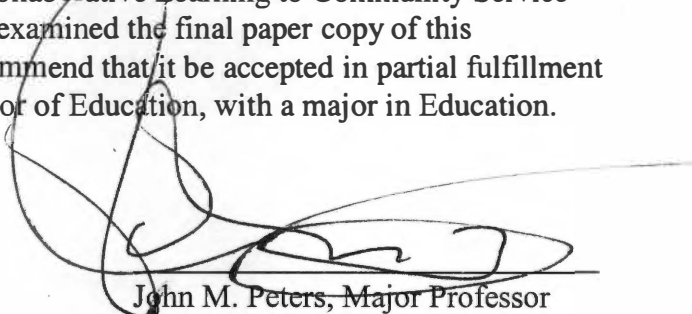


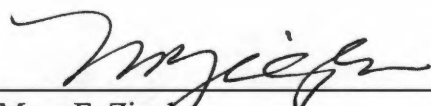
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mary Nelle Osborne entitled "Without a Vision the People Perish: Introducing Collaborative Learning to Community Service Leaders in Southern Appalachia." I have examined the final paper copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Education.

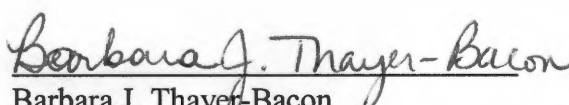


John M. Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:



Mary F. Ziegler

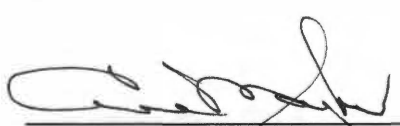


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**WITHOUT A VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH:
INTRODUCING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TO COMMUNITY SERVICE
LEADERS IN SOUTHERN APPALACHIA**

**A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Mary Nelle Osborne
May 2003**

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Thesis
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DEDICATION

The memory of John and Sally Osborne and Harry and Claire Tobey who were committed to lifelong learning and had an unquenchable zest for life!

With thanksgiving for my family Anne, Brian and Heather, Sean, Sharon and Alan, Becky and Sally, who walk this road with me, believe in me and support me in my dreams.

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ABSTRACT

I studied my role as facilitator of collaborative learning with a group of community service leaders from a small town in southern Appalachia. I framed my study in terms of Peters' (2002) action research model and employed interviews, tape recordings of meetings, field notes and journaling as data collection techniques. I analyzed my qualitative data with procedures developed by Spradley (1980) and Hatch (2002).

My interpretive analysis revealed five themes that described the group's experience with collaborative learning. These themes were communication and sharing, reflective thinking, forming collaborative relationships, participating in collaborative learning, and facilitating collaborative learning. Two additional sub-themes, time and safety, appeared within the set of five themes. These results indicated that community leaders and I were able to jointly develop conditions conducive to collaborative learning, experience cycles of action and reflection, engage in multiple ways of knowing, and produce outcomes that resulted in decisions affecting the leaders' work in their community. My own approach to facilitating collaborative learning experiences was also modified in ways attributable to the group's experience. I discuss implications of these findings for research and practice in community development and collaborative learning.

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Chapter One

Purpose

In studying my practice as a volunteer community developer in a small area of Appalachia, I attempted to learn what it was like to engage with other community developers in what was for us a new experience in collaborative learning. In the area where my study took place, leaders of community agencies have tried a number of approaches to help people improve their lives; yet conditions in their area of practice have barely changed. I was drawn to collaborative learning because it is a process that engages participants in the joint creation of new knowledge. My study is motivated by the possibility that joint action will make a difference. I decided to research my role as a facilitator of collaborative learning, not only because I wanted to improve these skills, but also because I saw the potential for all of us to learn about the community and to establish strong working relationships.

I engaged in action research to learn more about facilitating collaborative learning and to learn with, rather than about, the people of Campbell County. Action research is grounded in a participative worldview and produces practical knowledge that is gained with others in action. It is a form of inquiry that practitioners use as a way of improving their practice. I followed an approach to action research developed by Peters (2002). This eight-stage process, called DATA-DATA, guided my development of background, purpose, approach, design and analysis of results. The various stages are noted in the form of headings throughout this report, and the research task associated with each is shown in italicized notes. The details of the DATA-DATA model are outlined in the design section of this paper.

Describe

I describe the situation and the area of the practice I wanted to learn more about and possibly change.

My Practice

In my work as a community organizer I invite diverse groups to come together to talk. Sometimes the group members' goals conflict; sometimes they want the same things. But I value the potential of people coming together to work. I believe that involvement with each other provides us a way to experience our lives in a conscious and significantly meaningful way. With the intention of improving my practice, I designed this action research project to examine what goes on in the process of bringing people together to share in a collaborative learning experience. Action research calls for us to respect each other's practical knowledge and experience as we learn together. In my practice as a facilitator, I want to learn more, to become more skilled in implementing and facilitating such experiences.

My professional practice is centered on volunteer community development. I am responsible for supporting and developing programs in a community of active Christians at St. James' Episcopal Church, where I work as Director of Christian Education and Program. My job is to develop educational curriculum, plan activities, coordinate, recruit and train volunteer leaders and provide ways that members can participate in the life of the church. The philosophy of the leaders of St. James' is that member participation in the worship service, in community and parish outreach, and in the leadership of the church is central to a vibrant spiritual center. As a result of this understanding of our mission, we have many outreach programs. I volunteer with the Appalachian Resource Committee (ARC), which is supported by the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee.

Appalachian Resource Committee

The vision statement for the ARC is:

The Resource Team for Appalachian Ministries' vision is the service of the people of East Tennessee. This team serves as a networking and information clearinghouse for the Appalachian region. We provide opportunity for ministry by connecting individuals and congregations with existing community service groups. We know that by helping to form these relationships we minister not only to those in need but also to those offering skills as volunteers, allowing them to grow into the vision that Christ has for each of us.

During the past four years the ARC has given material and financial assistance to social service agencies and schools in the northern part of Campbell County. Before school began this year we collected enough school supplies and backpacks for some six hundred children. We also gave school principals store vouchers they could use to supply their students with shoes and clothing.

It was through these projects that I became familiar with some of the people of Campbell County and the extent of their needs. It was also through this work that I came to know some of the leaders of the community. I met the school principals, the local social service agencies directors, some of their clients, and some of the clergy involved in the local ministerial associations. I knew that the social service agencies struggled financially to keep their doors open and that several of the directors of these agencies lived below the poverty level. At times the ARC has taken individuals up to Campbell County to meet the service directors and tour their organizations in an effort to become more familiar with them and establish working relationships. We have also connected mission work groups with agencies in Jellico to conduct service projects.

Southern Appalachia, East Tennessee

While I have knowledge that comes from my experiences in Campbell County, I do not claim to be an expert about the region of Appalachia. The Appalachian mountain range stretches from Maine to Georgia, over the entire Eastern seaboard of our nation. Appalachia is formed of communities of people who are very diverse, who have been shaped by their own experiences, and who have their own stories. The people who live in each community are the experts of their lives. The setting for this study is one community located in the northern part of a county near where I live and work, which happens to be in Southern Appalachia.

There may be similarities between this study and what others have written about people from that region; I will refer to some of those sources throughout this work. In this section and in a general way, I will describe the town where my work was set. In the subsequent chapters I will refer to work about Appalachia as that work relates to the analysis of data gathered in this experience.

Through my involvement with the ARC as we worked in Campbell County, I became aware of distressing information. Presently in Southern Appalachia there are members of fourth-generation families who are living in severe poverty. In the 1960's this region was judged so impoverished that it was included in the Johnson administration's "War on Poverty". Save The Children, Aid to Distressed Families in Appalachian Communities and other national and international aid programs have been involved in the East Tennessee part of Appalachia for over forty years. Through my work in Campbell County I have seen people living in conditions that are as bleak as any I have ever seen. In some ways the people living in this region are worse off than they

were forty years ago because now there are fewer programs and funds available. Many of the people in Jellico, Tennessee, continue to suffer from chronic health problems caused by poverty and industrial pollution. Their access to health care is limited, and jobs are scarce and located in distant communities. Unemployment is a fact of life for many; education is seen by some residents as unnecessary. Government dependency is a life path for many children and adults. Southern Appalachia has a history of oppression and inequality, and labor strikes have not been an effective means to address systemic power issues (Gaventa, 1980). The area remains a “lost child” of our country.

In response to need

Though the ARC felt compelled to help, what we were able to contribute seemed insignificant, barely making a ripple as we added our drop to the bucket. We wanted to be able to contribute more; to do that we knew we had to learn more about the community, the people and the problems they face.

The members of the ARC and I began by studying the Census 2000 data to find out how the government defined poverty. The poverty level or threshold in the United States is set by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). This poverty threshold does not vary geographically. The official poverty definition counts money income before taxes and does not include capital gains and non-cash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps). In 2001 the OMB identified extreme poverty for a family of four as anything under \$14,000.¹ The average per capita income in the United States is \$35,000; the average per capita income \$28,000 for Tennessee, and \$18,000 for Campbell County.

¹ United States Bureau of the Census, 2000.

In light of the statistics, we could not understand the poverty we were witnessing fifty miles from Knoxville. We met people who lived in homes with no plumbing and who depended on river or well water for all of their household needs. The children who were coming to the social service agencies we worked with often had rotten teeth because of poor diets and the lack of fluoride in the water. Many of the adults my age (43) had lost all of their teeth. Children were having babies, in some cases with their parents' approval.

Learning about a community

We discovered that part of the reason for the discrepancy between the statistics and our experience was geographical. The census data represents the entire county, but the county is divided by a mountain range that separates the southern, more affluent region from the northern, more remote and poorer region. The southern part of the county is also closer to a city with a healthy industrial economy that employs many county residents. The northern part of the county is located next to some of the poorest counties of Southern Appalachia and is an additional twenty miles from employment opportunities in other cities.

The way the Census was conducted also contributes to the disparity. Census information was gathered by mail and by telephone. Most of the poor people we have met and worked with do not have telephones, and many of them are unable to read or do not read with the comprehension required to answer accurately the kinds of questions asked on the Census form. Some of the members of the community we know are mistrustful of anything they receive from the government and chose not to return the Census forms. For

these reasons we on the ARC believe that the Census data did not accurately represent information from the poor of the region.

According to a database that the ARC helped create with the service agencies in the Clearfork community, the average per capita income in the northern part of Campbell County is \$9,000. This is half the figure reported by the Census Bureau for the county and \$5,000 below what is identified as the national poverty level. The Census 2000 data, however, indicates that income in Campbell County has increased since the last survey. We realized that the information provided by the Census would have far-reaching implications, since state subsidies and Federal funding are based on the needs identified by this data. Acting on information provided in the 2000 Census, Federal and State governments and other organizations have announced plans to reduce their financial aid to Campbell County. We were told by a director of a program affiliated with Save the Children that, after reviewing the Census data, it was decided the region was not poor enough to qualify for services. This organization is leaving the area after twenty-five years of involvement, a departure that will severely limit the aid that can be provided through one of the Centers involved in this research.

Our committee looked at other information provided by the National Education Association (NEA) to confirm the data we had compiled. Their information painted a bleak picture and supported our own information and experiences. The NEA data indicated that Campbell County ranks second among counties in East Tennessee for drop-out rate of high school students.² Out of the 6,358 students enrolled in the Campbell County schools system in the 1999-2000 school year, 6.5% or 413 of them dropped out

² Annual report 2000, State of Tennessee Department of Education, November 2000.

before completing their high school degree. In comparison, the state dropout event rate is 3.9% and the national rate is 2.8%. The NEA data also told us that the Campbell County school district ranks as the fifth poorest school district in the State of Tennessee's 138 school districts. Over 64% of persons aged 5-17 in the Campbell County schools qualify for free/reduced price meals. The four schools in the northern part of Campbell County have a higher percentage of participants in the free/reduced meal program than the schools in the southern part of the county. Of the 1,184 students in the northern part of the county, ninety-one percent are eligible for the free and reduced-price program.

Analysis

I examine my assumptions about the situation and its implications for my practice.

I had learned a great deal about the community of Jellico through my involvement with the ARC. I knew the extraordinary poverty of the region, a poverty contrasted by the beauty of the place and the people. I came to know the people who worked in the community to make a difference. Often the ARC would visit these churches and social service agencies and make donations. Eventually I came to understand that the leaders of these organizations were doing all they could financially and professionally to support the people in need. But things seemed to be growing more difficult in the region for the community, as well as for the organizations.

I began to wonder what relationships existed between these organizations and their leaders. When I asked about any umbrella under which these agencies might be joined, I learned that, other than a ministerial group, there were no inter-agency linkages. There was no United Way or major funding source that linked these community groups. As I analyzed the situation, I wondered if there might be some benefit if the groups were

to coordinate their efforts. I suspected that the groups might be interested in identifying more efficient ways of operating. I began to seek a group that would be interested in participating in such a collaborative effort.

I suspected that, if my ARC co-researchers and I established such a group and engaged in a collaborative learning experience with the people living in the community, we could all share our knowledge and experiences and develop new understandings and relationships. In the process of developing such a group and facilitating collaborative learning among its members, I could benefit by learning more about my skills.

Additionally, the participants could gain from our joint effort because they would have an opportunity to learn more about each other and the possibilities of working together. The organizational leaders would have the chance to establish relationships that could lead to further collaboration. As my ARC co-researchers and I formed relationships with the organizational leaders and learned about the organizations, we could gain insight into ways that we could work to support their efforts in the community. We would learn how to be together in relationship by honoring each participant's practical knowledge of the community. The potential was that our new knowledge might lead to some actions that could benefit the community.

Theorize

I formulated an approach leading to a possible change in my practice.

In order to test my assumptions about collaborative learning, to learn more about my skills as a facilitator, and to explore potential benefits of engaging people in constructing their own learning experiences, I invited a group of individuals with similar professional interests to participate. I suggested that this approach of coming together to

share our knowledge might lead us to some new understandings and new knowledge that we would find useful in our work.

Because collaborative learning is based in relationships and because it honors the practical knowledge of the participants, I believed that it was the appropriate way to go about engaging with the people of Campbell County in a joint learning venture. I theorized that I would not only learn about my own skills as a facilitator, but we would learn about each other and develop relationships that would support future actions which might benefit the community. In our work the participants would also learn collaborative skills and build relationships that they could continue to develop if they so chose after this research was complete.

A collaborative experience demands a relational commitment, a positive regard for people, and respect for the individual and for the other group members (Peters & Armstrong, 1999). In our work together the practical knowledge of each individual would be treated with equal regard. While there might be times when the members of the ARC and I would be asked to extend our knowledge and experience to the group of local participants, we would not consider ourselves in any way to be experts about their problems, their lives, or their community. This belief, which is fundamental to collaborative learning, is grounded in the work of Myles Horton (1990) and the Highlander Center. Helen Lewis (2001) writes:

Highlander's philosophy insists that for institutional change to be effective solutions must come from the people who are experiencing the problem and who will be directly affected by the action taken (p. 357).

As representatives of ARC our support of the community would be defined by the members of these organizations who were also members of the community. Through this

collaborative experience our future actions would be grounded in our collaborative and practical knowledge of the community and would align us in such a way that our mutual efforts would be strengthened.

