last for one’s lifetime. The types of long-term memory have been a topic of ongoing debate among neuroscientists, but most agree there are two major types: (a) explicit or declarative memory, and (b) implicit or nondeclarative memory (Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Sousa, 2011; Uttal, Zull, 2002).

Explicit memory can be organized into two categories: (a) semantic memory, and (b) episodic memory (Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Sousa, 2011; Zull, 2002). Semantic memory is associated with names, numbers, dates, facts, and labels (Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Zull, 2002). Semantic memory is information that does not relate to any event. Semantic recall is the memory of knowing, and is the most concrete. Information in semantic memory is what shows up on multiple-choice tests or game shows like *Jeopardy* or *Who Wants to be a*

Millionaire. Episodic memory, on the other hand, pertains to personal life events or circumstances and is, therefore, generally easier to recall—it is the memory of remembering. Examples of episodic memories would be one's first day of college or a most recent birthday party. Episodic memories are stories that are reworked with each retelling (Sousa, 2011). Thus, when dealing with memory it is important to remember that memories are not objective.

Implicit memory addresses all recollections that cannot be explained in a straightforward manner (Sousa, 2011). Implicit memories influence what we think and do (Zull, 2002). The categories of implicit memory have been changed in the last 10 years as a result of neuropsychological research (Sousa, 2011). Sousa identified four generally accepted categories of implicit memory: (a) procedural memory, (b) perceptual representation system, (c) classical conditioning, and (d) nonassociative learning. Procedural memory is associated with learning motor skills and movement such as how to: ride a bike, drive a car, tie a shoe, or identify notes in music (Blakemore & Firth, 2005). Perceptual representation system (PRS) involves the structure of words and objects in memory that can be prompted by prior experiences without conscious recall (Sousa). In other words, PRS is the automatic human cognitive ability to complete things like word fragments. Although it used to be included with procedural memory, researchers have identified unique aspects of the PRS recall system that warrants its status as a separate category (Sousa). Classical conditioning or conditional learning is arguably the most widely understood type of memory formation, wherein a conditioned stimulus is learned to prompt an unconditioned response. Classical conditioning is also sometimes called associative learning because a response is associated with a stimulus (Sousa). The inverse of associative learning—nonassociative

learning—occurs in two forms: habituation and sensitization (Sousa). Habituation is how we learn to ignore stimuli that do not require our conscious attention. We become accustomed to our environments through habituation; the brain learns to screen out trivial stimuli so it can better focus on those that are important. Sensitization involves increasing our sensitivity to especially threatening stimuli and is closely linked with emotions. Thus, someone who has been the victim of a shooting tragedy may respond vigorously to any loud popping noise that resembles gunfire, even though it may be the byproduct of a harmless firecracker or older vehicle backfiring.

Although emotional memory has commonly been included as a type of implicit memory, it can be both implicit and explicit (Sousa, 2011). Emotional memory is, therefore, the most powerful type of memory because it transcends the dichotomy of memory types (explicit/implicit). A more detailed discussion of the role of emotions in memory formation and learning is included later in this literature review (see section on Emotions and learning), but first we return to the brain's “nuts and bolts” introduced at the beginning of this section on the brain and memory, for a brief discussion on prior knowledge.

Prior knowledge

The creation and degeneration of neural pathways is ongoing throughout life (Blakemore & Frith, 2005). We enter every learning opportunity with existing neural infrastructure. The notion that people learn by constructing new meaning based on what they already know is a parallel among the learning theories that will be explicitly discussed later in this literature review (National Research Council, 2000). Halpern and Hakel (2003) stated: “The best predictor of what is learned at the completion of any lesson, course, or

program of study is what the learner thinks and knows at the start of the experience” (p. 39). Boud, Keogh, Walker (1985) similarly stated, “The response of the learner to new experience is determined significantly by past experiences which have contributed to the ways in which the learner perceives the world” (p. 21). Thus, the traditional model of education that perceives students as empty vessels to fill with knowledge provided by an expert is inappropriate. Prior knowledge must not be overlooked.

According to Zull (2002), “When we speak of prior knowledge, we are speaking of something physical. It builds as brains physically change, and it is helped in place by physical connections” (p. 94). These connections are neural pathways paved through the brain and serve as the foundation for the building of new knowledge when accurate (National Research Council, 2000). When prior knowledge is inaccurate, it is imperative that it be challenged so networks get rewired, “...teachers need to pay attention to the incomplete understandings, the false beliefs, and the naïve renditions of concepts that learners bring with them to a given subject” (National Research Council, p. 10). The necessity to revise inaccurate or harmful pre-existing understandings is evident in Mezirow’s transformative learning theory wherein adults’ existing frames of reference are altered or transformed. The notion that new meaning is constructed based on what people already know is also seen in other adult learning theories that inform the conceptual framework for this study.

The different ways of theorizing adult meaning making may vary in exactly how the role of prior knowledge is understood in the learning process. However, both the amount and nature of prior knowledge are generally considered (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The amount and nature of prior knowledge is important because it demarcates the difference between experts and novices. An expert possesses a large quantity of highly

advanced knowledge in a specific area (Merriam et al.). Furthermore, being an expert in one content area does not necessarily translate into expert status in another (Merriam et al.).

Educators need to be aware of the amount and nature of prior knowledge a learner brings to a learning situation and design appropriate learning activities on the novice to expert continuum accordingly. The brain has the ability to generalize or modify prior knowledge if necessary to then use it in new situations in a process called *transfer* (Sousa, 2011). The next section examines the role of transfer in learning.

Transfer

Hunter (2004) explained, “Transfer is one of the most powerful principles of learning. Transfer occurs when past learning influences the acquisition of new learning. Transfer is the basis of all creativity, problem solving, and decision making” (p. 134). In other words, all new learning involves transfer from previous knowledge (National Research Council, 2000). The neural networks in the brain dynamically organize and reorganize when faced with new situations. In this way, prior knowledge is dynamically transferred to new learning situations. The process of transfer involves two parts: (a) transfer during learning, and (b) transfer of learning (Sousa, 2011).

The degree that past learning affects acquisition of new learning is one part of the principle of transfer, called *transfer during learning* (Sousa, 2011). This reprocessing of past learning can simultaneously reinforce existing knowledge while helping make meaning of new information in the brain. The National Research Council (2000) reported, “Previous knowledge can help or hinder the understanding of new information” (p. 78). To say it another way, transfer during learning can be either positive or negative. Positive transfer

occurs when previous learning aids an individual with new learning (Sousa). An example of positive transfer might be a British soccer player learning to kick field goals for an American football team. The soccer player's skills and knowledge regarding performance of a kicking motion (albeit kicking a soccer ball) will help in learning to kick a football. Negative transfer, on the other hand, is when past learning interferes with or confuses a learner's new learning (Sousa). An example of negative transfer might be the aforementioned British soccer player learning road regulations in the United States. The soccer player's knowledge regarding procedures in his home country may result in a cognitive struggle with having the driver's side of the vehicle and correct side of the road inverted. The knowledge used to operate a vehicle safely on the roads in Great Britain may now interfere with the new American context.

The other part of the principle of transfer is called *transfer of learning*, and refers to the degree that new learning is applied in future situations (Sousa, 2011). To understand how learning will be applied in the future, Sousa explained a low-road versus high-road duality in transfer of learning. Low-road transfer will occur nearly automatically with skills that are similar in nature (Sousa). For example, the knowledge of how to tie a gym shoe likely transfers subconsciously to learning how to tie a work boot. Conversely, high-road transfer occurs when intentional deliberation of new information is required to ascertain the prior knowledge that is appropriate for the new learning (Sousa). High-road transfer might occur when a surgeon takes a class on auto mechanics, as the surgeon has much prior knowledge of tools and procedures used to repair human bodies that may transfer to learning about the tools and procedures involved with repairing an engine.

To understand the role of transfer in learning, it is important to identify the factors that impact it. Researchers have identified four factors that affect transfer: (a) context and degree of original learning; (b) similarity; (c) critical attributes; and (d) association (Sousa, 2011; Tileston, 2011). The context and degree of original learning refers simply to the fact that, when learning is personally meaningful and accurate, there is a better likelihood of it being successfully applied to future learning. Similarity comprises the notion that previous knowledge or skills transfer most easily to new skills or information that is similar. Critical attributes are the components of a concept that make it different from all others. Transfer is sometimes generated when these critical attributes are recalled. Finally, association occurs when two skills or pieces of information are learned together, so that remembering one evokes automatic recall of the other.

The factors that influence transfer of learning can be used by skilled educators to enhance learning. Sousa (2011) explained, “Transfer is more frequently provoked by the environment than done consciously by the learner...who represents a large portion of the environment for students in school? Yes, the teachers! Teachers are the instruments of transfer for students.” (p. 147). There are various techniques that can be employed to invoke transfer. For example, Tileston (2011) recommended intentionally utilizing association to create links between course concepts and outside aspects of life. Sousa (2011) cited the importance of allowing students opportunities to consciously reflect on new learning, “...to make connections to previous knowledge and organize concepts into networks for eventual storage” (p. 157), thereby increasing transfer. The National Research Council (2000) similarly acknowledged, “Transfer can be improved by helping students become more aware of themselves as learners who actively monitor their learning strategies and resources and

assess their readiness for particular tests and performances” (p. 67). This type of intentional mental processing of learning opportunities is a salient aspect in the two-course series for this study. For example, students in the series are required to engage in critical reflective journaling about their learning throughout the courses, participate in round robin discussions about personal learning as a result of class topics or activities, and complete “Learning from Experience” (LFO) worksheets that structure intentional reflection about particular learning opportunities (Licklider, 2012a, b). The next section examines the role of reflection and other cognitive processes related to learning.

Individual cognitive processing

Learning happens inside the minds of individual learners. In its 2002 text, *Understanding the Brain: Towards a new Learning Science*, The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation defined cognition as the, “...operation of the mind which includes all aspects of perceiving, thinking, learning, and remembering” (p. 108). With this definition of cognition in mind, I use the phraseology “individual cognitive processing” to encompass all processes that occur inside the minds of individual learners. The cognitive processes involved in learning (the context for this study) and numerous terms used to address them will be discussed. Several examples of terms referring to cognition are: critical thinking (Petress, 2004); higher-order thinking (Knapper & Cropley, 2000); reflection (Merriam et al., 2007; National Research Council, 2000; Tileston, 2011; Zull, 2002); introspection (Robbins, 2008); active processing (Caine & Caine, 1997); metacognition (Goleman, 1995; Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, 2000; National Research Council; Sousa, 2011; Uttal, 2011); and intentional mental processing (Wiersema,

2006; Wiersema & Licklider, 2007). I use individual cognitive processing to encapsulate these and all other available terms. The following paragraphs emphasize a selection of these terms and give an explanation of their importance to the learning process.

The importance of reflection is noted in the theories on learning—those presented later in this literature review included. Different scholars have provided nuanced models of reflection in learning. Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning model, for example, includes reflection within the stages of a learning cycle. Merriam et al. (2007) referred to the kind of thinking Kolb’s model includes as “reflection-on-action” [wherein] “...we consciously return to the experiences we have had, reevaluate these experiences, decide what we could do differently, and then try out whatever we decided to do differently” (p. 174). Wiersema (2006) used the phrase “intentional mental processing of experiences” to describe this type of reflective practice by learners in reconsidering a learning experience. While experience is commonly noted to have a significant role in learning, the general consensus from research is that it is not experience but, rather, thinking about experience that results in meaningful learning. Thus, while thinking about a learning experience is imperative to the meaning-making process, it is not the end of the road for individual cognitive processing when it comes to learning.

Metacognition takes individual mental processing from thinking about an experience to thinking about one’s thinking related to that experience. A helpful way of explaining metacognition was provided to me by the professor of a cognitive psychology class I took as an undergraduate student as an “inner-mental dialogue” within an individual’s mind; a conversation with oneself about one’s own thoughts (K. Jones, personal communication, 2007). As with the concept of reflection, scholars have differing definitions of

metacognition. Ormrod (1999) defined metacognition as “...people’s knowledge of their own learning and cognitive processes and their consequent regulation of those processes to enhance learning and memory” (p. 319). The National Research Council (2002) identified metacognition as people’s ability to, “...monitor their current levels of mastery and understanding” (p. 12). Sousa (2011) posited, “Metacognition is the awareness one has of one’s own thinking processes” (p. 253). Within all of these explanations for metacognition is the basic notion that metacognition involves thinking about one’s thinking—which is how it is understood in the current study.

One important aspect of individual cognitive processing that involves the concepts of reflection and metacognition is the notion that these practices not only be engaged in retroactively, but during learning experiences. Merriam et al. (2007) defined this as “reflection-in-action”. Reflection-in-action occurs when a learner is capable of engaging his or her mind in deeper mental processing of a situation while still engaged in it. Thus, the ability to perform reflection-in-action can reshape what is being done while it is still being done. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002), “Few practical ideas are more obvious or more critical than the need to get perspective in the midst of action” (p. 51). Thus, in their book on leadership, Heifetz and Linsky presented the analogy of “getting off the dance floor and going to the balcony” (p. 51). *Going to the balcony* refers to the mental activity of stepping back in the midst of a situation and working to achieve a transcendental viewpoint of what one is engaged with, considering multiple viewpoints of what is really going on—including consideration of one’s own thinking.

The analogy of *going to the balcony* to see what is happening in a situation provides a clear image of an otherwise highly complex cognitive process. The art of transcending to

engage reflective divergent metacognitive thinking while remaining mentally present in a situation plainly alludes to the role of others in learning. The following section examines how others fit into the meaning making process.

Social interaction and learning

Social interaction in the case of adult learning provides the impetus for individual cognitive processes that precede meaningful learning. By interacting with others, an adult learner is forced to articulate his or her thinking, face alternatives, and reconsider as necessary. In this way, social processes are inextricably interconnected with what occurs inside the minds of individuals. In one way or another, learning is most often a direct result of our interaction with others (Wiersema, 2006). Lave (1991) summed up the relationship between social interaction and individual cognitive dimensions of the learning process, explaining that learning, "...is neither wholly subjective, nor fully encompassed in social interaction, and it is not constituted separately from the social world (with its own structures and meanings) of which it is part" (p. 64).

The role of social interaction in learning goes beyond shared interest or circumstance (e.g., taking a class together); it involves ongoing interaction amongst students. This interaction requires that individuals, "...make their implicit knowledge explicit—giving them the chance to explain their thinking to each other, listen to each other, and help each other explain" (Wiersema, 2006, p. 25). In this sense, social interaction refers to the act of students sharing, explaining, and challenging each other's thoughts, beliefs, and values. This discourse, in turn, stimulates the aforementioned individual cognitive process, which results in further critical conversation, and so on... in a continuing interactive cycle between the

individual and his or her interactions within the social environment of the learning situation. The role of critical dialogue is well supported in the literature on learning. For that reason, dialogue is the next concept addressed.

Dialogue

Vella (1994) highlighted the importance of dialogue in adult learning, “One basic assumption...is that adult learning is best achieved through dialogue” (p. 3). Issacs (1993) defined dialogue as “a sustained collective inquiry in to the processes, assumptions, and certainties that compose everyday experience” (p. 25). Caine and Caine (1997) asserted Issacs’ definition of dialogue and made clear what dialogue was not:

Dialogue is not debate and argument (with winners and losers). It is not consensus building (where agreement is reached but underlying beliefs are unchanged). It is not sensitivity training (where “we” become sensitive to “them”). It is not discussion (which is an exploration and a breaking apart of ideas without going beyond intellectual analysis). (p. 144)

In the current study, dialogue as social interaction in learning was applied according to Issacs’ definition as clarified by Caine and Caine’s delimitations.

Scholars have used a variety of other phrases when referencing dialogue in learning. Two examples are used from Freire (1973) and Mezirow (1991, 2000). Freire used the term *critical consciousness* to express active exploration of the personal meaning of abstract concepts through dialogue between equals. Mezirow (1991, 2000) opted for the term *reflective discourse*, which he defined as the “...specialized use of dialogue devoted to searching for a common understanding and assessment of the justification of an interpretation or belief” (p. 11). Mezirow’s reflective discourse, therefore, results in a critical examination of personal assumptions and more universal knowledge stemming from collective

understanding. Thus, it was expected that students who experienced learning as life-changing in the two-course series for this study would report having engaged in the critical examination of assumptions that Mezirow described.

Caine and Caine (1997) explained that, “Dialogue, therefore, is a process in which participants in a group gradually begin to shed masks, roles, and fixed ideas so that they can penetrate deeper meanings and come together in a genuine sense of communion” (p. 144). (The role of community is explored further in the section on Learning in Community.) Caine and Caine also understood the ultimate role of dialogue as a means to, “...become aware of and suspend the underlying assumptions that drive the ways in which we work. Using dialogue means that we bring our mental models into the open for self-examination” (p. 145). In order to effectively participate in this type of critical dialogue requires a certain degree of emotional maturity—knowing and having the ability to manage one’s emotions and awareness of the emotions of others (Mezirow, 2000). Thus, the role of emotions in learning will be discussed in the following section.

Emotions and learning

Sousa (2011) explained, “Emotions interact with reason to support or inhibit learning. To be successful learners and productive citizens, we need to know how to use our emotions intelligently” (p. 48). Emotions influence memory formation and therefore impact the learning process, as mentioned in the opening section in this literature review (also see Brain basics and memory). The Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2002) reported, “...scientists are beginning to realize through experiments what educators have seen in schools: emotions are

in part responsible for the overall cognitive mastery present in children and adults and therefore needs to be addressed more fully” (pp. 55-56). Similarly, Blakemore and Frith (2005) found that, “Brain research has started to investigate the relations between emotions and memory, which most of us, from personal experience, would expect to be intricately linked” (p. 177). Therefore, it is imperative that those facilitating learning for others recognize and understand how emotions impact learning.

The brain’s main responsibility is to ensure the survival of the organism it resides in (Sousa, 2011). To accomplish the task of self-preservation, the brain prioritizes inputs. In the prioritization process of the brain, emotional data is a high priority. As such, “Emotional memory takes precedence over any other kind of memory” (Sprenger, 1999). In fact, “Emotion is so strong in the brain that it takes priority over everything else” (Tileston, 2011, p. 42). If a situation generates an emotional response, the older part of the human brain—known as the limbic system—overpowers more complex cognitive processes (Sousa). The limbic system is centrally located in the brain and is comprised of the amygdala, hippocampus, thalamus, hypothalamus, and basal ganglia (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2002). Tileston (2011) explained how the brain is strongly tied to emotion, “The amygdala, found in the forebrain, is responsible for encoding emotional messages and bonding them to the learning for long-term storage” (p. 42). Emotions can affect memory formation and subsequent learning either positively or negatively (Sousa, 2011).

Sousa (2011) identified two distinct ways that emotions affect learning: (a) the emotional climate in which the learning occurs; and (b) the degree to which emotions are associated with the learning content. Emotions that learners associate with a learning experience, but not the content, become part of implicit or nonassociative memory. When

the environment is perceived positively, endorphins are released in the brain and the learning experience can be more successful and pleasurable for the learner. However, when a person experiences stress or negative perception of the environment, the hormone cortisol is released throughout the brain and body, triggering defense instincts such as the fight or flight response. In this situation, the brain focuses on handling the cause of the negative environment rather than processing the other information for memory retrieval—this phenomenon is sometimes referred to as a “neural hijacking” (Goleman, 1995). The fight or flight response produces physiological changes in the body such as increasing pulse or blood pressure, perspiration, hyperactive senses, and the tensing of muscles ready for movement (Sprenger, 1999). Increasing learners’ awareness of these physiological cues will allow them to better manage these instinctual reactions and instead engage the rational thinking part of their brains. Controlling emotion prevents learners from becoming emotionally hijacked, and is what Mezirow (2000) posited to be necessary to be able to engage in critical dialogue and achieve meaningful learning. Emotional competence is necessary for optimal learning to occur and allows learners to retrain themselves and their impulsive reactions to events, handle new educational environments, teachers, classmates or topics (Blakemore & Frith, 2005). Another common term for emotional competence is “emotional intelligence”, a term coined by Goleman that involves awareness and control over one’s own emotions combined with recognition of and empathy for others’ emotion that allows for effective management of relationships.

Emotions that learners associate with learning content instead of the environment become part of explicit or associative memory. When students explicitly connect with curriculum content via emotions, recall and meaningful learning are more likely to occur

(Sousa, 2011). Thus, facilitators who engage learners' emotions with otherwise non-emotional content help the learners create stronger memory pathways for that content in their brains. Sousa suggested several strategies to stimulate an emotional investment in course concepts: (a) role-playing, (b) journal writing, and (c) real-world experiences. The two-course series utilized in this research employs each of the three aforementioned tactics recommended by Sousa.

The ability to transcend the implicit/explicit memory dichotomy in the brain is why emotions are so important to the learning process (Sousa, 2011). Numerous studies have reported the powerful role of emotions in learning (Eunjoon, Plass, Hayward, & Homer, 2012; Maidment & Crisp, 2011; Schutz, Hong, Cross, & Osborn, 2006; Trigwell, Ellis, & Han, 2012). Not surprisingly, recent literature on adult education has suggested a holistic role of emotion in learning (Dirkx, 2008; Jarvis, 2006; Merriam et al., 2007). Knowledge of how emotions affect learning can empower educators and learners alike to employ strategies that capitalize on the power of emotions, enhancing memory formation, retention, retrieval, and transfer to new situations. In other words, understanding emotions can result in more meaningful learning.

Now that the various foundational aspects learning have been identified and discussed, how these elements manifest in the learning processes of adults will be examined. The next section presents selected adult learning theories, most pertinent to understanding the context of the series in this study.

Selected Adult Learning Theories

As explained in the literature review summary in Chapter 1, the participants in this study all experienced the phenomenon under investigation (life-changing learning) after having completed their bachelor's degree. Therefore, all participants were 21 years of age or older at the time of their participation in the two-course leadership development series. These individuals are considered adults in the United States.

Adult learning has been explained and defined in a myriad of ways. Rather than attempting to describe all theories in existence, this section focuses on three major bodies of scholarship contributing most to the educational philosophy and resulting curriculum employed in the series for this study. In their book, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, Merriam et al. (2007) posited that andragogy is, "Probably the best-known set of principles or assumptions to guide adult learning practice..." (p. 79). Thus, the first approach presented is the concept of andragogy applied by Knowles (1968, 1970, 1980, 1984a) and self-directed learning. Next, the role of experience, "...which has a long legacy in the writings on adult learning" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 80) will be explored via Kolb's (1980, 1984) experiential learning theory. Finally, the theory of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991, 2000) will be discussed.

Andragogy and self-directed learning

Knowles (1968) introduced the concept of andragogy as "a new label and a new technology" specific to understanding and facilitating adult learning (p. 351). Through his work with adult learners, Knowles concluded that instructors working with adults need to focus on the learners' interests, and that optimum learning is most likely to occur if educators

facilitate cooperative learning opportunities where teacher and student work together as learners. In other words, a teacher of adults is most effective as a skilled guide on the side instead of a sage on a stage.

Knowles (1984a, b) originally posited four characteristics to describe adult learners, but later developed this into five overarching assumptions regarding ...

1. The concept of the learner – adult learners are self-directing;
2. The role of the learner’s experience – adults enter into a learning opportunity with a greater volume and different quality of experiences than youth;
3. Readiness to learn – adults become ready to learn when they encounter a need to know or do something necessary to functioning more effectively in some area of their lives;
4. Orientation to learning – because adults become motivated to learn by experiencing a need in their lives, they approach a learning opportunity with a life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning; and
5. Motivation to learn – adults are intrinsically motivated; though adults may respond to some external factors such as a better job or higher salary, the most potent motivators are internal rewards such as greater self-confidence or a better quality of life.

In summation, Knowles’ andragogy described the adult learner as: (a) having an independent self-concept and the ability to direct his or her own learning; (b) having life experiences that are a resource for learning, learning needs connected to societal roles; (c) having a life-centered approach to learning and interest in applicability of knowledge; and (d) being motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors. A brief overview of each assumption and its implications for adult education is provided as follows.

Knowles (1984a) noted that a central function of adulthood is the need to be perceived by others “as capable of taking responsibility for ourselves” (p. 9). When adults experience a situation where they feel that they are not allowed to be responsible for themselves, they feel resentment and resistance, often subconsciously (Knowles). The implications of adult learners as being self-directed has far-reaching implications for adult education. The importance of this initial assumption of Knowles’ andragogy is made clear in several ways. First, Knowles (1975) wrote specifically about the concept shortly after conceiving his original model of andragogy and positing four assumptions in 1970. Second, while Knowles did specifically emphasize the role of the learner as self-directed, other scholars outlined self-directed learning theory (SDL) based on this notion. It appears that, while Knowles was developing his theory of andragogy, Tough (1967, 1971) presented SDL as a major development in the field of adult learning. Nevertheless, SDL has remained as a distinct field of study in adult education since the time of its original introduction. Scholars have and continue to research SDL, providing an abundance of literature since Tough’s original conceptualization. In fact, so many scholars have written about the topic that subsequent scholars have written papers about the expanse of SDL literature. One such example is “Two Decades of Literature on SDL: A Content Analysis” (Brockett et al., 2000) that reviews twenty years of SDL research literature. Furthermore, the International Self-Directed Learning Symposium was held for the 26th consecutive year in February, 2012 in Cocoa Beach, Florida, and the SDL society hosting the symposium is still flourishing.

In addition to the self-directed nature of adult learning, the andragogy model asserts that adults enter into a learning opportunity with more experiences that are inherently of different quality than any a younger person might possess. The longer people live, the more

experiences they have. Knowles' (1984a) inference that these experiences are also of higher quality rests on the rationale that varied role performance in adulthood (spouse, parent, employee, etc.) provides a broader range of experiences; thus, better-quality experiences. This assumption about adult learners' experiences has several implications. It means that in many learning situations adult learners, themselves, are the richest source of information and the varied experiences of group members in different roles lead to greater heterogeneity in an adult learning group (Knowles). One potential negative consequence of more experience is that "...adults often have developed habitual ways of thinking and acting, preconceptions about reality, prejudice and defensiveness about their past ways of thinking and doing" (Knowles, p. 10). This assumption also has clear lines to subsequent adult learning theories that will be addressed in this literature review. The importance of experience in learning underlies Kolb's experiential learning theory, discussed next in the order of this review. Additionally, critical examination of personal meaning structures for viewing the world is a central tenet of Mezirow's transformative learning theory.