My thinking about community organizing and social change was influenced by the philosophy and critical pedagogy of the Brazilian activist Paulo Freire (1970), who wrote “the pedagogy of the oppressed ... must be forged with, not for, the oppressed in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity” (p. 30). Freire shares the perspective of Horton (1990) as reported by Lewis (2001) and indicates that groups should learn together to bring about change. When I presented my proposal to the ARC members, I said that we could not be effective in our efforts to help if we acted as if we were the experts who were there to do things *for* the community. It was Freire (1970) who cautioned about offering “false charity”:

False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the “rejects of life,” to extend their trembling hands. True generosity lies in striving so that these hands--whether of individuals or entire peoples--need to be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and working, transform the world (p. 27).

If members of the ARC and I were committed to helping people of the community in a significant and lasting way, then we could not remain aloof. Our first goal was to be involved in a significant and effective learning experience with the people of Jellico. Freire (1998) termed this type of meaningful educational process *Conscientizacao*:

In order to know better what I already know implies, sometimes, to know what before was not possible to know. Thus, the important thing is to educate the curiosity through which knowledge is constituted as it grows and refines itself through the very action of knowing (p. 31).

Freire (1998) further espoused that critical education was a form of networking--a “community of knowledge and knowledge formation” (p.17). As co-learners with the people of Jellico we would create this “community of knowledge” by engaging in the process of collaborative learning, a process that is grounded in dialogue, honors the multiple ways that people know, and offers the opportunity to engage in critical thinking through reflective practice.

Types of Teaching and Learning

In a collaborative learning experience, participants may be stepping out of a familiar learning experience into an experience that is initially uncomfortable because of its unfamiliarity. Peters and Armstrong (1998) describe “Three Types of Learning.”

Type I is “Teaching by Transmission, Learning by Reception.” Common in education and appropriate for dispensing information efficiently and effectively, an example of a Type I learning situation is the lecture. In this learning experience the teacher is the holder of the information and the assessor of whether or not students have accurately acquired the information. Paulo Freire (1991) refers to this model as “banking”:

Nor do the students practice any act of cognition, since the object towards which that act should be directed is the property of the teacher (pp. 67-68).

In this model there is little peer interaction because each student is expected to be accountable for his or her own learning. At the end of a Type I lesson the student will “know that,” as in factual information, or “know how” to do something, as in a craft. In Type I there are clearly defined roles for teachers and learners; remaining in these roles furthers the perceptions of learners as passive recipients of knowledge.

Another type of learning, Type II, is described by Peters and Armstrong (1998) as “Teaching by Transmission, Learning by Sharing.” Again the focus is on individual learning and the role of the teacher is to transmit information; however, in this type the teacher allows students to work together, usually in small groups, to hold discussions about the topic to deepen their learning. In this learning experience the teacher holds the correct answers but groups may arrive at the answers in a variety of ways. This type of teaching is also central to the team-based management theory espoused by Scholtes (1998), Argyris (1985) and Schein (1985, 1992), where people work in small groups to accomplish projects with some guidelines and expectations expressed.

Learning experiences such as those described above are valuable, but they are limited to the acquisition of information that is already known, in these instances by the teacher or group project leader. There is an expected outcome that is understood, and the object is for the participants to arrive at certain conclusions. While these learning experiences may be effective for the transmission of existing information, they are not always adequate to address the task at hand when the answers are yet to be determined.

Collaborative learning is synonymous to what Peters and Armstrong (1998) call Type III learning. In a Type III experience, all participants bring information to the group, each member is considered an equal, and no one person is the holder of the right answer. Answers do not exist; they are jointly created by the group.

Generally, a collaborative learning group will cycle back and forth through all of the teaching and learning styles as they learn the process and develop as a group. Eventually the group will engage in dialogue and reflection and work together to co-create what Isaacs refers to as “the common pool of meaning” (1999). The group

members develop a relationship with each other but also with the “pool of meaning,” which represent new knowledge, previously unknown before their involvement in the collaborative effort and coming out of their shared experience.

Collaborative learning is a process, a way of being together grounded in dialogue and the social construction of knowledge. Some specific and identifiable elements are found in the collaborative learning process. These elements of collaborative learning are outlined here and they are discussed in the subsequent pages of this paper.

- **A dialogical space** – establishing an environment that fosters trust, respect, openness, sharing, and support that is developed and maintained by group members;
- **Cycles of action and reflection** – engaging in the cycles of action and reflection as part of the group practice to examine assumptions, improve awareness of learning and process, etc.;
- **Focus on construction** – integrating process and content by approaching a task or a topic with the intention of creating new knowledge and understanding;
- **Multiple ways of knowing** – recognizing, valuing, and calling upon the various ways of knowing each person brings as a result of previous experiences.

Dialogical space

Perhaps the first consideration of the facilitator of collaborative learning is the establishment of the dialogical space. This space has social, emotional, and physical dimensions. When I introduced the general concept of collaborative learning to the participants in my initial meeting with them, I explained that it would be through our talking together, through our dialogue, that we would learn about the process of

collaborative learning and that there might be some benefit that would come out of that shared learning experience. The participants agreed that such a thing was possible.

As we began our group meetings I told the participants that I would trust them to bring up the issues they felt were important because they knew what was relevant, significant and meaningful to them. I wanted to communicate my desire to honor their experience, acknowledge them as experts and encourage them to participate in dialogue.

To accomplish a dialogue and create a dialogical space we must admit that we do not know the destination of our shared words; only the beginning is certain. The goal of a dialogue is to discover the other's intention and meaning by talking and thinking together. Bohm (1990) wrote: "Therefore, you have to watch out for the notion of truth. Dialogue may not be concerned directly with truth – it may arrive at truth, but it is concerned with *meaning*" (p. 26). Our dialogues were the way we would arrive at our own understanding, our own meaning about the region; we limited our scope to that purpose. According to Bohm (1990), "As soon as we try to accomplish a useful purpose or goal, we will have an assumption behind it as to what is useful, and that assumption is going to limit us"(p. 9).

In our dialogues we would respond to issues as they came up, and through our talking we would construct new understanding of the issues and each other. This was the agenda for each meeting, and I acknowledged this assumption in the presence of the group. Gustavsen (2001) writes:

...dialogue situations are "relational-responsive" events where each event has a strong constructive side to it. No event is a replication of a previous event, no new event is a printout of theory constructed ahead of the event. However, for relational-responsive processes (with associated new social

constructions to appear) to be possible, people need to be exposed to each other in relationship-building events (p. 24).

To encourage a space where “relationship-building events” could occur for our meetings, I attended first to the physical area where we met. I arranged the chairs in a comfortable, pleasant, non-work environment where the participants could relax and focus on each other and what was being said. Kemmis (2001) states:

People must constitute a communicative space (in meetings, in the media, in conversations with friends and colleagues, etc.) before they can work together to achieve mutual understanding and consensus (p. 100).

I attended to our dialogues to create a “communicative space” where the group felt safe enough to speak openly, where they were heard and felt free to participate. I modeled the behaviors that I wanted the participants to adopt. These included respectful listening, critical thinking, and reflecting on what we were learning as we went along.

I also encouraged this environment by using questions, or asking a speaker back about something they said. This use of questions reveals the meaning of what was being said and encourages the speaker to say more about a subject. Open-ended questions (Evans, Hearn et. al., 1979) were used to elicit and maintain the dialogue during group sessions. Examples of some of these facilitative questions are: “Can you say more about that?”; “I hear you saying...” or “What stood out for you?” Asking a member about something they have said encourages further clarification or expansion, which in turn leads to a deeper understanding of the topic being explored. More than listening to understand, or checking, as when an interviewer checks back with a participant to see if she is hearing and interpreting the intention of the speaker correctly, the use of questions

in dialogue is to inquire more deeply; and participants listen to understand *and* to be influenced by the speaker (Brickey, 1999).

Participating in a true dialogue can have a very powerful and positive effect on people who often report they feel they have been “attended to”, that is to say they have been heard and as a result feel affirmed by the group. Bohm (1990) describes such occasions as

“shared meaning” flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which will emerge some new understanding. It’s something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It’s something creative. And this *shared meaning* is the “glue” or “cement” that holds people and societies together (p. 1).

Cycles of action and reflection

Another element of collaborative learning is establishing cycles of action and reflection (Peters, 1991). If it is through dialogue that we connect with others, then it is in reflection that we learn and make meaning. This is supported by Kvale (1983): “The only way to know what certain events mean to persons is to have them express something about them, even if only in terms of language” (p. 161). Action research, which is the method on which this experience is based, is often described in terms of cycles of action and reflection (Heron & Reason, 2001) so that there is a “development of both understanding and practice as the cycling develops” (p. 448). During these cycles of action/dialogue, the facilitator encourages the group to reflect on the process by “stopping the music.” In this way the facilitator interrupts the flow of dialogue and verbally brings attention to the assumptions underlying the thoughts and actions of the group (Brookfield, 1990, p. 177). I have heard this called “catching ourselves learning” by collaborative learning groups.

According to Brookfield, (1990) critical reflection involves:

(1) identifying the assumptions that underlie our thoughts and actions; (2) scrutinizing the accuracy and validity of these in terms of how they connect to, or are discrepant with, our experience of reality...; and (3) reconstituting these assumptions to make them more inclusive and integrative (p. 177).

The facilitator is charged with being able to perceive the underlying themes in the dialogue and to alert the group during the process of dialogue, encouraging the group to engage in critical reflection and becoming aware of personal assumptions. Brookfield (1999) defines assumptions as “those taken-for-granted ideas, commonsense beliefs, and self-evident rules of thumb that inform our thoughts and actions” (p. 177). Since these assumptions are taken for granted, they may affect beliefs and actions in ways of which participants are not aware. To encourage the development of self awareness, the facilitator regularly encourages the participants to reflect on their experience in the group.

Our skills in dialogue improved as the group meetings and our relationships developed. We learned the skills of dialogue by listening and watching the way we behaved. Sometimes I followed the thread of a topic the group had introduced and encouraged a deeper exploration of a topic or idea by posing questions. Sometimes the participants maintained and developed the dialogical thread of our talk much better than I, demonstrating participant leadership which I welcomed and encouraged. The group developed the skills of being able to go back and pick up an idea for further reflection and discussion. The group also took risks together as they challenged each other to think about the assumptions they held regarding a subject. They encouraged each other to share their thinking with the group. These challenges and risk-taking behaviors were encouraged and therefore contributed to the creation of an environment where it was safe

to continue this practice. This process of sharing and reflection is cyclical and reciprocal and can lead to an understanding among participants that does not occur in everyday conversation or discussion. Mezirow (1990) writes this about reflective practice:

Reflection enables us to correct distortions in our beliefs and errors in problem solving. Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built (p. 1).

During this study I also maintained communication with the group between our meetings through electronic mail and provided transcriptions of our meetings to encourage participants to keep thinking about the experience between our meetings. I also invited their responses, corrections and reflections about how I was interpreting the events. In this way we were continually involved in acting and reflecting on our actions.

An assumption that we make in this kind of research is that the outcome will improve the human condition by contributing to practical knowledge that is useful in everyday life, to creating new forms of understanding, “since action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p. 2). It is in reflection that learning takes place, as we question our previously held beliefs and consider alternative ways of thinking. The potential is that in a collaborative learning setting the whole group will come to a new understanding or awareness and that they will act on the basis of their new awareness.

Focus on construction

When I began meeting with the individuals who were to be participants in this work, I explained to them that I perceived them to be the experts about their community. This belief was congruent with the philosophy proposed by Horton and the Highlander Center, according to Lewis (2001):

The process of people gaining control over knowledge and skills normally considered to be the monopoly of the experts is empowering and produces much more than information....they may see their children's health deteriorate or the wildlife and natural phenomena becoming endangered. Residents may not know these phenomena in the same way as scientists, or use the same concepts and language to describe them, but they do understand them. Scientists must learn to acknowledge and respect their knowledge (p. 361).

The power of practicing collaborative learning is unbounded because it builds on the unique experience and knowledge that each individual brings to the effort. At the beginning of each collaborative session there is only potential and uncharted territory. That potential is unleashed each time a group meets and jointly co-creates the meaning of their experience. Isaacs (1999) writes about something similar, a powerful "collective intelligence" that can be harnessed in groups:

...collective intelligence quotient, or "CQ" of the people around you; together we are more aware and smarter than we are on our own. And together, we can perceive new directions and new opportunities more clearly than we can on our own (p. 11).

But the knowledge that is constructed during a collaborative experience is more than an *accumulation* of everyone's knowledge and experience. During the process something new to all the members, something that is possible only in that unique setting, in the coming together of those people, occurs. It is also meaning that is shared and acted upon by the members. Gergen (1999) writes this about 'shared meaning':

There is a strong tendency to place the locus of meaning within the process of interaction itself. That is, individual subjectivity is abandoned as the primary site on which meaning is originated or understanding takes place; attention moves from the within to the between (p. 25).

The meaning of an experience does not reside in any one individual. The meaning of an experience will emerge, however, via the dialogue and reflection that goes on between us

as we come to explore and understand together. It is knowledge that the group has created and thereby “owns.” Peters & Armstrong (1998) write:

In a collaborative learning experience, individuals bring their knowledge and their actions to the table, and as members of a group individuals contribute their collective knowledge and actions to the experience. Thus, in a collaborative learning experience, individuals learn and the group learns (p. 76).

Participating in collaborative learning requires that group members value practical knowing as well as expert knowing and act in ways that show equal respect for the two. Myles Horton in a discussion with Paulo Freire (1990) talked about the position that some experts take or are given in groups:

I have no problem with using information that experts have, as long as they don't say this is what you should do. I've never yet found any experts that know where the line is. If people who want to be experts want to tell people what to do because they think it's their duty to tell them what to do, to me that takes away the power of people to make decisions. It means that they're going to call another expert when they need help. They learn by doing what you're supposed to do, and there's no empowerment that comes as a result of that (p. 130).

Multiple ways of knowing

Collaborative learning encompasses a much broader range of ideas about what constitutes knowledge and knowing than more traditional forms of teaching and learning. Reason and Heron (1986) stated that people are self-determining and second, regarding the nature of knowledge, they

distinguished at least three kinds of knowledge: (a) experiential knowledge is gained through direct encounter with persons, places or things, (b) practical knowledge concerns how to do something – it is knowledge demonstrated in a skill or competence, (c) propositional knowledge is knowledge about something and is expressed in statements of theories (p. 458).

As a person participates in collaborative learning, she will experience all of these ways of knowing and come to see such ways of knowing as valuable. Participants in a

collaborative learning experience will determine the course of their own learning. Heron and Reason's (1986) concept of "self-determining" suggests a pedagogy that is generative and gives responsibility for the learning with the participants.

Shotter (1993) also identifies three ways of knowing: *knowing that*, *knowing how*, and *knowing from within*. *Knowing that* refers to the form of factual or theoretical knowledge of life and the world. *Knowing how* is a form of practical knowledge, as in knowing how to perform a craft or a skill. There is another knowing that occurs from within relationships with others that Shotter (1993) calls *knowing from within*:

...unlike the other two kinds of knowledge, it is knowledge of a moral kind, for it depends upon the judgments of others as to whether its expression or its use is ethically proper or not – one cannot just have it or express it on one's own or wholly within one's self. It is the kind of knowledge one has only from within a social situation, a group, or an institution, and which thus takes into account and is accountable to the others in the social situation within which it is known (p. 7).

This knowledge allows one to orient herself to a group of people or a situation in order to participate as a member of a group and to understand and be understood in a variety of contexts. While one may "know from within" any number of different circumstances and situations, this kind of knowing is particularly important in collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning generates knowledge that is flexible and ever-adapting, and involves participants in learning through cycles of action and reflection with others.

The kind of knowledge that is generated in this experience comes from the participants and is based on their knowledge and understanding of the social situation. The learning and knowledge that come about are direct results of the collaborative relationships that are developed. Such results cannot be understood in other terms. Gergen (1982) calls for a "reformulation of the nature of sociobehavioral science and a reconsideration of its

potential” (p.5). Collaborative learning offers another perspective of how we are to understand our experiences.

By equally involving all the participants in the joint construction of knowledge, it is possible to avoid the potential danger of one person’s controlling what is knowable. Honoring ways of knowing, from the scientific to “knowing from within a situation” (Shotter, 1993), and assuming that all have value increases the learning potential and enriches the learning experience. Many times, in traditional educational and organizational settings, relational knowing is under-valued or ignored completely. In a collaborative learning setting, a group may experience relational knowing as one of the multiple ways that people come to know.

Collaborative Learning provides a way we can learn, as Shotter (1993) proposes, to see others as genuine, not as data or statistics or as some label attached to a group: “We will begin to see others as worthy of our interest and respect”(p. 2). Collaborative learning is generative in that it builds on the knowledge and experience of the individuals involved, but it also goes beyond any individual’s knowledge to create new understanding and new knowledge that is understood by and can be acted on by the group.

Act

I identified what I wanted to find out about my practice.

I chose to formally examine this practical theory of collaborative learning because I wanted to do these things:

- Describe the process of collaborative learning experienced by my co-researchers and selected community service leaders in Campbell County, TN.

- Describe my experience as facilitator of collaborative learning in the Campbell County context.

This study provides a description of one occurrence of collaborative learning as experienced by myself, by members of the ARC and by leaders of Campbell County community groups.

This study has implications for me to learn about and improve my skills as a facilitator of collaborative learning and community developer. In addition to my practice there are implications in this study for those interested in collaborative learning, action research and community development and service. There are also implications for the participants of this study and the social service agencies they lead.

Chapter Two

Design

I identified the method and procedures I would use for collecting data.

Chapter one provided an introduction to my practice and its setting and the purpose of my research. In Chapter two I will discuss my research design.

Action Research

Action research consists of a family of approaches to inquiry that are participative, grounded in experience, and action-oriented. This form of inquiry is frequently undertaken by practitioners who are interested in improving some aspect of their practice, and by organizations, groups and communities as a part of their organizational or social change efforts. According to Bradbury & Reason (2001),

action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p. 1).

Stringer (1999) writes that the primary purpose of action research “is as a practical tool for solving problems experienced by people in their professional, community, or personal lives”(p. 11).

Levin and Greenwood (2001) outline what they identify as the “core elements” of action research:

- Action research is context-bound and addresses real-life problems.
- Action research is inquiry where participants and researchers co-generate knowledge through collaborative communicative processes in which all participants’ contributions are taken seriously.

- Action research treats the diversity of experience and capacities within the local group as an opportunity for the enrichment of the research/action process.
- The meanings constructed in the inquiry process lead to social action or these reflections on action lead to the construction of new meanings
- The credibility/validity of action research is measured according to whether actions that arise from it solve problems (workability) and increase participants' control over their own situation (p. 105).

Most forms of action research follow steps or procedures that are roughly aligned with rational problem-solving and decision-making processes. For example, Hatch (2001), says this about the phases of an action research process:

(Action research) is usually organized in a cycle of identifying a problem through careful observation, reflecting on the dimensions of the problem, designing a change that addresses the problem, implementing the change, and assessing effectiveness through careful observation (p. 39).

This cycle of action research phases is similar to one expressed in the action research work by Kemmis (2001) and by Quigley and Kuhne (1997) who based their approach to action research on the seminal work by Lewin (1948) on participative decision-making.

According to Bradbury and Reason (2001), the purpose of action research,

is not to produce academic theories based on action; nor is it to produce theories about action; nor is it to produce theoretical or empirical knowledge that can be applied in action; it is to liberate the human body, mind and spirit in the search for a better, freer world (p. 2).

Bradbury & Reason (2001) suggest that the questions for action researchers to ask about the results of their work are pragmatic and should examine the value of any outcomes.

Such pragmatic questions to be asked are "Is the work useful/helpful?" "Do people whose reputations and livelihoods are affected act differently as a result of the inquiry?" (p. 449). They go on to say that the answers to such questions are not always

"straightforward" but that these results must be explored "reflexively by those who are

participating, which in turn informs the relational process. Ideally, people's response to action research work is 'that worked' or that was 'helpful'" (p. 448). Gustavsen (2001) agrees with Bradbury and Reason (2001) and adds that in action research "we are required to shift from a theory-driven way of working to a practice driven way" (p. 24).

The practitioners of action research are positioned, according to Peters (2002), "as legitimate subjects of their inquiries, for there is no logical way to separate them from their own practices" (p. 1). In other words, the practitioner-researcher's role in his or her research project is not only acknowledged; it is made a subject of inquiry along with the role of others whose experiences are also the subjects of inquiry.

Levin & Greenwood (2001) acknowledge that in action research, "the integrity and professional knowledge of the researchers is a key element" (p. 105). But they go on to write that "action research merges professional knowledge with local knowledge in a process of collaborative sense making" (p. 105). The participative worldview upon which action research is founded requires that the world be seen not as "consisting of separate things but of relationships which we co-author" (Bradbury & Reason, 2001, p. 6).

Because the experiences of participants are the focus of action research, any actions taken as a result of the research will reflect the participants' practical concerns with problems and issues. The data used in action research comes from the people involved in or living in that situation, and it emerges from the dialogical relationships shaped by the participants.

I chose an action research approach because it fit my research aims. I wanted to better understand aspects of my practice, and action research is, by definition, concerned with inquiry into one's practice. I also wanted to better understand the experiences of

others with whom I practiced in a particular community, and the focus of action research on lived experiences promised to help me achieve that aim. Further I wanted to help others better understand their own experiences, and the participatory nature of action research lends itself to achieving that aim as well. My research focuses on collaborative learning, the elements of which are consistent with the features of action research as I have defined it in my study. These elements—cycles of action and reflection, the creation of a dialogical space in which people form an inquiring relationship, the focus on construction of something new, and the inclusion of multiple forms of knowing—seem to be consistent with the reflective, participatory and constructionist aspects of action research discussed above. While my approach to inquiry was not a “pure” form of participatory action research as defined by researchers such as Hall (1979) and McTaggart (1991), it did include many of the features of participatory action research. For example, I involved two co-researchers in the planning and implementation stages of my research, and my approach to facilitating collaborative learning encouraged the full participation of all participants in forming new relationships and constructing new knowledge for ourselves. In this sense, my research was “with people” and not “on people,” to cite an expression by Marshall and Reason (1994).

Finally, I did not seek to test formal theory or to create new theory. Instead, I sought to gain understanding with others’ about our professional experiences. My inquiry was therefore situated and practice-based, and it utilized a particular approach to action research.

DATA-DATA

I chose Peters (2002) DATA-DATA model as the framework to guide my action research project. Peters (2002) describes his model as consisting “of eight cyclic phases of action and reflection leading to a plan for designing and conducting an action research event” (p. 4).

The approach can be understood as consisting of two parts, DATA-1 and DATA-2. DATA-1 represents the planning and reflective phases of action research, in which the practitioner-researcher³ identifies and analyzes the situation in which he or she practices and the factors that contribute to an interest in possibly improving some aspect of the practice. It should be noted that the steps involved in DATA one – Design, Analyze, Theorize and Act – were used to organize the information that I discussed up to this point.

In DATA-2, the practitioner-researcher designs his or her study, and selects and implements appropriate data collection procedures and analysis techniques. The analysis of data leads the practitioner-researcher to reexamine his or her practical theory developed in DATA-1, leading to further reflection on the practitioner’s way of doing work. Ideally, this phase of the inquiry cycles back to the situation in which the practitioner-researchers found themselves desiring to explore some aspect of their practice, and the whole inquiry process begins again. The steps involved in DATA-2, Design, Analyze, Theorize and Act, are used to frame the various chapters and sections of this dissertation, beginning with this section of chapter two.

³ In describing DATA-DATA, I refer to the practitioner-researcher as if only one researcher is involved, but my description should be understood as applying to situations in which more than one researcher can be engaged in action research. My study involves other co-researchers as discussed in the Participants section.

The following is a summary of DATA-DATA steps (Peters, 2002):

(DATA-1)

D = Describe. In this phase, researchers lay out the area in which they seek a change in their practices and the situation in which their practices occur. The essential question to be asked in this phase is a What? question; i.e., “What is my experience with my practice in the situation in which I practice? No attempt is made to judge the experience or the situation or to reason why either exists in its current form. This will occur in the next phase.

A = Analyze. In this phase, researchers examine their assumptions about the situation and reasons they attach to the way they practice in the situation. The essential question is a Why? question; e.g., “Why am I experiencing my practice in this manner?”, or “Why is the situation as I am experiencing it?” The why question gives the researchers an opportunity to more fully explore their practices, their concerns, doubts, interests, ideas and feelings about the practices and thus lay the groundwork for how they will seek to change it, if they decide to do so.

T = Theorize. Here researchers lay out the approach they will take to make a change in their practices. This is an expression of their practical theories of aspects of the practices they wish to change, and their theories might be augmented by consideration of formal theories and/or the other researchers’ theories that are assumed to have special relevancy to the practical situations. The essential questions to ask here are both What? and Why? questions; i.e., “What am I going to do (about the problem or issue, or to take the particular initiative identified above), and Why this way and not other possibilities?”

A = Act. This is the phase in which researchers identify what they wish to know about their theories. The essential question is a What? question: “What do I wish to find out about what I plan to do?” The answer to this question will identify some aspects of the theories and not others, for practical reasons and in terms of what the researchers are most interested in finding out. Again, this phase resembles plans for other kinds of research, as those plans often involve stating research questions or hypotheses that will be addressed or tested in a study. (It should be noted that researchers have a choice to make at this phase. Just as the first DATA represents reflective practice, researcher-practitioners are presented with at least three options at this stage: They can (1) decide not to put their plans into action, for any number of reasons; (2) put their theories into play, without the intent to study it in any systematic manner; or (3) put their theories into play with the intent to study it as a form of action research. The first two are usually what happens in the daily world of reflective practitioners; the third option represents one of the differences in reflective practice and action research.)

(DATA-2)

D = Design. In this phase, researchers select the procedures for collecting and analyzing data. The essential question is a How? question; i.e., “How will I study my research questions?” A range of design options are available for consideration

by researchers, including, e.g., a case study design, surveys, experimental designs, ethnographic strategies, phenomenological studies, and others. Data analysis options include both qualitative and quantitative procedures and more. In short, all of the methodological options available to researchers doing other kinds of research are available to action researchers. The task faced by any researcher is to choose the design and procedures appropriate for the research questions asked and the type of data being collected.

A = Analyze. This is the phase in which data are analyzed. The procedures for analyzing data are usually specified in advance of this phase, along with the design decisions and according to the assumptions of statistical tools that may be selected in advance. The essential question here is a “What?” question; i.e., “What do the results say in response to the research questions?” The responses, or findings, are simply presented at this point, and the interpretation of findings is made in the phase that follows.

T = Theorize. Here researchers interpret the findings in terms of their theories developed in the first DATA. The essential question is a “What?” question, as “What do the findings mean in terms of my theory of practice?” It is also against the background of the researchers’ practice provided in Describe and Analyze phases of the first DATA that theory is re-approached and considered anew in light of the study’s findings. The background is part of the context of the researchers’ theory, then and now, so it is likely that they will better understand the background as a result of re-theorizing their practice. Thus, the whole of the researchers’ practices ought to be made clearer by such research, and parts of their practical theory should be sharpened by their findings.

A = Act. This is the action step in which researchers turn back to their practices and go on in terms of what they have learned from reflecting on their revised theories. This is the major cycle change in DATA; if the researchers have come this far, they are at a juncture of having learned, reflected, and now going on with their practice better informed, perhaps a little more skilled, and changed to some extent as researchers of their practices (pp. 5-8).

I decided to use DATA-DATA to frame my research because it provides a systematic approach to planning, designing and implementing an action research project. It also is grounded in reflective practice (Peters, 1991) and provides for the use of accepted research procedures and analysis techniques of the researcher’s choice. DATA-DATA has been used by other action researchers, including Brickey (2001), Cotter (2001), Naujock (2002) and Merrill (2002) who demonstrated its utility as a framework for conducting various forms of action research.

Finally, DATA-DATA positions the practitioner as a subject of his or own inquiry, and it helps the practitioner-research situate himself or herself in his or her own practice and its setting.

Participants⁴

The research participants consisted of six individuals from Campbell County and three from Knoxville. In many ways this group was representative of the population of Jellico, which is a primarily Caucasian community. The six Campbell County participants were leaders of five non-profit social service agencies in the Jellico area. Three of the Campbell County participants were born in the region, two had relocated to the community to do social service work and one was born in a town near Jellico. All of the Campbell County participants were Caucasian females with the exception of one participant who was part Native American. Of the Campbell County participants, two were under the age of thirty and four were over forty. The Knoxville participants included myself and two retired businessmen from the Knoxville area who were members with me on the Appalachian Resource Committee. Of the three from Knoxville, two were male Caucasians over the age of sixty and one Caucasian woman over forty. Of the nine participants, three had ancestors who were from the region of Campbell County. Four of the participants had lived their whole lives in Jellico.

The participants range in age, educational level and marital status. The Knoxville participants all had graduate level college degrees. The participants from Campbell County had educational experiences ranging from high school degrees to some college experience to graduate level degrees. The educational background of the participants was

⁴ I use pseudonyms in place of the participant's names to respect their privacy.

law, education, counseling, social work, religious study, medicine and business. Of the participants three were not married and six were married with children. Three of the nine participants were grandparents. The experience of the participants as professional community service workers ranged from three to forty-five years. The organizations are located near the town of Jellico. One was located about ten miles west of town, two were located in the center of Jellico and two were located about twenty miles east of downtown. Because of confidentiality I do not use their actual names in this document. In Table 1 descriptions of the participants are provided to help the reader. They are described more fully in the subsequent pages.

(Table 1) Participant Chart

Name	Participant	Organization	Other
Herb	Co-researcher	Volunteer with CASA, ARC	Retired CEO businessman
Frank	Co-researcher	Volunteer with ARC	Retired lawyer, journalist
Mary	Director	Woodland Land Trust, Eagan School	Forty years of experience in the mountains as community organizer
Betty	Director	Crazy Quilt	Crafting organization which also houses a food pantry, thrift store and offers emergency assistance in the western part of the county
Wilma	Director	Mountain Women's Exchange	Involved in offering continuing educational offerings, affiliation with Carson Newman College, summer arts programs for children
Jane	Director	Mountain Parent Resource Center	Offers pre-natal and early childhood education, day care and tutoring programs for a community in the eastern part of the county.
Aurora	Assistant to the Director	Mountain Parent Resource Center	VISTA worker, tutor
Julie	Director	Youth for Christ	Christian Values Program for teens and children

The participants from Knoxville included two members of the ARC, Herb and Frank. They were involved from the outset of this study and assisted in identifying other participants. Herb is a retired business executive and does extensive volunteer work in the northern part of Campbell County. I call Herb my “gold card” to the mountains because of the trust and respect the people there have for him. Herb spent thirty-seven years with Carrier Corporation, thirty-two of which were in management positions. Carrier conducts nuclear research and manufactures medical instrumentation, communications equipment, as well as thermal engineering and physics research equipment. Herb retired in 1997 and currently volunteers on several boards of directors for social service agencies in the northern part of Campbell County.