According to Knowles' (1984a) andragogy, adults become ready to learn "...when they experience a need to know or do something in order to perform more effectively in some aspect of their lives" (p. 11). The andragogical assumption is that adults enter a learning opportunity as task-centered after experiencing a life need. This means that they "...do not learn for the sake of learning; they learn in order to be able to perform a task, solve a problem, or live in a more satisfying way" (Knowles, p. 12). This occurs naturally when an individual moves into a new stage and is faced with performing a new role, such as becoming a parent. The challenge for adult educators is to artificially induce this readiness. Knowles recommended exposure to role models, career planning, and self-evaluative exercises as

ways to trigger readiness in adult learners. Knowles further emphasized the importance of adult educators effectively communicating the relevance of course content or activities, and striving to organize curriculum according to life situations. In other words, they should talk about why a topic is important and relate it to learner's lives outside the classroom.

According to Knowles' andragogy, adults are motivated intrinsically. While some adults may respond to external factors, such as a better job or higher salary, the andragogical model asserts that the most compelling motivators for adult learners are internal rewards such as a better quality of life or greater self-confidence (Knowles, 1984). Therefore, adult educators and adult education programs should focus their recruitment and retention efforts accordingly.

While I have included the implications for adult education within my discussion of each assumption, this overview of Knowles' andragogy would be remiss without inclusion of the model's seven stated implications for program design that flow out of the five assumptions about adult learners:

1. Climate setting – both the physical and psychological learning environment must be specifically designed for adult learners.
2. Involving learners in mutual planning – adults will feel committed to decisions about their learning in proportion to the extent that they were involved in making them.
3. Involving participants in diagnosing their own needs for learning – utilization of competencies that reflect personal (felt) and organizational (ascribed) needs allows adult learners to identify areas that need work.
4. Involving learners in formulating their learning objectives – adult learners will take ownership of their learning if they determine and state what they plan to achieve.
5. Involving learners in designing learning plans – allow adult learners to devise strategies to achieve their own learning objectives.

6. Helping learners carry out their learning plans – support of adult learners throughout their learning process.
7. Involving learners in evaluating their learning – inclusion of adult learners in evaluation of the accomplishment of personal objectives and of the effectiveness of the larger program.

While andragogy remains the most learner-centered of all approaches to adult learning, it is clearly not the ultimate theory of adult learning (Houle, 1996). In fact, andragogy is more commonly referred to as a concept rather than a theory of adult learning that describes adult learners more so than the process by which adults learn. Merriam et al. (2007) explained that “...andragogy actually tells us more about the characteristics of adult learners than about the nature of learning itself” (p. 79). Thus, andragogy is clearly not the single comprehensive model for understanding adult education; if it were, there would not be other theories warranting inclusion in this literature review.

While andragogy may have failed to achieve unifying status and render further research in the area of adult learning unnecessary, it was successful in identifying numerous characteristics of adult learners that are just as applicable today as they were when Knowles (1970) first presented them. In addition, many of the aspects addressed in Knowles’ model are key components of other pertinent adult learning theories. Experiential learning theory, discussed next, is one such work with many parallels to Knowles’ andragogy.

Experiential learning theory

Approximately the same time that Knowles was generating revisions of his original work on andragogy, Kolb was developing his experiential learning theory (ELT). Kolb built upon the works of Dewey, Lewin, and Piaget to create an ELT model that “...provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of

which are consistent with what we know about how people learn, grow, and develop” (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 2000, p. 193). The idea that learners should draw on present life experiences as well as previous ones in the development of new knowledge is a key component of ELT.

In Kolb’s (1984) model, learning is the process of knowledge generation through the transformation of experiences into understanding. Kolb asserted, “Knowledge results from the combination of grasping experience and transforming it” (p. 41). Kolb’s two paired continua are the perception continuum and the processing continuum. The perception pair includes emotional responses—what a learner thinks or feels about an experience. The processing pair comprises the learner’s approach to a task and how she or he transforms it into understanding. These two pairs make up the four aspects of ELT. The perception pair is concrete experience (CE) and abstract conceptualization (AC), while the processing pair is reflective observation (RO) and active experimentation (AE). Kolb believed understanding occurred in a learning process comprised of transactions between social knowledge, personal knowledge, and a person’s lived experiences. Kolb explained learning in a four-stage cycle of learning:

Learning is thus conceived as a four-stage cycle. Immediate concrete experience is the basis for observation and reflection. These observations are assimilated into a “theory” from which new implications for action can be deduced. These implications or hypotheses then serve as guides in acting to create new experiences. (p. 21)

Kolb (1984) postulated that, based on these two paired dimensions, four different types of knowledge could be generated by a learner:

1. Experience grasped through apprehension [feeling] and transformed through intention [watching] results in *divergent knowledge*.

2. Experience grasped through comprehension [thinking] and transformed through intention [watching] results in *assimilative knowledge*.
3. Experience grasped through comprehension [thinking] and transformed through extension [doing] results in *convergent knowledge*.
4. Experience grasped through apprehension [feeling] and transformed through extension [doing] results in *accommodative knowledge*. (p. 42)

Particular learning orientations or learner actions distinguish these types of knowledge created at each phase of the learning cycle in Kolb's (1984) ELT. In the first stage of the ELT model (concrete experience) the learner actively experiences a situation of importance to him or herself. The learner makes observations of experiences and later reflects back to process what has been seen in the second stage (reflective observation). Reflections are synthesized and refined in the formation of abstract conceptualizations in the third stage (abstract conceptualization). Finally, abstract concepts are tested to create new understandings (active experimentation). It is important to note that while most learning begins with the first stage (concrete experience) the starting point in the cycle depends on preferences of the learner.

Learning styles

During the learning cycle opposing learning modes are combined and four specific learning styles emerge (Kolb, 1984). These learning styles include: (a) Assimilating, (b) Accommodating, (c) Converging, and (d) Diverging. The assimilating learner prefers AC and RO. Assimilators are logical and excel at understanding and concisely organizing information. They are more interested in abstract ideas than people and learn best through readings and lectures. The accommodating learner favors CE and AE. Accommodators learn best from "hands-on" learning opportunities and enjoy challenges. They tend to rely on instinct more so than logic, and value other people's contributions to solving problems over

their own analysis of the situation. Converging learners fancy AC and AE. Convergents excel in the application of concepts or theories to practical situations. They are problem solvers who would rather avoid interpersonal issues and social situations. Diverging learners' dominant abilities are in CE and RO. Divergers are interested in other people and can brainstorm to see a situation from multiple points of view. They are imaginative, artistic, and emotional with broad cultural interests (Kolb et al., 2000).

Despite these various styles, it is important to note that learners do not need to utilize just one learning style. Turesky and Gallagher (2011) examined professional coaches and found that experiential learning theory helped their clients overcome overreliance on their dominant learning style, enhancing skills teaching others whose learning styles were different from their own. The more balanced a person is, the more sophisticated he or she is as a learner, and better prepared to generate knowledge from a variety of experiences and help others do the same (Kolb et al., 2000). After all, experiential learning defines learning as meaning-making from experiences. Kolb (1984), himself, explained that ELT was, “the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience” (p. 41). It is interesting that Kolb used a form of the word transform. Kolb's reference is not the only parallel to Mezirow's (2000) transformative learning theory, but it is arguably the most blatant. Likewise, Merriam et al. (2007) noted that “Mezirow's theory concerns how adults make sense of their life experience” (p. 132). Given the clear connections between ELT and transformative learning theory, this review of the literature moves to an overview of the latter.

Transformative learning theory

The basis for Mezirow's transformative learning theory is the notion of perspective transformation as the defining characteristic of learning in adulthood (Merriam et al., 2007).

Perspective transformation is the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about the world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167)

Transformative learning theory can be traced back nearly four decades to 1975 when building on the existing adult education scholarship, Mezirow presented the notion of perspective transformation. The idea of learning as perspective transformation entails developing critical awareness of personal beliefs and biases, and engaging in an active process of self-reflection that results in continual review and revision of these understandings, rather than a passive procedure wherein definitions of concepts are submissively accepted from others. Mezirow (1991) explained that "...transformation can lead developmentally toward a more inclusive, differentiated, permeable, and integrated perspective and that...This is what development means in adulthood" (p. 155). This idea builds on the aforementioned philosophy of Knowles (1984a), who explained adult learning as self-directed. In transformation theory, learning is likewise achieved through a personal process of revising meaning structures based on life experiences (Mezirow, 1991).

Mezirow (2000) defined personal meaning structures as "frames of reference" and explained that they are comprised of two dimensions: (a) habits of mind, and (b) subsequent points of view. A habit of mind is, "a set of assumptions—broad, generalized, orienting

predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience” (p. 17).

Mezirow identified several varieties of habits of mind:

- Sociolinguistic (cultural canon, ideologies, social norms, customs, “language games,” secondary socialization)
- Moral-ethical (conscience, moral norms)
- Epistemic (learning styles, sensory preferences, focus on wholes or parts or on the concrete or abstract)
- Philosophical (religious doctrine, philosophy, transcendental world view)
- Psychological (self-concept, personality traits or types, repressed parental prohibitions that continue to dictate ways of feeling and acting in adulthood, emotional response patterns, images, fantasies, dreams...)
- Aesthetic (values, tastes, attitudes, standards, and judgments about beauty and the insight and authenticity of aesthetic expressions, such as the sublime, the ugly, the tragic, the humorous, the “drab”, and others)

These habits of mind are manifested as points of view. A point of view is made up of groups of meaning schemes, which Mezirow (2000) explained as “...sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments—that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality” (p. 18). These meaning schemes generally operate outside of our consciousness, and if not brought to light through critical reflection they arbitrarily control our perceptions (Mezirow). Thus, according to Mezirow, learning occurs in one of four ways: (a) elaborating existing frames of reference; (b) learning new frames of reference; (c) transforming points of view; and (d) transforming habits of mind.

Mezirow first developed the theory of perspective transformation in 1975, when he presented transformation process. Mezirow elaborated (1991) and later revised (2000) his original theory, resulting in the following 10-stage process:

1. a disorienting dilemma;
2. self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame;
3. a critical assessment of assumptions;
4. recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared;
5. exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions;
6. planning a course of action;
7. acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans;
8. provisional trying of new roles;
9. building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships;
10. a reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective.

The first stage in Mezirow's process—"a disorienting dilemma"—is necessary to engage this critical reflection. People hold beliefs based on their upbringing, religion, or authority figures without ever critically examining these ideologies (Mezirow, 1998). As such, the cognitive dissonance one experiences when these ideologies are called into question, most often through dialogue, or "reflective discourse" (Mezirow, 2000), can be personally challenging. Therefore, emotions and emotional maturity is also important to this process.

Mezirow's work remains relevant to understanding meaningful adult learning. A review of empirical studies of transformative learning theory conducted by Taylor (2007) affirmed Mezirow's scholarship. In his review, Taylor found that the majority of research on transformative learning was situated in higher education settings. Furthermore, Taylor also noted that most of the studies employed naturalistic designs (qualitative, phenomenological)

that utilized semi-structured interviews with participants who reflected upon previous transformative learning experiences. Taylor recommended that future studies institute a selection criteria for participants based on the characteristic of having experienced transformative learning. Taylor emphasized in 2007 and, again, in 2008 that:

...research further substantiates the importance of a holistic approach to transformative learning in addition to the often-emphasized use of rational discourse and critical reflection. A holistic approach recognizes the role of feelings, other ways of knowing (intuition, somatic), and the role of relationships with others in the process of transformative learning. (p. 11)

It is clear that “...transformative learning has both individual and social dimensions and implications” (Mezirow, 2000, p.8). Mezirow recognized a significant role of others in individual learning. This relationship is further discussed in the following section, wherein the notion of “learning in community” is explored.

Learning in Community

The role of others in the personal meaning making process has been emphasized in scholarship on learning. Mezirow’s (1991, 2000) transformative learning clearly espouses the importance of the social dimension in the meaning making process. Knowles (1984a) discussed the value of the variety of experiences presented by a group of adult learners in his andragogy model’s second assumption. Kolb’s (1984) ELT indirectly advocated for the importance of others in the learning process; while learners with particular learning types in ELT rely more heavily on others in individual meaning making, there is some degree of need for others in each stage of the model. Vella (2002) also presented dialogue and interactions with others as the cornerstone for *quantum learning* “...that which uses all of the neural networks in the brain, putting things together in idiosyncratic and personal ways to make

significant meaning” (p. 73). Embodying important aspects of the three theories previously discussed at length, Vella (1994) identified 12 principles of adult learning:

- Needs assessment: participation of the learners in naming what is to be learned.
- Safety in the environment and the process.
- A sound relationship between the teacher and learner for learning and development.
- Careful attention to sequence of content and reinforcement.
- Praxis: action with reflection or learning by doing.
- Respect for learners as subjects of their own learning.
- Cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects: ideas, feelings, actions.
- Immediacy of the learning.
- Clear roles and role development.
- Teamwork: using small groups.
- Engagement of the learners in what they are learning.
- Accountability: how do they know they know?

Vella’s (1994) 12 principles established that the community learning environment is necessary for an individual to achieve the process Mezirow explained—connecting the dots and bridging the gap between self and others in learning. The relationship between self and others in learning is encapsulated by the concepts: cooperative learning and collaborative learning. Embedded within these approaches is the idea that learning happens best in groups—in community. The next section presents the concepts of cooperative learning and collaborative learning, draws critical distinctions between the two, and elaborates on how they are both integral to the learning in community context of the two-course series in this study.

Cooperative and collaborative learning

As mentioned previously, the role of others in learning is embedded in cooperative learning and collaborative learning. Both methods favor students working together interdependently on learning tasks rather than doing so independently in competition with one another. As a result, some authors use these terms interchangeably. Nevertheless, there

are distinct differences between the two camps. The next sections provide explanations of the approaches, highlight differences, and connect them to the context of the study. A brief overview of cooperative learning includes an emphasis on Johnson and Johnson's (2006) *learning together* (LT) approach, as this method was the specific cooperative learning strategy most utilized in the two-course series in the current study. Next, a synopsis of collaborative learning is given. Finally, a section comparing and contrasting the two approaches and situating the context for this study within this literature concludes the conversation on cooperative learning and collaborative learning.

Cooperative learning

Cooperative learning is a form of learning wherein, "...students work together to maximize everyone's learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 477). Cooperative learning has been around since before the first millennia, and been used worldwide in the time since (Johnson & Johnson). A wide variety of cooperative learning methods have been developed, therefore, defining it can be a challenging endeavor. Smith (1996) delineated a general definition that said cooperative learning is, "...the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning" (p. 71). Cooperative learning was developed in large part as an alternative to a perceived overemphasis on competitiveness in traditional education and involves students working together on a common task (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005).

According to Barkley et al. (2005), the teacher's role in cooperative learning maintains traditional ideology about the position:

In cooperative learning, the teacher retains the traditional dual role of subject matter expert and authority in the classroom. The teacher designs and assigns

group learning tasks, manages time and resources, and monitors students' learning, checking to see that students are on task and that the group process is working well (pp. 5-6)

In other words, cooperative learning requires that the teacher appoint roles, structure experiences, and monitor progress.

Cooperative learning has received a great deal of attention in the literature on educational practices and, as a result, numerous literature reviews and meta-analyses of the scholarship on cooperative learning are available. In one such meta-analysis, conducted by Johnson and Johnson (1989), more than 500 cooperative learning studies were reviewed. The consensus of this analysis and similar ones (Slavin, 1991, 1995) is that cooperative learning (of which there are several specific approaches) results in positive student outcomes in academic achievement, interpersonal interaction, as well as personal and social development.

One of the most commonly cited cooperative learning approaches is Johnson and Johnson's (2006) *learning together* (LT) method. LT was also the cooperative learning approach employed by the two-course series for this study. LT has roots in a variety of philosophical and psychological traditions, but like most cooperative learning approaches, it can be most strongly linked to the social interdependence perspective (Johnson & Johnson).

Social interdependence was first introduced as a concept by Koffka in the early 1900s. Koffka's research was advanced by Lewin in the 1920s and 1930s, and then further refined by Deutsch (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). As one of Deutsch's graduate students, David Johnson became involved with Deutsch's work and, with his brother, Roger Johnson, developed it into what is now social interdependence theory. "The premise of social interdependence theory is that the type of interdependence structured in a situation

determines how individuals interact with one another, which in turn determines outcomes” (Johnson & Johnson, p. 91). In other words, when individuals in a group have personal goals that are positively interdependent, their individual actions will encourage the success of others’ personal goals.

Positive interdependence or cooperation is possible when “individuals’ goal achievements are positively correlated” [because, in these situations] “individuals perceive that they can only reach their goals if and only if the others in the group also reach their goals. Thus, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to all those with whom they are cooperatively linked” (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 91). Thus, students in a positively interdependent community of learners are motivated to help each other learn in order to reach the group goals—they focus on “we” instead of “me” (Johnson & Johnson). While important to achieving a cooperative learning environment, interdependence is not the only essential component according to Johnson and Johnson.

Another important component of cooperative learning is individual accountability (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Individual accountability requires all members to do their share. When individual accountability is achieved, all members contribute to the group, and cooperative learning is possible. In addition to positive interdependence and individual accountability, Johnson & Johnson identified: social skills, group processing, and promotive interaction as additional components essential to cooperative learning.

If individuals are not taught the skills needed for high-quality cooperation and motivated to use them, cooperative learning will not be successful (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Social skills are essential to achieving cooperative learning because they form the basic connection between individuals. In the series for this study, the leader carefully

outlined rules for interactions and expectations for relationships in the early part of the semester during the first class. Johnson and Johnson stated that social skills are especially important when students are allowed to “engage in complex, free exploratory activities over a prolonged period” (p. 111), which was the nature of the series in this study.

Similar to the critical individual reflection encapsulated in the three aforementioned adult learning theories, cooperative learning necessitates this same kind of thinking by the group—about the group. This is known as group processing (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). Groups must consider how well they are functioning and how to improve their processes from time to time (Johnson & Johnson). Group processing is collective reflection with outcomes that are twofold: “to (1) describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful and (2) make decisions about what actions to continue or change...to clarify and improve the members’ effectiveness in contributing to join efforts to achieve the group’s goals” (Johnson & Johnson, p. 112). In the case of the series for this study, group processing can be seen in both of the aforementioned forms. The instructor models these components in the form of group reflective practice.

Johnson and Johnson (2006) also expressed the need for promotive interaction among group members. Promotive interaction involves group members providing help and assistance to each other, sharing resources, challenging each other’s conclusions and reasoning, acting in trusting and trustworthy ways, and feeling less anxiety and stress (Johnson & Johnson). This notion of promotive interaction has clear ties to the previously discussed social and emotional elements of learning, and also aligns with the ideal of “true community” as defined by Peck (1984). This notion is further explored in an upcoming section (see Defining community).

According to Johnson and Johnson's (2006) LT, there are also three varieties of learning groups: (a) formal cooperative learning, (b) informal cooperative learning, and (c) cooperative base groups. A formal cooperative learning group is one where a teacher introduces the concepts, principles, and strategies needed for group cooperation, but steps aside to let the group interact while being available in the event assistance is needed. An informal cooperative learning group involves small student groups convening for short periods throughout a lesson to discuss and clarify lesson concepts. Finally, a cooperative base group is a small permanent group assigned to nurture long-term relationships. Johnson and Johnson recommended educators use an integrated cooperative learning approach incorporating all three methods, which was accomplished in the two-course series for this study. The leader establishes "learning partners" who remain constant throughout the duration of each course (cooperative base group), utilizes quick small group discussion periods throughout learning opportunities or lessons (informal cooperative learning group), and introduces as well as models the behavior necessary for effective cooperative group learning prior to stepping aside and allowing students to engage freely.

Within the LT approach a variety of cooperative learning strategies can be employed toward achieving student learning outcomes, but every endeavor must seek to engage learners in their own active learning within an environment that balances challenges with supports. These methods can be used to achieve integration of the three aforementioned types of cooperative learning groups (formal, informal, base) while fostering the five key components of cooperative learning (interdependence, individual accountability, social skills, group processing, and promotive interaction) to allow a group of learners to grow into a real community of learners.

This section has introduced the general principles of cooperative learning as well as delved deeper into one specific approach. The next section moves the discussion to collaborative learning, followed by a specific focus on explaining the differences between it and cooperative learning.

Collaborative learning

Like cooperative learning, collaborative learning also involves a group of two or more individuals working interdependently on a learning activity. Collaborative learning also advances academic achievement to higher levels than individual or competitive learning (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2005; Bruffee, 1993, 1999; Gerlach, 1994). Unlike cooperative approaches, collaborative learning comes from constructivist ideology that assumes “...knowledge is socially produced by consensus among knowledgeable peers as students work in pairs or small groups to achieve shared learning goals” (Barkley et al., 2005, p. 6). In other words, collaborative learning happens when the learners and the educator work together as equals to create knowledge (Matthews, 1996). Kuh (2008) noted that “...collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one’s own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences” (p. 1). Kuh explained the aims of collaborative learning to be moving from simply learning with others, to learning from others. The idea of learning from each other is the heart of the notion of learning in community.

One of the most frequently recognized researchers focused on collaborative learning, Bruffee (1993, 1999) stressed that in collaborative learning environments, the teacher is not

viewed as the all-knowing expert regarding course content or class activities. Rather, the teacher in a collaborative learning environment is an equal member in the community of learners. By positioning the teacher as an equal in the community, there is no default answer—no ruling authority that students can become dependent on for answers. In this way, collaborative learning environments develop autonomous citizens who think critically and communicate articulately.

Barkley et al. (2005) identified three essential features that characterize all collaborative learning approaches: (a) intentional design, (b) co-laboring, and (c) meaningful learning taking place. Intentional design refers to the structuring of learning activities that provide the most fertile environment for maximum collaboration—and, therefore, maximum learning, to occur. Co-laboring means all group participants must actively engage and share more or less equally in working toward a given goal. Finally, without the existence of meaningful learning, shifting the responsibility to students through intentional design that necessitates active and equitable engagement is educationally meaningless (Barkley et al.). Given these stated features of collaborative learning, the subsequent statement by Barkley et al. is justifiable: “Collaborative learning, then, is two or more students laboring together and sharing the workload equitably as they progress toward intended learning outcomes” (p. 5). While their definition of collaborative learning is helpful, it is intentionally vague so as to adequately encompass the various approaches to collaborative learning. Unfortunately, this generality may render one uncertain about the distinctions between collaborative learning and cooperative learning. A focused discussion of how the concepts are different from and similar to one another would better separate the concepts. Thus, the next section explicitly contrasts cooperative versus collaborative learning.

Cooperative vs. collaborative learning

While all collaborative learning requires cooperation, not all cooperative learning requires true collaboration (Palinscar & Herrenkohl, 1999). The preceding distinction serves as a jumping off point for a section dedicated to discerning the differences between cooperative and collaborative learning. Although some authors use the terms cooperative learning and collaborative learning interchangeably, this study align with the many scholars who advocate a distinction between the two (Barkley et al., 2005). One of the strongest advocates for collaborative learning, Bruffee (1995) explained:

Describing cooperative and collaborative learning as complementary understates some important differences between the two. Some of what collaborative learning pedagogy recommends that teachers do tends in fact to undercut some of what cooperative learning might hope to accomplish, and vice versa. (p. 16)

Bruffee (1995) pointed out that the goals of cooperative learning and collaborative learning conflict. On one hand, in cooperative learning the goal is to work together in mutual harmony under the direction of a teacher to find the clear and clean solution. On the other hand, in collaborative learning the objective is to develop autonomous, articulate, thinking citizens—and to do so requires that learners must occasionally navigate lively debate or conflict. In cooperative learning the teacher assigns group member roles and requirements. With collaborative learning, group members must negotiate these roles and requirements for themselves. Thus, Bruffee (1999) contended that, while cooperative learning is desirable for working with youth, collaborative learning should be the goal when working with adult learners. “Collaborative and cooperative learning were developed originally for educating people of different ages, experience, and levels of mastery of the craft of interdependence”

(p. 87). In other words, education for children should be cooperative and education for adults should be collaborative. However, because of accreditation, degree requirements, and a host of university-specific constraints, adult educators must utilize elements of cooperative learning to maintain necessary control over the learning process while striving to achieve the environment and ideals of collaborative learning (Barkley et al., 2005). Millis and Cottell (1998) noted that, in reality, adult educators must negotiate elements of cooperative learning into collaborative learning. Therefore, Millis and Cottell conceptualized the relationship between cooperative learning and collaborative learning as a continuum ranging from most structured (cooperative) to least structured (collaborative).

The explanation from Millis and Cottell (1998) in the preceding paragraph is helpful to understand the context of the two-course series for this study. To preserve the authority and structure necessary to operate within the confines of higher education, the leader incorporates aspects of cooperative learning into a collaborative model, creating a hybrid approach. The tenets of collaborative learning form a basic philosophical foundation and goal environment for the series, but because of the aforementioned restraints of operating within a formal higher education institutional context, the elements of cooperative learning are utilized to provide necessary structure. Generally, more structured cooperative learning is employed during the first class in the series—particularly in the first half of the semester. The leader gradually moves the class through the continuum toward the collaborative pole, and in the second semester the learning environment is almost exclusively collaborative. Of course, this journey is different with each cohort of students as they evolve from individual learners in competition with each other to interdependent individuals learning in community.

Defining community

The ultimate goal for any group of learners ought to be to achieve true community (Wiersema, 2006). Groups that reach true community capitalize on the important social and emotional aspects of learning. However, what is true community? Peck (1987) explained that "...there is no adequate one-sentence definition of genuine community. Community is something more than the sum of its parts, its individual members" (p. 60). Peck noted that "The facets of community are interconnected, profoundly interrelated. No one could exist without the other. They create each other, make each other possible" (p. 61). Thus, rather than attempting to construct a simple definition of true community, Peck highlighted the following characteristics that exist interdependently where true community occurs:

- inclusivity – everyone is welcome;
- commitment – members of the group must commit themselves to one another;
- consensus – decisions are arrived at through consensus;
- realistic – multiple frames of reference inspire more realistic decisions;
- contemplative – examines itself and is self-aware;
- safe place – individuals feel wholly accepted and are free to be themselves;
- laboratory for personal disarmament – a safe place for experimenting with new types of behavior;
- group that can fight gracefully – where conflict can be resolved without physical or emotional bloodshed and with wisdom and grace;
- group of all leaders – authority is totally decentralized; and
- spirit – a palpable spirit of peace prevails. (pp. 61-76)

When considering the two-course leadership development series in this study, the only characteristic above that does not fully align is *consensus*. The community of learners in the series was allowed by the leader to self-lead and make most decisions about the group's learning but, for the sake of operating within the structure of a formal education environment, Licklider had the final say.

The series in this study utilized a *learning in community* format, wherein focus is given to intentional development of a community of learners. Peck (1987) referred to this type of intentionality in the creation of community as “by design”. Community by design is one of three ways that Peck explained true community forms, with the other two being: in response to crisis and by accident. Wiersema (2006) explained why deliberate design is the only real option for creating true community in an educational setting:

Students often form their own study groups in response to crisis. Some of those communities may even move toward Peck’s notion of true community by accident, but most of them dissolve once the crisis (test or course) passes. [Thus,] The development of a true community of learners must occur through deliberate design... (p. 49)

It is clear that educators cannot rely on true community for learning forming by accident, nor should they hope it does through crisis. Rather, leaders of learning must be intentional in their efforts to establish these unique learning environments. Peck (1987) identified three-stages that lead to the development of true community: (1) pseudocommunity, (2) chaos, and (3) emptiness. Successful progression through these stages and beyond emptiness, results in achievement of true community.

In the first stage, pseudocommunity, members avoid conflict by withholding the full truth about themselves, their feelings, and their beliefs. Simply put, members fake it (Peck, 1987). Pseudocommunity tends to be what one would find in a typical classroom—cordiality taking precedence over meaningful learning. Mezirow (2000), whose transformative learning has already been discussed, alluded to this same challenge as “Cultural canon, socioeconomic structures, ideologies and beliefs about ourselves, and the practices they support often conspire to foster conformity and impede development of a sense of responsible agency” (p. 8). In other words, pseudocommunity inhibits true community. In

the two-course series for this study, pseudocommunity existed for all groups at the beginning of the first course.

The second stage, chaos, breaks the chains of pseudocommunity and moves a group closer to true community. Chaos is achieved only when members commit to full disclosure of themselves, their feelings, and their beliefs (Peck, 1987). Chaos is a time of unconstructive fighting and struggle as a result of members' individual differences (Peck). Chaos is uncomfortable and unproductive—but superior to pseudocommunity because real interactions are now happening and as a result ways of knowing are challenged. A group in chaos will also often attack its leader and must either revert back to pseudocommunity, disband entirely, or move forward by entering into emptiness (the next stage in developing true community). Groups in the series for this study likely advanced at different rates, but it seemed that most entered chaos shortly into the first course as a result of artful prodding by the leader.

In the emptiness stage, members must let down the barriers they have built that prevent genuine communication with others. They do not renounce their beliefs but they do open themselves to constructive communication with everyone in the group, rather than just those who think and feel the same as themselves (Peck, 1987). Members empty themselves of their personal differences and shortcomings, and learn to truly listen to others (Peck). Groups that get past this third stage achieve community and demonstrate the ten aforementioned characteristics as they strive towards whatever purposes they espouse. In the case of the series in this study, the purpose of the community of learners was to promote the continued growth and development of every individual. It was likely that most groups in the

series moved through emptiness to true community sometime during the second half of the first course or during the second course.

Wiersema (2006) concluded that, when it comes to meaningful learning, “community does, indeed, matter!” (p. 108). Wiersema recommended that facilitators of learning work to establish true community in their classrooms. The creation of true community, where Peck’s (1984) 12 characteristics exist, establishes a safe and fertile environment for students to practice skills in learning, reflecting, and leading. Allowing students to engage in a true community of learners will result in the development of more productive professionals who act as interdependent citizens in a global society (Wiersema, 2006).

Summary

This chapter provided a review of literature relevant to this study. As previously stated, the goal of this research was to understand the phenomenon experienced by participants: life-changing learning. Therefore, it is important that learning be understood. As the voluminous amount of available literature on learning in general is staggering, the scope of this review was thoughtfully limited. Since participants for this study experienced the phenomenon as adult learners in a specific two-course leadership development series in a higher education master’s program, literature was addressed that positions the concept of learning within this context.

This chapter began by identifying and presenting selected fundamental aspects of all learning. Topics addressed were: (a) brain basics and memory; (b) prior knowledge; (c) transfer; (d) individual cognitive processing; (e) social interactions and learning; and (f)

emotions and learning. These components are embedded in various learning theories and are the foundation for understanding meaningful learning.

Because the purpose of this study was to understand life-changing learning that participants experienced as adults, only selected theories of adult learning were addressed. Three adult learning theories were discussed: (1) andragogy and self-directed learning; (2) experiential learning theory; and (3) transformative learning theory.

The literature review concluded with an exploration of the notion of learning in community. The final section on learning in community included an overview of cooperative learning, collaborative learning, the differences thereof and the connection to the context for the study, as well as discussion about genuine community and its relevance to learning.

Chapter 3 will present the design of the study, including the epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods employed. Detailed explanation and rationale for design and methodological decisions is provided. Chapter 3 will provide a clear understanding of exactly how this research study was conducted.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The perceptions of students who experienced the two-course leadership development series as life-changing were pursued and analyzed in this study. The main objective of qualitative research is “...to understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant’s perspective” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). Thus, this study sought to understand a phenomenon—life-changing learning in a leadership development series, through the eyes of those who experienced it. Given the inductive nature of qualitative inquiry, careful consideration was given to the interdependent components of the research design. There are four major tenets of any qualitative study that comprise the scaffolding for the endeavor (Crotty, 1998). This scaffolding begins with an epistemology, moves to identification of a theoretical perspective, theoretical perspective informs what methodology is designated, and methodology serves as the design behind the selection of particular methods to be used in order to achieve the desired outcomes (Crotty). Identification of these four elements provide “a sense of stability and direction” (p. 2) for the study.

Epistemology: Constructivism

An epistemology is a philosophical position on life and knowledge, “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). As the philosophical foundation for this study, I utilized a constructivist paradigm as my epistemology. Constructivism is the view that: “all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). In this study, meaning for learning in the two-course

leadership development series as life-changing was constructed from the participants, their experiences, and their interactions with me as the researcher. To further solidify the epistemological underpinnings for my research, I drew upon Guba and Lincoln's assertions related to the constructionist paradigm as presented by Broido and Manning (2002):

1. The researcher-respondent relationship is subjective, interactive, and interdependent.
2. Reality is multiple, complex, and not easily quantifiable.
3. The values of the researcher, respondents, research site, and underlying theory cannot help but undergird all aspects of the research.
4. The research product is context specific.

For the purposes of this study, I elected to use the term constructivism (and its different syntaxes), but this is understood synonymously with constructionism. The focus on individual meaning making makes constructivism an appropriate epistemological choice for this study that sought participants' constructed meaning of their experience in a two-course series as life-changing.

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism

A researcher's theoretical perspective is "our view of the human world and social life within that world" (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). Demarcating this perspective is important because it is within the theoretical perspective employed in a study that the researchers' assumptions about the methodology for the study are grounded. Crotty (2003) noted, "Different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world" (p. 66). An interpretivist theoretical perspective was employed within the context of a constructivist epistemology as the foundation for this study. Merriam (2002) described the interpretivist approach as an attempt to learn how individuals make meaning out of their experiences interacting with their

social world. Defined in this way, interpretivism was appropriate for this study because meaning was constructed by participants through examination of their interpretations of learning experiences in the two-course leadership development series.

Methodology: Phenomenology

Flowing from an interpretivist theoretical perspective, the guiding methodology for this study was phenomenology. Moustakas (1994) explained that in a phenomenological study:

The aim is to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. From the individual descriptions general or universal meanings are derived, in other words the essences or structures of the experience. (p. 13)

A researcher conducting a phenomenological study begins by identifying the phenomenon to study, brackets out his or her own experiences, gathers data from several participants who experienced the phenomenon, analyzes the data, reduces it to exemplar quotes or significant statements, and then combines these into themes that represent the central meaning of participants' lived experiences (Moustakas). Thus, utilizing phenomenology enabled the investigation of participants' meanings and interpretations of their experience in the two-course series as life-changing. Consequently, the essence of the phenomenon in this study (experiencing learning in the series as life-changing) emerged directly from the participants (Creswell, 2003).

In order to focus on participants' interpretations of their lived experiences, recognizing and working to set aside my own beliefs was imperative (Merriam, 2002). In phenomenological research, this bracketing process is typically referred to as "Epoche" (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas defined Epoche as "a process of setting aside predilections,

prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness, and to look and see them again, as if for the first time” (p. 85). More importantly, “With belief temporarily suspended, consciousness itself becomes heightened, allowing the researcher to intuit or see the essence of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002, p. 7). I engaged the Epoche process to ensure that the participants’ meanings of the phenomenon determined the findings of this study. Moustakas highlighted the challenge of Epoche for researchers: “...the process of Epoche, of course, requires unusual, sustained attention, concentration, and presence” (p. 88), throughout the research process. Therefore, I utilized a reflexive journal to aid in such an arduous commitment (see Reflexive journal section). By documenting my thinking I made internal thinking external, thereby creating an exposed and accessible record of my thoughts related to the study.

Data Sources

This qualitative phenomenology sought to understand the experiences of master’s students who experienced learning that was life-changing in a specific two-course leadership development sequence in a higher education graduate program. Therefore, participants who would most contribute to this understanding were “purposefully selected” from all students who had previously completed both courses (Creswell, 2009, p. 179). Those selected as potential participants were identified by Licklider. Licklider attested to witnessing life-changing learning in these students first-hand. Furthermore, Licklider received personal communication (written or spoken) proclaiming this phenomenon, either while the student was still engaged in the sequence or after having completed it. Finally, when these potential participants were contacted about the study they continued to self-identify as having

experienced the phenomenon being investigated (having experienced learning in the series as life-changing).

Recruitment of participants

Participants for this study were recruited who most appropriately met the following selection criteria: (a) completion of both courses in the leadership sequence; (b) identification by Licklider (both witnessing a transformation and receiving personal communication from the individual attesting to the experience as having been life-changing); and (c) self-identification at the time of contact for the study to indeed having experienced learning in the sequence as life-changing. With the help of the series' leader, a list was generated of over 30 individuals who met the first two criteria for inclusion as participants in the study.

Determining the ultimate number of participants needed in a qualitative study is difficult. Merriam (2002) recommended that data collection continue until a degree of saturation is achieved, "that is, you begin to see or hear the same things over and over again, and no new information surfaces as you collect more data" (p. 26). Therefore, participants were sought out and interviewed until the data became saturated.

Data Collection

The most common data collection in a phenomenological study consists of "in-depth interviews and multiple interviews with participants" in order to collect rich, thick data that honestly represents their interpretations of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). As mentioned in the preceding section, during the summer of 2012 I worked with the series' leader to generate a list of 30 potential participants for the study that met the first two aforementioned selection criteria. Then I used email and social media (Facebook and

LinkedIn) to contact those whom I could access reasonably for in-person interviews. In other words, I contacted only those on the list who were in closest physical proximity to me as the researcher (i.e., residing within approximately 300 miles of my residence at the time).

Interviews

The interview in a phenomenological study is typically informal and interactive, utilizing open-ended questions that lead to responses providing meaningful data about participants' experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To ensure I collected the rich, thick data needed to produce a good and trustworthy phenomenology, I conducted semi-structured focus groups as well as semi-structured individual interviews with a convenience sample of individuals who completed the two-course leadership development series and reported their learning to be life-changing (Creswell, 2007; Esterberg, 2002; Merriam, 2002).

Focus groups and individual interviews with participants were the primary sources of data for the study. A copy of the interview protocol appears in Appendix A. Focus groups are helpful when a research study seeks to understand the role of a group process in individual experience and meaning making (Esterberg). Given the "learning in community" environment of the series in this study, starting with community interviews (i.e. focus groups) was warranted. One former student would mention something of great significance that sparked others' memories in a dynamic group process. This provided valuable insights and enhanced the quality of the individual interviews subsequently conducted by informing the questions and ordering thereof.

In addition to utilizing data saturation as a litmus test for total number of participants, Polkinghorne (1989) also recommended that in a phenomenological study, the perceptions of

5-25 people who experienced the phenomenon be pursued. In this study, the total number of participants was 12. Two focus groups were held that included a total of six participants, and then individual interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved. Saturation was accomplished after six individuals (unique from those in the focus groups) were interviewed. Of the 12 total participants, eight were women and four were men. Participants' educational and professional backgrounds varied, they ranged in age at time of the interview from the mid-twenties to 40 years-old, and most worked in higher education. Descriptive profiles of each participant are offered in the Participant Profiles section that appears at the beginning of Chapter 4.

Building rapport

Because interviews are relationships between people—however artificial they may sometimes feel—interpersonal skills are crucial to being a good interviewer. If the person you are interviewing doesn't trust you or feel comfortable in your presence, then the interview is unlikely to go well. (Esterberg, 2002, p. 91)

In qualitative research endeavors the necessary trust that is purposefully developed between the interviewer and interviewee is called establishing rapport (Esterberg, 2002). To ensure that participants understood the purpose and procedures of this study prior to data collection, I provided each a copy of the dissertation proposal abstract via email to review at their convenience. After having sent these materials I exchanged correspondence to answer any questions participants had in advance of our time together in person. When meeting with participants, I began as Moustakas (1994) suggested, "...with a social conversation or a brief meditative activity aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere" (p. 114). I reiterated my positionality as having the shared experience of personal transformation in the two-

course series, as similarity is effective when establishing rapport with interviewees (Esterberg). Then I moved to a review of the study and informed consent followed by, once again, asking what questions participants had—and, of course, answering any questions. In this way, participants obtained as much information as possible about the study prior to their participation in it, which enable them to feel more at ease by knowing they were sharing their experiences with someone who genuinely appreciated them. These strategies enabled me to establish a strong rapport with the participants and obtain data that were rich, thick, and meaningful to uncover the essence of the phenomenon addressed in this study.

Document analysis

While interviews with participants constituted the majority of the data for this study, written materials served a supporting role, providing insights when available. The texts used in this study were what Esterberg (2002) categorized as “...documents and private papers...things like letters, diaries, and personal papers” (p. 122). Inclusion of these materials in the analysis was completely contingent upon the participants possessing them after time removed from the experience, and also granting approval for their use. Private papers were participants’ self-reflections during engagement in the series. These self-reflections were captured in required journaling exercises and final learning portfolio projects. Documents were course syllabi for the classes, which served as the final source of data for this study. These syllabi were used to better understand the curriculum for the classes, develop questions for the interview guide, and provide context for what participants report. Reviewing these additional sources of data provided a means to study participants’ thoughts and experiences unobtrusively (Esterberg).

Reflexive journal

As mentioned in the discussion of the study's guiding methodology as phenomenology and subsequent importance of maintaining the sustained process of Epoche, a final component of this study was documentation in a reflexive research journal of my thinking as well as my thinking about my thinking. Reflexivity was defined by Lincoln and Guba as "...the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'" (2000, p. 183, as cited in Merriam, 2002, p. 26). I engaged in this critical reflection throughout the research process using a reflexive journal, thus improving the trustworthiness of my study and increasing my credibility as the researcher engaging in it (Patton, 2002).

Data Analysis

Esterberg (2002) prescribed, "...ideally, you should begin data analysis in the field or in the process of gathering data" (p. 151). Thus, in this phenomenological investigation of students' perceptions related to learning in a two-course leadership development series as life-changing, I generated transcriptions of interviews as much as possible throughout the research process rather than at the conclusion of the final recording. This allowed for questions that arose through data analysis to be addressed in subsequent interactions with individuals and with those successively interviewed. In other words, interviews were tailored slightly as discoveries were made in the research process and trustworthy inductive data analysis was performed (Esterberg).

Interview transcripts and other sources of data were first read for a general understanding of the content. After having become more intimate with the data (Esterberg,

2002), I engaged in a two-cycle coding process utilizing QSR NVivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software program. NVivo was an important tool in the meaning making for this study, as it enabled me to intricately organize a vast amount of complex data. NVivo not only helped organize and ensure efficient retrieval of data, it also enabled viewing of data and emerging understandings in creative and divergent mediums. Having such a powerful tool at my disposal increased the efficiency and trustworthiness of my analysis. This analysis began with first cycle initial and NVivo coding to depict subthemes in the raw data (Saldaña, 2009). Sub-themes were then organized through second cycle focused and axial coding to make connections between a category and its subcategories and develop main themes (Creswell, 2007; Saldaña, 2009). By employing this analysis process, I sought the essence of participants' lived experiences in the series.

Trustworthiness Criteria

To ensure the quality of this study, I carefully planned methodological safeguards to make certain the results are validated and therefore can be trusted (Merriam, 2002; Cresswell, 2007). In this study, quality was defined by how accurately findings reflect the perceptions and interpretations of the participants' lived experiences. Recognizing my own positionality (see Researcher Positionality) through the Epoche process, both prior to and while engaging in this endeavor, was important to the overall trustworthiness of this study. In addition to the Epoche process, I employed numerous other validation strategies throughout the course of the research in order to enhance the trustworthiness of the study. Validation strategies included: (a) triangulation of data; (b) member checks; and (c) an audit trail.

Triangulation of data

I employed triangulation in the study as defined by Merriam (2002): “Using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings” (p. 31). In this study, triangulation was achieved by collecting multiple sources of data. As discussed previously, data were collected via interviews with participants as well as in document form. The interview transcripts were the central source of data, whereas multiple types of documents (course syllabi, personal communications, and journals or other forms of reflective writing) helped give context to participants’ experiences and interpretations thereof.

Member checks

Engaging in member checks is another common method for ensuring quality in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). Merriam defined member checks as: “Taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they were plausible” (p. 31). In this study, I sought validation of the themes as they emerged through the research process from the participants. This occurred both during interviews as well as in follow up communications. I performed member checks by sending emails with information for participants to review and consider, and then followed up with a conversation on the phone. Engaging in this member checking further contributed to the trustworthiness of this study.

Audit trail

An audit trail was also maintained for this study along with triangulation of the data and the conduction of member checks. An audit trail in qualitative research is “A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study” (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). In order to demarcate my audit trail, I maintained an aforementioned reflexive journal wherein I recorded my “reflections, questions, and decisions on the problems, issues, ideas” (Merriam, p. 27) as well as a list of data in chronological collection order. In this way, I chronologically ordered evidence of my interactions with participants and data throughout the research process.

Delimitations

This study examined the experiences and perceptions of a group of individuals who experienced their learning in a specific two-course leadership development series for graduate students in higher education as life-changing. This study was not an evaluation or assessment of the series. Noting that the criterion for inclusion in this study was that an individual identified by the leader also self-identified as having experienced learning in the series as life-changing was important. This certainly meant different things to different individuals but, nevertheless, excluded all those who took both classes but did not identify as having experienced learning of this level of significance.

Findings are relevant to the specific series under investigation. The findings in this study have potentially helpful implications for facilitators seeking to promote meaningful learning for adult learners, particularly those in similar leadership development contexts.

Limitations

This research was conducted with several limitations. My role as the researcher is the first that must be considered. I had personally experienced life-changing learning in the two-course leadership development series and a personal relationship with the leader thereof (see Researcher Positionality). Nevertheless, I took numerous steps to ensure the trustworthiness of the study (see Trustworthiness Criteria) and I am confident in the results of this endeavor.

A second limitation was the methodology. Because it was a phenomenological study to determine the essence of a life-changing learning experience in a specific two-course leadership development series at a large public university in the Midwest, the findings are bounded to that context. While possible implications for practice are presented, in no way have the results been generalized to other contexts.

Related to the aforementioned limited population for the study, due to finite resources as a graduate student, I had to limit the sample of individuals I could interview to those I could reasonably drive to meet (i.e., within approximately 300 miles of my residence at the time). Similar to the geographic limitation, was the identification of potential participants. I relied on identification of possible participants by Licklider. It is entirely possible that there were students who similarly experienced the series as life-changing, but did not feel compelled to communicate this to Licklider. Therefore, the voices of these individuals were not captured in this study.

In qualitative research, the researcher is the main instrument in the research process (Merriam, 2002). As the researcher for this study, I interacted with participants to learn, and then tell their stories. In order to truly understand participants' meanings for their life-changing learning experience in the two-course leadership development series, I had to rely

on their openness to share their stories. While I am confident in my efforts to build rapport and use appropriate open-ended questions, my finite resources and resulting data collection plan could have impacted what the participants chose to share.

Ethical Considerations

Another critical consideration to ensure quality in qualitative research is whether it was conducted in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2002). Doing so assures the study is “good” and the outcomes of the study can be believed and trusted (Merriam). The most important step to making sure this study was conducted ethically was to ensure the protection of participants. The following paragraph identifies the details of how participants in this study were safeguarded.

As the researcher for this study, not only have I completed numerous courses on conducting ethical research, I have also completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) office of Extramural Research’s Protecting Human Subject Research Participants certification. Upon receiving committee approval to pursue this study, my first step in the research process was to obtain human subjects approval from the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University (see Appendix B). Only after human subject approval was gained did I begin contacting potential participants (see Appendix C-1). When former students agreed to voluntarily participate, I asked each to sign an informed consent document that detailed what they were agreeing to and their rights as participants in the study (see Appendix C-2). Among these rights was the freedom to: (a) skip any question in interviews, (b) refuse to provide any document(s) for the document analysis, and (c) the ability to withdraw from the study at any time. The participants’ actual names were replaced with

pseudonyms at the time of data collection, and these pseudonyms were the only identifiers after the interview. Given these specific protections to ensure participants were protected, there was little to no risk to participants, thus ensuring the study was conducted in the most ethical manner possible.

In addition to safeguarding the participants, a conversation of ethical considerations would be remiss without explanation of my relationship (as the researcher) with the series' leader. As stated in the positionality discussion, I experienced the phenomenon of life-changing learning in this specific two-course series. However, I had not stated that Licklider was also the chair of my dissertation committee. To overcome this potential ethical difficulty, my dissertation committee appointed an additional faculty member as a safeguard against this potential conflict of interest. This member helped ensure the goodness and trustworthiness of my study by reviewing the progression of my work throughout the research process.

Summary

This chapter presented the design and methods of this study that outlined the “scaffolding” that guided my research (Crotty, 1998). I drew from a constructivist epistemology, interpretative theoretical framework, and phenomenological methodology. The primary methods of data collection were interviews, supported by document analysis. Data analysis began with interview transcripts being transcribed verbatim and loaded with supporting documents into NVivo 10. After data were loaded into NVivo, they were processed through first cycle initial and in vivo coding to identify sub-themes in the data. First cycle coding was followed by second cycle coding (focused and axial) to describe and

organize sub-themes into meta-themes. After data collection and analysis were performed, two additional chapters (4 and 5) were written. These chapters will provide participant profiles, the themes discovered, and discussion regarding the broader implications of the study.

CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study. Participant profiles are provided to offer brief descriptions of the participants followed by data from the study that are presented and explained. Quotations are used throughout the chapter illustrate the participants' experiences and subsequent perceptions in their own voices. When exploring and describing the participants' experience of the phenomenon (life-changing learning in a two-course leadership development series), the results are organized into three areas: (a) Where Are They From and Why Did They Come? Why? (b) A Unique Learning Experience; and (c) Evidence of Life-Changing Learning.

The first section—*From Where Did They Come? Why?*—describes the participants' backgrounds leading up to their entering the series. This section provides essential background information on the participants, their educational journeys, work experience and career paths, as well as their reasons for enrolling in the series and preliminary expectations.

The second section—*A Unique Learning Experience*—explores the participants' experiences of the courses in the series—the process of their engagement. Participants had an intense learning experience: high expectations, being challenged, and also held accountable for honest self-reflection and critical engagement in personally meaningful learning that was only possible because of an established community environment in the classroom and shared onus for learning. Support from the professor and fellow learners in the community was balanced perfectly to propel one's learning continuously forward throughout the classes and beyond.

The third and final section, *Evidence of Life-Changing Learning*, displays evidence of the ways that the phenomenon was manifested in participants' lives. This section explores the ways participants' ways of knowing and habits of mind were changed as well as how they applied these new understandings in personal, academic, and professional arenas of their lives.

Participant Profiles

In order to introduce the study's participants prior to presenting the findings of the study, brief descriptions of the participants are included. Snapshots of their educational journeys and career paths are also provided. All participants were encouraged to select their own pseudonym for the study, but they all ultimately elected to have their pseudonym randomly assigned for them. The use of these pseudonyms was necessary to protect the participants' identities and ensure confidentiality.

Abby

As an undergraduate student at a large public Midwestern university, Abby majored in Studio Arts in a College of Design. Realizing that she did not want a career as an artist but was not willing to throw away her hard work in the College of Design, Abby decided to add a minor in Psychology (another interest area) and considered career options in art therapy. However, through her work as a student community advisor in residence life, she stumbled upon the idea of a career in higher education student affairs. At the time of the interview, Abby was a second year master's student working as a graduate assistant in a Department of Residence Life.

Alisha

For the majority of her career, Alisha had worked in fundraising and, at the time of the interview, was working in this field. As an undergraduate student at a large public university in the Midwest, she majored in Journalism and Mass Communication. Upon graduation, she worked on the East coast with the Red Cross as an Americore Vista. Alisha began this post with a focus on events and fundraising, but soon transitioned to role in charge of leadership development, camps, trainings, and clubs for youth. After nearly three years, Alisha returned to the Midwest and a role at a large public university in fundraising and events. She worked in this position fulltime for one year, before beginning a master's degree in Public Administration. Alisha took the first class in the leadership and learning series and decided to switch to the Leadership and Learning emphasis in the Higher Education master's program. At the time of the interview it had been nearly five years since Alisha completed her degree, and she had been working nearly four years as a development coordinator for a hospital.

Ben

As an undergraduate student at a mid-sized public university in the Midwest, Ben majored in Sport Management and minored in Business. Attending graduate school after a year internship after completing his undergraduate study, he initially pursued interdisciplinary graduate studies but, after taking the first class in the leadership and learning series, he elected to pursue the Leadership and Learning emphasis in the Higher Education master's program instead. Ben had always had a passion for athletics, having competed in

college. At the time of the interview, Ben was in his second year while working fulltime in Game Operations for a large public Division I university after receiving his master's degree.