Frank is an attorney practicing in Knoxville and was formerly Vice President and General Counsel for St. Mary's Health System, Inc. He worked for the Federal government, including twenty-one years as an employee of TVA as Assistant to the Manager of the Office of Natural Resources. He also worked for the US Environmental Protection Agency. Before joining TVA, Frank had a career in journalism beginning with the Kingsport Times-News, The Knoxville Journal, United Press International, and finally with the Associated Press. He is currently on the Board of Directors of Aid to Distressed Families of Appalachian Counties and is Chairman of the Episcopal Diocese's Land Management Committee. A resident of Norris, Tennessee, he has served as a City Judge and was elected to two terms on the Norris City Council.

Before we began to organize within the Campbell County community, we spent a good deal of time talking about collaborative learning and the philosophy of the research project. Once we had come to a shared understanding of collaborative learning, we began

to think about the area of the county on which we would focus. The northern part of Campbell County became our focus since more of our work was in that community. We narrowed our focus more specifically on Jellico and nearby small towns.

The original research proposal targeted a ministerial association from the Jellico region. We were familiar with some of their members from our earlier work with the ARC. I met with the group from the northern part of the county before writing my research proposal; several members said that they would be willing to participate in the study. Once the proposal was approved and I returned to the group, however, they declined. The reason they gave was concern about confidentiality. I explained that, if something came up that was confidential in nature, we would cease data collection and not consider it part of the research. The ministers added that, because they thought of themselves as outsiders in the community, we might find a more representative group with which to work. The concern seemed valid because the majority of the ministers were not from the area, nor would they stay there longer than their churches allowed. While their refusal to participate delayed my research, my questions were broad enough to include other groups without harming the integrity of the project. My co-researchers and I discussed other options, and Herb suggested that we invite leaders of the non-profit social service agencies that we support to participate in the project.

Over a five-week period I met individually with the directors of five different agencies in the Jellico area to seek their participation in this research. Each meeting took several hours of what I term “sitting and rocking.” We would sit and talk about their work and my proposal. I had met each of these directors through the ARC but had not spent much time with them individually. These visits allowed us to get to know each

other. We talked about my professional background and my life, and I explained that my work consisted of bringing groups of people together. They shared information with me about their work. I explained that I was working on a research project to help improve my skills as a facilitator and that I wanted to arrange a meeting with them and several organizational leaders from their community. I explained that I planned to meet four times over the course of the summer at a local restaurant in downtown Jellico and that I would cover all expenses. I had chosen four meetings because the schedule fit nicely with the spring and summer months when children were out of school and therefore the directors would have more time available to participate in the meetings. I talked with them about confidentiality and told them that I would record the meetings, but those recordings would only be used for my research. I introduced the concept of incorporating the collaborative learning process in our meetings. I provided each of them a copy of my Internal Consent Form from the University but did not ask that they commit to the project or sign the Form at that meeting. I let them know that, if they chose to participate, they could bring the signed Form with them to the next meeting. The leaders of the five organizations that I met with agreed to participate in the project.

The first of four group meetings was set for May of 2002. We met in a private meeting room in a restaurant in the Jellico area. These are the organizational leaders who participated in the meetings.

Mary, the founder of The Woodland Community Trust (Woodland) came to the mountains from Chicago after the Order in which she had been a nun was disbanded. Woodland has been in existence for twenty-five years and was developed in response to the fact that 90% of the land in the Clearfork Valley area near Jellico belongs to absentee

landowners. The goal of the land trust is to acquire enough land to establish a community center based on plans and ideas put forth by the residents of that community. Mary has had extensive training at the Highlander Center and in community development.

Betty, Director of the Crazy Quilt Organization, has lived most of her life in the Jellico area. Crazy Quilt, located about five miles from downtown Jellico, has been in operation for twenty-seven years. It was started by a Catholic nun and has a craft cooperative which sells handmade mountain crafts. Crazy Quilt also operates an emergency food pantry and a clothing store and offers some emergency financial assistance to members of the community. In the summer they offer a mountain arts project for children in the community.

Wilma, Director of the Mountain Women's Exchange (MWE), is also a native of the area. MWE grew out of the Woodland Community Trust, Crazy Quilt and the Mulberry Friendship Center and is now twenty-four years old. MWE offers tutoring for all grade levels and a four-year college degree through Carson Newman College. To date forty-eight students have completed their BA degrees through this program.

Jane is the Director of The Mountain Community Parent Resource Center now in its tenth year. The Center was started as a Save the Children project. Save the Children has been working in Campbell County for twenty-two years and is leaving the mountains this year. Focusing on healthy children, the Center offers a mother-to-mother home visiting program through Vanderbilt University's Center for Health Services. Women of the community are trained to operate this program, which encourages good pre-natal and follow-up care. The Center also offers educational programs to parents about early

learning and development so that their children will be better prepared to enter the school system as well as offering drug and alcohol education and sex education for teenagers.

Aurora is also from the Mountain Community Parent Resource Center and is a native of White Oak. Aurora came to work with the center originally as a VISTA worker six years ago. She now works in the school and after-school programs and is working towards a degree in education at Carson Newman College.

Julie, founder and director of Youth for Christ, is originally from Philadelphia and moved to the mountains with her husband Ben almost three years ago. Youth for Christ offers the youth of the Jellico community some safe recreational activities through Christ-centered programs. They have had over one-hundred and fifty young people participate. Julie works for Indian Mountain Clinic as a physician's assistant, and Ben is a middle school teacher.

Data Collection

The data for this research focuses on four two-hour meetings held in Jellico from May of 2002 through August of 2002. This design used a four-way approach to understanding a single phenomenon. There were four different data sources which consisted of the transcriptions, my field notes, my journals, and the participants' feedback. All of the meetings were tape-recorded with the recorder visibly placed in the center of our meeting circle. One of the group members other than myself supervised the taping. I chose to use the recording of the actual conversations that took place in our meetings rather than rely on an indirect way of gathering evidence. My analysis would therefore be based on verbatim transcriptions and not on a filtered version of what participants said in those meetings. I also recorded the debriefing meetings that Herb,

Frank and I held immediately following the meetings. I treated these debriefings as field notes and as a record of what went on in the meetings from the perspective of the co-researchers. Field note data provided an additional viewpoint of the event as well as an account of the experiences of co-researchers. The third source of data was my notes that I kept in a personal journal. These journal entries included my reflections on aspects of the meetings, including my actions and observations and thoughts I had after the meeting. Taken together, these three sources of data provided a form of “triangulation” of viewpoints and accounts that in turn increased the richness of my data.

The fourth source of data consisted of participants’ reactions to the results of my analysis of data generated from the first three sources. I gathered their reactions by sending the results of my analysis by electronic mail to each participant and asking them the following questions: “Can you please describe your experience of our meetings?” and “What has come about as a result of the experience?” Five of six participants responded to my request with answers to my questions. My co-researchers collaboratively participated in constructing the meaning of our experience along every step of the analysis. Following up with the participants in this way is consistent with my interest in doing research *with* the participants instead of doing research *on* the participants. While all of the participants were not fully involved in conceptualizing and designing this study, we were fully involved in collaboratively constructing what went on in our meetings. I returned to the participants with my request for their reactions to my analysis to complete this cycle of our joint action. In this way I was exploring the outcomes with those who were the participants, as advised by Kemmis (2001).

Data Analysis

I transcribed the audio tapes and analyzed them using inductive qualitative data analysis as described by Spradley (1980) and expanded by Hatch (2001) because it was congruent to the epistemological stance fundamental to action research and collaborative learning. My analysis began after the fourth meeting. The first step in the analysis was to read the transcripts several times and then perform a line by line inspection, making notations in the margins or on separate paper of the purpose of each line. Examples of some of these were “to communicate information,” or “to tell about oneself.” I created my “frames of analysis” (Spradley, 1980) which is a “segment of text that is comprehensible by itself and contains one idea, episode, or piece of information” (p. 210). I included in my frames of analysis the non-verbal interchanges between people, reflections they expressed or learning they noted. I included my observations of physical behavior, such as how members turned towards one another, or noticed gestures, or laughed together.

The next step was to create categories of meaning, that Spradley (1980) calls Domains. Domains can be identified according to Hatch (2001) by reading the data, “searching for particulars that can be put into categories because of their relation to other particulars” (p. 212). Domains are categories organized around relationships that can be expressed semantically. According to Spradley (1980) domains have three elements: cover term, included terms, and a semantic relationship. “Included terms name the members of the category and a cover term names the category into which all the included terms fit” (p. 213). The next step is to identify the cover and included terms of each domain. After these terms are identified, they are examined for semantic relationships. I

used Spradley's (1980) nine semantic relationships to identify how included terms and cover terms were related in the data. (See Appendix B for a table listing these nine semantic relationships.) I emerged from this analysis with twelve salient domains. I examined the domains looking for relationships between domains and within domains. Then I made connections between the twelve domains and identified themes or patterns in the data. I emerged with five major themes and two minor themes that seem to run throughout. These minor themes can be understood as the ground against which the figures of the major themes can be understood. Once I had completed my search, Frank and I re-read the transcripts and agreed on our mutual understanding of the themes. Overall, this approach to data analysis was consistent with my aim to describe the experiences of participants, including my own experiences, in a way that could be understood in the context of our practices.

Organization of the study

Chapter one provided an introduction to my practice and its setting and the purpose of my research. In Chapter two I discussed my research design. In Chapters three through seven, I present and discuss my findings. In Chapter eight these findings are further discussed in terms of what I learned and implications for my practice. I also explore the implications of the study for others whose work relates to the concerns of this study.

Chapter Three

Findings

I present and discuss my results.

Five major themes emerged from the data analysis. The first theme, Communication and Sharing, describes the process of the group's getting to know each other. Reflective Thinking relates to the groups' reflections on their work and their conversations during the four meetings. The third theme, Forming Collaborative Relationships, relates to discourse, particularly dialogue, about areas of common interest. The fourth theme, Participation in the Process of Collaborative Learning, describes the group's experience in jointly constructing new knowledge. The fifth theme, Facilitating Collaborative Learning, focuses on what I did to introduce and facilitate collaborative learning. Two additional themes emerged which serve as ground themes through which these figure themes can be understood. The first is the element of time as it relates to the process of collaborative learning; the second is the concept of safety or security experienced by members of the group.

The remainder of this chapter contains a discussion of the first theme, communication and sharing; subsequent chapters will discuss each of the remaining four major themes (Chapters Four through Seven).

Communication and sharing

I was very concerned about creating an inviting environment for the group. The act of coming together to eat was an important aspect of our meetings. Wilma was a little awed to be coming to that particular restaurant for our meetings. I considered it a casual, family style place but she considered it "fancy" and worried about how to dress. I assured

her that we would be in a conference room closed off from the main dining room and that I wanted her to feel comfortable. I decided to pay for all of the meals because I did not want the meetings to cost the women anything. They were already giving their time and that was enough. For some, the cost of eating out would have prevented their participation.

The meetings were held on a weekday during lunch hour. At the start of each meeting I arrived early and arranged the tables so that we were in a circle. I took a great deal of time to prepare the space so that it was inviting and comfortable. I made sure that the participants would not be blocked from one another or me by any physical obstacle. I removed the centerpieces that the restaurant had placed on the tables as decoration and made sure each place setting was roomy.

My co-researcher Fred usually took charge of setting up and operating the microphone, which was placed in the center of the table. I was free to focus on the dialogue without worrying about taping as we got started. I also turned down the “Muzac” that was playing over the house system so that we would have no trouble hearing each other. The lighting in the room was adequate and not glaring.

At the start of each meeting I took care of “housekeeping” chores like sharing transcriptions from the previous meeting or handing out a contact sheet. At the first meeting I shared what became my working definition for collaborative learning,

“...people putting their heads together, sharing power equally, and sharing their knowledge. Then out of that sharing creating something that is new, that comes about as a result of everyone’s effort.”

I asked that the participants try to attend each meeting but to let me know if they could not make a meeting. Finally, I explained, as I had in our individual meetings that,

I don't want this to be a burden, I want it to be something that you guys are coming together to share your experience, which is tremendous, your experience as professionals and as members of this community. And then we will see what happens. I don't have an outcome. We don't have to accomplish anything other than be together.

I knew that these were action-oriented people. I wanted to give them permission to explore together and not feel constrained by the idea of accomplishing something for the purposes of my research. As Isaacs (1999) writes, "We simply cannot make dialogue happen" (p. 262).

For the most part group members were not familiar with each other and a lot of time, especially during the first meeting, was spent sharing information. First I asked participants to introduce themselves and say a little about their organizations. I also asked questions to encourage the participants to say more about a topic. As the meetings continued, the group members began to inquire of each other on their own.

The participants provided valuable background information about the history of their organizations and how they came to be involved. They told about the systems that they had in place within their organizations. As they talked, the other leaders and I listened carefully and, at appropriate times, asked for more detail about what they had shared. They answered the questions freely and shared information about upcoming community events.

Professional information

For some the information that was shared was old news. For Julie, who is a relative newcomer to the area, information about the organizations was all new. There were a few surprises as members learned about new directions that some of the organizations were taking. There was a curiosity to find out what others were doing, how

their programs were alike or how they were different. In this way they began to find out how their organizations fit together in serving the community. They also began to get acquainted with each other in a professional and practical way.

I invited Julie to start us off because she is the newest in the area. Julie talked about her organization, Youth for Christ, which offers programs for youth in downtown Jellico. She told us about those programs and noted that they had one hundred and fifty youth involved last year. She told the group that young people find out about meetings by “word of mouth;” she believes this approach has been effective because of the large number of youth that are participating. The purpose of her work is to give the youth of the community a “safe recreational place, Christian guidance, just healthy entertainment.” Julie said that she hopes to create an organization that will last; one of their goals is, “to get a youth center in the town ..get these kids some recreation, some safety and teach them some moral values at the same time.”

Betty told the group about Crazy Quilt, the twenty-seven year old organization that she directs. It is the oldest service organization in the area. Betty shared how the crafting cooperative allows people to supplement their income by selling their handmade wares. People from across the country have bought their quilts and crafts. Local crafters also exhibit their wares at community events and church bazaars. Betty explained that the organization has expanded its mission to include a clothing store and food pantry. The organization also offers a summer art project for the local children with peer leadership at its core. Crazy Quilt collects Christmas presents which are given out to poor children in the area. Betty spoke of her desire to get a website established so that the organization could begin marketing its crafts on a national basis.

Wilma told the group about the history of her organization, Mountain Women's Exchange (MWE), which is twenty-four years old. MWE grew out of the Crazy Quilt and Woodland Community Trust and offers educational and tutorial services for ages pre-school through adult. Wilma shared that to date forty-eight people have completed their bachelor degrees through a partnership with Carson Newman College. This received a "WOW!" from Betty and other members in the group.

The leaders inquired about programs at other organizations. Wilma shared that her organization has a free lunch program that accompanies an arts program for children in the summer and asked Betty, "Do you have that?" Wilma and Betty were also interested in Jane's home visitor program for mothers. Betty has a similar outreach program that has been problematic and was glad to have an opportunity to consult with Jane.

Aurora explained to the group that she came to the Family Resource Center six years ago as a VISTA worker. She now has a position working with the after-school program and is pursuing her Masters Degree in education from Carson Newman. When Aurora spoke, the group was a little more involved in asking her questions about her role in the organization because she is still shy about speaking in front of people.