Emerie

As an undergraduate student at a large private university in the Midwest, Emerie majored in Civil Engineering. For two years after graduating, she traveled to colleges and universities all around the United States working for a national sorority. Then Emerie decided to pursue a master's degree in Higher Education Student Affairs with the Leadership and Learning emphasis full-time. At the time of the interview Emerie was a second-year master's student working as a graduate assistant for campus visits in the Office of Admission.

Ernie

Ernie majored in Spanish as an undergraduate student at a mid-size public Midwestern university and planned to teach high school. Realizing that a career as a high school Spanish teacher was not what he ultimately wanted, he decided to pursue a master's degree directly after obtaining his bachelor's degree. Ernie planned for a career in higher education student affairs and, thus, enrolled in the Leadership and Learning emphasis of the Higher Education Student Affairs master's program. At the time of the interview, Ernie was a second-year graduate student working as a graduate assistant with leadership and service programs in the Student Activities Center.

Jen

As an undergraduate student at a large public university in the Midwest, Jen majored in Kinesiology and completed the athletic training program. After earning her bachelor's

degree, Jen spent six months working fulltime as a Certified Athletic Trainer for a small wellness clinic and then returned to her alma mater for a six-month internship as an athletic trainer. The opportunity for a graduate assistantship in Athletic Training presented itself six months later and, after a year off of school, she started to pursue her master's degree in the Leadership and Learning emphasis of the Higher Education Student Affairs program. At the time of the interview she was a second-year graduate student while she continued to work as graduate assistant in Athletic Training.

Mandy

As a first-generation college student at a small private college in the Midwest, Mandy majored in exercise science and completed an athletic training program. To date, she was still the only member of her family to have obtained a four-year degree. Upon graduation from the small private college, she worked for one year in patient rehabilitation for a chiropractic clinic and considered pursuing Physical Therapy school but ultimately decided against it. Instead, she applied and was accepted to the Higher Education Student Affairs master's program with the emphasis in Leadership and Learning. She had planned to work as a graduate assistant in Athletic Training and the Leadership and Learning emphasis, which was what many others from that area had done. However, after being admitted to the academic program she learned she had not obtained a graduate assistantship in athletic training. Thus, while a graduate student, she worked in athletics retail, with youth sports camps, and then in academic services. At the time of the interview, Mandy was in her second year working fulltime in Athletic Academic Services at a large public Division I university upon completion of her master's degree.

Tessa

Tessa did her undergraduate studies at a mid-sized public university in the Midwest. After seriously considering several areas of study—from elementary education, to interior design, to public relations—Tessa ultimately majored in business communications. After receiving her bachelor's degree, for one year she traveled throughout the United States as a trainer for an orthodontic software company. It was during this time that Tessa gained a better understanding of her interest in teaching and helping others to develop. Then Tessa moved to a position at a human resources/staffing company where she worked for five and a half additional years. During her time at the staffing company Tessa did start a master's program in training and development. However, a marriage and subsequent move to a new state forced her to forego graduate school after completing just one class. She found a new job as a corporate trainer with a consulting company and worked in that role for six years. Then an opportunity arose for her to apply her skill sets in a higher education setting as a Career Services professional. While she was in this most recent fulltime position, Tessa realized her passion for helping students learn and develop as professionals. Thus, she decided to pursue her master's degree and, subsequently, completed the two-course leadership and learning series for this study. At the time of the interview, Tessa continued to work with students in Career Services.

Tia

As an undergraduate at a large public university in the Midwest, Tia majored in Psychology. Upon graduation, she worked as a program assistant in an academic department for nearly a year before accepting a fulltime administrative position in a Dean's Office at the

university. She worked in this role for nearly five years. During her third year in this post, Tia decided to pursue her master's degree. She took classes fulltime, while also maintaining her status as a fulltime employee. At the same time she was completing her degree, Tia made a move to a new position in another Dean's Office at the same university where she continued to work at the time of the interview.

Troy

Troy was a Sports Management major as an undergraduate student at a large public university. After graduating, he worked briefly for the Professional Golf Association before spending two years working for the national executive office of a fraternity. Troy had a plan to pursue his master's after two years of working fulltime, which was exactly what he did. At the time of the interview he was in his second year as a master's student in the Higher Education Student Affairs master's program with an emphasis on leadership and learning, worked as a graduate assistant for a Multicultural Student Affairs Office, and was active as a musician.

Sasha

As an undergraduate student at a large public Midwestern university, Sasha majored in Sports Management and was very involved as a student manager for a Division I women's athletic team. Realizing she wanted a career working with student athletes, she went directly into the Higher Education Student Affairs master's program with the Leadership and Learning emphasis. At the time of the interview, Sasha was a second-year graduate student while working as a graduate assistant for a Learning Communities Office.

Tate

Tate was an Athletic Training major as an undergraduate student at a mid-size public university in the Midwest. Tate admitted that in high school and college he never really much cared for school, but knew how to get A's. Upon graduation, he went directly to graduate school—more for experience as a graduate assistant in Athletic Training than for any specific master's program. Tate started graduate school in Interdisciplinary Studies, focusing on Nutrition, Health and Human Performance, and Education. Tate experienced the first class in the leadership and learning series after nearly a year as a graduate student and decided to switch to the Leadership and Learning emphasis in the Higher Education master's program. After obtaining his master's degree in Education (with the emphasis on Leadership and Learning and a minor in Nutrition), Tate went directly to chiropractic school where he spent the next three and a half years earning his Doctor of Chiropractic. At the time of the interview he had graduated and was working fulltime for more than a year as a sports medicine provider.

From Where Did They Come? Why?

The participants entered into the series from a variety of backgrounds at different stages in their personal and professional lives. Not surprisingly, the participants also had different reasons for taking the classes and preliminary expectations for their experiences therein. Better understanding the individuals who experienced similar life-changing learning experience in this first section of the results is important to the phenomenal nature of the experience and resulting life-changes examined in the following segments (A Unique Learning Experience and Evidence of Life-Changing Learning). Thus, in this initial section

the participants': (1) backgrounds; (2) reasons for taking the series; and (3) preliminary expectations for the series are presented. These themes emerged directly from the participants' comments.

Backgrounds

The participants entered into the two-course leadership development series from a variety of backgrounds at different stages in their personal and professional lives. To understand the similarities and differences among the participants, their backgrounds will be broken into two areas: (a) education, and (b) work experience. Information about the life-stage of the participants at the time of entering and engaging in the series is included within the discussion of their educational and professional histories.

Educational

Participants' educational journeys prior to the series were wide-ranging. Six participants completed their undergraduate studies at the same institution where they also pursued graduate school and the series. The other six participants earned bachelor's degrees at outside institutions that varied in size and represented both the public and private spheres of higher education. Participants' undergraduate majors included: Athletic Training, Business Communications, Civil Engineering, Exercise Science, Journalism, Kinesiology, Psychology, Spanish, Sports Management, and Studio Arts. Of these areas, three participants had majored in Sport Management, three were involved in Athletic Training—one majoring in athletic training while two completed athletic training programs but majored in Exercise Science and Kinesiology, and one participant had a degree in each of the remaining fields

(Business Communications, Civil Engineering, Journalism, Psychology, Spanish, and Studio Arts).

Most participants enrolled directly into the master's program of which the series was a core part. However, there was an interesting trend of students starting in other master's programs and then switching to the one housing the series after starting the first course in the series as an outside elective. Talking about his experience and decision to transfer graduate programs, Ben explained:

...when I came into my first year of grad school I did the kind of generic Interdisciplinary Graduate Studies, where you take three different programs. Kind of make your own major. They didn't have sport administration here, which was kind of what I was looking for, but they had this kind of thing. I pieced together: business work, kinesiology, and the leadership section to kind of make my own sport management. The first semester was kind of rough with kinesiology classes. It wasn't what I was expecting. It was a little more narrowed into the research part. Then the one class that kind of resonated was the leadership class with Jo—my first class there. I think Barb knew that I wasn't really feeling the other classes and I was getting more out of her class. She spoke to me about transferring in to be full-time with the leadership coursework. So that first semester she kind of helped me out and didn't make me lose any time or be here any longer. She transferred some of the classes I took to knock out other ones that were required that kind of transferred over. So that was a big help. Then I was into the (leadership and learning master's) program.

Much like Ben, Tate also started out as an Interdisciplinary Studies master's student before switching to the leadership and learning master's program:

So I went to grad school just basically to get a master's. I didn't care in what. It was just that I wanted to work [and get] Division I athletic training experience and I knew a couple people who went to Iowa State. So I went to Iowa State. I went to grad school and I didn't know what I was going to do. I was just going to pick a major. I kind of was going to do that Interdisciplinary Studies right? You pick and choose—you pick three things. So Education, Nutrition, and Health Human Performance stuff...Then it

wasn't until after the first year where I kind of went into Jo's class (and transferred programs).

Similar to Ben and Tate, Alisha also gravitated to the leadership and learning master's program after experiencing the first class in the series. During her experience in the first course Alisha realized it offered her more than the master's in Public Administration program she was in and transferred.

I was going to be in a MPA—Master's in Public Administration. I was starting to take those classes and this [the Leadership and Learning class] was going to be a supplement to those because of the higher ed' connection. Because I was in higher ed' administration. So that's where I started and then I was just like, well this part doesn't get me excited, so why am I going to want to study this for two more years? I was able to transfer over (to the Higher Education—Leadership and Learning master's program).

The theme of students who changed over to the home program of the series (leadership and learning master's program) after beginning the first class, instead of merely taking a class or two as an elective or outside emphasis option, is important and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

The brief overview of participants' undergraduate degree fields in this section gives some indication of what their professional pursuits were likely to be. The next section specifically outlines what their work experience and career trajectories were at the time when they elected to take the series.

Work experience

In the same way that their undergraduate fields of study varied, participants' represented a broad range of work experience. Four participants entered graduate school immediately upon completing their bachelor's degrees, three worked for one year, two

worked for two years, one worked for three years, one worked for four years, and one spent 15 years in the workforce before starting the leadership and learning master's degree program.

Participants' work experience and career plans prior to graduate school were as varied as their paths thereto. Upon enrolling in the series, Emerie and Troy had worked in higher education Greek life, Alisha had been in youth services as an Americore Vista for the Red Cross and then event planning for fundraising, Tia had worked as an administrative assistant in a dean's office, Ben had spent a year in athletics event planning, Mandy had done patient rehabilitation as a chiropractic assistant, Jen worked in an outreach medical clinic and then a university as an athletic trainer, and Tessa had spent years in human resources, training, and then working in higher education career services. Even the four who entered the master's program directly upon earning their bachelor's degrees had different career plans. Sasha and Tate wanted to work in collegiate athletics while Abby and Ernie were interested in higher education student affairs careers.

Reasons for enrolling

Participants' reasons for taking the classes were as varied as their journeys to them. One participant was encouraged by a co-worker while another was seeking a profound graduate learning experience. However, most participants were simply interested in earning a master's degree and gaining critical career experience as graduate assistants—and the master's program for which the two-course leadership and learning series was part of the curriculum was what they happened to choose or were placed.

For Alisha, who began her graduate school experience in a master's of public administration program, the leadership and learning classes were recommended by a co-worker and fellow MPA student, *"My co-worker who was also in the MPA program had taken a couple of Jo's classes, so it must have been those two classes. She suggested that I also do that."* Like Alisha, Tessa also heard positive affirmations from co-workers about the leadership and learning classes:

I had the belief based on other people that were in the program that were around here that this was a good skill set to have or a good, good classes to be able to take and get that information.

Contrasting the recommendations for the leadership and learning classes that Alisha and Tessa received, Tate was actively discouraged against taking the classes:

I just picked them randomly. I was told not to. My program director at Iowa State for the athletic training, she did not give Barb great reviews. The reason why is she says it's—she's going to demand too much of your time, she's not going to be understanding of your schedule, and she basically will teach you like a child. So I was advised not to take her classes. I think maybe that's why it pushed me in a little bit because I'm like "arghhh". You kind of always have that little rebellion side and I was sure it's fine and whatever. But it kind of just fell in. I liked the idea of being involved in the education realm of sports medicine. So I figured if my dream goal is to be a program director I probably should start to get more invested into program development...I think I just chose it. But the one thing I do remember is that I was advised not to take it.

As a self-identified "non-traditional graduate student", Tessa also cited relevance to her career interest working with students in higher education career services, *"I guess I felt like it combined the higher education part of working at a higher education institution with students, but then what my job was with those students. It was a little bit different than maybe a typical student affairs type of position"* and a desire for self-improvement, *"...that's*

why I was in this program. I wanted to open my eyes. I wanted to expand my horizons” as additional reasons for choosing to enroll in the leadership and learning master’s program and take the classes in the series. While it is likely that most of the remaining participants would agree that they took the classes for career prep or self-improvement, in the interviews they generally cited happenstance as their reason for enrolling in the series. For example, Mandy said:

I was put in those classes. Originally I was going to do athletic training and I hadn’t passed my boards yet so that’s just where we were put for athletic training...I mean I originally applied for kinesiology and one of the athletic trainers had called me one day and was like, “everybody else is doing the leadership and learning program, have you thought about doing that?” I was like “I don’t even know what that is”. Ha-ha. So I was pretty much just put in it and didn’t really have a choice...

Most participants shared similar experiences to Mandy as to why they enrolled in the series, making statements like Troy who shared, “*So for me it was a random decision to be honest*”. Participants’ reasoning for joining the classes—or lack thereof is important because it sets the stage for the next two major sections about their life-changing experience in the series and the subsequent evidence of life changes. Understanding what participants expected from the series is a logical follow up to the discussion on their reasons for enrolling therein. Thus, the next section examines the preliminary expectations participants had for the series.

Preliminary expectations

While participants’ backgrounds and reasoning for enrolling in the series were varied, their initial expectations for the series were surprisingly similar. Most participants were

attracted by leadership in the title and overlooked learning (also in the title). For example, Troy talked about his interest in leadership driving his expectations:

For me, I think the leadership caught my attention. Ever since undergrad I knew that I had a passion leadership in general. Also, in some sense knew that I wanted to be in front of people. Like, I wanted to be a speaker or a facilitator of some sort. I got so much experience and fulfillment out of from undergrad. A really close mentor of mine got his PhD in leadership or something like that. And so...oh leadership! There we go. That's what I want. So my expectation was—before I met Jo, was just learning about leadership more.

Similarly, Tessa was more absorbed by the idea of leadership and gave little thought to why learning was included in the title. In addition, displaying another common trend in participants' expectations for the series, Tessa did not expect much:

My perception was that I was going to be able to get skills and have experiential opportunity in these classes to learn about how I can use my leadership to assist students. I think the learning part was just like you know, I was going to learn how to do that. You know? That was really my only...I mean I was pretty broad thinking at that point and wide open for my expectations. I didn't have high expectations.

Much like Tessa, Jen was enticed by the idea of leadership and likewise admitted that she did not plan to get much out of the series—she was more focused on her work experience as an athletic training graduate assistant:

I really had no clue what to expect. Coming into it I liked the idea of leadership and learning but I thought it would kind of be a joke for what I was going into. Not really applicable to anything that I was going to encounter. It was just another thing for me to do while I was here. I didn't have a lot of expectations and maybe the ones that I did have were negative in a lot of ways. Just extra food on my plate I guess.

Tate was equally forthcoming in sharing his minimal expectations for the series:

When I first went in I thought it was going to be easy because everybody says graduate schools a joke, so I thought it was going to be a joke. Based on the

graduate classes I had taken already up to that point...how many tests do you get? Hardly any right? Like, you're not going to test me but I have to do a little portfolio and show my learning? I can make that stuff up! I never read a book before that point. Well, chapters in textbooks but I'd never read a book. So I thought it was going to be an easy walk in the park. Like it was a night class that fit into my schedule well. I think it was 5:30-8:30pm one day a week or something like that. I'm like this fits perfectly into my schedule and is going to be easy. No stress. I mean it's an education class! Come on.

The participants basically approached the series as another box to check-off so that they could attain a degree. Based off of previous experiences, participants were, “*more or less anticipating some fluff*”, as Ernie put it. They did not expect to learn much, at least not in the way that they eventually did. Mandy explained:

Never once did I ever think about—and I think this was just because of a lack of knowing, but never once did I think this was going to make me a better person. I just thought I was going to get a degree at the end of all this and I can get that done easily. So I never really thought about how I would grow.

The expectations that participants' carried into the experience were a crucial aspect of the findings for this study. The expectations give a sense for participants' prior knowledge and attitudes about learning as they approached the series as well as set the stage for exploring their experiences therein. Consequently, participants' experiences in the series are the focus of the next section.

A Unique Learning Experience

Troy unknowingly provided the perfect summation of the unique learning experience the participants encountered in the series when he exclaimed, “*It's like you went through hell but you had a water bottle the whole time!*” In his gruff assessment, Troy encapsulated the elements that comprise participants' experiences in the series. The *hell* Troy referred to was a personal, purposeful, applicable, challenging experience learning in community that

involved high expectations, critical reflection, dialogue and shared accountability for learning supplemented with support (i.e., the *water bottle*) from Licklider and the other learners in the community. This skillfully orchestrated balance created the perfect storm—a unique learning experience that was the catalyst for life-changing learning.

The community learning environment that participants experienced was established by expert facilitation. The role of the leader pervaded participants' accounts of their learning in the series. Given the emphasis placed on the significance of this particular leader, it is not possible to separate this individual from the curriculum and subsequent facilitation thereof.

Alisha explained the connection between the series leader and the impact of the series for her learning:

In a way I think Barb is one of the main factors. Just the way she creates the class. The way she thinks about things and arranges the entire semester and she just, you know, she is so intelligent about this stuff. She makes it look like she's not doing any work. It looks like she didn't—like you wouldn't think that everything is planned out but she has done such a great job of planning things out to help everybody there along the journey in the time that they're supposed to be on that journey. It just evolves in the right way.

Tate illuminated the intricate interplay between the classes in the series and the leader's direction thereof:

Because when I look at that...to me...it was that made a change in my life over the class. But when I look at how Barb did that, it was through the class. So it made it not as a class or not as an objective or just a hoop to jump through, it was an experience. Barb was an experience.

Going further, Tate questioned the likelihood that anyone else could facilitate the same level of learning and achieve the same outcomes, even if they employed the same techniques as Jo:

I want to believe that others can apply her methods and get the same result but I don't know. I can take one of the best lecturers I've ever seen and put them in that position, but I just don't think....there's something about Jo. The

one thing is the passion towards the leadership and the passion towards the education and this life-long learning experience that is given off by Barb and shared throughout the class. That is the driving force. She's a spark plug and everybody else feeds off it.

The preceding explanations from participants illustrate the profound impact of the leader and her role in creating and administering more something more than just a two-course series—a journey, an experience. Every theme in the data relates back to the role of the leader or the subsequent learning in community ethos she ensured in the classroom. The themes presented in this section of the results will help the reader better understand the leader's paramount importance to participants' life-changing learning. Further, the themes in this section holistically comprise the overall essence of learning in community.

Therefore, this section begins with an examination of participants' initial reactions to the series. Initial reactions are followed by an explanation of how community was created in the classroom. Next, the level of mental engagement in learning and reasons for this engagement are examined. Then reflection and metacognition are discussed. Finally, how purpose impacted applicability of learning is described.

Initial reactions

Participants' initial reactions were as much about Licklider as they were to the actual curriculum or content of the class. Some participants held on to their low expectations at first and resisted—almost in an effort to will their expectations true as a sort of self-fulfilling prophesy type phenomenon. For example, Tate admitted he expected the class to be an easy A and more or less a waste of his time:

So when I first showed up to that class, after like 10 minutes I'm like, "This isn't going to value my life at all". Like, "I'm not going to be a better

healthcare provider because of this class”. That’s what was my original thought was.

Tia was intimidated by the format of the class that was different from what she was used to doing:

You know I read Jo’s syllabus the first day and I’m like “Oh my gosh! This is so much stuff and there are so many expectations and objectives!” I had never seen a syllabus like this. There are no real assignments. There was nothing about, you’re going to read this on these days and what the assignments are or anything like that. It was just this overview, but it was still eight pages long! So the organizational freak in me kind of rebelled a little bit at that because I was trying to do this full-time and I wanted to know what exactly I need to read every week or when my assignments were going to be. So it was hard for me to have this ambiguity.

One group of participants shared a sense of initial intimidation upon their first encounter with Jo. This was a common reaction to Licklider as the series’ leader. The initial intimidation quickly changed to intrigue, admiration, and motivation. Troy explained:

But then when I met her was the intimidation. I think I liked it because it was very blunt and up front and straightforward and I respond to that. I was just like ok this lady’s going to be cool. Like this is going to be interesting. The words, “I have my biases” I think I’ve never forgotten that. “I have strong biases” is what she said. That’s the only thing I remember from that entire day, was her saying, “I have strong biases”. So I’m thinking wow this is going to be interesting! Ha-ha. And it was intimidation, but I was really excited.

Like Troy, Ernie experienced feelings of intimidation that gave way to excitement:

...that day at orientation when I saw, for lack of better words, how intense Barb was and could be I was excited about that. But I was like ok there’s actually going to be more here. So it was more of a sense of purpose I think at that point and like I said my interest before with the leadership and learning components...I think it was at that moment that I saw it was actually going to be something substantial. I was actually really excited about that at a time when a lot of people were like fleeing or maybe changing from the leadership and learning track.

Intimidated in the same positive manner as Troy and Ernie, Emerie first exclaimed, “*She intimidated me!*” but then made a striking revelation:

It wasn't that I was intimidated and scared. I was intimidated because I just wanted to be so much like her in that first moment of meeting her I was like can this even be attained? You know? And so moving through the classes I think my intentions were...to just be listening to everything that Barb had to say. Really following her lead you know? And following her instruction through that because I saw what it did for her life and I saw where it's taken her to be in a place of self-confidence, and really like being able to utilize her skills, and even to know what her skills are. So that was my hope in meeting her for the first time.

Amid the variety of initial reactions to Licklider and the first class in the series by the participants, was the common denominator that none fully embraced the classes and their learning therein on day one. Most participants felt some degree of fear or intimidation towards the leader and her unique style (that did also stir excitement and/or admiration) or they held stubbornly to their preliminary expectations and resisted full engagement towards learning. Despite their early thoughts about Licklider and the course, each participant progressed to achieve profound learning—affirmed as life-changing by the participants themselves. How was this possible? The answer is the following sub-themes presented in this section on the learning experience and the story begins with the creation of community in the classroom.

Creating community

The first step in the unique learning experience participants engaged in was the establishment of a safe environment, where all were welcome. Tate described the importance of the inclusive environment he encountered in the series, “*...it never once made me feel like I was out of place.*” Similarly sharing how comfortable he felt, Ben said:

I thought it was for like teaching and people wanting to be in higher education and I thought it was kind of just for that. And then there was me and this role where I wanted to be, in operations for athletics. I didn't think I would fit in again. That was my trouble with the interdisciplinary (program), I just wasn't fitting in. But this was. You could fit in with any role you wanted to.

The participants all expressed the existence of a community ethos in the classroom that was evident right away and stronger as the semester moved forward. Ernie explained that he, “...felt comfortable in the class rather immediately, whereas I don't always feel that way in other classes.” Abby shared a similar sentiment to Ernie, but was more descriptive:

I feel like there was just this naturally occurring safe space from day one. We didn't have to talk about it, we didn't have to define it, and go over what we needed to do to make it a safe space. It was just the way that the course was laid out and the way that it was modeled for us...

Encapsulated in Abby's statement is the realization that the environment was not the result of some divine coincidence, but the result of purposeful design and expert facilitation.

Ben shared his perception of the community creation process:

That's something I don't think happened right away. I knew going into the class a few people that I... I'd seen them around. I felt right away more comfortable with them, and then there was a few faces I didn't recognize...and you could chart the class and everyone when they kind of came together and felt very comfortable with each other. The conversations reached new depths. The class became more fun. More learning was had...By the end when everyone knew each other and it was a sense of community, I think things really opened up. There were a few people in the class that I instantly thought I would not get along with—they weren't my cup of tea. But by the end of it, we're having them over for barbeques and stuff like that. They're just really cool guys and women in the class too. I think the sense of community really, really grew throughout the semester and through the short two classes. It was really impactful.

After the community of learners had been established, it became an oasis of sorts for its members (the participants). The creation of a community not only enabled the learners

therein to challenge each other's thinking and engage in meaningful dialogue, it provided them with a genuine network of support comprised of people that they trusted. Jen explained, *"I feel like there was a level of respect that we all shared amongst each other with different ground rules and things that we came up with."* Because of this rapport amongst the group, participants experienced a learning environment like no other. Tia, who was enduring a difficult time at work while in the series shared, *"...it was almost therapeutic for me to be able to go and know that I had these people that I could trust because we had established this relationship."* In other words, the community of learners was a safe space for participants to honestly share, openly converse, and learn meaningfully.

It is clear that the participants experienced a unique community environment. However, the question remains: what served as the catalyst for this community creation? Participants identified the layout of the classroom and strategies employed therein as the two components that the leader utilized to encourage the establishment of community.

Classroom layout

The first factor used to encourage the creation of community was the classroom design. The room was organized in a large circle with students sitting around the periphery facing each other. This type of circular seating arrangement is a classroom setup not commonly used in education. The impact of this circular arrangement was that it generated an immediate and lasting response from students. One of the first things that came to mind for Ben during our interview was that, *"...it was a class in the group setting...The circle of tables all around."* Students looked at each other every day, learned each other's names, and got to know one another. Ernie recalled, *"Obviously we were sitting in a circle. So it felt*

like, we were all looking at each other so we could converse easily.” Alisha went into detail on the arrangement of furniture in the classroom:

One of the things that I remember, you know, was that we sit in the big circle. That obviously helps with the conversation. You get to see—look people in the eye when you’re talking. You get that understanding of each other. I don’t ask a lot of questions. That’s not my style. I sit back and listen and learn. I put things together and then I ask a question. So when I’m in a group situation, I can be perceived as not being interested, which is totally not the case. It just not my personality and the way that I learn. So one of the things that I loved about the arrangement and everything we did was that it was made to make every person’s learning style fit. So I didn’t ever feel outcast. Everybody knew that that was just my style and that I would ask questions just maybe not at that point. That kind of stuff just lessened your anxiety level. It let you learn and just be present.

The circular arrangement—the fact that Licklider was not physically distinguished from the students—sent the message of equality, that all around the circle had value and were expected to contribute to the community. However, the classroom layout was not the only thing that contributed to the community dynamic in the series. The strategies used by the leader were equally important to the creation of a community of learners. These strategies are the focus of the following section.

Strategies employed

The leader set the expectation that the classroom was a safe space for all participants to comfortably question and converse. In addition to the foundation the physical layout set for building community, participants talked about activities that were used to build trust and promote the safety necessary for a community environment. Tessa explained, “*But for whatever reason the environment was just you know...the expectation was set that it was a comfortable environment. The foundation was laid that this was a comfortable environment*

through the different activities that we did at the beginning.” The cycle of utilizing specific strategies to build trust had a snowball effect: the more trust was built the more meaningful subsequent activities would be. The more meaningful the activities became, the stronger the trust between members grew, and so on. Similar to Tessa, Tia also talked about the importance of the activities and also emphasized the impact of Jo’s what happens here, stays here proclamation:

I think just as we started doing more activities together and knowing that this was a confidential space and that nobody could go back and tell the dean what I said about the dean’s office. Things like that. I knew that with her it was a safe space as well. With some of my other professors I didn’t feel like I could be frank.

So, what were the strategies? Participants identified and explained a variety of tactics utilized both at the outset of the first class and throughout the remainder of that course and the second that helped to rapidly build and maintain a safe community for learning. Among the vehicles for building community that participants identified were: name-tagging, base groups, go-rounds, and learning partners.

Talking about the community building, methods employed for that purpose, and impacts thereof, Ernie said:

I think just the way that we kicked off the semester with the initial class. We started off with name-tagging. But then beyond that, we had the go-rounds...So everybody had an opportunity to speak and that was something that I to date had not done in any of my classes either. So if you were an external processor you had to wait your turn. If you were an internal processor you had time to think about what you wanted to say. And if you weren’t ready when it came to you, you could pass and she’d come back to you. So you were still held accountable to speaking but at the same time you could do so kind of on your own terms. It just made it a lot more comfortable in knowing that everybody is going to do this. And even if it wasn’t sharing something there but having your learning partner and having that additional

resource of somebody to process with. The fact that I knew that I was going to be working with that person all semester was a lot different from just a random lecture, turn to the person next to you—say this to the person you just met two seconds ago and then regurgitate it back...that wouldn't happen. So I think those pieces there made me feel a little more comfortable with the setting and the way that she was going about it.

Ben reflected on how the name-tagging strategy that Ernie also mentioned aided the community development process:

Meeting each other—the name card thing. That's one also. Where the first day of class I think we had a note card. You had to put your name on it and also your hobbies, your interests, and where you're from. Random things about you and you'd display it in your own way. Then you'd go around the room and meet as many people as you can in a few minutes and by the end you took that little bit of information and you went a long way with it throughout the semester. That was just a first, the first class—for someone like me who's pretty introverted it was a shock to be able to do that. But the notecard, having these bullet points so to speak, to go through and say "Oh you like this and this" and have common ground...it really helped to fast forward that sense of community.

Abby also mentioned the use of name-tagging as a way to get people talking and engaged. In her following statement, Abby explained how the name-tags were used to establish one of the other community building strategies, base groups:

Yeah. So we had...we did nametags at the beginning of each semester. The nametags were different colors and so your base group was the group of people with the same color. I think it was usually four people in a group. So not with every activity, but with some group activities we would go to our base groups to do them.

Going on to define and explain what base groups were, Abby explained:

I just remembered about our base groups and how we used base groups for a lot of things. Especially the more uncomfortable or difficult things...and I think, well obviously that was intentional but I think it helped a lot. If it was an activity that we were going to struggle with, it helped already having that group and knowing how you work within that specific group of four people.

In other words, base groups were a way to get to know a few members of the class well and establish a “go to” group for participants. Clearly, name-tagging and base groups were strategies that impacted the development of community in the series. A strategy similar to base groups but on a smaller scale, was learning partners. Tessa talked about how the use of learning partners contributed to the creation of community:

So I mean I definitely think that it was initiated in those first classes with the activities but then it just continued to build and develop. Being comfortable, working with different people, and getting to know your learning partner were all things that helped to facilitate a supportive environment.

The utilization of learning partners allowed the participants to get to know a peer in the community at a deeper level. A high level of trust was established between learning partners. As a result, learning partners were comfortable to be brutally honest with each other. Abby described this no holds barred relationship between learning partners:

You felt like you could be honest with that person because you got to the point where you knew each other and I think a lot of us stayed with the same learning partner for both classes, both semesters? So it made it a lot easier to be like, “Well I really screwed up this week!” Something like that... You were just, again, comfortable with talking about it and being honest.

The other impact from instituting learning partners was a natural sense of camaraderie between partners. Talking about the solidarity between learning partners, Ernie stated:

And to add onto part of that too, you didn't want to throw you're learning partner under the bus either because she (Jo) wouldn't be sitting around the table and for examples say, “Scott, could you tell us how you did in your head, heart, hand this week?” No, it was, “Scott, tell me how your partner did this week in his or her head, heart, hand?” So you kind of had to...ok...you had to pay attention, you had to listen, even though you might be thinking what you were gonna share. But like I said, you didn't want to throw your partner under the bus either. Make sure that you gave them all the details, all the information so they can be successful when Barb was asking them the question.

The role of the leader's high expectations for students to take responsibility for their own and their classmates' thinking and learning is alluded to in Ernie's preceding statement. The way that Licklider would challenge and then hold students accountable to engage their thinking by asking the difficult questions is a crossover element amid several themes in this chapter (see sections on Accountability and Looking in the mirror). As Ben demonstrated in the last quote, the use of learning partners also made sure the participants stayed mentally present in the classes that comprised the series. Therefore, the importance of mental engagement and components contributing thereto are discussed next.

Mentally engaged

Another aspect that made the learning in the two-course series a unique experience for participation was their level of mental engagement. The participants overwhelmingly agreed that the amount and level of thinking that they engaged in the series far surpassed any other academic experience they had had. For instance, Ben proclaimed, "*I knew that class engaged me more than any other class had...*" In addition to engaging students in the classroom, the participants also said they regularly had to think deeply about course content in preparation for class. Not only that, like Mandy, participants would also be, "*Thinking about it for hours afterwards*"—something they had not experienced prior to the series.

Explaining how even though the classes in the series would meet for three hours, Abby would remain mentally focused in the whole time:

I think I just wasn't used to learning that much in three hours; actually being mentally engaged for all three hours. I don't think I've ever had another set of classes where the entire time I am thinking and I am engaged and I know what's going on and I'm listening. Most times there's some point where I just check out for a few minutes and just check my email or something. But that never happened in those classes. Not ever that I can think of.

Like Abby, Jen was also surprised by the level of engagement she was able to sustain, resulting in a three-hour class that seemed to go by in a mere 20 or 30 minutes:

Yeah I can relate 100% there with that active engagement and that level of thinking. I've felt like I thought a lot every day in my job and having to go through things, but nothing like THIS. Three hours went by in what I felt like was 20-30 minutes. It just flew by. When I went into grad school too I was like, "Ho-ho...three hour class! You're kidding." You know? I was like, "No way am I going to do that!"

Ernie expounded on the theme of mental engagement, explaining that his focus would begin well before class, continued throughout, and then would be ongoing for quite some time afterwards:

...the brain being a muscle it was something that I guess I hadn't fully exercised—at least not in that way for a while. Mine was more than just the three hours we were in class. It was a couple hours leading up to class because you were already running through your "head, heart, hand". You're making sure that you covered all your bases. You want to make sure you are on top of what readings or discussion points that are going to be coming up. You know and it may not of been the first week or two that I was thinking that far ahead but then I quickly realized what I needed to do and how I needed to be processing. So really it wasn't just the three hours that my brain was wired to the max, but 5 hours. You know 2 hours before...at least 5 hours. 2 hours before and probably even an hour after if I wasn't walking right into something else.

Ernie also introduced a strategy that would continue the participants' mental engagement in their learning between classes: head, heart, hand. Head, heart, hand was a tactic that required each student to identify something they had learned and make a commitment to think more about or practice it before the next week's class. Not specifically mentioning the head, heart, hand, but addressing how the classes in the series stimulated mental engagement beyond the time in class, Tessa shared:

It's not very often that you...go to a class and you have to think about that class later. You know? It's like you go to class and when it's over you're like, "I'm out of here, going to leave my books there, and see you next Monday." So I think it was that forced—in a good way that we'd reflect on everything that we did. Because I would go home after that or whatever and think of how things went in that class.

The participants realized the possibilities of their own thinking, and learned that they had the ability to sustain deeper-level processing at length. Coming from a background in athletics, Jen used a sports analogy to explain the development of participants' capacity for sustained mental processing, *"I felt like she took us from sprinters to marathon runners."* It was evident that participants experienced cerebral engagement as they had never before, becoming real life mental marathoners. Nevertheless, how did this change come about and what brought it on? According to the participants, there were a number of contributing factors that started with high expectations.

High expectations

The role of high expectations for students to be mentally present set the stage for the level of active engagement they ultimately achieved. The leader raised the gravitas from day one with her expectations for the class. The expectations had nothing to do with letter grades, but rather individual thinking and meaning making. Troy remembered, *"Then her expectation—her expectation that we're in this classroom for three hours and it's still not enough for us to get through what we need to get through."* The reason that three hours was never enough was that the leader focused on the learners instead of a rigid teaching itinerary. The high expectations for individual meaning making meant that a predetermined plan for each class period could not always be followed. Tessa explained how the expectations for the participants to take their learning wherever their lives were meant the facilitation of the

class had to adapt to the learners, “*I just liked the structure of it. I felt like it wasn’t just, ‘This is what we’re going to cover’. It was, ‘This is what we’re going to cover, but if it goes a different direction that’s ok.’*” As a result of the learner centric approach Tessa described, participants recalled how tuned into the classes they were and when they reflected on being engaged, they discussed the importance of high expectations.

The high expectations that participants encountered clashed with many participants own low preliminary expectations for the series. A passage from the interview with Ben highlighted how early expectations laid the foundation for sustained mental engagement in the classes:

It wasn’t a class you could go in and sit in the back. You had to be engaged. And she (Jo) warned us in the beginning that you would be tired, physically tired, after her class. And I didn’t believe that, but it really came to be true because your brain is going non-stop because you never know when you’re going to be called upon to give an insightful answer. That kind of stuff surprised me. I didn’t believe her right away, but that’s what I think about that class was just wear and tear on the brain. But it made its point and it made an impact. So, the learning was there. That’s my knee-jerk reaction when I think about the class!

While many of the participants gave examples of the leader’s high expectations for individual meaning making in the series, Tate offered a particularly rich account:

So when I went in, I remember I would sit and have a stocking cap on with a hood over. Just sit down and again, because I’m not taking notes so I’m pretty much thinking about other stuff. It was I think the second class where Barb held me afterwards. She’s like, “No more hats, no more hoodies, you’re going to pay attention in class”. I was like, “I’m paying attention and I can do two things at once”. I was a prick. I was like I don’t need this and I said, “What’s next? You want me to take out my earring too?” She was like it’s not about how you look. It’s about how you’re engaged in the class. I was thinking well it’s my money and it’s my education experience. I know what I’m learning. Like you’re talking about current events! Ha-ha. I can watch the news (sarcastically). So it was that week though where I completely

changed. Where I just kept being like how dare her to demand more of me!? I said, "I'll get an A in your class, don't worry". And I'm like how dare you expect me to like add any extra effort in this class!

Tate went on to explain:

She was like, "You're either all in or you're not". She never did it mean. She did it like "I expect more from you". When you approach it that way, like she was a coach then. So then it's like alright this is maybe where I do need to put more effort. So the next week I wouldn't say I was rip-roaring ready to go, but I definitely showed improvement. Every week after that I improved, you know.

Jo clearly had high expectations and was not afraid to make those expectations known. In addition to high expectations, the example provided by Tate introduced an important component of challenge that contributed to the level of sustained mental engagement participants achieved in the series.

Challenged to think critically

Paired with the high expectations the participants encountered in the series, was the degree to which they were challenged to think critically about themselves and the world around them. While the challenge ultimately came from everyone in the community of learners, including self, it started with the leader. For example, Ben professed, *"She would push you in ways you haven't experienced."* Similarly, Troy explained how the leader and others in the class challenged him to think critically:

I was forced and challenged to basically step up and realize that even if I don't like it, I'm still responsible for knowing that. So it was more so of a reality check. Like, though you may not like politics or the news that doesn't make you irresponsible for understanding and being in the know. It made me just think about my grandmother and my parents and there always, "you need to be in the know" and "you need to be aware". It made me see that in a completely different light. So it is my responsibility as a citizen, as an aware

citizen with full rights to be knowledgeable of things that are going on in my world—in this world that I live in that impact me, that impact others.

Of course, the participants' transformation from cerebral sprinters to mental marathoners did not transpire without growing pains. Participants talked about “headaches” and “knots in their stomachs” as common consequences of the consistent challenge to think deeply in the series. Sasha shared about how constant challenge resulted in physical side effects for her:

I don't think I walked away from a single one of her classes without some kind of severe headache. Just from thinking so much and processing. I overanalyze everything anyways so being challenged to think and try and process through and figure things out was just...everyday was a headache. Just trying to understand what she was trying to get me at and where she was trying to push me and understanding that while it was a pain in the butt at the time it was the BEST thing I've ever done.

Abby readily confirmed Sasha's depiction of the challenge contributing to headaches:

I had those headaches too; every single day. But you also come out of those classes so excited all the time too. Its like, “I know that this is a pain and all I want to do is go home and sleep but oh my gosh what did I learn today?!?”

Some students described a more guttural manifestation of their mental effort in the series. For example, Mandy experienced knots in her stomach:

I mean, there were times where my stomach was in knots when I left that class, and there were times when I've never felt better...The knots in my stomach definitely were the times where—two things: I was challenged that day or someone was trying to challenge me. Typically Jo. Or I completely disagreed with what other people were saying and I didn't have enough nerve sometime to challenge them back. So that just left me with that like irritation. Either why didn't I say something? Or why are my ideas so much different from the other peoples? That was definitely the knots in my stomach.

While being challenged to think critically caused cognitive dissonance or even physical discomfort for some participants, they all grew to relish the challenge. For example,

Ben shared:

Initially I just knew it was so different than anything I'd had before, but I was also intrigued by it. I'm a person who enjoys being challenged. I think that's why I'm kind of drawn to athletics is constant challenges. If you're not playing anymore, then in the workplace you can be challenged with new things. Any work place is usually like that... But I think her (Jo) challenging the classroom and wanting them to be better, better student and better individuals. I was drawn to that. It's not just a cake walk class when you go in and it just—it wasn't boring. It wasn't boring at all. You were very engaged. We started each class by current events. Like you had to just pay attention to everything and that's stuff a lot of students just take for granted. They just pass it by. They're so plugged into other things that aren't as important. It just kind of—it was just such a new approach to me that I really enjoyed the challenge of it.

One of the reasons that the participants came to enjoy the challenge was the use of engaging dialogue and real-world content (current events) in administering it. Thus, dialogue and current events are the focus of the next two sub-sections.

Dialogue. Dialogue was consistently utilized to challenge participants to think critically in the series. Dialogue spread out the responsibility for learning (also discussed in Accountability) and increased mental engagement in the series. Mandy described the dialogue in the series and emphasized Jo's role in the facilitation thereof:

You don't have to raise your hand. You can just ask each other questions and it's just an open forum for anyone to speak at any given time. Chime in. You know? I liked how Barb would say, what do you guys think? When someone asked a question, before she would say her opinion she would ask everybody else's opinions and then she would let us know what she was thinking.

Due to the manner in which it was structured, dialogue became a vehicle for learning that led the participants to think in ways they otherwise would not have. Tia remembered, “*It was just very interesting in what came up in these discussion and how I would learn from it or think further about things I had never thought about.*” Confirming the positive role dialogue played in participants’ learning, Tate also shared, “*I thought the discussions always were great because they always led to something that I never expected.*” Thus, the participants had to be ready for anything and considered ideas they had not previously.

The dialogue, itself, was also different from what participants had experienced in previous educational endeavors or environments. Alisha explained:

But it was still more casual than I even expected. Having the conversations, you know? There was book work obviously, but it was more about the reflection and the conversations and how were we applying it now and in the future. That piece of it was different than I had anticipated. Frankly, different from every other class that we took.

As community developed among the learners in the series, the dialogue subsequently became more honest and open. Therefore, dialogue in the community required participants to navigate conflicting viewpoints when they arose. Tia talked about how the students learned to interact as leaders when disagreements arose:

You know learning more through discussion instead of PowerPoint. Being able to kind of go with the flow depending on what comes up in those discussions. Being less rigid about that technique or the syllabus or things like that. Then, yeah just kind of my interactions with everybody, even if I don’t agree with you I can respect where you’re coming from. I don’t care necessarily if I change your mind or not but we can have a respectful conversation.

The role of dialogue in the class was so significant that when asked broadly what came to mind about their experiences in the series, the participants identified it. Thus, while they may not have expected it or always enjoyed steering through a critical conversation with

differing viewpoints, they did believe it was a significant aspect of their life-changing learning experience in the series. For example, when asked what came to mind when she thought about learning experience in the series, Tessa shared, *“It was a conversation I guess. That’s what comes to my mind. Every single class was conversation.”*

As discussed previously in the discussion of strategies used to create community, the go-rounds were used as a strategy to facilitate discussion in the series. One of the most commonly used go-rounds was describing something that happened in the world and explaining how you made meaning of that current event within one’s own context and the topics focused on in the reading for the day. The role of current events as real-world examples utilized to challenge participants’ thinking via critical dialogue was well-established in the data and therefore presented in the next section.

Current events. The use of current events in the series forced participants’ to think critically about the world around them and their place therein. When asked what came to mind when they thought about their learning in the series, participants talked about current events. For example, Tessa said, *“Oh, the current events part of it. That part I think was a key.”* It was clear that the use of current real-world examples to explore course concepts raised the gravitas of learning in the series and challenged the participants to consider the connectivity of everything in their lives with the world around them. The participants took the course readings more seriously when they were challenged to consider them within the context of real-world happenings. As a result, they learned to think more critically and began to view their lives through new lenses. Talking about how current events and the discussion thereof impacted her awareness, Tia explained:

Jo was always trying to get you to think about how things are connected. So you had to bring in a current event or something that you saw and kind of how it related to something that you'd read. Then just realizing, oh so there's this conflict here but how is that going to impact you here? Or they're trying to do these educational reforms, or these agricultural reforms. What is that going to do to the price of food in a year? You know? Just becoming more aware of how things are.

Later, Tia reemphasized the how current events challenged her thinking:

...realizing how things are connected. So those current events—like how, thinking deeper about what is it that you're presenting to me right now and what are some of the underlying things? You know? Not trusting anything at face value and giving more critical thought to it.

Emerie offered an example of how a current event challenged her to think at a deeper level:

...we talked about current events. That was really crucial in the change of mindset. Talking about like, is our president really a good leader for us? What does that mean for us as a country? To you know elect, a leader to that. And when we call them a leader what does that mean?

The participants did not automatically critically question their thinking about events in the world and their subsequent perceptions thereof in the way that Emerie displayed above. Like most other aspects of the course, it was not until after they were repeatedly held accountable to do this thinking that it started to become a habit of mind and significantly impact for their learning.

Accountability

Accountability was the third leg in the tripod that supported the high degree of mental engagement by participants in the series. The accountability that participants described was unique. The structure of the class as a community of learners spread the onus for learning to all the members. The leader held students accountable, students held each other accountable,

and even more importantly they learned to hold themselves accountable. Abby shared how the community environment facilitated ownership for her own learning, “...in the leadership and learning classes I had that respect for everybody and respect for myself that I needed to hold myself accountable for getting these things done so that I had something to contribute to the conversation...” Abby’s sentiment has obvious ties to the previously discussed role that dialogue played in upholding accountability and the way that participants were challenged to think critically. Emerie similarly pointed out opening go-rounds (dialogue) but also highlighted journaling as elements that kept her accountable for thinking and learning when she said:

Journaling was huge and opening go-rounds were huge. Those were like the two things that held me most accountable. Journaling forced me to really process my thinking enough to put it in writing. I didn’t often do that before and I find myself doing it more now. Even in like our other classes, or even in my work. I’ll find myself just like writing an email to myself just to process. I never processed that way before it was always just like in my head floating around. So that really held me accountable. The go-rounds at the beginning of every class held me accountable to do thinking before I got to class and come prepared for class. Also, to come prepared to challenge people in class on that go-round. So if there were things I didn’t understand or didn’t agree with to be like writing down some thoughts in the moment about like how I was feeling or how I was interpreting what they were saying or why I initially disagreed. So I think those were the two tools.

Here again, we can see how aspects of the learning experience in the series overlap and intersect. Dialogue helped to challenge participants’ thinking but, perhaps, part of that challenge was that it subsequently held them accountable to do so. Likewise, journaling was a way for most participants to reflect on thinking and learning, but it also served as a measure of accountability. After all, reflection is not tangible to others until it is shared verbally or put onto paper in the form of a written reflection. Thus, while Emerie mentioned dialogue and journaling as accountability measures, the strategies most salient to

accountability for the participants were learning partners and being “called out”. The next two sections examine each of these themes, respectively.

Learning partners. Learning partners were the most salient accountability measure for the participants. Every participant mentioned the learning partner in terms of how they helped to hold each other accountable for learning in the series. Learning partners were commonly referenced in statements like, “*the learning partner definitely helped me hold myself accountable*” (Troy) or, “*so that learning partner was the one holding us accountable.*” (Abby). Therefore, if the learning partner was the most salient accountability measure, what is it? Who is it? There were differences as far as whether the learning partner was assigned or self-selected, and if it was the same person throughout the series or changing for each course. For example, when prompted to share what came to mind about the learning experience in the series, Ben said:

The first thing that came to mind was your learning partner. You were assigned a learning partner. Before the class started you'd meet with them. You'd give your run down on the assignments, the readings, what you took from them, how you learned, how you progressed. Then they'd give their side and you'd go back and forth on that. Again, right away that kind of became a joke time, let's hem and haw with my friend, this guy I'm just meeting. But by the end of it you were actually getting into the stuff because you knew you were going to have to say your stuff and know what you were saying. So that was one of them that kind of established community. That was a smaller feel because there's just kind of you and one or two other people...

On the other hand, when Ernie described the learning partner he said:

Yeah the learning partner was just a single individual that you identified in the first week or two. The second week you had to report back whom your learning partner was. There was somewhere I heard it was kind of your accountability buddy. But we had...you were responsible for presentations at one point, but it was the person who was from week to week was holding you accountable...The learning partner was somebody that you met with weekly or could even process after class with. That was kind of the intention too.

Given the diversity of participants in the study, ranging the full span of the series' existence, the discrepancy of whether the learning partner was chosen or assigned was expected and not important. What was important was the role the learning partner played in participants' accountability for learning. Tessa explained how the learning partners kept each other accountable for thinking and mental engagement during classes:

So then the learning partner, like I said, was the person that would hold you accountable when you did any kind of activities in the class. You'd turn to your learning partner and talk about this. You'd ask your learning partner, check in with your learning partner...

Expressing how the learning partner served as an accountability structure for thinking or mental engagement in between class meetings, Emerie said:

The learning partner was somebody in the classes that we were talking to routinely. So we made a commitment at the end of each class for something that we were going to be working on or something that we were going to be thinking about in the next week before we met again the next week... You knew that she's going to be asking me next Tuesday about like how I've been thinking about this and what I've been doing. So coming back at the beginning of the next class we would touch base with our learning partner and meet with them and talk about what we had decided to think about for that week and what we had decided to focus on. Talk with our learning partner about the progress that we made or new questions that were introduced to us about the topic that we were thinking about. Again, it was good. Sometimes we would settle in on the same thing that we were focusing on through the week. You know? Like hey we're going to look at how we see leadership in our assistantships. So it was cool because you're both coming back and having the same conversation. There were other times that we were looking at totally different things. She's like, "I'm going to look at how I like to do this with my boyfriend. What this looks like in our relationship". I was like, "I'm going to look at how this is with my supervisor" you know? We came up with totally different observations and realizations. So it was cool again to be applying it to different situation, but sometimes come to the same realizations! But yeah, that was a good form of accountability from week to week.

Another way that the learning partners helped spread out the accountability for learning was the requirement in each course for the learning partner teams to lead a learning

session for the whole community. Leading a learning session was a significant learning opportunity to facilitate learning for others, because as Tia noted, “*You were basically in charge of leading this learning experience for your classmates.*” Ben explained what the learning session entailed and talked about the impact of the experience:

...in this class we had the students take a whole class period and they were the lesson leaders. So, they were given a topic that Barb thought would be important to hit on but she would stay out of it completely. She'd sit in the back of the room and we were in charge of planning the entire lesson, which took a lot more time than I realized. You'd have to...you'd have to guide the conversations and provoke the thought provoking questions—give those to students and do an activity for everyone. So the whole class period is yours basically. That was definitely new.

In addition, new to the participants was a practice called “feedforward” that followed each student led learning session. Tia described the feedforward:

The interesting thing as well was that was my first experience with feedforward. So I'm very familiar with feedback, but at the time I'm like what do you mean by feedforward? You mean they have to come up with three things that I did really well and maybe two things that I could improve on in the future? Like I just want what can I improve on. Then also needing to do that for yourself. Instead of recognizing this went bad or this went bad, recognizing what went well. The other interesting thing was you couldn't address anyone's feedforward, you had to just say thank you. Which was really interesting too because I'm like, “No I want to tell you why we did this this way!” So it was an interesting experience.

Feedforward held participants accountable whether they were facilitating the learning session or having it facilitated for them. For the students leading the learning, feedforward forced them reflect on the experience working with their learning partner and identify successes and areas of improvement for the future. For the students having a session facilitated for them, the feedforward required them to stay mentally engaged—they knew that they would be held accountable to provide substantive critique of the experience their peers facilitated.

Therefore, feedforward was an important learning accountability tool. A related form of constructive interaction between members in the community that ensured accountability was being put on the spot for something that was said or done. Therefore, the next section discusses the impact of being confronted or “called out” for one’s thoughts or actions.

Called out. Being called out was simply being confronted about something that was said or done. All members in the community (discussed previously in the section on Creating community) could call someone out. In other words, both the leader and the students were allowed to make call outs. The individual on the receiving end of a call out would be held accountable for something they said or did and challenged to think deeper as a result of being called out. Likewise, to call someone out required a high level of mental engagement on the sender’s part as well. Thus, both parties benefitted from the practice of call outs. The call outs were challenges, but framed so that they were constructive rather than destructive or threatening. This type of positive confrontation would not have been possible before the environment was established as a safe space where members trusted each other and were committed to the learning of all in the community. Tia explained how learners in the series could call each other out once the community had been established as a safe space for meaningful learning:

It became a safer space to kind of call each other out on behaviors. I got called out a couple of times about how I needed to let students do things, especially in student council because I would tend to take on those responsibilities. My classmates were like, why are you doing this? Why are you the one sending this email? And they’d kind of start calling me out on that behavior.