At the second meeting we had three new members present who had not been able to attend the first meeting. Mary, from Woodland Community Land Trust, Ben, who is co-director with his wife Julie at Youth for Christ, and my co-researcher Herb were able to join the rest of the group. Ben was on summer vacation from his job as a sixth grade teacher in LaFollette Middle School. The newcomers were asked to share about their organizations and their work experience so that we could quickly begin to integrate them into the group process.

Mary has over thirty-five years of community organizing experience and told us she has focused most of her effort on Woodland. The organization, she explained, was developed in response to the problems that the community has with absentee land ownership. Woodland was designed to offer housing and small business opportunities to very low-income residents of the Clearfork Valley community. To date the organization has acquired two hundred acres, forty of which are suitable for human settlement. Woodland has also developed a Living Learning Center which offers high school students, college students and church groups the chance to learn about Appalachian life and culture while participating in a work camp.

Herb shared that he was writing grants for several of the organizations represented in our meeting and that his goal was to collect information that more accurately represented the northern part of the county. According to Herb, the Census lumps the northern part of the county in with the southern part. This misrepresents the area, he says, because the people who live in the northern part of the county are poorer but are not identified as such by the Census. This was an issue that was visited in greater depth at other times.

The leaders commiserated about the variety of difficulties they face running their organizations. They often talked about how their organizations struggle from lack of funding and community involvement. Julie said that she is not running a program for the younger kids because of a lack of volunteers. The participants shared ideas about fundraising and finding support through newsletters, family and friends. Mary shared with the group about how difficult it has been to find funding for building projects because their group is relatively small and “aren’t in the agenda of the county.” Mary has

been funded by her home church for years “as a ministry of community development” which she said is rare for churches or other organizations to do or understand because “It’s not issue oriented. We’re not out there fighting the bad guys. It’s not service-oriented, we’re not providing services.”

There was frequent laughter in the meeting as the leaders described ways they coped when their plans went awry. Jane has a great sense of humor and related most of her life events through storytelling. Jane told the group the story about how she came to be the director of the Mountain Community Parent Resource Center (MCPRC) in White Oak. She told the group that she wrote the grant that provided the funding to start Campbell County’s first family resource center, MCPRC, where she now works. After she received funding to staff the Center, the organization was offered money for a teacher position, and a church group said they would build them a building. Jane was put in the position of supervising the building. The story she told about the problems she ran into with the building had the whole group laughing. The problems were very serious but in hindsight Jane found a lot to laugh about:

And then we started out our building, and it was coming along really nicely and we were calling the Fire Marshall to get approval and they would say well look at your state building permit. Well we didn’t have one because we thought the architect would take care of all this. And then he said, “Well Ma’am I can’t come and inspect anything because you don’t have permission to build the building. So how much do you have done? Well, it was like finished and ready to open!”
(*Laughter*)

The Parent Resource Center did open and for twelve years has focused on pre-school and after-school programs designed to help children prepare for school and learning. The center also offers a recreational program at White Oak for middle and high school students.

The leaders talked about the specific difficulties they have in fulfilling their organizational missions. Mary's story reminded us that sometimes the visions of the individuals in the area are in direct opposition to those of the community organizations. Mary said it has been difficult to carry out the plans for the land in the Woodland Trust because sometime the landowner's have other plans:

it does make a difference that one guy from Jellico ...has introduced this Jeep crawling or climbing...and is bringing in thousands of people...that same man owns a piece of Eagan Mountain...that we bought to be the outdoor classroom. It makes a difference that he is going to clear cut it and strip mine it because it doesn't match with our plan.

Other leaders talked about the complexity of helping people who have so many needs. Herb said that it is hard to do social service work, especially in the mountains. His original goal had been to work with people specifically about "housing" issues. He soon learned however, that he had to address all the needs of the family and could not just focus on housing.

Jane said that she frequently experiences the same thing. The time it takes to meet the needs of clients can really hamper the ability of the agencies to function. She agreed with Herb that there is a lot more to helping a person than carrying out the mission of the organization:

You have to do all of these other pieces before you ever get to work on that. Like our programs are out of school time programs and early intervention but then you have families who don't have food and need food vouchers. And we have families who don't have clothing so their kids aren't going to school. So you have to fix all of these other pieces to get to your work. And we spend a great deal of our time trying to get those pieces before we ever get around to our work.

Betty said that this is something she also faces at Crazy Quilt; "You get bogged down in dealing with all the needs; you can't focus on vision."

This inability to focus on long-range planning issues was shared by all the groups. Most of the organizational leaders have volunteer staff, but often the complexity of the problems requires the leader's involvement. The leaders said that they know they need to do some long-range planning to address their financial and administrative issues, but they constantly find themselves operating in crisis mode. They compared notes about how they could use their staff more efficiently, but, again and again, "We can't afford it" was the bottom line when it came to solving their organizational problems.

Community problems

The group had gone through introductions and provided general information when they began to share openly about community problems. They were most passionate about the problems with the county educational system. Campbell County has the lowest achievement test scores and the second highest dropout rate in East Tennessee. There was a lot of discussion about the qualification of the teachers and some of the group seemed suspicious that some teachers got their jobs because of "who they know" and not because of their qualifications. Others blamed the students' weak academic performance on lack of funding for the schools.

Jane told the group that her husband, a teacher, said that another reason the children are not successful is because of active absenteeism: "Dan says, my husband that one of the problems he has is that his kids don't come to school very much. He has kids who miss twenty days out of the month." This observation was supported by Julie, whose husband is also a teacher, "...what is your husband to do? What is my husband to do when the kids aren't in school? There's the root problem that nobody's taking care of."

The group described what they say is a pervasive attitude about education that is shared among many parents in the community. According to the group, many parents do not see education as necessary for their children's future. Wilma told the group what her daughter reported from school, "It's like this little kid in Amy's class he said, 'My mom said it don't matter what I get, I'm not going anywhere anyway.' This is in seventh grade!"

The group said that many parents in the community tell their children that education is not necessary, that they don't have to go to school and that they don't have to do well when they do go to school. But, the group reported, there is another value being handed down to the children. Jane shared her concern that, "...if a child has a learning problem in our school system and they test out for this they get a check...A disability check." Jane went on to say that her son is working in an AmeriCorps position in a school and he has told her that "some of the brightest kids are in special ed." According to Jane, these bright students tell their teacher, "Now Jimmy I can't make another 100 because if I do they're going to take my check. I just want you to leave me alone." Jane says that financial support the government provides through the disability system "rewards people for not being able to do things" and does not help people in the long run.

Julie agrees and says she has seen a lot of parents who come in to her clinic with their children and "...tell their kids, you have something wrong with you." Wilma added to her statement saying, "And they start believing it." These parents, Julie says, "keep on beating it into them so they can get their check."

The leaders shared other stories that reflect how they think the government has “crippled people” as Jane put it. The children attending her programs tell Julie that what they want to do when they grow up is “get a check.” Wilma gets similar answers from her students when she asks them “What are your short and long term goals?” They answer “to draw a check.” Jane says that government has, “made them dependent. And they think that’s as good as it gets and who wants any more.”

There were other stories about children having children in order to “get a check.” Julie told a story about a family who brought their nineteen-year-old daughter to the Health Clinic to get an ultra sound. Julie is a physician assistant in the clinic; when she asked the girls’ mother, “do you want to find out what the sex is the mom was like, Yea! We’ve been trying to get a baby for five years.” They had been trying to get their daughter pregnant since the girl was fourteen so that they could receive government aid.

While the organizational leaders know that economic conditions in the region make it difficult to survive without government assistance, Wilma says that some of those who are surviving financially are doing so because they are engaged in illegal activities like growing marijuana or selling prescription drugs. Julie told stories about how her clinic has resorted to conducting random drug testing and if “...we find out they’re not taking their medicine they’re just dropped and they’ll never get them from us again....you can get \$10.00 a pill for Darvocet.” Darvocet is a commonly prescribed, much abused and very addictive pain medication. Wilma said, “I know people that have gone out and broke their foot, hurt themselves to get some pills.”

Federal and State government

During the summer that we met the State sales tax was increased 1.5%. The State's decision to increase the tax came about because the State Legislature was unable to balance the budget. Events leading up to the increase in tax included closing non-essential government offices. Rumors spread about teacher and other job cutbacks.

Julie told us that her husband, Ben, who is a teacher, decided to take a job in Whitley County, Kentucky, across the nearby state border. Ben and Julie were skeptical that after the budget cuts were made he would continue to have a job in Tennessee. They made the decision to take a job in Kentucky because of better pay and working conditions. Plus, Julie said, "It's probably the best in the area academically...It cut his commute in half...and he's teaching what he wants to teach...the state cuts were just scaring everybody."

The group talked about how confusing the sales tax is because it applies to certain items and not others. The group was unclear how it would affect their organizations, and they talked about how they understood the tax applied to certain services and retail items.

As we talked about the new taxes, Betty brought up the issue of absentee land owners and how this affects the tax base in the area which in turn impacts the community. Betty said, the land is "not being used for anything. They pay dead land taxes. Because it's not being used for anything it's just there." Because the land is not being developed, it is not increasing in value and therefore not increasing the revenues of the city or county. And "dead land" taxes are significantly lower than taxes on developed land.

The news about the increased sales tax and the continuing lack of financing in their region led the group to talk about the Census. The group said that the information provided by the latest Census 2000 inaccurately represents their area which concerns them because federal and state officials use the Census as their primary resource for gathering information about communities. The group said that they feel the decisions that these government officials make about funding and special projects are determined using inaccurate information. The inaccurate depiction of the region by the Census affects the group in both personal and professional ways.

The Census divides the county into districts and determines the needs of those districts based on population and use. Betty asked the group, "Who decides where the districts begin and where they end?" She was concerned because the latest Census information says that "Newcomb has only increased by 100 people since 1947/48." Information provided by the Census is what the "politicians and government official's look at" when they make decisions about assessing community needs and establishing budgets. Betty stated that she felt that there were small communities that use the services of Newcomb that were not counted because they are not in the district of Newcomb. Betty continued, "I just wondered if they considered little hollers like Whistle Creek. Whistle Creek is not in Newcomb but it adjoins it."

Because poverty and need is based on a per person basis, an accurate accounting of the community is important. Betty went on to say that many years ago she had conducted a survey as part of her work with MWE. They went to every other house in Newcomb, talked to the families, read the questions to them and helped them fill out the

survey. Betty explained that they surveyed a thousand families and used that information to start the Mountain Arts Project,

I guess what I'm saying is when you've got government officials and they see these figures, but, they don't know they're not right. Or they just assume they're right. There's a lot of people that's getting left out.

Herb said that she was right to be concerned and said the State of Tennessee had recently conducted a survey on health, income and education using the telephone to contact their families. Herb said, "So they interviewed 2900 families by phone to get these statistics. Well, they're not good because the people we deal with don't have phones." Betty drove the point home by saying, "It's hard for politicians to make accurate decisions on stuff if they don't have all the facts".

The group believes that the information about the community from the 2000 Census is inaccurate and has affected the funding for a variety of organizations in the region. Part of the problem, Herb explains, is that they do census by zip code. While Jellico is a census area, the small communities around it are not. Herb observed, "So they only have like 2000 people in the census and there are 8,000-9,000 people up here."

Julie shared that she had tried to get a low-rate payment for her college loans based on the fact that she is working in a medically underserved area,

And the year that I applied they said we've decided that your area is too rich, you're above that so we don't do low rate payment in your area. And they point out the data they have on their computer.

The National Health Service Board is the group in charge of those funds and they based their decision about the region on information they got from the Census.

The groups feel they can no longer depend on local or state government to support them and they are looking more and more for individual donations or institutional grants.

There were mixed opinions about what was the better money, individual or institutional versus governmental. Herb said that he believes that government money has too many strings attached and that, "Institutions can give it to you much more quicker and easier without all the formality." Betty added that, "Most of our funds are from private donations and some grants...(over the) last few years these individuals are having as hard a time as we are. And it's hard for them to continue to give."

As the national economy continues its downward spiral, people who have previously donated to these organizations are feeling the financial crunch, which in turn affects these non-profit organizations. The leaders expressed concern about how their agencies would survive financially.

Local economy and power

Whenever the group talked about funding, the conversation eventually led to the local economy. There was a group suspicion that there was some kind of conspiracy to keep business out of the community. Historically there was precedence for this kind of thinking. The mine owners in the past had prevented industry and other businesses from coming to the area in order to keep the workers locked in to their low-paying mining jobs and dependent on buying from the mining stores (Gaventa, 1982, 1990).

The research group expressed their suspicions about why new businesses were not coming into the area. The community is located near a major highway that runs north and south. There are also railways in and out of the town. At one time Jellico was a bustling, prosperous city as the processing center for the coal mines in the region. The group wondered what was keeping the city from re-inventing itself.

Betty seemed to believe that the political powers in some way prevented businesses from coming in,

...there were quite a few businesses that wanted to set up in the industrial park. One of them was a battery producing place. And they blackballed that right quick...even though it was going to bring in hundreds of jobs and keep people employed.

Julie had heard rumors that Buster Brown wanted to build a factory in the town. While this could not be confirmed or denied, the group was suspicious that something or someone was preventing industry from coming into the community. There was an assumption that some group was at work blocking improvement of the town.

Being suspicious of unseen powers was a manifestation shared by the group leaders. The participants also said that people in the community are afraid to complain about lack of jobs, or the pollution or anything that identifies them as challenging the perceived powers that be. Again, some of these fears are valid since they have historical precedence, true life experiences where retribution for speaking up was meted out by politicians and mine owners. Betty remembered that, when they were working to get the asbestos out of the schools, the teachers would call them anonymously to give them information. This was she said because "they didn't want to lose their jobs or get blackballed by the community and have to leave the community in order to file unemployment." The group talked about how this fear continues to control people, and they stated that it was a very difficult behavior to change.

There were other situations that the group described where an individual's behavior was being controlled in some cases to the point of abuse. Herb said that there are many cases of family abuse reported to the agencies involving situations where

husbands attempt to control their wives. When Herb spoke of this problem all of the other group leaders reported clients who had similar stories. Jane said it was difficult in small communities to report cases of abuse because often the person taking the report is related to the abuser and the victim. One of the leaders of the organizations reported that she knew this scenario personally because had experienced it as an abused and frightened wife. She said it was not until her neighbor knocked on her door and took her to a school board meeting that she got involved in community issues. The woman, whom she calls her mentor, refused to leave her house until Betty came out. The woman was on the agenda for the meeting but the board was not going to call on her or discuss her concern. Her mentor disrupted the meeting and demanded that the board talk about the asbestos issue. Betty said that she was impressed by her neighbor's being willing to "stand up there" and decided that, "if she was willing to put her life and her reputation on the line for kids that she doesn't even know then I ought to at least be able to back her up."

Aurora said that she too was a very timid person, "I wouldn't even speak. It about killed me to introduce myself." Jane is Aurora's mentor and has been encouraging her to do more and more as a leader in the program. As the group continued to share their stories, it became obvious that each of them had a mentor who had been able to draw them out of their fear into action. Their mentors believed in their abilities to lead and, by becoming leaders themselves, they lived into that vision.

The agencies and their leaders have faced great opposition in their communities and their organizations have been targeted for acts of violence. An arsonist burned down four of the homes at Woodland Trust. Three years ago there were attempts on the part of local politicians to close MWE because of their program offerings. In the face of these

dangers, disappointments and opposition, the groups continue to offer people a way to develop their skills and knowledge.

Developing skills of dialogue and trust

When we first started meeting, our group was satisfied with sharing cursory information, but as they grew more comfortable with each other they began to inquire about what was being said to more clearly understand the intention of the speaker. It took some time for the group to develop the skills to do this regularly, and they slipped back and forth in their level of inquiry. As we were learning about one another, it was as if we were learning the sounds of individual instruments and how they were played. It took some time before we mastered the skills of making consistently good sound.

We started with the basics of communicating and sharing with an intention to develop the skills of collaborative learning as we got to know one another. In the process we shared information that drew us to one another. As we shared of ourselves in these meetings we began to weave bonds of trust to one another.

Erich Fromm, (1956) wrote:

what does one person give to another?...that which is alive in him. He gives him of his joy, of his interest, of his understanding, of his knowledge, of his humor, of his sadness - of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in him (p. 24).

Fromm (1956) continues that such giving enriches the one who gives of himself as well as the one who receives because it enhances his or her own sense of "aliveness". "In truly giving, he cannot help receiving that which is given back to him" (p. 24-25). We related our thoughts, our dreams and values to each other by sharing a meal, laughing together, telling our life stories and talking about our families our communities. Coming together

in this way gave us knowledge about each other and helped us understand that we shared a purpose in our work.

According to Bohm (1998) wandering through conversations and sharing in the way we did is an important part of the group process in learning dialogue:

...in a dialogue we are not going to have any agenda, we are not going to try to accomplish any useful thing. As soon as we try to accomplish a useful purpose or goal, we will have an assumption behind it as to what is useful, and that assumption is going to limit us (p. 9).

My goal was to involve the leaders as quickly as possible in the process. I started our conversation by asking the leaders to introduce themselves to the group. I chose the newest member of the group to go first because I reasoned that the others would be the most curious about her and her organization. Julie told the group about her organization, and after she gave a brief overview she just stopped talking. I suspected that she had more to say about her work so I encouraged her to 'say more' by asking her a question and tapering off,

MNO: "Can you tell us about Youth for Christ? I mean it is a non-denominational?"

Julie: "Non-denominational, not for profit organization..."

She went on to provide details about the goals and programs of her organization in answer to my question. By asking someone to say more about what they have experienced in their lives we are extending ourselves to them in an attitude of respect. Through this practice we express that we are listening to understand and we acknowledge the other person and the relationship that exists between and among us. We are practicing what Gergen (1998) refers to as "relational responsibility" (p. 19). Once we have achieved this relational understanding, we can begin learning together.

Communication and sharing includes how the group shared information about their organizations, their jobs and how they got things done. It was the “getting to know each other” aspect of our meetings, and reflects how the group began to develop a collective understanding of each other and their work in the community. Isaacs (1999) refers to this process of group development as “rule following” (p. 259). He says that people “carry on a kind of aggressive banter about what is wrong and what needs fixing” (p. 259). They do this because they do not yet trust one another to share what their true feelings and thoughts are, so they maintain polite interaction. The participants expressed their frustrations when they talked about what they thought needed “fixing” in the community. They shared stories about the people in the community who take advantage of government assistance, sell prescription drugs and seem comfortable with doing as little as possible. These stories were about “those people” in the community and expressed emotional and psychological distance that the group was keeping between “us” and “them”. Isaacs (1999) writes that such conversation is typical in the first phase of dialogical experience in a group. Such distancing Isaacs (1999) claims results from a desire of people to maintain “face”, an emotional component drive by fear. It seemed to be safe enough to talk about “those others” in the community but the work we had to do was to create an atmosphere of safety where we could learn and reflect on our own work and ourselves. Other studies on collaborative learning have identified this early bantering as a part of the process that groups go through in learning to dialogue (Armstrong, 1999; Tissue, 1999; Cotter, 2001). The information that the leaders talked about seemed to be an important factor in building a sense of trust in the group, as well as a better understanding of each other.

Collaborative learning honors the knowledge that people have about their own lives and communities. I approached this research with an intention to bring a group together to examine their ordinary, day to day lives. It may seem simple to have such an ordinary theme appear in the results, but it is often the ordinary that we do not attend to, and it is in the ordinary that we live our lives. This region of Appalachia has had years of attention and money poured into it from the government and outside agencies. Yet we find that things have not improved as much as one might have hoped. The intent of this research was to return to the local experts and as Husserl (1967) suggests get “back to the things themselves” (p. 29) to involve the people themselves in the creation of their own knowledge (Peters, 2002). During the four meetings we had to learn to see what was right before our eyes, or as Wittgenstein (1953) writes, “...we want to understand something that is already in plain view. For this is what we seem in some sense not to understand” (no. 89). We started that process by developing an understanding of each other and our work.

Everything that we chose to share in our meetings called the group’s attention to people and events that we found important in our lives and our practices. It was through our sharing that we defined and redefined ourselves. Our experience is reflected in what Shotter (1996) writes:

We must move away from foundationalist, theory based approaches to ones more rooted in people’s practices. For in our view of things, we are never not engaged in one way or another in some kind of activity in the world, and thus we are always actively relating ourselves in some ways to our surroundings (p. 216).

Our narratives, our stories about our lives and our works were the vehicle through which we revealed ourselves.

In the same manner that we inform others about ourselves, we also form an understanding of others by what they share. Wittgenstein (1958) wrote, “Language is itself the vehicle of thought” (p. 107e). Members of our group began to understand how others experienced the world and what they perceived as problematic or challenging. We gained a sense of what was thought by what was said.

Chapter Four

Reflective Thinking

Another theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was reflective thinking. As participants continued to talk about their work, their passion for the community became evident. They seemed to become more comfortable with each other as they found out that they all were working towards common goals. Eventually the group was comfortable enough to disagree with one another. My field notes indicate that by the second meeting the group members also began to take on some of the duties of a facilitator. For example, Wilma noticed a gesture or sound that Herb made and asked if he was going to say something. Herb said that he did want to say something and went on to share some of his frustrations. Later in that meeting Frank noticed a movement of Julie's and asked her to speak. Group members were developing knowledge about each other through their joint experience of talking and listening, and they began to act on that knowledge.

Education

The group learned the skills of dialogue in "fits and starts" and was not always successful in engaging in dialogue. On one occasion one of the leaders voiced an assumption about a situation and another challenged the accuracy of that assumption. The challenge was clear and did not offer an invitation for response, but rather effectively closed down any further exploration of the matter. This happened when Julie was telling us what teaching was like for her husband Ben, a middle school teacher in the southern part of the county:

My husband's school has got, for middle school age, has got the worst scores. Last year he had the worst scores of any schools in the county, which is surprising to me because he works for LaFollette Middle School and a lot of them are more wealthy down there.

It is true that the school serving this community had the lowest achievement test scores in the county. However, her suspicion that this school was where the wealthier children attended was challenged by Jane, whose husband had also spent many years as a teacher at the same school. Jane countered the notion that the children attending LaFollette Middle School were from the more affluent families:

Honestly Julie they're not more wealthy because the children...all the children from the projects go to east and our kids go to west. And all those kids go to LaFollette Middle School. The more affluent families go to Jacksboro Middle School primarily and they have more resources and they have better test scores.

Jane effectively shut down Julie with her countering statement and did not encourage Julie to reply. Jane's statement was given as fact and was expected to be taken as such; she did not leave an opening for any further discussion of the matter.

As the group developed the skills necessary to engage in dialogue, there were occasions in our meetings where perspectives expressed by the group members were challenged, and further dialogue and reflection was encouraged. One such occasion involved a group discussion about the issue of whether or not getting a good education could improve life in the mountains.

Herb told the group that he had identified some children in the community who he felt had potential to be excellent scholars. He stated his belief that getting the children out of the community and into a boarding school would give some of them a chance for a successful future; then they would return to and improve the community. When certain children had expressed an interest in going to boarding school, Herb had tried to get the

families to agree. The families had not been receptive. Herb was frustrated because "It's a wonderful opportunity. And I have children that are very brilliant, but their parents are on drugs. How do you get a child out of that environment?" Wilma offered a contrasting view of the situation based on her experience:

In some situations it's not that they don't want the child to go out and make a better life for themselves, it's the family ties are so strong here it's hard to let go....some of them, I'm not saying all of them.

The group began to explore the values of the community through discussion and to move beyond their own values and assumptions about the situation.

The discussion began to develop some dialogical characteristics as it went on. Mary said that, while she believes that a good education is a great thing, it does not necessarily follow that the children would return and contribute to improving life in the mountain communities. Herb and Mary had been talking about the movie "October Sky" which tells the story about life in a coal-mining town during the 1950's. In the movie a group of students were inspired by their teacher to pursue their interest in rocket science. The true story is that many of the students from that county left the community to pursue higher education. Herb was impressed that these children were able to "break away from their families." Mary confronted Herb's assumption that these individuals returned to contribute to the community once they became educated. After she stated her opinion, she added the phrase, "Do you think so?" This gave Herb the opportunity to reflect on what he knew and to re-engage in the conversation with Mary. He stated that, while some of the young men came back to the town as mining engineers, the financial contribution that they returned to the community was probably nil. Herb admitted, "Did they bring an investment back into the community? No, I don't think so. Socially, I think so." While

Mary disagreed with Herb, the act of asking him what he thought was dialogical and kept them both involved in exploring the topic more fully. The result was that Herb became aware of an assumption he had made that a child, once properly educated, would return to the community and add value. Mary and Herb agreed that they both believe that education was part of the solution to their problems but that it is not the only part.

Mary challenged the group's thinking on several occasions. She urged them to become more critical about the underlying causes of the problems they were identifying and talking around.

Reviving not surviving

Eventually the group began to use the skills of dialogue to identify positive values that can be found in the community. These are values that the group feels can be beneficial to a larger portion of society. Mary spoke of the strength of the mountain people, reminding the participants that there are people who "have stayed in the mountains because of certain values" and there are those who have returned to live in the mountains after moving elsewhere. She said that "They know that they have less money, but they have what they want." She added that "At a time that our country is being talked about around the world for the way we use and use....we are called to some kind of a simpler lifestyle" and that "You can go to the mountains and find out how" to live this way.

Wilma also talked about the strength of the poor people of the mountains and identified many survival skills. The "majority of these people are survivors" she says.

It all comes back to, we are survivors. You look at somebody on the Families First Program. They draw \$147.00 a month. To me that's a survivor. If they've

got three kids or two kids and can live on \$147.00 a month plus their food stamps....we want to learn together how to survive and how to make this living.

Mary offered an alternative to using the word survivor. "You know somebody put me down the other day ...and said, we're not willing to be survivors, we want to revive." The concept of "reviving" became an idea that the group leaders began to think about regarding their work.

Community work

In reflecting on what they were saying in a critical manner, participants began to build on each others' ideas about community work. They formed a collective understanding of what they valued about their work. Mary set the tone as she shared her philosophy about community organizing. She said she "was convinced that no expert had solutions, including myself" and that "when I went there (to Clearfield) I would support whatever community people wanted to do." Mary stated that she believes the people are the experts about their communities: "I believe the knowledge is within the people. They haven't collectively developed so that they can move on it."

Mary went on to state her belief that people have to experience or learn about being successful: "When you are successful, you are in a system that works, and when you get whole communities that are out of that system...those answers don't work for us." Living in a community that is not successful, or does not "work" as Mary put it, often leaves people with a sense of being apart, of not participating fully in society. She believes that the region of Jellico is one of many communities where people have not learned how to be successful, nor do they expect to be successful. The group went on to explore how this concept related to the behavior of the people living in the community.

Betty confirmed Mary's remarks and shared her own observations, "People consider themselves haves and have-nots." Betty believes that this attitude manifests itself in the belief people have that, "No matter how hard they struggle, no matter how much they do or no matter how much they fight the system they are always going to be one of those have-nots." Betty added that eventually the people who feel this way will "lose faith in what they are trying to get accomplished".

Wilma pointed out that this region has many generations of people that have never known any other way of life but poverty and dependence on the government. She said that at MWE they see a "lot of people that are in a cycle and their ancestors went through this and lived off the government."

Betty said that Crazy Quilt wants to intervene in people's lives before they "...get into a situation and lose faith. Before they get in that situation and say, well I can always turn to welfare." Wilma agreed, "Right...that's where we need to step in as a community." There seemed to be some sort of group breakthrough at this point. The dialogue changed and people began talking about how their organizations could be involved in addressing the underlying issues and not just the resultant behavior.

Mary summed up what she saw as their responsibility as leaders as she quoted Proverbs, Chapter 29, verse 18: "Without a vision, the people perish." "What we need to help our people who are surviving is to think of a vision of how life could be," she said. Wilma suggested that the vision would have something to do with Mary's previous statement, "not just surviving, but reviving." By participating in dialogue and reflecting on their knowledge of the community, they were able to identify positive, social attributes and ways they could support the development of their community.

Dialogue

The group was participating in dialogue and critically reflecting on their shared knowledge and experience. It was through this critical reflection that the group came to know each other on a deeper, more significant level. Gergen (1999) writes:

Just as in relationships, the reality of relationships is also created in the ongoing practices of dialogue. Relationships, like personal identities are not things in themselves. They are by-products of particular forms of talk. To participate in a friendship, a family, a marriage, a team, or an organization requires conversational work: an effort to create a reality that is different from or not reducible to individual selves (p. 22).

These verbal relations are primary in our experience of all that it means to be human, for our language is how we experience our world.

Shotter (1995) wrote of the dialogical experience:

If only we could heighten our sensibilities to what is actually happening between us, then perhaps we could see ourselves at work within such activities - or, at least, if not to 'see' ourselves, then to 'hear' our own voices at work in how we can and do shape our own lives (p. 7).

It is through the use of dialogue that a sense of common understanding or "shared meaning" develops among group members. Bohm (1996) writes that this "...shared meaning is the 'glue' or 'cement' that holds peoples and societies together" (p. 1). This "glue" is what held the group together as they began to develop a sense of one another and their shared values. Buber (1937) writes:

We may term this way of perception *becoming aware*. It by no means needs to be a man of whom I become aware. It can be an animal, a plant, or stone. No kind of appearance or event is fundamentally excluded from the series of the things through which from time to time something is said to me. Nothing can refuse to be the vessel for the word. The limits of the possibility of dialogue are the limits of awareness (p. 10).

As the group members continued to practice dialogue, they became aware of the assumptions they held about social issues. These assumptions were called into question by the group and became a point of reflection for the participants. In the previous example, Herb's assumption about education having a positive impact on the community was called into question by Mary. Once he was made aware of his assumption, Herb had the choice of maintaining the assumption, perhaps by entering into debate with Mary, or of exploring his assumption in a dialogical manner. Herb chose to participate in dialogue with Mary and heard that her experience of education was different from what he had assumed. According to Isaacs (1999),

Dialogue, as I define it, is a conversation with a center, not sides. It is a way of taking the energy of our differences and channeling it toward something that has never been created before. It lifts us out of the polarizations and into a greater common sense, and is thereby a means for accessing the intelligence and coordinated power of groups of people (p. 19).

After listening to Mary, Herb reflected on his assumption in a critical manner. Reflection enables us to correct our beliefs, to determine, "What am I doing wrong?" Mezirow (1990) writes that, "Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built" (p. 1). Herb critiqued his previous assumption that education was *the* answer and reformulated his view after hearing the perspectives of others.