As is common in educational settings, the leader did hold learners accountable and often did so with a call out. Tate explained, “*She just tells you how it is!*” So, while

participants were confronted and held accountable by their peers, they more commonly reported being called out by the leader. Reflecting on his experiences being held accountable for his thoughts or actions by Jo, Troy said:

So I think she (Jo) would sometimes use me as an example. Or if I would have said something and she would pause and just like stop, “So class see how Troy did this?” It would initially just make me feel like jeez! Thanks for calling me out! I appreciate it. It would be things such as filler words. So when I talk—when I spoke in class and just rambled, rambled, rambled, rambled...she would stop me and she would go to the class and say, “So you see how Troy did this?” Because I was an extraverted thinker and I said things, or when I would reply to a question or make a statement I would have an elongated answer of some sort. So she would explain to the class from her perspective, my thinking and how that reflected in my responses. So initially it would be her just teaching. It was about learning. So initially I was like jeez thanks for picking on me, and it would be consistent. It wouldn’t just be one time here but every other week I would say, or every other class I would get that. But it really forced me to learn and think about what I was saying.

Troy’s sentiment was shared by Mandy, who confessed that she would often leave the classes, “*feeling like I was being put in my place sometimes*”. Mandy described what she meant in greater detail saying, “*Like you think one thing and then you’re in these classes—Jo’s classes, you get put back in your place really quickly. Why do you think that? Or why do you assume that?*” Calling students out was also a way to ensure that processing was done in the group and not just by an individual. Emerie explained:

And then also the calling on people. So when she’s facilitating, to be reading faces...There were multiple times when she saw me thinking and she was like, “Emerie what are you thinking?” Holding me accountable for those thoughts and helping me vocalize them was crucial to getting things out in the open and having that be a part of our environment. So it wasn’t just an individual processing of experience.

Emerie’s statement explained how calling someone out was an accountability strategy, but also contributed to community development and participants’ mental

engagement in their learning—before, during, and after the class meetings. To illustrate this, when talking about being called out Tate said:

I mean the fact that I was always thinking about the class and preparing and stressing and nervous and questioning. Maybe I would have never had this [life-changing] experience if she would have never called me out? You know what I mean?

The challenge of being called out forced the participants to process at new cognitive levels. As Tia described, the confrontation forced learners to peel back the layers of their thinking until they arrived at the core of their rationale:

I think Jo's role was to ask the hard questions and to not let us get away with just a half ass response. Her favorite thing to say is always, "Claims need reasons". So you couldn't get away with just kind of an "Ehh" reason. She would ask you "Why is that?"...You know, like asking those hard questions until you're finally like in such a spot where you can't escape it anymore and you get down to the truth of it really. So I think Jo's job was to really ask those difficult questions that you couldn't get away from to learn more about yourself in that way.

While Tia emphasized to the role accountability played in the life-changing learning experience, she also highlighted the focus on learning about self. This notion of self-exploration and understanding is the next theme addressed.

Looking in the mirror

The third major component of the unique learning experience was critical self-awareness. Participants' learned about themselves through reflection and metacognition. Tia explained how learning in the classes began with, "*Knowing more things about myself, like having to take that look at yourself and like for better or for worse this is where I'm at.*" The participants talked about the importance of establishing honest self-understanding. Troy explained:

It was just me knowing some things about myself and then also realizing that just because I may not know something now doesn't mean I'm not capable. So it was me handling and dealing with some of my insecurities as a person.

The aspects of identities that became most salient varied amongst the participants, but all made some difficult realizations. Alisha commented, “*I think there's just a lot of reflection and introspection in Jo's classes where you'd have to come to terms with things—a lot of hard truths about yourself or just realizations.*” Then, Alisha unintentionally provided the title inspiration for this theme when she went on to discuss how she learned about herself in the series:

*I think one would be that learning more about myself. Really being able to look at yourself and your strengths, your weaknesses, your beliefs, your goals. **Because it really was like holding up a mirror to yourself.** You know? You were forced—but you wanted to, but you were forced to look at those things. I enjoyed that part... When you're not taught to do that so many people go on with errors but think, I'm this great person and I do everything perfectly. That's kind of what the culture is. Haha. But you don't learn from that!*

Alisha later went on to then share:

...everybody should be able to go through this process and learn more about themselves. And I think that so...in general, it was learning more about myself in this class that made me be a better—be more aware so that I can be a better leader. So I can help more people. So it was a lot of the inner exploration maybe.

In much the same way as the community environment of the series or the sustained mental engagement previously discussed, self-awareness did not occur instantly or by accident. Troy explained the process of inner exploration Alisha referenced, “*...we were forced to reflect, and then reflect on reflection, and then reflect on the reflection again.*” Troy's statement expressed how participants learned to think about an experience (reflection) and then think about their thinking pertaining to the experience (metacognition).

The graduated level of mental processing involved with reflection and metacognition was new to the participants. As a result, some maintained an initial level of resistance. However, the participants who resisted did eventually embrace the experience. Troy credited sustained challenge and high expectations for his embracing the importance of reflection and metacognition in learning. Talking about this realization, Troy said, *“But then when we got to it we realized like yes this is ridiculous but there’s so much reflection and so much to be learned from it.”* Tessa likewise reflected, *“The reflection part was critical to what I got out of that class, and how I think that helped me moving forward with the rest of the classes (in the master’s program).”* Expanding on his earlier statement, Troy said:

So that was really powerful to me, to mention reflection. The student affairs program in general is all about reflection right? Like reflect on your experiences, reflect on your identities. Well, I did not—and we had other classes, like even our theory classes were specifically geared towards reflecting upon what we bring to a group or what we bring to a situation. But I had not done more honest reflection than in these courses.

The participants attributed a great deal of their learning how to reflect and engage in metacognition to journaling that was required in the series.

Journaling

As with everything else in the series, participants brought preconceived notions about journaling with them to the series. At the outset of the series, journaling held a negative connotation for most students. Tate for example, shared the biases pertaining to the practice of journaling that he carried with him into the series:

...the people that I originally thought did journals had life issues. You know? It was for the people who were depressed. Ha-ha. Just yeah, it doesn’t seem like it’s a good use of your time if you’re going to spend 30 minutes journaling...But I changed. It was a way for me to communicate a little bit better. One of my issues—and you probably notice this, but sometimes I have

a little trouble with getting my point across. Sometimes I see what I want to say but I don't necessarily communicate it that well. I think that the journals were a way for me—especially at this time in my life, where I was able to communicate stuff. Like, if I really didn't understand this thing but I really didn't want to say anything because everybody else seemed like they were engaged. Journaling was a way for me to let her (Jo) know, and for her to comment on it and talk with me about it and not feel threatened. Then it became more than that. Then it became, alright so if that's ok—again, it went from me getting a question answered to me being like this reflector. Like, ok this is what I got out of it. I don't know if that was your target, but this is what I got out of it. Of course it's like, "Yeah, its ok, whatever you want." But it went from getting it answered to just expressing stuff.

Clearly, journaling allowed for private communication with the leader for those like Tate, who might not be comfortable discussing every topic with the entire community, furthering the safety of the classes in the series. As Tate also illustrated, journaling became a vehicle for participants to intentionally engage in individual reflection and metacognition. Further, journaling helped to extend the participants' thinking outside of class. Writing down their thoughts made participants' thinking explicit to both them and Licklider. Emerie explained the simple act of writing became powerful for learning, *"Journaling forced me to really process my thinking enough to put it in writing."* Tessa likewise concluded, *"The reflection part, the journaling, allowed me to write about that and think about that more and then react to it."*

Emerie brought up another outcome of critical reflection and metacognition through journaling:

I think that the journaling part of it helped me ask the questions but then also made me answer them. It wasn't just a, "Hey think about this". No, formulate an answer. Like figure out what this means for you and even if the answer is I don't know, that's fine but keep thinking about it.

Emerie talked about discernment of individual meaning. This of course was the essence of learning in the course becoming personally meaningful. Participants critically examined and then refined or reframed their personal guiding values, beliefs, and biases.

Values and beliefs

One outcome of the personal introspection in the series achieved through journaling, dialogue, and other class activities or assignments, was that participants learned what their guiding values and beliefs truly were. Not only was there an expectation for the participants to identify what these core values, they were also challenged and held accountable to define them. Talking about her values and the impact of the series, Emerie said:

...I really saw how my values didn't shift, my values became more defined. My values weren't necessarily defined by what I did. I had trouble at first establishing or defining my values. I asked like in what sense? Like for my family? For my work? For me personally? And the courses really helped me realized that they all need to be the same! That's all a part of who you are... it didn't necessarily redefine my values, but it clarified my values. It helped me really understand that this needs to be consistent over everything in life; my relationships, my learning, my work and everything.

As Emerie evidenced, the participants realized that values are constant. This insight was a clear theme amongst the participants, and a direct connection to acting purposefully as leaders. Sasha also expressed how the series helped her to define and articulate her guiding values:

Because that the other thing that she's (Jo) taught me is just...I thought I knew what my values were when I walked into that space and then I realized that things that I considered part of my core values were not really. They kind of fluctuated depending on the situation and things like that. Taking a deeper look, a closer look at what my actual core values are. What things am I absolutely unwilling to compromise on? Realizing that I have a better grasp of what those are and that I really do hold true to them...now that I can actually articulate what they are, I'm being a lot more intentional about holding true to those.

Mandy further relayed the importance of learning about her own guiding values and expressed how this awareness allowed her to practice leadership as an engaged citizen:

...we talked about values and morals and like whether you and I have the same values, if we both have something set and I know I'm not going to cross this line, I can see your point. So even though we might disagree, I can see your point.

For Troy, examining and defining his values transferred into helping him identify what he is looking for in a life partner. Identifying values also helped Troy become more constant in his different personal and professional roles:

Things that I value for myself changed and grew and that also made me think about what I value when I'm looking for a partner or things like that too. It was so much more than just class. I think that her (Jo's) classes were life preparation. I really feel like it was a life preparation class. Because she was very smart at incorporating family, incorporating the individuals that were parents, and like as a parent how do you do these things with your children? Yeah it was...I've really taken the classes as improving me and my personal self is no different than my professional self.

The holistic examination of core values and beliefs had profound and lasting impacts for the participants. As a final example, Jen talked about how her spirituality was reinvigorated through the experience in the series identifying and evaluating her values and beliefs:

Questions that I'm asking myself or even just being comfortable disagreeing with certain things...that's definitely channeled over to my faith life and made me a stronger believer and like stronger and more secure in that part of my life.

Clearly, examining values and beliefs was a big part of the reflection and metacognition that the participants engaged in the series. In the same way, "Looking in the mirror" was an integral component of the life-changing learning experience for participants. As inferred in many of the participants' statements about the effect of knowing their values,

participants became more intention in their thoughts and actions as leaders. This intentionality is a clear connection to acting with purpose, which was another vital aspect of participants' life-changing learning experience in the series.

Purpose and applicability

The fourth factor that contributed to participants' unique learning experiences in the series was a focus on purpose that enabled unparalleled applicability of learning to individual context. The leader of the series was purposeful in ensuring that participants defined their own purposes for learning. The importance of purpose was evident in participants' accounts of their experiences. For example, Sasha said, *"I think for me the biggest takeaways are just the idea of: purpose, purpose, purpose."* Ernie similarly explained:

...everything that we did had a purpose. Every question that was asked had a purpose. Every activity that we did had a purpose. Every discussion that we had had a purpose and an end goal, and we wouldn't move on to the next purpose until that purpose was achieved, until we had met that purpose, that objective.

Ernie's statement, while powerful, was unclear as to who determined each purpose and whether it was attained. Abby clarified, *"She (Jo) always made sure we knew the purpose before we moved on. Most of the time it was that we had to come up with what the purpose was."* The participants were not always aware of this prevailing strategy in action—Licklider requiring the students to identify their own purpose for learning. This was an undercurrent that the participants' shared. For example, Jen said:

It always amazed me too because you say how like everything had a purpose and it made me in awe almost at the fact that there was a purpose. You're totally right that she (Jo) wouldn't even necessarily like...I don't know how to say it...but it wouldn't be... we would always just end up towards the purpose. I didn't even know how we got there, but it was just an amazing component for me.

By forcing the students to decide their own purpose for learning, the leader ensured that all learning in the series had a defined purpose that was personally meaningful and therefore readily applicable to individual context. There were numerous examples in the data of how each participant was able to assign their own purpose to learning that became exceedingly applicable as a result. Alisha explained, *“I guess everybody just takes their own thing away from it. But everybody takes something away from it.”* Sasha similarly said, *“I could see where it could be applied. I could see where I wanted it to be applied.”* Tessa shared, *“It was real life for ALL OF US. Because we were all able to say what we wanted to say and how it related.”* Jen likewise said, *“...we could always put everything into our context. So it was very applicable. I could use everything almost immediately.”* Tia explained, *“... the approach was done in such a way that it was very realistic and it was very relatable. No matter what position you were in or what background you’re coming from.”* This notion of applicability was pervasive in participants’ experiences. Participants provided rich illustrations of how making their own meaning in the series resulted in learning that could easily be applied to the various areas of their lives. For example, Abby said:

Those things that we learned were taught in a way that weren’t just like, “go apply this to your future career” or “go apply this to your job right now”. Most of the things we talked about were things that have impacted my entire life. They’ve impacted my relationship with my fiancé. They’ve impacted like the way I will raise children in the future. Everything. And my job as well. And the way that I talk to my friends and challenge them when they are going through things. There’s just so many different applications for the things that we learned in those classes.

Likewise, Troy talked about how deeply he was impacted by his learning in the series that the rest of his life was changed—he would be benefitting from the experience for decades to come:

I look at it and the depth that it's ingrained and how it influenced the different identities of myself, I think that's what made it life changing. Because it's things that I see myself using 10, 20, 30, 40 years from now and it's only going to make me better like fine red wine.

Emerie also provided examples of how learning in the series, because it was self-determined, easily applied to different aspects of her life:

So I think that the natural immediate application is what's truly made it life changing. And also...I mean I've already seen it. I've seen it impact my work. I've seen it impact the work that I do with students. I've seen it work in the relationship that I have with my supervisor. How we work together. We're very similar people, so sometimes we're challenged with challenging each other but some of the tactics and things that I learned in the class are already helping our relationship to be better. So that's been really cool. Outside of work I've seen conversations with my family change. I've seen the things that I'm learning in class apply to my dad as a K-3 principle. You know? I just, the applications are coming so naturally that it's just how can I not want to keep learning about this stuff? This is really cool!

When participants talked about applicability—which they did often, it became clear that what made the learning in the series so applicable to their lives was that they were assigned their own purpose to the learning. The leader did not decide how a course topic or line of discussion was interpreted or applied. Instead, she challenged the students to make their own decision, and then supported them in their efforts to so. By facilitating the class in this way, the learning was personally meaningful to each individual learner. Repeated examples of this occurrence were evident in the data. Tia expressed how she believed the learning experience in the series was life-changing because of how readily she was able to apply it to all aspects of her life:

I think it was because you could relate it so easily to whatever was going on in your life. So whether that was your assistantship, your full-time position, something going on in current events, or something like that. It was really open to how you interpreted that and how you could bring that back to the classroom.

The notion that students were free to interpret their own purposes and subsequent meanings for learning was important. When the participants made their own meaning it required them to apply it to their own context. Learning became personal rather than externally defined. Emerie explained:

I guess thinking about it, the “magic”—if we want to call it that is the application to context. It’s not just focusing on learning, its focusing on an understanding of learning and learning in whatever stage you’re at. Leaving it open that my journal could be all about my work if I wanted to if that’s where I was learning right here in the moment. And Troy’s learning could be all about his growth in relationships, but still we’re learning together and we’re still like gaining understanding together and analyzing things together. I think that’s the gap that’s not often bridged. We look at education and we look at learning as something that’s really compartmentalized. That, you know, ok in this class in high school you can only learn about math in this class and you can only learn about this in this class. In sports you can only learn about these skills. Well, no! Let’s think about what kind of leader you are in a sport. Let’s think about what kind of leader you are as you learn about math. You know? I don’t know that’s just never bridged earlier in life. I think the magic of the class is that the way it was instructed really let each student latch on to something and find meaning in that. There’s a lot of thought and planning that goes into that that doesn’t always happen in education. That’s the magic for me. Letting each student—or allowing each student to form those connections.

As Emerie’s statement reiterates, applicability of learning in the series was one of the most salient aspects of participants’ experience. In her statement, Emerie provided the key to how applicability in the series, “...the way that it was instructed really let each student latch on to something and find meaning...” The way that the classes in the series were instructed was what enabled the participants to find their own meaning.

Personal meaning making was a new and challenging experience for most participants. So it was essential that they were supported in the journey. The next section describes the uncommon level of support that participants received in the series.

Support

When discussing the support of student learning in the series, it is imperative to distinguish that the support was for students' individual meaning making, not to help them achieve some understanding dictated by the leader. Tied to how the series focused on students determining their own purpose for learning, the support students received was likewise directed to buoy individual goals for the learning. This distinction was clear in what participants shared. Explaining how the leader cared deeply about the success of students getting what they wanted out of their learning in the series, Tate shared:

I haven't met somebody who cared as much about an individual achieving their goals than her (Jo). It wasn't her goals that she had for the class—I mean she has her objectives that she wants to reach. You have to (in order) to have class. But she cared about you developing. I've just never, never, never seen that again in my life!

Describing the same experience of the leader caring about her success accomplishing what she desired, Jen explained similarly:

You talk about believing in you and that was like the first time I'd ever had a real teacher believe in me and challenge me. But not in a competitive sense or not like if you don't understand—if you don't eventually get this you can go. You're not going to amount to anything. I'm done helping you. I'm done working with you. It was just different and it was really incredible in that fact.

Jen later went on about the role of the support she received as it related to her learning experience in the series:

So those classes were not just an out, but they were like a positive thing. If everything in my day was going bad, at least I had this one instance where something was positive. Somebody believed in me, cared about me. I mean, work is super stressful for me. I put in at least 14 hours a day just with my grad assistantship. So those classes were not just an out, but they were like a positive thing. If everything in my day was going bad, at least I had this one instance where something was positive. Somebody believed in me, cared about me, because in my job everybody's taking something from me.

Abby also talked about support from the leader:

I knew that she really cared about us and cared about our learning and wanted us to succeed. Not just get through the class and pass it and go move on. Like she wanted this to be something that stuck with us for our entire life and she taught it in that way because she really cares and was passionate about our learning and about learning in general.

Abby's statement summarizes the focus of the leader's support for students in the series: wholly towards whatever purposes they envisioned for themselves and their learning. As Abby said, Licklider was passionate about the participants' learning, but also helped them to better understand how others learned. By learning more about how people think and make meaning, the participants not only became better at facilitating learning for others, they maximized their own learning. This focus on learning in the series is addressed next.

Learning focused

One of the reasons that participants could assign their own meaning to learning in the series, was because the classes were focused on learning. For the first time, participants experienced an educational environment where learning was more important than letter grades. In other words, the curriculum and assignments were structured to emphasize learning. Tate remembered, *“That was the first time where it opened my eyes from learning to get an A on the test, to actually learning.”* Tate went on, *“I shifted my thoughts of learning for a letter grade to learning to make me a better educator.”* Ben offered an example of this learning focused philosophy in action:

In the papers you'd write, she'd notice if it wasn't hitting yet and instead of just giving a grade, a letter grade, her biggest goal was to make sure that learning was there. So instead of just putting an F mark, she'd give it back and say “You're close but you need to do this and this and kind of make sure...which I think the end goal of teaching should be is make sure the

learning has been passed along, and that was kind of her goal. It was cool to see that different side of teaching.

Despite the inclusion of the word leadership in the course title, the learning was centered on learning itself—how others learn and how they themselves learned as learners. Tia shared how her previous understandings of learning were redefined, “*I knew from psychology that people learned differently, but I had no idea of all of the different ways or like how you could incorporate all these different methods to learn.*” Troy discussed the impact of understanding more about the brain and how people learn.

Then also learning how the brain works. So because we learned how the brain works, how the brain learns: repetition, making meaning, multiple ways of viewing the information, we were able to purposefully plan lesson plans. We were able to purposefully facilitate conversation. We learned how to pose a question. Breaking down the question and seeing if it is effective. Is it an open-ended? Is it a close-ended? Does it provide enough information? Do you say it over and over or do you read it once? Even down to the detail...So it's very step-by-step, but because of the intricacies of learning, being meticulous about how you facilitate a conversation, how you teach a new learning concept, how you interact with someone, it makes you more aware of the possibilities. So essentially we're no longer stuck in a box of this is how everything is done all the time. We have a "tool box" so to say of various methods that we can pull from based on the individuals that we're in front of because everyone is different. Each environment is going to pose a different challenge in how they interact with one another. It's our responsibility to create the opportunities and the atmosphere. However, the onus is on them for the learning. That was also big for us to learn. As instructors—as a teacher it's probably the hardest job you're ever gonna have! Is being a teacher! But the learning is up to them. It's your responsibility to create an opportunity for them to do it in an atmosphere or environment for it to be effective, but if they leave the class not learning anything that's not your fault it's theirs. Cause you've done everything you possibly could to provide an opportunity for them to utilize that and make meaning for themselves.

In the preceding excerpt, Troy explained how his newly attained understanding of learning allowed him to contribute more to helping others learn. Since the other members of the community of learners were also developing their knowledge base, there seemed to be an

exponential growth effect. The more the participants learned the more effective they became at challenging each other to think critically—which led to even deeper learning. Given the emphasis on self and application to individual context in the classes, knowledge of how people learn was then applied to the self as a learner. Mandy explained, *“It wasn’t about a subject or something specific but more about how we learn and bringing that out.”* The focus was on learning.

The participants learned in community how people learn and about themselves as learners. They were challenged and held accountable to derive their own purpose for learning and supported in doing so. Learning became applicable to everything in the participants’ lives and they connected their burgeoning knowledge about how people learn and themselves as learners to leadership. These complexly interdependent factors culminated in a learning experience that changed the participants’ lives for the better. As Tate shared when he described what the experience did for him, *“It completely changed everything about me. From educational...it changed my personality...I think I’m a much more well-rounded professional and just a nicer person. A more engaged person.”* The final major section of this chapter presents the evidence of how the participants’ lives were changed through their learning experience in the series.

Evidence of Life-Changing Learning

This final section of results presents the outcomes of participants’ life-changing learning experience in the series. The most significant change happened within the minds of the learners. The experience in the series resulted in a lasting fundamental shift in how the participants interpreted the world around them. This change in thinking had clear

implications for the participants' future actions as they applied what they learned to enhance future opportunities for themselves and others as practicing leaders. The following section begins the discussion with the transformation in participants' ways of knowing and habits of mind.

Cognitive transformations

The participants experienced a revolution in how they perceived and thought about the world around them. This cognitive transformation was the fundamental aspect of the life-changing learning in the series. Explaining how her learning enabled her to apply a more transcendent perspective to people and situations in her life, Tessa said:

I agree with the statement that these classes were life-changing because it opened my eyes and helped me to see things from other perspectives. So not just being like looking straight ahead all the time, but looking at it from a lot of different angles. The life-changing part was personal and it was professional.

Taking the explanation of this transformation a step further, Jen explained how the shift in perspective was coupled with a move towards thinking more critically as a habit of mind:

For me, it changed the way that I see the world and everything in it. It's funny looking back on it because I didn't ever assume that I would have this type of an impact on anything. How should I put it? Sorry...I didn't think that something would have this type of an impact on myself. I didn't expect to really get anything out of this program, which now saying that is almost...I feel like it's an injustice. It's almost insulting. I don't mean it to come off that way at all. It's just that...I think differently and I don't even know how to explain it but I do.

The idea that the learning led to thinking more critically and divergently was a quintessential element amongst participants. For example, Emerie said, "I think it just totally

changed my mindset and how I think about things.” However, heightened cognitive processing ability was viewed as both a blessing and a curse by participants. Tate explained:

A change in the way I think. But going back to the beginning, that's that scary part for me because I can't shut my mind off now and that's stressful. Like really stressful. It was way easier to do the $2 + 2 = 4$, instead of being like: "How did 2 develop?"

Continuing about life, in general, after his changing in thinking, Tate added, *"I struggle because I can't shut it off. I don't know when to shut it off."* Once his eyes were opened to the complex interconnected nature of the world, it was impossible for Tate to return to the simpler worldview he used to rely on. Like Tate, the participants all became more aware of the connections in the world. Explaining her experience, Tia shared:

I think I just became so much more aware about how things are connected. Kind of how things were impacting me. All of these different qualities and ways that I could be better or even just recognize that I had limitations, whether it was something I could change or not. Being able to recognize other people's points of view. Before, I think I was very quick to respond and not listen to the entire argument.

While the ability to consider multiple competing perspectives at once was challenging to get accustomed to at first, it enhanced the participants' abilities to better understand and interact with the people in their lives. To further express how her newfound cognitive ability helped her to better engage with other individuals, Tia said:

I think just in the way I interact with anybody really. Being open to anyone's experiences or differences, different viewpoints, or anything like that. Also realizing how things are connected...So being more aware of kind of what's going on around me. How things impact other things. Underlying messages. Things like that. So just being more hyper-aware of that.

Similarly, expressing an increased effectiveness for her interactions with others, Mandy offered:

I just think day to day, to be honest. I just interact with people so much better. Not even from a business point of view, but just understanding that maybe I don't know where you've been or where you're going but I can maybe have those discussions and find out. Not assume anything. I have a lot of—not a lot, I have a fair share of grad students in the ELPS program who come apply for a job here. I think I have one right now and I've probably had four total maybe. Just hearing them talk to me, I know that that's where they...I feel like it's a mentality. I think it's a good mentality to have. So I think that those classes helped me to more professionally converse with students, converse with my employees, and my co-workers and my coaches.

Within the conversation of perspective change and subsequently enhanced interpersonal abilities were two major areas that participants talked about. Not surprisingly, these two areas were the foci for the classes in the series: learning and leadership. The next section discusses participants' understanding of learning as a result of their life-changing experience in the series.

Understanding of learning

The participants' perceptions of learning were transformed through their experience in the series. They developed a complex understanding and appreciation for how people learn. Illustrating how ideas about learning reformed from memorization and regurgitation of information provided by an expert in a classroom setting to a non-stop collaborative process that happens everywhere, Emerie said:

Even looking at my definition of learning...you know, changing that from just internalizing knowledge to really processing knowledge. That's something that I was always trained to do. Like learning happens in the classroom, you know? Especially coming back to school after a couple of years off, I was ready. I was like, "Oh I'm ready to learn again". Ready to learn again?! I was learning all through those two years that I was working! I think that it just conceptualized that for me. I realized it was happening. I realized I was growing, but I called it growing and not learning.

The participants gained appreciation for learning as a dynamic collaborative process that is ongoing throughout life. For example, Tia stated, "*I think it helped to change my*

perception about what was going on. The fact that you're always learning and you're always improving and you're never done." This new appreciation for the complexity and continuing nature of learning was common among participants. Tia provided an example of how her new understanding of learning fundamentally altered her worldview—particularly of learning:

...it was really difficult for me to sum up what it was I had learned in the program because I feel like I'm still learning and I know I'm never going to be done learning. So I don't feel like I'm there to where I can say yes give me my master's degree, I've learned all I need to know. Because I'm not there...I don't think that the learning's ever done. I don't think that I'm ever going to be 100% the best I can be.

Articulating the significant change in his perception of learning from before and then after the experience in the series through examples, Tate explained:

It was just answering a question. It was a black and white response. Yes or no. I need to be able to answer everything. So if you sprain your ankle, why did you sprain your ankle? Two plus two equals four. Stuff like that. I never dug any deeper. For instance, if there is going to be a test I'll go through the bullets and make sure I memorize those, but if a door opens somewhere else—one, I never saw those doors back then, and who cares anyways if it's not going to be graded. That's really what my thought process was. The only way you're going to make headway anyways is with grades you know? 90%. That's all I care about. So it was really clear cut and dry before. Afterwards you start becoming more confused. Ha. You start asking—you have a lot more questions than answers. My personality is still looking for answers, but I know now that one, I'm never going to find some answers, and every time I come up with an answer I have three new questions. That I think is this whole "life-long learning experience". I think the target of that class at least to me was how to become a life-long learner and how do you become a leader in whatever you're doing using this life-long learning?

Tate's explanation not only displayed the metamorphosis of understanding about learning, it made the connection to leadership. The participants all talked about the interdependent nature of learning and leadership. Hence, the relationship between

participants' transformed beliefs about learning and their equally reframed understanding of leadership is discussed next.

Understanding of leadership

Participants' concepts for what it means to be a leader were changed as they reevaluated their beliefs about learning. The transformation of one idea directly influenced that of the other in an interconnected process of meaning making. Providing evidence of how her reconceived definition of leadership was directly related to her new appreciation for learning, Tessa said:

I think I can just be more of an active leader if I'm constantly learning. So I could take the easy road and just keep doing what I'm doing. Right? I know how to do it. I've been doing it for six years. It works. Right? Or I can take the lead, not necessarily just lead people but take an active role in the conversation. Like, "Tell me what you're seeing in the curriculum right now" or "Explain to me what students are telling you". Then the faculty are saying, "Tell us what the employers are asking for so that when we're teaching, are we teaching to that?" So I think they're directly related and just how I can act on my leadership ability to be present in the conversation, active in the conversation, and continuously learning.

Participants shared the belief that leadership involved committing oneself to continuous improvement and helping others to learn. Leaders were seen as part of the learning process, engaging others and always learning themselves. Emerie explained a realization she made about leadership, *"But I realized that me demonstrating it wasn't the leadership. It was me learning with everybody that was the leadership."* In addition, speaking about the importance of a leader as a learner, and emphasizing that leadership is not about position, Tate shared:

I think the other thing too is that I felt like it meant—everybody wants to be seen as the leader, especially once you get over that idea of power and position being the defining term. Qualities of leadership I think can be

applied to anyone and anywhere. So it was really setting me up for future development. Professional development, like what—if I'm not there yet, what is it that I can work on? Or what are two areas that I need to work on? And then another two areas that maybe I can work on later? Things like that.

Like Tate, Tia also moved away from the notion of leadership as positional. After her experience in the series, Tia understood leadership to be about the facilitation of learning for self and others—unrelated to power or authority:

I think it's to prepare us for these...at some point we're going to lead a discussion or we're going to have to take—even if we're not in positions of power, which was how I defined leadership before, we're going to be responsible for helping people learn and helping ourselves continue to learn.

Tia went on to say anyone could be a leader if they genuinely cared for others and helped them to learn; she also reiterated the importance of the leader's continual learning:

Leadership now I define as knowing more about yourself and kind of having some defining values and morals. Not necessarily being related to a position or to any sort of title. A leader can be anybody. A leader could be the child that stands up to a bully or the person that comes to work every day or anything like that. So it could be anybody and its more qualities and it's having—one thing that always stood out to me was this "genuine care and concern for other people". That's always a good quality of a leader, a desire to keep learning and to encourage other people to learn.

Tate echoed Tia's definition of leaders as life-long learners who genuinely care about others and contribute to their success by helping them learn. Further emphasizing the point that leadership is not tied to positional authority and explaining that it is instead about influence, Tate said:

Management I feel is trying to control people and its more of a position. So it's a supervisor and people in positions underneath them. Not really caring about the growth of those employees or of those positions, it's very related to the task. Leadership again can be at any level and it has genuine care for everyone. That person knows that they always need to learn, they're never done learning and they also want other people to lead and to learn as well. Knowing that you really can be a leader without followers. You could be the highest position ever but it's not going to matter if you can't influence people.

Likewise noting that leadership did not require a title or position and explaining how she began to see this new notion of leadership in her life, Emerie reflected:

Now it was more of an ok, now I've seen how I've been a leader in my family where I don't have any title with that. I'm just a sister and I'm just a daughter to my parents. But you know there's positions and situations that I've been in where you know, my parent's going through this massive job change and I've seen—that was happening when I was taking these classes. And I saw all the skills of leadership were applying to that situation. Outside of having a title. Outside of being in charge of people. Those sorts of things. So I think that was one big transition. Just realizing that there doesn't...there isn't a required title in leadership.

Participants moved from understanding leadership as authority or titles to instead seeing it as the ability to influence others independent of position. Leadership was also perceived as directly tied to life-long learning. In other words, leaders committed to continual learning—both for themselves and facilitating opportunities for others. These significant changes in the participants' perceptions of learning and leadership were manifested in their actions as they applied what they learned as practicing leaders.

Concrete applications

As discussed when explaining participants learning experiences earlier in this chapter, one of the most significant components of the learning process was that each learner decided their own purpose and subsequently applied learning to their own context. Those applications persisted after the series concluded as participants continued to learn from their experiences. For example, Jen shared:

And for me too it's not just you know you talked about how much you learn and continue to think about all you were learning. It's still today like what I've learned from it, it continues to pop up in ways now that I'm not thinking about it all the time but I'll...something will happen and I either can handle the situation differently. I'm continuing to still find out things that I learned from it and maybe I didn't see right away either.

After completing the series, the participants continued to learn and planned on doing so for a lifetime. In their stories, were numerous examples that provided evidence of participants' pledges to be life-long learners. They applied their new understandings of learning, leadership, and the connections thereof to the many facets of their lives, maximizing their own learning and facilitating it for others.

Maximizing learning opportunities for self

Participants' applied their learning to their lives outside the series. The applications of their new perspectives allowed them to maximize their own learning in all situations and become more purposeful leaders. For example, Alisha shared:

So to me, it was just kind of learning—taking what I learned in class and then being able to see it the next day at work. Just all of that started snowballing to help me make some decision and realize that I didn't like the train I was going down. It scared me. I didn't like the person that I was—that they were trying to make me be. They were trying to get me into new positions. They were trying to support me. They wanted to—they were trying to promote me and they thought they were doing what was right for me. But through this [the Leadership and Learning classes] I realized that's not the life I want to have.

Tate discussed how he learned to benefit from all life's experiences:

To take an experience of your life, whether you're thinking it was worthy or not worthy. Maybe it was a bad experience. Then actually look into it and see what you actually took away from it. I learned more from those than the ones like for instance: chiro school. I came to chiro school because I didn't understand it and I didn't think it was valid. So I came to chiro school and now look at me. But you take things away from any experience. That is something that I wasn't doing before that class.

Expressing how her new autonomy as a learner helped her in the graduate school courses outside the series she had taken in the time since, Sasha said, "...it showed me I can still learn these things and I can still grow and now I'm understanding how I learn so now I can fix my attitude about these other classes as well." Sasha also explained:

It's better now. I feel like I have a better attitude now and I can recognize when our teachers are using strategies, like ok I get this I understand what they're trying to get at and stuff like that. So, I think it's better now than if I had never had those classes. I have a better attitude about these other classes.

Tessa drew a contrast between her tendencies before the series and how she approached opportunities differently afterwards to ensure her learning was personally meaningful:

So I think it's just—and I've always been a learner. You know? Sign me up I'll go to that session. Conference coming up? I'll go! I've always been interested in that. But I think this helped me see why that was even more important. Not just the opportunity to go and learn something and travel somewhere but what am I getting out of that that will be helpful for me in my job? I really do that in my office. So if we go to a conference, we talk before the conference about what are our expectations for it, and then we talk afterwards. So there's like a debrief afterwards because I think we all get different things out of a conference. So sharing that information.

In Tessa's example, it was clear that she practiced leadership as a life-long learner who engaged others to discuss, reflect, and learn in community. This commitment to helping others learn and examples of how participants applied their learning in doing so, is the focus of the next section.

Facilitating learning for others

While it was significant that the participants applied their newly attained understanding of self and how people learn to enhance their own learning, what was really exciting was the evidence of them applying this knowledge to helping others learn. This focus on facilitating learning for others aligned with their transformed beliefs about leadership (empowering others by helping them to learn). For example, Tessa said:

I think empowering other people is something that kind of comes to my mind. That I was able...it was a topic or a skill that I was able to get out of the

classes. I don't have to do it for you—I think in the type of job that I'm in it would be easy for me to just fix your resume. Or if you want to talk to that employer let me call them for you. I did do that at first because that was easier. And when I'm at home with my kids it would just be easier if I unpacked your backpack every day. It's lying on the floor again and that's bothering me so I'm going to do it. Or, let me empower you to do those things...it's not doing anybody any good if I fix your resume and submit it for you or if I make a phone call for you, or if I just give you the name of an employer. But instead, I'm going to show you some resources where you can find some employers that I think are going to be of interest to you. Or here's a suggestion that I might have for your resume. Maybe you could do this for the rest of your document and then I'm happy to take a look at it to see what I think so you feel good about this document. So it's changing my actions and my language to help people be empowered.

The kind of thinking that Tessa engaged in to better help others learn was common among the participants. Tia shared a similar experience:

Anytime I work with students...before I started the class—or before I took the class, my first response was always that I need to solve this problem. That I need to do this for you. Now, I try to kind of use that letting them come up with their own solution and acting more like a sounding board. Asking those difficult questions—the leaders questions of “Well, why is that?” or “What do you think this means?” So that's one lesson I always think about...knowing that I don't have to have the answer and how powerful it is actually to help a student come to the answer on their own. Asking you know, “Why is it that you think that?” or saying “I don't know, but we can find out together”.

Ben also reported practicing as a leader, in much the same way as Tessa and Tia did:

Teaching others is huge one I took from it that I still use. I think before I found it easier if for example an intern messed up something—we had a set up and they messed it up, it was easier for me to go and just fix it myself. And between you and me my boss still does that. He will just fix it. And through this class I have been able to tell him, you know if we keep fixing it, we're going to have to fix it every time. They'll do it every time—they're not learning anything. Whereas, if we take the time—that first time they mess something up, it's more on us than them because they don't know what they're doing. To explain, “You did it this way and this is the right way to do it”, they'll go from there. They'll learn it. I think that passes learning and instead you're just fixing their mistakes...That was a big piece and I see a lot of people in athletics not holding people accountable for their jobs that they're supposed to do and other people pick up their slack instead of having an adult conversation of this is what needs to be done and why and how it

burdens the rest of us when you don't do it right. So when somebody's doing wrong there are two approaches. You can either be kind of mean about it where the people are going shut you off and just say they're yelling at me, or you can teach them in a positive way and they're going just kind of, "That wasn't so bad. I did it wrong but you showed me how to do it right".

Sharing how he not only applied his learning to helping others learn, but also completely changed his attitude about teaching, Ben continued:

...I never viewed myself as going into a teaching role and then this class I kind of thought well I don't really fit in because I'm not going to be a teacher, I'm working in athletics. But, and again I'm not high on the chain of command here but I do supervise all of our interns and that's a program I kind of started from scratch. So I bring them in and I view myself as their teacher. I have to—before they come in I know their office hours I do all of their scheduling. I have to make a quote on quote "Lesson Planner" or what they want them to do. I know what they know and what they don't know and what I'm going to have to teach them. I anticipate their questions. This is stuff I never—I don't think I would have got this far without this class. You have to plan so much with a lesson plan before to be prepared, kind of that purposeful planning of how you want to move forward having interns come in. What you want them to accomplish. What questions you think they're going to ask. That kind of stuff. It came a little late to me but I think that's the biggest change. Working as a teacher and kind of teaching to other people.

Prior to the classes, Ben never thought of himself as any kind of teacher, but afterwards he defined himself as one. Then, like Tessa and Tia, Ben realized that telling someone the answer or what to do was not going to help them learn anything. All three participants applied what they had learned in the series to ensure the students they were working with truly learned through the experience. Troy also referenced how he learned to empower others by asking questions and supporting them instead of simply giving them the answer, when he explained why the learning in the series was life-changing:

I would say the amount that I use it in my everyday life. Purely from the amount of how I think about facilitating the discussion. How I think about my reflection. How I can apply that. Not just in one aspect of my life but in multiple. How I create lesson plans. How I create questions for classes.

While Troy did reference himself (his own reflection and learning), the focus was clearly outward; he emphasized his role as a leader in facilitating the learning of others.

Giving a vivid example of how she applied her knowledge acquired in the series as a practicing leader and life-long learner helping others to learn, Jen said:

Just right away after class was over this summer my brother-in-law he was just starting a summer community college class. He actually—he graduated but he wasn't allowed to walk...for a lot of different reasons. He was somebody in high school who was in a lot of team taught classes—never really thought he'd go to college. We kind of pushed him in that area...like try to find a trade if nothing else. So it was his first college class and it was algebra. He just...had a very dim outlook on how everything was going to happen and he asked me if I'd help him with it. I was home for the summer so I was like oh sure, you know, we'll work on it. I really tried to help him around the fact that I wasn't going to do the work for him and I wasn't going to walk him all the way through it, but I was going to be there if he needed somebody. If I was going to spend my time on this he was also going to do well. So like having that expectation with the challenge and support and things, it was cool to see how he changed through the whole...I guess class or whatnot. He actually, he did end up with an A in it and he understood it. It wasn't so much that I was like you can worry about your grades all you want but as far as this goes, you're year and a half of school or two years what you need to do is understand. You need to be able to take your skills [with you] and actually do them and not just blow through...so he...it was just interesting to take some of the things that we'd learned in class and see how they could help somebody else. It was unbelievable because he came into it with such a bad attitude. Like he wasn't going to do this and why would he do that—just really defiant and everything. At the end he was like, he called me and was like I got an A and I did this! Or he'd be like, don't even bother doing that because I'll figure it out. Just go through and he'll figure it out and man he had it. He was on top of it. He was beating me through problems (smiling and laughing). So that was really cool.

Jen's story of working with her brother-in-law was a powerful example of how the participants acted as leaders and applied what they had learned. Abby shared a similar experience:

My fiancé has a niece and nephew that we babysit for frequently and the way that I interact with them and the way that I correct them is a lot different because of the things that we learned about the way that people learn.

Especially, we specifically talked about how children learned sometimes...and just understanding all those different things I understand why it's important to tell a child why you want them to do something and not just say to do it. Why the context is important. All these different ways that you wouldn't think that my grad class would apply to a two year old, but it really does.

While Abby's example showed how she applied what she learned to her personal life,

Tate provided a similar sample of how he applied it to his work:

A patient will come in and I'm like the number one goal you need to ask is "why?" and I better have a reason. If I'm doing something to you and I can't explain why I'm doing it, then what? Why I am I doing it. So if somebody comes in and is like "I have hip pain". Well, I say "Why do you have hip pain?" and "Let's find out". (At this point he gets up and grabs a pole and acts everything out as he explains). So let's say that your right hip hurts alright. This is stuff that I got from class that I use in my practice. So I have them do a squat and they shift. Well why do you shift? All that tells you is your shifting right? So you got to think why are you shifting? One is you could have something tight here [front of quad on leg] or something weak here [backside] alright. So then you keep digging. You go back and forth. So then let's check hip motion. So then let's say that you have decreased motion on this side. Well why do we have decreased motion on this side? So this all comes down to how I'm going to treat you and we basically took layers down. Instead of me saying let's just lay you on your side, adjust you and do tissue work—because that's what really a lot of people would do that if you come in with hip pain. Now [instead] it's why, why, why, why, why. We try to get the biggest thing. Maybe it's an ankle. Maybe it's a shoulder. You open up these doors and these pathways. This is the same technique I use with relationships. Like with Beth. If she comes home and I'm like "what's going on?" and she says, "I had a bad day". Well how come? Instead of being like "That sucks...work sucks". It's just the conversation goes so much deeper and more intellectual.

Tate and the other participants not only learned to think more critically about the situations in their lives and act with purpose as leaders, but they also developed the ability to help others engage in deeper thinking. Consequently, the participants were able to facilitate more meaningful learning for others. Troy explained:

It's helped me in my facilitation and how I interact within the classroom. It's made me appreciate being in an instructor so much more. I came into the program wanting to stay away from teaching. I don't want to be a teacher, I

don't want to teach, I don't want to be in front of the classroom, I don't want any of it. Now I find myself excited to get into the classroom and teach. I don't see myself not doing some part of that for the rest of my life.

For Troy and others previously discussed (Ben, for example), the experience changed how they felt about teaching. Learning in the series caused several participants to go from not seeing themselves as teachers or even avoiding roles as educators, to seeking them out and defining themselves by them.

Summary

The results of the study were presented in this chapter. In order to give context to the findings, participant profiles were provided at the start of the chapter. This helps the reader gain greater perspective of the individuals who experienced the phenomenon in this study. In presenting the study's findings, information was organized into three areas:

The first section—*From Where Did They Come? Why?*—described the participants' experiences prior to their engagement in the two-course leadership and learning development series. This section provided essential background information on the participants: their education, work history, reasons for enrolling in and initial expectations for the series.

The second section—*A Unique Learning Experience*—delved into the participants' experiences specifically related to their learning in the series. Their initial reactions and experience of learning in community were presented, including: how the community was created, their level of mental engagement in the courses, the role of reflection and metacognition, and how being supported to assign their own purpose to learning—make their own meaning, resulted in unparalleled applicability to their individual contexts.

The third and final section—*Evidence of Life-Changing Learning*—provided information on the impact of the life-changing learning the participants experienced in the series. This section showed how participants’ ways of knowing and habits of mind were fundamentally changed. It also addressed the ways in which participants’ understanding of learning and leadership were refined and interconnected. Lastly, the section presented the participants’ numerous applications of their learning.

The next chapter will present discussion and implications for the study. The research questions are discussed to examine the findings presented within the conceptual framework,. The relevant literature is also revisited in this discussion. Then implications for practice are presented, followed by recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Summary

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of former graduate students who experienced life-changing learning in a specific two-course leadership development series. By uncovering the essence of this phenomenon and identifying the key contributing factors, educators can enhance the likelihood that future students in this program experience the same level of meaningful learning. Additionally, this study may inform similar programs, practitioners in adult education more generally, as well as the scholarship on adult learning and leadership development. Therefore, the information presented is valuable for the following: (a) stakeholders involved with the specific series for this study (administrators, faculty, as well as former, current, and future students); (b) practitioners facilitating similar leadership development opportunities for adult learners; (c) those facilitating adult learning in any discipline or context; and (d) scholars interested in leadership development and meaningful learning therein.

The literature review included relevant scholarship that helped to frame the study. First, fundamentals of learning were presented, including: (a) brain basics and memory; (b) prior knowledge; (c) transfer; (d) individual cognitive processing, as well as the roles of; (e) social interactions; and (f) emotions in learning. Next, selected adult learning theories were discussed, including: (a) andragogy and self-directed learning theory; (b) experiential learning theory; and (c) transformative learning theory. The chapter then concludes with a thorough exploration of learning in community that includes a detailed discussion on cooperative learning and collaborative learning.

A qualitative research design was employed to understand participants' perceptions of their learning experiences in the two-course series as life-changing. To achieve the purpose of the study, the endeavor was guided methodologically by phenomenology.

Phenomenology was the most appropriate methodological choice for this research endeavor because it best aligned with the purpose of this study—to understand the shared essence of the participants' life-changing learning experiences and subsequently identify key contributing components (Moustakas, 1994).

Twelve individuals participated in the study. These participants were “purposefully selected” (Creswell, 2009, p. 179) to participate according to several criteria. First, each participant had previously completed both courses in the series. Second, the participants were all identified by Licklider as having experienced life-changing learning—and had explicitly communicated this to the leader either verbally or in written form (letter or email). Finally, each participant maintained their belief that the learning experience in the series was life-changing at the time they agreed to partake in the study. Two focus groups were held that included a total of six participants. Following the focus groups, individual interviews were conducted with new participants (unique from those who participated in the focus groups) until saturation was achieved. Saturation was accomplished after six individuals were interviewed. Of the participants, eight were women and four were men. Participants' educational and professional backgrounds prior to their engagement in the series varied, as did their career goals and discipline at the time of the interview—though most worked in higher education settings. The participants ranged in age at time of the interview from their mid-twenties to late-thirties. Descriptive profiles of each participant were included to provide context for the study's results.

All of the interviews were transcribed personally by the researcher to ensure the integrity of the data. The data were organized and analyzed using QSR NVivo 10, a qualitative data analysis software program. Analysis began with first cycle initial and in vivo coding to depict subthemes in the raw data (Saldaña, 2009). Sub-themes were then organized through second cycle focused and axial coding to make connections between a category and its subcategories and develop main themes (Creswell, 2007; Saldaña, 2009). Themes that emerged through analysis were presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 organized the emergent themes about the participants' life-changing learning experience into three sections. The first section—*From Where Did They Come? Why?*—described the participants' experiences prior to their engagement in the two-course leadership and learning development series. This section provided essential background information about the participants: their education, work history, reasons for enrolling in and initial expectations for the series.

The second section—*A Unique Learning Experience*—delved into the participants' experiences specifically related to their learning in the series. Their initial reactions and experience of learning in community were presented, including: how the community was created, their level of mental engagement in the courses, the role of reflection and metacognition, and how being supported to determine their own purpose for learning—make their own meaning, resulted in unparalleled learning that was directly applicable to their individual contexts.

The third and final section—*Evidence of Life-Changing Learning*—provided information about the impact of the life-changing learning the participants experienced in the series. This section showed how participants' ways of knowing and habits of mind were

fundamentally altered. It also addressed the ways that participants' understandings of learning and leadership were refined to better reflect the symbiotic nature of the two concepts. Last, the participants' numerous applications of their learning were presented.

The final chapter of this dissertation addresses the research questions stated in Chapter 1 within the context of the results presented in Chapter 4 and the broader literature discussed in Chapter 2. Implications for practice as well as recommendations for future research are then provided. Chapter 5 concludes with my final thoughts as the researcher who conducted this study.

Findings

The following research question guided the study: How do students who reported learning in a two-course leadership development series as “life-changing” make meaning of this phenomenon? The answer to this question is the fundamental structure—or essence, of the phenomenon and the final step of analysis in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, the essence of life-changing learning in the series is described as:

A significant change in the way one examines, thinks about, and participates in the world—becoming more discerning in view, more critical in thought, and more purposeful in action, as a result of personal meaning making in a unique community environment of high expectations, challenge, accountability, and support.

The learning experience changed participants' lives because they were allowed to learn what was most important to them. The purpose and resulting atmosphere of the series enabled the participants to engage in critical thinking and make meaning within their own circumstances. They were challenged, supported, and held accountable to determine how their learning in the series applied to their lives. Each participant defined how she or he

achieved the learner outcomes for the series and developed her or his own perceptions of the enduring understandings (see The two course series in this study to review learner outcomes and enduring understandings).

The individual onus for meaning making within one's context that participants experienced pervades the literature on adult learning. To position the many facets encapsulated in the essence statement of the phenomenon within the broader context of the relevant literature, the discussion in this chapter is organized according to the three research sub-questions used in the study:

1. What are the background experiences of participants and how do they relate these to their life-changing learning in the series?
2. What factors or components of the experience do participants identify as most significant to their life-changing learning in the series?
3. How did the life-changing learning influence participants' personal and professional lives at the time and in the time since?

Research Question 1: What are the background experiences of participants and how do they relate these to their life-changing learning in the series?

The first research question sought to examine the role of background experiences of participants for their life-changing learning in the two-course leadership development series. As discussed in the review of relevant literature, the importance of previous experiences and resulting understandings (prior knowledge) is a significant predictor of future learning (Halpern & Hakel, 2003). Background experiences and resulting understandings are an element of each adult learning theory reviewed in Chapter 2. Knowles' (1984) andragogy asserted that adults enter a learning opportunity with a number of quality experiences that are

important to their learning. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) included the component of learners drawing upon previous understandings of life experiences in the development of new knowledge. Finally, the main premise of Mezirow's (1991, 2000) transformative learning theory is the transformation of existing personal meaning structures based on life experiences. Thus, the scholarship on adult learning clearly affirms the role of prior experience and resulting knowledge in the generation of new learning, so it was important to explore the backgrounds of the participants in this study and examine what role those played in their experiences of life-changing learning.