In our day to day living we are rarely aware of the many assumptions associated with our actions. By participating in collaborative learning our assumptions can be revealed and we have the opportunity to alter our perspectives of how we see and experience the world. Covey (1996) writes that we all see the world through an individual "lens," and he advises that, "We must look *at* the lens through which we see the world, as

well as at the world we see, and that the lens itself shapes how we interpret the world” (p. 17). Mezirow (1990) says that this ability to critically reflect on “our presuppositions involves challenging our established and habitual patterns of expectation, the meaning perspectives with which we have made sense out of our encounters with the world, others and ourselves” (p. 12). To learn collaboratively we must first learn how to reflect critically on the assumptions we hold about the world. Through their individual reflections the Campbell County leaders began to move, through dialogue, to a collective sense of shared meaning and to a new mutual understanding.

For many in our group, becoming mindful of how we were relating to one another was quite a new experience. Shotter & Katz (1996) write:

In other words, our relating ourselves to, and our understanding of other people, comes about through quite a different process to that through which we understand things and objects; it comes about in a nonintellectual, embodied, dialogical or conversational manner, in which an embodied, temporally unfolding, responsive form or understanding...is at work (p. 219).

Participants who are new to collaborative learning can become uncomfortable during this experience. Letting go of the assumptions by which we have lived our lives can be an unsettling experience. But it is necessary and vital work as the group continues to discover and challenge assumptions and preconceived notions of which they were previously unaware. Senge (1994) promotes balancing advocacy and inquiry but reminds us that this process “can be hard on people’s cherished opinions” (p. 253). Bohm (1996) seems to agree:

Then what is called for is to suspend those assumptions, so that you neither carry them out nor suppress them....The point is to keep it at a level where the opinions come out, but where you can look at them. Then you may have to see that the other person’s hostility provokes your own. That’s all part of the observation. You become more familiar with how thought works. That is part of collective

thought – people thinking together. At some stage we would share our opinions without hostility, and we would then be able to think together; whereas, when we defend an opinion we can't (p. 12-13).

Fortunately participants in this collaborative learning experience did not seem to be taken aback by the process. They willingly and mindfully participated, reflected and adjusted their assumptions as they continued to learn.

Chapter Five

Forming Collaborative Relationships

As the group began to develop and practice the skills of reflective thinking, our relationships started to change. We were beginning, as Gergen (1999) describes, “to move from a language of individual resources to that of relationship” (p. 36). We began to develop our ear for one another, as we tuned our voices to the chorus that was created by joining individual voices. The group began to participate in what Park (2001) describes as “relational knowing” which “does not describe anything, nor does it consist of facts. Rather it resides in the act of relating and shows itself in words, expressions, actions and other forms of doing relationship” (p. 85).

Participants became aware of the intangible qualities that each leader contributed to the group experience. Group members seemed to sense these qualities through what others in the group said. We learned about the humility of members who would not speak of their own successes and achievements and their generous natures as they complimented the successes of others. For example, Wilma was very excited about the work that Julie and Ben were doing:

It was like the kids were starving for something. They needed something... I think what Julie is doing is one of the best things that has come in to this community in a while. It's not only teaching them spirituality and all it's teaching these kids morals and good leadership skills. It's just really good.

There was evidence of other relational qualities, such as a respect among members, as they listened carefully to one another. Participants honored their commitment to each other by following through on their promises to participate in the research. They also expressed the commitment they feel towards their community as they

talked about their work. Betty, for instance, who qualifies for food stamps and knows how to budget her money and “power shop,” considers herself fortunate. She said, “I’ve got two years of college behind me. What about these people that don’t have any education, that don’t know how to budget their money?” In this way the group shared their values, and other intangible qualities like honor, integrity and trust became part of our shared understanding of each other.

We were changed in the way we felt and acted towards the members of the group. Gergen (1999) calls participating in an experience like this learning to be “relationally responsible” to one another:

We discuss relational responsibility as a dialogic process with two transformative functions; first, in transforming the interlocutors’ understanding of the action in question...and second, in altering the relations among the interlocutors themselves (p. 5).

One aspect of how our relationships changed through the course of the meetings was in the development of safety. The members began to trust that the group was a safe place to explore and be vulnerable. This became evident as the group changed in their willingness to share intimate details of their lives, like the struggle of living with the stress and concerns from their jobs and how it affected them personally, both emotionally and psychologically. Wilma shared her frustration with the inequality she sees:

...All these girls driving these new cars while I’m putting away in my little... Well, half the time I’m working I don’t get paid. You work for a non-profit, you don’t get paid. You know?

Wilma expressed this in an exasperated tone and looked around the group to see if others might be able to relate to what she had said. At the time no one else spoke up; however, the group continued to develop as a safe place, and by the third meeting Betty trusted the

group enough to share. Betty said that she knows what it is like to live below the poverty line and offered us a glimpse of what she faces in her life,

I don't have a phone right now because I couldn't afford to pay the bill. And it's either eat or pay the bill...anybody that's in a community group like we are, they have pretty much said to themselves that they are going to be poor. Because there: a; never is going to be enough money and b; they don't expect to live, pardon the expression, "high on the hog". If I had any extra it would probably go back into the center to try to help another family or pay an electric bill for somebody or to buy my volunteers something...But living above the poverty level would be good.

In my journal I commented with amazement that,

Some of these program directors are living below poverty. Betty makes \$11,500 a year. How is that possible? And she knows things about surviving that I will never know. She let her home phone go, her personal phone go, because she couldn't afford it. There are things that we do not know or understand about their situation that they deal with daily and cope with and do very well.

As our relations became more intimate and the group became a safe place where members could trust one another, there was an urgency to be present to one another in a relationally responsible way. Shotter (1997) writes:

In other words, those involved in such joint action, create unique, novel circumstantially appropriate 'situations' between themselves, which, although they may contain no independent, material objects as such at all, it is just as if they did – hence the moral force of such 'things' as commitments and promises. For those within a 'situation' feel required to conform to the 'things' within it, not because of their material shape, but because we all call upon each other, morally, to recognize and respect what exists 'between' us. Thus, as neither 'mine' nor 'yours', the 'situation' itself constitutes something to which we can both contribute: It is 'ours' (p. 9).

Through our social interchange, the sharing of our narratives, our relationships were altered as we learned, what Gergen (1999) calls to "read and respond" to one another. It was within the process of our very conversations that our relationships became transformed.

Safe enough to share our fears

By the fourth meeting the group became a place where the members could express their fears. Mary, who often set the tone for others, revealed that after forty years of experience in social activism and a variety of efforts, “We have done very little for very few.” Mary shared with the group that she had doubts about the effectiveness of her lifelong work. Her very sobering admission was a stimulus and served as an invitation for the others to reflect on the impact of their work. As she continued her reflection she said,

How interesting it is that even though some of us who helped found the Mountain Women’s Exchange were disappointed in the way it went I couldn’t help but think that these two women, who were on either side of me, developed their leadership out of that. And that the first director of Mountain Women’s Exchange moved on to being director of Save the Children’s Federation who ends up being really important to your center and to the...What I was saying is things don’t come out the way you planned it, but once something starts, flowers grow and turn out to be themselves.

Julie, who is newest to the region, let Mary know that she had heard her statement and in return she offered an alternative perspective by sharing her belief that, “You may start up with an objective in mind but even if it doesn’t turn out...you never know the impact.” Julie’s statement was both affirming and supportive.

Isaacs (1999) would say that this was an example where the group was continuing to develop the *container* for dialogue. Certain conditions make dialogue more likely to appear “in which deep and transformative listening becomes possible” (p. 242). Isaacs writes that, “the active experience of people listening, respecting one another, suspending their judgments, and speaking their own voice are four key aspects of the container for dialogue” (p. 242). The image of the container as a closed shape is ancient; art therapists would call it a specifically feminine symbol in that it is womb-like. The group is

represented by this container which held our individual lives. The circle in which we sat in our meetings is also a shape that connotes wholeness. The shape of the circle harkened back to the concept of the container. Our group became that place where the organizational leaders poured out the intensities of their lives and life work. And creating a strong container became part of the focus of our collaborative work.

After Mary shared her doubt about her life work, Julie offered perspective, with the intention of looking at her situation a different way. Mary reflected on Julie's comment and became aware of something which she shared with the group. Mary told us that an individual from the community came to her organization because she wanted to call a community meeting about a problem. Mary was encouraged because this person knew first of all to turn to the organization for help and second that this person knew such a thing could be done to address problems. Mary remembered this as one success resulting from her life's work and she recalled it because Julie had reminded her that "you never know." It was as if Mary was able to remember the sound of her own song because Julie hummed a few notes.

Shotter (1993) writes that 'knowing from within' is

knowledge of a moral kind, for it depends upon the judgments of others as to whether its expression or its use is ethically proper or not – one cannot just have it or express it on one's own, or wholly within one's self (p.7).

Shotter explains that this moral type of knowing occurs "only from within a social situation, a group, or an institution and which thus takes into account the others in the social situation within which it is known" (p. 7). This kind of knowing, a knowing that "occurs from within the group" comes out of the experience and through the effort of the group, and it is created and shared by all the group members.

The group went on to share intimacies and the container continued to be strengthened. Betty shared what she called her “biggest fear” which is “that the interest will kind of peter out and that the younger generations...will not see it as a critical thing...the things that we’ve started now will disintegrate.” Betty voiced a fear that is familiar to all of the group leaders who are aging in their leadership positions. Betty asked the unanswerable question they all were afraid of: “Is there someone that would want to continue the work that got started?” There was no answer provided but the question was one on which the group reflected for quite some time.

The group knit a web of safety that held them as they shared their problems, their fears, their successes and their joys, as well as challenging each other’s assumptions and perceptions. Engaging in reflective practice and thinking critically as a group brought them into deeper relationship with one another and moved them closer to being able to learn collaboratively.

In my journaling from the third meeting I commented that,

We are getting to the point in dialogue where they want some kind of solution-seeking going on. I was asking the ladies today to be more reflective about their own practices and asking more in depth questions about their practices and how they have their organizations set up.... I think we are to the point now where they are looking for some feedback and opportunities to collaborate.

There was a collective power that was beginning to develop through our relationships that would allow us to move to a collaborative learning experience.

Chapter Six

Participating in the Process of Collaborative Learning

By the fourth meeting I began to ask participants to tell me about their experience as participants in collaborative learning. The group shared that they saw value in coming together and that some had intended to arrange such meetings before. Jane brought up the fact that she and Mary had made a pact several years ago to “get together for lunch every two weeks.” She said they had wanted to do this to “stay in touch about what we were doing.” Jane admitted that, while the pact had been made, they had never acted on it because they were “off doing what we are supposed to be doing so we don’t have time.” Jane affirmed that participating in these meetings had value and that she thought “We should do that more.” Julie agreed saying, “It’s good to know what other people are doing.” This seemed especially important to her because she felt that “Being an outsider to the community and coming in, it’s hard to figure things out.” Their comments indicated that there had been some practical benefits to the meetings.

Some of the group members were beginning to have ideas about how they wanted to go on together after the research study was completed. Betty said the purpose of such meetings might be,

...an opportunity for us all to get together and see what does work in one group and what could work for another group and using the life experiences and the experiences of the past and that kind of stuff. And I am more than willing to do that. Because I think that there is a lot of knowledge within these groups. And you can always learn something from Mary! (Laughs)

Again their thinking was about how their meetings could provide a practical solution.

Mary however, set a challenge for the group if they were interested in continuing to meet:

I need to find a critical group of people who can be thinking through what's wrong with the economic system...what's the injustice of the system that doesn't pay for the kind of work that a community needs?

Mary was interested in a group that was willing to reflect critically on the issues they face. At the same time she was fully responsive and supportive of the group. Mary had missed the first meeting, but I had sent her a transcript of the session. She spoke of what it was like for her to read those notes and how encouraged she was by the potential, the possibilities that meeting could provide,

...when I read that I thought, my God, I love what's going on in these communities! And who better than you all know that. And if at some point if we stay together I mean we talk about what can kids have as an alternative?

Her excitement was genuine about the community work they were all doing and the potential that the group could unleash by cooperating and focusing their efforts.

I think we all start where we are lodged and what we can start with. And that's why getting together to me is so important because if we know what you are contributing to that but somebody else is contributing to shape up the political system while someone else is challenging the unions. That's when the pieces begin to fall together.

A sense of safety provided by the group

In our last meeting I again asked the group to reflect on their experience of the meetings. The leaders talked about how isolating their work is and how the interaction with other people who understand their situation was comforting for them. Betty continued, "To know that if I wanted to I could call Mary and say, 'Mary, I am having a problem' and being able to work it out. I know that resource is there." There seemed to be some comfort provided by the knowledge that these safe relationships could continue after the meetings had officially stopped. The members felt that they could turn to each other as resources for solving problems.

It takes time to know people

Her lifelong involvement in community organizing in this rural area gave Mary the benefit of historical perspective as she spoke of her work “paying off”:

This summer we had this Community Institute...a place where families can learn together...the opportunity for one week of a course that Berea was having on entrepreneurship for the public good...they gave us money for it. So for one week I had money to get the Institute to work like one of our dreams...After all these years, I knew who could be the best cook. I knew who could manage the money...in one week we could distribute \$6,000.00 to about twenty people in the community...if that had come to me twenty years ago I wouldn't have known the people....It takes so long to know who's got the talent for something....We did a good job...because we knew people who could do a good job. But it takes years to find that stuff out.

It takes time to form relationships within a community, as Mary's story indicates. But more often people do not take the time to form community.

Wondering together

It takes time before a group trusts each other enough to share their dreams with each other. Mary had an idea about the kind of work she wanted to continue with the organizational leaders. She put the question before the group leaders, “What do you want to do and if you had the money would you know exactly who to pay?”

The Youth for Christ organization is considering renting part of the MWE Building which would benefit both organizations by providing a central location for the youth meetings and would put MWE into a positive cash flow situation. Julie envisioned more as she talked about the possible outcomes from having a community space. The group talked about the merger forming a “family center” which offers services to the entire family. Julie thought it important that the building would be marketed as a multi-function facility to raise community awareness about all the services combined in MWE

and Youth for Christ. As the group talked about all the possibilities of such a merger, Mary wondered about the impact on the community of having a family center service building downtown:

If the groups could collaborate with each other and create signs and standards that would imply a connection. After a while society knows how to move in and out of these different places doing different things. ...people know some change is happening.

Jane admitted that “We forget about how people perceive us. We’re so busy doing what we do.” They were talking about a new concept, of forming a collaborative of social service groups, and they were excited about the possibilities.

Eagan School, part of Mary’s educational project, is also exploring ways they can collaborate with a church over in their “holler” by sharing their building for a reunion that draws three to four hundred people. Mary wondered about the future, “What could happen with these relationships? Those are the kinds of things that I’d like to talk about?”

Joint construction of knowledge

The group continued to focus on individual information and organizational needs and seemed unable to move towards joint construction of new knowledge. For that to happen, the focus of the individual in the group needs to move from her own knowledge to a joint understanding. This period of development in the life of the group results in a tension which can be uncomfortable for the group members and can result in what Isaacs (1999) terms “instability in the container” (p. 261). With Mary pushing group members to reflect critically on their situations, the group tipped and began to deliberate about ways they could merge their efforts in the community. This dialogue finally led to an understanding that was jointly constructed.

Mary said that she needed guidance regarding an approach she was taking in her work with young people. One of her programs rewards young people for their positive participation in community programs. They receive “community investment certificates” which they can use to buy things at the commissary. Mary got some feedback from the young people that they were not interested in the items that the commissary had for sale. They told her they really needed school supplies and other items they could not purchase with food stamps. After finding this out Mary went to the office and found the twenty or more book bags that the ARC group from Knoxville had delivered to be given away.