When examining the backgrounds of participants in this study, a wide variation was found to exist. The participants' undergraduate fields of study ranged across multiple disciplines that included: Athletic Training, Business Communications, Civil Engineering, Exercise Science, Journalism, Kinesiology, Psychology, Spanish, Sports Management, and Studio Arts. The participants subsequently differed in their paths to graduate school and the two-course leadership development series in this study. Four participants entered graduate school immediately upon completing their bachelor's degrees, three worked for one year, two worked for two years, one worked for three years, one worked for four years, and Tessa was the outlier in the group, bringing nearly 15 years of professional experience to the series. Not surprisingly, the participants had worked in a variety of professional fields. The only way that the participants were the same upon entering the series was that they all intended to work with students in some capacity. The variance in participant backgrounds is significant, because despite their differences, they all experienced similarly life-changing learning—making the phenomenon in this study all the more phenomenal. How was this possible? The

answer to that question begins with a discussion of the role the participants' backgrounds played in their learning in the series.

As previously stated, participants' different prior life experiences and resulting knowledge did play a significant role in their experience of life-changing learning in the series. Students in the course were adult learners who were empowered to decide how learning in the class fit within their own contexts. In this way, the backgrounds of participants were acknowledged rather than ignored in the facilitation of their learning. The participants were empowered to be self-directed in making personally significant meaning in the series (Knowles, 1984). New learning started from each participant's prior knowledge (based on previous experiences) as each participant made their own personally significant meaning. The importance of respecting adult learners' agency in their own learning was one of the 12 principles outlined by Vella (1994), "Respect for learners as subjects of their own learning" (p. 4). The respect of the learners allowed them the autonomy to make their own meaning as Alisha explained, *"I guess everybody just takes their own thing away from it. But everybody takes something away from it"*. The backgrounds of the participants were important because previous experience and resulting understandings caused each individual to focus on and think about different aspects of the class differently. This self-determination of one's own learning empowered students and was the bedrock of what made their learning experience in the series life-changing.

Discussion about Research Question 2 further explores the purposeful empowerment of participants' in the meaning-making process and illuminates the subsequent components that contributed to their life-changing learning experience.

Research Question 2: What factors or components of the experience do participants identify as most significant to their life-changing learning in the series?

The second research question focused on identifying the components of the series that were most significant to participants' life-changing learning experience. The aspects of the unique learning experience most salient to participants were organized into four overarching themes and discussed at length in Chapter 4 (following an overview of participants' initial reactions). First, the creation of community was the foundation of the profound learning experience in the series. Second, a high level of mental engagement was achieved in the series that was unparalleled by other educational settings the participants had experienced. Third, participants engaged in reflection and metacognition in the series that allowed them to learn about themselves—their values, beliefs, how they think, and why. Finally, the purpose for meaning making in the series was self-determined by the participants, resulting in learning that was highly applicable to individual context. In the following discussion, each aspect of the experience is examined within a broader context that includes connections to relevant literature.

The significant role of others in the personal meaning making process is emphasized in the literature about adult learning (Knowles, 1984; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Vella, 1994). Participants' in this study similarly identified the creation of community as an important factor in their life-changing learning experience. Drawing upon elements of collaborative and cooperative learning (Barkley et al., 2005; Bruffee, 1993, 1999; Gerlach, 1994; Johnson & Johnson, 2006) the series utilized a "learning in community" environment.

As explained in Chapter 4, tactics like a circular classroom physical layout and strategies such as name-tagging, base groups, learning partners, and go-rounds were

employed to build community among the learners. Participants developed deep trust and respect for the others in the community, subsequently achieving true community (Peck, 1987) and enabling what Troy appropriately called an “*open brain environment*”. As a result, the classes in the series became a uniquely safe space for critically honest conversations between community members working together to help each other learn. The reflective discourse (Mezirow, 2000) participants engaged in aided them in confronting deeply personal ways of knowing and habits of mind.

Given the important role of emotions in learning—with the ability to impact either positively or negatively (Blakemore & Frith, 2005; Sousa, 2011; Tileston, 2011), the community ethos allowed participants to be comfortable and feel safe to open themselves up to learn. Thus, community undergirded all of the other components participants identified as important to their experience of learning in the series as life-changing. This finding affirms Wiersema’s (2006) findings and assertion that it is important to start with community when working to facilitate meaningful learning.

A high degree of mental engagement in the series was identified as a second major component of the participants’ life-changing experience. The cognitive commitment to learning in the series was significant because in addition to helping participants stay mentally present during class meetings, it extended their cerebral engagement beyond the hours spent within the confines of the formal classroom. High expectations and accountability for thinking challenged participants in ways they had not experienced before. Participants talked about engaging in critical thinking (Petress, 2004) or related notions such as higher-order thinking (Knapper & Cropley, 2000) or intentional mental processing (Wiersema, 2006; Wiersema & Licklider, 2007). The participants were not able to rely on a one-dimensional

approach to their thinking and subsequent learning. Further, this level of critical individual processing became a habit of mind connecting through all dimensions of the participants' lives. Tate provided the most poignant example of the mental engagement and deeper thinking, explaining that it was:

A change in the way I think. But going back to the beginning, that's that scary part for me because I can't shut my mind off now and that's stressful. Like really stressful! It was way easier to do the two plus two equals four, instead of being like, "How did 2 develop?"

As Tate's statement demonstrated, the participants changed how they think. Participants replaced often ego-centric or one-dimensional perspectives with critical and divergent ones. This was similar to the findings from Turesky and Gallagher's (2011) experiential learning theory study of professional coaches, where individuals required to use different learning styles—or thinking styles, engaged in deeper learning (Kolb et al., 2000). What the participants described also aligned with Vella's (2002) assertion that using all of the different neural networks in the brain results in higher order thinking and truly meaningful learning.

A third major contributing component to participants' life-changing learning in the series that flows out of the challenge to think critically and consequent high level of mental engagement, was the role of reflection (Merriam et al., 2007; National Research Council, 2000; Tileston, 2011; Zull, 2002) and metacognition (Goleman, 1995; Merriam et al., 2007; Mezirow, year; National Research Council, 2000; Sousa, 2011; Uttal, 2011). Mezirow (1991, 2000) expressed the importance of adult learners developing critical awareness of their personal beliefs, understandings, and biases as one of the first steps in the learning process. Mezirow further recommended engagement in an active process of self-reflection as

the best means for learners to attain critical self-awareness. The participants' practiced reflection and metacognition through strategies such as journaling and critical dialogue. As a result, the series became as Alisha described, "...like holding up a mirror to yourself." Alisha's statement expressed the significant role of critically processing one's actions, thoughts, and beliefs in the meaning making process.

The lesson to be gleaned from this theme was that when it comes to learning, doing is imperative, but thinking is more important—and thinking about thinking is even more significant. Troy provided a helpful explanation of how this was enacted for participants in the series, "...we were forced to reflect, and then reflect on reflection, and then reflect on the reflection again." In other words, facilitating well-structured experiential education activities or opportunities is not enough; educators must be intentional about having learners make their learning personal by thinking about learning experiences, and then thinking about how they thought about those experiences and why. Understanding self and critically processing how and why one thinks the way one thinks and acts the way one acts, was also vital aspect of the fourth theme of the life-changing learning experience in the series that is discussed next.

The final and most significant aspect of the experience was that participants determined their own purpose for learning in the series and made personal meaning within their contexts. As a result, everything participants learned was applicable to their lives. As discussed previously in Chapter 5, the importance of acknowledging adult learners' central role in their learning is supported in the literature. Tough's (1971) self-directed learning theory (SDL) was built on the belief that adult learners take an active role in their learning. The first assumption of Knowles' (1984) andragogy was that adult learners are self-directed.

Consequently, Knowles' seven implications for program design all advocate for the agency of learners in the learning process. Likewise, the 10 stages of Mezirow's (1991, 2000) transformative learning theory are determined by the learner rather than some outside source (such as an educator). Similarly, Vella (2002) emphasized the importance of learners determining what they are learning; in other words, "putting things together in idiosyncratic and personal ways to make significant meaning" (p. 73). Despite this support for personal meaning making in the literature on adult learning, the traditional model of education (where an authority mandates what should be learned) pervades. This two-course series in this study put adult learning theory into actual practice and allowed the learners agency to make their own meaning—a gap not often traversed in higher education.

The four overarching themes of components contributing to participants' life-changing learning experience in the series are complexly interrelated. There are clear connections between and among these four components and the sub-components organized within each. Many of the sub-components of one theme have implications for one or more of the other three themes. The organization of Chapter 4 for this dissertation was my best effort as the researcher to organize this complex phenomenon on paper. Through collection and analysis of rich data, repeated communication and input from the participants, and careful consideration in the research process, it became clear that the components presented in the results were those that played significant roles in the phenomenal nature of the participants' learning experiences. While the nature of qualitative research formally limits the results to the specific two-course leadership development series studied, any leader interested in facilitating meaningful learning would be well served to adapt these components to their own unique contexts.

Research Question 3: How did the life-changing learning influence participants' personal and professional lives at the time and in the time since?

The final research question sought information about the impact of participants' life-changing learning in the series—tangible evidence that it did indeed change their lives for the better. It was clear that participants' developed a well-defined understanding of how people learn. However, through engagement in reflection and metacognition, the participants gained an honest understanding of themselves—particularly how they thought and therefore learned. It was equally evident that the participants connected their new ways of thinking and enhanced knowledge of learning to leadership and what it means to be a leader. Mezirow (1991, 2000) called this type of fundamental cognitive revolution in the minds of individual learners “perspective transformation”:

...the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about the world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (p. 167)

Mezirow's perspective transformation encompasses both significant internal transformations of how an individual thinks, as well as external changes in their actions. In this study, participants described how their transformed ways of knowing and habits of mind led to changes in their actions. They became autonomous learners who were able to more easily transfer their learning and get more out of other learning opportunities—both while they were in the series and in the time since. Participants also applied their knowledge as leaders helping others learn. The change in perspective ultimately led to significant changes in participants' personal and professional lives.

As previously stated, participants became self-responsible learners as a result of understanding more about themselves and how they learn. Participants consequently applied their autonomy as learners to other learning opportunities—both while still in the series and in the time since. Rather than relying on an external authority to provoke transfer of learning (National Research Council, 2000; Sousa, 2011), the participants did it for themselves. They became more intentional in their meaning making, both inside of classrooms and everywhere else. Numerous examples of how participants applied what they learned to enhance other opportunities for themselves were discussed in Chapter 4 (see Maximizing Learning Opportunities for Self), including: Sasha adjusting her thinking and actions in other graduate school classes, Tate explaining how it impacted his learning in chiropractic school, Tessa talking about her approach to professional conferences.

In addition to the participants utilizing their learning to maximize other opportunities, they also talked about how their perspective transformation helped them to make difficult decisions and significant life changes. For example, several participants switched graduate majors after beginning the first course in the series and engaging in critical reflection about their academic ambitions. Another example was that Alisha and Tia who worked full-time while in graduate school actually changed jobs while in the series, as a result of critical reflection on what they were doing and what they truly desired. Or consider Tate, who made the decision to go to chiropractic school that he otherwise would not have. There were a plethora of examples like these in the data discussed in Chapter 4 (see Concrete Applications) that provided clear evidence of the significant positive influence of learning in the series on participants' lives while enrolled in the series and in the time since.

While the participants benefitted most directly from their life-changing learning in the series, they were not the only ones who did. What is most exciting about the profound impact of the learning in the series is that the participants used what they learned to in turn help others learn and grow. Participants reframed their perception of leadership to practice as leaders who learned continually and empowered others to do the same. The experience in the course made them aware of their power as leaders in the world, and that being a leader meant life-long learning for self and facilitating that for others. Hence, in the same way that the participants had assigned their own purpose and made their own meaning in the course, each applied that knowledge within their own context to facilitate learning for others. A few examples of participants empowering others to learn were: Tessa's work with students in career services, Tia's advisement of a student organization, Ben's work with interns in athletics events, Jen's interactions with her brother-in-law as he engaged in a challenging summer class, Abby's using what she had learned to help her young nieces and nephews grow, or Tate instituting principles of learning in his treatment of patients as a chiropractor. At the time of the study, the ripples of the participants' life-changing learning in the series had already spread across the many arenas of their lives. It was further evident that the ripples of the learning would continue to travel and grow wider as participants' moved through life and generated subsequent ripples in the lives of others.

Implications for Practice

The study's findings have implications for a variety of constituencies. Among those who can learn from this research are all involved in the facilitation of learning. Educators in all disciplines and of all age levels can adapt the lessons learned from this study to enhance

student learning in their own academic contexts. Likewise, leaders of groups and organizations such as businesses or athletic teams could do the same. The inherent beauty of learning and leadership—and, consequently, the information on how to best facilitate growth and development thereof, is that it applies across all levels of the human experience regardless of context. Anyone can apply the lessons learned in this study to improve their practice as a leader.

Those aspiring to create powerful learning experiences for others can adapt the lessons learned from this study to their own contexts. It is clear that the creation of community and facilitation of learning that gives learners permission to make their own meaning transfers to nearly every situation a leader would encounter. There were numerous examples of the transferability of the components contributing to the life-changing learning experience for participants in this study. The examples of how learning applied to various contexts were provided by the participants who occupied different types of personal and professional roles.

The information presented in this study is helpful in identifying certain attributes that any leader facilitating learning for others can work to strengthen. Participants did say that they did not believe anyone else would have achieved the same impact as Jo, even if they imitated her personality and employed all of her strategies. However, that does not mean working to improve one's ability to help others learn is a futile effort. Licklider is the first to say how she has, and continues to learn and improve as an educator—and she has been in the business of helping people learn in many contexts and capacities (not just in the formal classroom) for nearly 40 years. So, anyone aspiring to lead others and therefore help them learn, should take note of the lessons learned in this study and adapt them to their context.

Beyond building a community environment and implementing the various components shown to have contributed to participants' life-changing learning, there are several important lessons for anyone leading learning for others. First, it is important that a leader of learning genuinely care about the success of those he or she is leading. If there is not a genuine care, that person likely ought to find something else to do. Second, those leading learning cannot be afraid of conflict or holding learners accountable (calling them out). It seems that the direct approach is best in order to maintain high expectations, challenge, and hold students accountable for thoughts and actions—but only when done in environments where real genuine care, support, and trust are present. Finally, a leader of learning should understand that showing vulnerability or sharing personal accounts of failures is not weakness. As a role model for life-long learning, it is powerful when a leader of learning is not afraid to admit what he or she does not know, or what he or she has learned from past struggles. This type of openness helps in establishing rapport, gaining the trust and respect of the learners, and building community. By improving these aspects of his or her approach to learning, a leader will enhance the meaning making for learners.

The implications within a specific higher education context are most easily identified. The unique learning experience that participants encountered, as well as the components contributing to that experience, should be used as a model for similar leadership development and discipline specific curriculum alike. It is clearly more difficult to plan and facilitate a learning opportunity that allows the learner to determine their own meaning than it is to give a lecture or require students to memorize and recite information. However, the impact of personally meaningful learning in community supersedes what can be achieved by the more traditional regurgitation model of education. Educators should strive to design curriculum

that enables students as responsible agents in their own learning process, using reflection and metacognition, as well as encouraging critical and divergent thinking. The result will be personally meaningful learning that is applicable within one's own context and lasting in its impact.

To summarize, the lessons learned in this study apply to similar academic leadership development contexts, discipline specific academic contexts, as well as organizational and leadership contexts outside of education. A leader in any role (as a parent, as a child, as a teammate, as a coach, as a friend, as a boss, or as an employee) can adapt the findings of this study to benefit his or her own endeavors. This research study provides an exemplary model for facilitating powerful learning to develop leaders who think critically, act purposefully, continue to learn for a lifetime, and support others in doing the same—or, as Jen explained:

I think differently and I don't even know how to explain it but I do...I think very differently. I don't see things in anywhere the same light. I almost felt like I was growing up in a way. But it's hard to put what it's done into words, because it's an emotion for me. It's a feeling, it's a thought process. It's just so much more. You talk about believing in you. That was the first time I'd ever had a real teacher believe in me and challenge me...It was just different, and it was really incredible in that fact. It really transferred into all aspects of my life and that it's going to continue to. I'm happy about that. It's something that I'm glad that I experienced for so many reasons and I think I'll even continue to see them further on.

Recommendations for Future Research

Considering the valuable information garnered from this study, there are several possibilities for future research to further explore life-changing learning and leadership development. One of the first and most obvious recommendations would be to replicate this study with another group of students from the same curricular series or from those who report a similar phenomenon in a separate curriculum or program. Likewise, expanding the

scope of the research to explore the phenomenon across multiple programs where similar profound learning experiences have been reported is recommended—if appropriate sites can be identified. Comparing the results of such endeavors will further illuminate the findings of this study and add significantly to the literature on meaningful adult learning and leadership development.

While the current study captured a cross-section of participants at various lengths of time removed from the series, the longest it had been for a participant since completing the series was about four years. Therefore, an extension of the current study with the same participants five years hence, or a revised longitudinal version that collected data from additional participants over the course of several years would offer more insight on the life-changing learning experience over more of an actual lifetime.

A follow up study that collected data from participants before, during, and after their engagement in the series is further recommended. Such a study could include a control group of students from a comparable graduate program that do not take the series. The experiences of this control group while still in graduate school could be contrasted with those who do take the series. Further, data on the life and career outcomes of this control group could subsequently be collected and compared to their counterparts who completed the series.

Utilizing other methodologies to study the two-course leadership development series in this study would also provide useful insight for scholars. A case study that included data from all students—instead of just those who believed the experience was life-changing would offer an interesting contrast for comparison. An ethnography that intimately follows students before, during, and after the series would further illuminate the experiences of the

participants. A quantitative study could even be conducted to examine the phenomenon, if an instrument for data collection was carefully designed. Admittedly, this final suggestion would be the most challenging.

Final Thoughts

Conducting this research to explore the experiences and resulting perceptions of individuals who experienced life-changing learning has been a challenging experience. While at times difficult, each step along the way was also exciting and rewarding. This study, to which I have dedicated over a year of my life, has been the one of the most personally meaningful learning experiences I have ever had. This endeavor enabled me to research a topic about which I was passionate and provided valuable information that truly applies to the human experience. In a world that grows more complex with each passing day, there is a pressing need for purposeful leaders who think critically and facilitate meaningful learning for others. The 12 individuals who participated in this study are just such leaders.

I will be forever grateful to Abby, Alisha, Ben, Emerie, Ernie, Jen, Mandy, Tessa, Tia, Troy, Sasha, and Tate; they sacrificed their time, shared their personal experiences, and encouraged me in my work. They each brought so much to this study and they all valued what they were taking part in—and what they took away from it. They talked about how they enjoyed the chance to think deeply and reflect on their experiences, as well as repeatedly emphasized how much they looked forward to reading the final write-up. The journey has been challenging, but these leaders helped make it enjoyable, meaningful, and successful.

My major professor and doctoral committee were another vital source of invigoration and support throughout this arduous endeavor. Reflecting on my thinking from when I

initially decided to pursue a doctorate, I realized I had no conception of the rigorous individual challenge the dissertation requirement would present. The guidance of my major professor and esteemed committee members has enabled me to navigate the many of obstacles and overcome the inherent challenges of this process.

As stated at the outset of Chapter 1, this was a study of two interrelated concepts about which I am passionate—learning and leadership. As someone who experienced life-changing learning in the two-course leadership development series and now intends to spend his life supporting similar learning and leadership development in others, this topic is of great interest to me. I am pleased with what has been learned through this research. I look forward to seeing how leaders in higher education and all contexts can apply this information to enhance learning for others.

As I reflected on how to best conclude this dissertation, it seemed most appropriate to do so with final reflections from Licklider on the phenomenon in this study:

I believe earning a Master's degree is a sign of an educated person. I believe it is a privilege to earn an advanced degree. I strongly believe that a highly educated person has an obligation and responsibility to our world to use his/her mind well.

My overall goal for my students is that they will use their minds well for the good of all. This means I must insist they learn not what to think but how to think—and think for themselves. They have an obligation to know what they think, why they think it, and to be able to articulate the reasons for their claims. Then they must transfer their thinking to action.

I think I came closer to getting most students to meet this overarching goal when I began to take myself less seriously. By this I mean that the learning outcomes for the program are important, but what is not as important is that each student demonstrates meeting the outcomes in the same way. I am now old and experienced enough to insist that students learn for themselves and demonstrate their learning in their own ways.

One of my students succinctly described the journey many take through their experiences with me:

“First we tried not to do what you wanted us to do, but you insisted and held us publicly accountable. Then we did the thinking and hard work because you said we had to. Then we did it because it works! And, finally, we are doing the thinking and the work for ourselves.”

Learning and leading—it doesn’t get much better than that!

APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

A focus group interview or in-depth individual interview was used to gather data from each participant. The following guides were used for the focus group and individual interview sessions. Follow-up questions and additional probes such as “Tell me more”, “Describe what you mean”, or “Give me an example of what you mean” will be utilized depending on conversations.

Focus Groups

- GO ROUND: Who are you and what do you do?
- GO ROUND: What was your background prior to taking the two-course series?
- Why did you pursue this program and what were your initial expectations?
- What comes to mind when you think about your experiences in the series?
- Why was your learning experience in the series life-changing? What made it life-changing?
- Describe what life-changing means to you.
- How has this learning influenced your life in the time since completing the series?
- What else was important to your experience at the time or in your life since?

In-depth Individual Interviews

- Tell me about your background prior to taking the two course series.
 - Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your background prior to taking the classes in the series that would be important for me to know to understand your experience?
 - Where did you go to school/college? What area of study? Work before returning?
 - What experiences/beliefs did you have related to leadership? What about learning?
- How did you come to be in the classes? Why did you sign up?
- Describe your initial expectations for the series.
- When you think about the classes, what comes to mind?
- What about the classes was the same and/or different from other classes you have experienced?
- What role did your background play in your experiencing learning in the class as life-changing?
- What does “life-changing” learning [in the series] mean to you?
 - Describe how learning in the series changed your life?
 - What was most important to making your learning experience life-changing?
 - What was going on in your life outside of school when you were in the series?
 - How has your life-changing learning experience influenced your life in the time since completing the series?
- What else would you like to share about your learning experience or your life since?

APPENDIX B. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice Provost for Research
1138 Pearson Hall
Ames, Iowa 50011-2207
515 294-4566
FAX 515 294-4267

Date: 11/12/2012
To: Scott Paja
113 Marston Hall
CC: Dr. Barbara Licklider
N247C Lagomarcino
From: Office for Responsible Research
TITLE: Student Learning in a Two-Course Leadership Development Series
IRB Num: 12-528
Study Review Date: 10/31/2012

The project referenced above has been declared exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b) because it meets the following federal requirements for exemption:

- (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted education settings involving normal education practices, such as
- Research on regular and special education instructional strategies; or
 - Research on the effectiveness of, or the comparison among, instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey or interview procedures with adults or observation of public behavior where
- Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects cannot be identified directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; or
 - Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could not reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to their financial standing, employability, or reputation.

The determination of exemption means that:

- **You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.**
- **You must carry out the research as described in the IRB application.** Review by IRB staff is required prior to implementing modifications that may change the exempt status of the research. In general, review is required for any modifications to the research procedures (e.g., method of data collection, nature or scope of information to be collected, changes in confidentiality measures, etc.), modifications that result in the inclusion of participants from vulnerable populations, and/or any change that may increase the risk or discomfort to participants. Changes to key personnel must also be approved. The purpose of review is to determine if the project still meets the federal criteria for exemption.

Non exempt research is subject to many regulatory requirements that must be addressed prior to implementation of the study. Conducting non-exempt research without IRB review and approval may constitute non-compliance with federal regulations and/or academic misconduct according to ISU policy.

Detailed information about requirements for submission of modifications can be found on the Exempt Study Modification Form. A Personnel Change Form may be submitted when the only modification involves changes in study staff. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans Form will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review. **Only the IRB or designees may make the determination of exemptions**, even if you conduct a study in the future that is exactly like this study.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu

APPENDIX C. RECRUITMENT EMAIL AND INFORMED CONSENT**C-1. Recruitment Email**

Dear (*insert name*),

My name is Scott Paja, and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Iowa State University. I am writing to request your participation in my dissertation research focused on student learning in the graduate two-course leadership development series in the School of Education at Iowa State University. I have attached an abstract of the study to this email for your review.

You were identified as someone who experienced life-changing learning in the classes. If you do in fact believe this to be the case, I would love to talk with you about your experience. Participation will either include being part of a focus group or doing an individual interview. The focus group or interview would be scheduled according to your availability at a location convenient for you.

As someone who experienced life-changing learning in this series, this topic is very important to me. I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. I am confident that this research will provide valuable information. Findings will help further inform the curriculum of the series and contribute to even more students experiencing the same degree of transformative learning therein. Additionally, the findings will have implications for similar leadership development programs elsewhere as well as facilitators and scholars of adult learning and leadership development more generally.

Please reply to this email or call me (815-275-9733) if you are interested in participating. I look forward to the questions you have and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Scott Paja

C-2. Informed Consent Document

Title of Study: A phenomenological study of life-changing adult learning in a two-course leadership development series.

Investigator: Scott Paja

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of former graduate students who experienced life-changing learning in a two-course leadership development series. By uncovering the essence of this phenomenon and identifying the key contributing factors, educators can enhance the likelihood that future students in this program experience the same degree of learning. Additionally, this study may inform similar programs as well as the scholarship on leadership development and adult learning.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will involve either a focus group interview (no more than 120 minutes) or an individual interview (no more than 90 minutes). You will be asked to answer questions related your experiences. Information about educational, professional, and personal aspects of your life may be sought. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable. The interviews will be audio recorded and then transcribed. The audio files will be deleted following transcription. A pseudonym will be assigned for each participant, so the researcher is the only person who will know your identity. You will be allowed to select your own pseudonym if you desire.

RISKS

There no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study. Information of a personal nature may be sought by the researcher, but you may opt out of questions at any time.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be no direct benefit to you, other than an outlet to share your experience. However, it is hoped that what you divulge will ultimately benefit the series being studied, similar programs elsewhere, as well as facilitators and scholars of adult learning and leadership development.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated monetarily for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of Iowa State University, and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: The researcher is the only person who will know the identities of the participants and will do all the transcribing of the audio files. The identity of participants will be replaced by pseudonyms so no one except the researcher will not know the identities of the participants. After the interviews have been transcribed, the audio files of the interviews will be deleted. Throughout the study, data will be kept on a password protected computer, in the locked home of the researcher. All potential identifiers will be removed. If the results are published, your identity will remain completely confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study.

For further information about the study contact investigator Scott Paja (815-275-9733) or Dr. Barbara Licklider (515-294-1276).

If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator (515-294-4566), IRB@iastate.edu, or Director (515-294-3115), Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

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