Mary said,

...we have twenty one kids who worked all week. They have these community investment certificates. They know that these are the things they'd like to get, but, if you're just going to give them away, it defeats my purpose. ...They bring up these things and I begin to see it as kind of the missionary, being nice and giving things.

Jane said that she understood and agreed with Mary's point. Jane also received over fifty book bags to distribute from her center. The group began to talk about ways that they could get the book bags to children who needed them but in such a way that it would encourage positive participation in the community. Jane said that,

One of the things that we've tried to teach our kids is that if you want things you are going to have to work for them....this area has been receiving relief since the Civil War and our government is taking away a lot of people's dignity. They just think you ask and you receive and you can't.

The group talked about the rationale for their concern and what they were trying to accomplish within their organizations, and everyone in the group agreed to coordinate their activities and projects to support the agencies in their efforts. The group decided that they had the responsibility to give the bookbags away because that was the promise given

to the donors. However, everyone agreed to coordinate any future projects to support the efforts of the agencies.

Herb remembered another project the group needed to review. A group from Knoxville brings up aged wood for firewood which in the past has been given away. The group began to talk about how the young people of the community could use this firewood as a fund raiser. They could split the wood and sell it themselves and learn about the effort involved in making money. The group's excitement built as they talked about how these actions could support their organizational efforts rather than sabotage them. They were exhilarated and hopeful that their collaborative effort was a step in the right direction in addressing systemic community issues. And Mary closed our last meeting by saying, "It's good to get together."

Making meaning

As the group went through this process they reported feeling supported, feeling encouraged, hopeful, inspired and not alone. They said things like, "It is good to get together," and "It's nice to know what's going on" to describe the connection they felt between the participants in the group. The emotional value of such an experience was best expressed by Betty who, buoyed by her experience, said, "I'm not the only one out there doing this." These connections that the group began to feel for one another developed into a sense of relational responsibility as the group developed. The group began to care about the experience of the others, and respect and trust began to grow even more between the members. This has also been cited as a common experience in other studies of collaborative learning including Tisue (1999), Cotter (2001), Brickey (2000) and Armstrong (1999).

Tisue (1999) writes:

Conditions such as safety, trust, openness and respect also help to connect and build thinking and interaction. Safety in a group means that it is okay to be vulnerable without fear of negative consequences. Similarly, trust means it is safe for group members to take risks by expressing personal thoughts and experiences. It is through members sharing such stories and experiences that trust is built (p. 89).

Building an environment of respect, trust and safety is necessary to the experience of joint construction. This can initially be an awkward and uncomfortable process for members. We have been encouraged to develop and rely on our “first language of individualism” as Kemmis (1996) describes it (p. 169). We do not have many opportunities in our lives where we come together to discover common ground. Ironically, for the individuals who participate in such an effort a sense of social disconnection and isolation may be experienced before a connection and larger sense of purpose develops.

The group was able to pool their knowledge about their organizations, about their missions, and about the needs of their community to construct an understanding of how they needed to work together. Shotter (1993) refers to this decision to act as a “joint action” and writes, “This *joint action* has unintentional and unpredictable outcomes but, the action has an intentional quality to it” (p. 39). The leaders’ decision to manage the distribution of book bags or wood was not something that anyone in the group could have predicted when we began our work together. Nor was it an intended outcome of the facilitator or the group. But the action seemed to be both of those things. The joint action was born of the group experience and joint effort.

The participants in this meeting reported that even though they had meant to get together regularly, “They never did, because they never had the time.” The participants admitted “feeling bogged down,” “overwhelmed” by all their job demands of them. We can become so immersed in what we have to do that our sense of community can become very narrow. We see it through a certain “lens” and as the group members said, “get in a rut.” Spinning our wheels in “this rut” can lead to burn out, which was a big fear expressed by most of the participants.

In a collaborative learning group we have an assortment of lenses available to us that are offered by the group members. As we learn to use the tools of attention and inquiry we express what Kemmis (1996) calls our “second language” (p. 169). This second language comes “of tradition and commitment in communities of memory” and reminds us of our common goals and shared values. Participating in this experience in Jellico reminded us of what we have been missing-- an opportunity to participate fully in community, to rejuvenate one another and to discover our common ground, our truth, together.

As Bakhtin (1986) writes, “Truth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (p. 110). Peters & Armstrong (1998) refer to the type of learning that occurred in the group as having come about because the leaders

...don't just talk with one another. They also talk into the group and from the group. That is, as individuals talk to one another, they construct meaning from what is said and how it is said, and the result is meaning that the several people have constructed in the process of talking and interpreting (p. 76).

The Appalachian group acted on their new knowledge when they decided how they would support the reward systems of different agencies. They jointly decided to take action to support their programs and encourage positive participation in the community. This was possible because the group had created what Isaacs refers to as a “common pool of meaning” (1999). Everything that the group had communicated and shared about the region and their jobs, the history of government dependency, hopelessness and poverty, the positive value of simple living, their critical thinking and reflections on these issues all culminated in this decision to act. This decision of the group was unplanned prior to their participation in the collaborative effort. Heron and Reason (1986) write:

As we participate in the whole we co-create with it. In some sense we choose our reality and our knowing of it; therefore, valid human inquiry essentially requires full participation in the creation of personal and social knowings (p. 463).

This experience provides an example of the potential for the creation of knowledge through joint action. Isaacs (1993) evokes the following metaphor to illustrate this potential:

A flock of birds suddenly taking flight from a tree reveals the potential coordination of dialogue; this is movement all at once, a wholeness and listening together that permits individual differentiation but is still highly interconnected (p. 25).

The goal and the challenge before a collaborative learning group are to achieve that “movement all at once,” to achieve a level of group thinking that is exponentially generative. It is a time when the “flight of the group” is everyone’s primary concern.

Chapter Seven

Facilitating Collaborative Relationships

One of the first challenges in pursuing this research project was gathering a group to participate with me. After the original group decided against participating, I returned with my co-researchers Fred and Herb to re-organize and plan how to establish a group where none existed. As we talked about who we would invite, we also talked about what we had learned from our experience with the ministers. It became clear to us that for a group to join our study, there needed to be some interest that the participants had in common. In our experience the common area of interest was service to the community. We also made the assumption that participants needed to be able to offer respect to other participants, including the facilitator.

We realized that the relationship between the participants, especially in forming a collaborative learning group, is of primary importance. Peters & Armstrong (1998) consider these relationships to be “vital to the process” (p. 83). Brickey’s (2001) study on collaborative learning identified the relationship between the facilitator and the participants as a “major concern.” In beginning this work I wanted a group that was willing and interested in participating. I also sought a group with similar professional interests, hoping that their common interest would lead to an initial commitment to the group which could develop as we went along. Therefore, I focused on my individual relationships with each participant and took our initial meeting as a time to give us a chance to know each other better.

Preparing my co-researchers

I discussed the collaborative learning process that I hoped to introduce in our meetings and shared some literature with Frank and Herb before we started our meetings in Jellico. I reviewed that our goal was to involve ourselves in dialogue and that we should ask ourselves about our intention,

Are we going there to be listeners? Do we encourage that to come out in this group? That's the process. As we make ourselves accessible through dialogue and collaborate with these people, we are going to come up with some kind of understanding about the community and the people themselves. And we will learn about ourselves and the group as well.

As we talked about potential group members, I learned there was no coalition of social service agencies in the Jellico area. I sensed that there might be an interest on behalf of the leaders to participate if the study was based on something they would find beneficial. But we also realized that we were preparing to launch a study as outsiders of the community and that we would have to find a group who would accept us and be willing to form relationships with us.

Fortunately I had Herb, whose introduction of me to the community was central to my success in organizing a group. Although he lives in Knoxville, Herb is well respected and deeply trusted by the organizational leaders in the Jellico community. He has his own volunteer work through CASA and the Henderson Settlement, and he also has dedicated four years to working closely with the leaders of the agencies in Jellico. Herb has helped the directors pursue funding, helped their clients with housing issues and financial and medical assistance and he has offered a dependable and sympathetic ear. Herb serves on the board of Woodland Trust and has put in countless hours of physical labor at the Parent Resource Center developing a recreational area. Herb has seriously considered the

idea of moving to the mountains so he can do more, but has been persuaded that he benefits the community the most by maintaining social connections outside of Jellico.

Herb arranged and went with me to my introductory meetings with Wilma of MWE and Betty of Crazy Quilt. They have seen the time, work and money that Herb has invested in their community. They trust him, and his endorsement of me was invaluable and accelerated the potential success of this project. His approval of me had credibility with them and in some ways extended to me. I also assume that my involvement with the ARC and the commitment that we have shown through our work in the community gave me credibility.

Creating a safe environment

Tisue (1999) states that creating a safe environment is an important element to establishing collaborative learning. She writes that environment is “physical as well as emotional and psychological” (p. 72). Preparing the environment of our meetings was something to which I gave a lot of attention because of the importance it plays. I decided that we would meet in a local place away from the offices of the leaders so they could not be interrupted and could focus on being together with their peers. I arranged the space so that it was comfortable, inviting and without barriers between participants.

I also attended to the creation of the psychological and emotional environment as Tisue (1999) identified it. I never gave instructions to the agency leaders about my expectations for their behavior. I did, however, model behavior that fostered a safe environment conducive to collaborative learning. I did this by treating participants with respect and affection that was sincere and genuine. I often shared joy with the group through laughter, usually about ordinary life events. I also treated them with respect

through my language, by the attention that I gave them, and by the way I took our meetings seriously. I knew their time was precious and I respected it by showing up on time and ending our meetings promptly. I encouraged everyone to participate and looked for ways to bring out those who were naturally more reserved. I tried to listen in a caring and compassionate way, asking questions in order to better understand their experience. And I treated them as the trustworthy and capable people that they are. All of this seemed to have a reciprocal effect for all of us.

Roles and responsibilities

While I explained that I had no agenda for what we were to accomplish in our meetings, I shared my expectation that we would participate as equals in the meetings and treat one another as co-learners. This called for some members of the group to readjust their paradigms about leadership roles. The group, however, soon became comfortable with the idea and in no time was taking on some of the duties of the role of facilitator. I noticed that from the first meeting to the fourth the group moved from being passive participants waiting to be called to more active leaders readily engaging in the group. This behavior has been noted as part of the process a group goes through in developing the skills of collaborative learning (Alderton, 2000; Armstrong, 1999; Brickey, 2001; Tisue, 1999). By the fourth meeting the responsibility of facilitating dialogue was shared by all of the group members.

Collaborative learning calls for participants to rearrange their personal beliefs about teaching, learning and knowing. For some, participating in a collaborative learning experience may mean stepping out of what is comfortable and familiar into a new and strange learning experience. Collaborative learning calls for members to go beyond just

working alongside one another in groups to becoming participants in creating knowledge.

The shift that occurred placed me, instead of a leader ahead of or over the group, in a position alongside the others. This shift is described in Peters & Armstrong (1998)

Treatise on learning described in Chapter One.

Our work in Jellico was to encourage what Peters & Armstrong (1998) refer to as Type III or collaborative learning. The teacher, or in this case the facilitator, is considered a co-learner, an equal to each group member as well as an active participant in creating knowledge. The group progressed to the point where they were able to dialogue and reflect together, creating what Isaacs (1999) refers to as “a free flow of meaning” (p. 395). The group members developed a relationship with each other but also with the “meaning” as they create it.

We began to know others in the group, and to be able to see the world through their eyes. We gained knowledge that was rooted in our relationships. We began to understand how the world is experienced and understood by others. We took the time to understand each other’s perspectives and to learn about our history; our own awareness expanded and we were able to make room for other possible ways of seeing, understanding and experiencing the world.

Time

Time was a consistent theme throughout our group meetings. This theme has been significant in the work of other researchers in the field of collaborative learning including Tisue (1999) who studied her practice as a facilitator in a family business environment and Armstrong (1999) who studied a reflective practice course. In both these studies and in my own, the concept of time is perceived both as sequential time *Kronos*, and what

Isaacs (1999) refers to as *Kairos* (p. 288) which is a sensed and subjective experience of time. Isaacs (1999) writes that:

The process of thinking together with a group in dialogue seems to enable people to shift their experience of time. They embrace *kairos*. They gain perspective, they reset, and they develop a keener sense of when to act and when to reflect (p. 289).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) also discusses time in a similar manner and suggests that there is an intimate relationship between time and subjectivity. The subject of our lives, he writes, is more than a series of successive events which we are temporally connected to and relationally disconnected from. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes:

Time is therefore, not a real process, not an actual succession that I am content to record. It arises from my relation to things. ..What is past or future for me is present in the world (p. 412).

As we participated in collaborative learning we operated very much in the 'now' with one another. But we spoke of times past, of the influence of history on us and how we would go on together in the future. And it was this temporal dialectical motion that propelled us to a collective understanding. Merleau-Ponty (1962) writes that in such an experience:

...time is someone, or that temporal dimensions in so far as they perpetually implied in each, being collectively expressive of that one single explosion or thrust which is subjectivity itself (p. 422).

As we collaboratively expressed our understandings of the community and of our lives we became aware that we shared an understanding "which grasps its own being, and in which, in short, being and being conscious are one and the same thing" (Merleau-Ponty 1962, p. 424).

Armstrong (1999) writes:

The process seems to take time, requiring participants and facilitators to adjust to the initially unfamiliar demands of a collaborative learning experience. Eventually when acceptance of the possibilities ...skills begin to develop... (p. 93).

Tisue (1999) found that relationships develop and roles change over time contributing to the ability of the group to collaboratively learn.

Mary mentioned the forty years it has taken her to get to know the people in her community and their specific gifts and talents. Although she counted the years, there is a sense that what she was saying was really about *Kairos* time. She was not seated with community members in class learning about them. She gained a sense of their talents and abilities through the natural rhythm of the life events they shared.

Julie talked about being a newcomer and not having the benefit of experience that the others did in knowing the community and the 'powers that be'. Again, Julie was referring to *Kronos* time when she added that she is a "newcomer". But what she said also indicated an understanding of *Kairos* time, a relational time that did not include her and in which she would like to participate.

There was a sequential time aspect or *Kronos* to the meetings which started at noon and ended two hours later. There was also a *Kairos* time to the meetings in the natural rhythm that was established by the group, a rhythm that could not be predicted or initiated. The group acted into *Kairos* as they learned the skills of dialogue and tested the safety of the group and as they moved through cycles of action into reflection and jointly constructed knowledge.

There were other references in my journaling to time, the time it takes time to form relationships where people feel supported and comfortable enough to trust. These

relationships were not developed in a sequential order. Our exploration of each other moved back and forth in a *Kairos* of learning as we revealed ourselves slowly. Shotter & Katz (1998) write, "in relationally responsive forms of meaning, meanings are expressed in the unfolding movement of an utterance's embodied voicing, in a tone, style or way of talking..."(p. 160).

By the third meeting there was a "group memory" that was reflected when the participants asked to revisit topics that they had discussed some time before. Participants used a variety of statements to get the group back to the original subject. One example was when Mary said, "I'd like to go back to talking about something Herb said earlier," or when she said, "You know, keeping on your target, I'm not sure..." And the group knew what she was referring to and did return to that en route to deeper dialogue. The group developed a sense of the reservoir of meaning that allowed them to move around in dialogical time, *Kairos*, to locate and respond to previously asked questions. The group developed a pool of shared meaning from which ideas or events were not lost or erased from the group's memory. Such subjectivity as Merleau-Ponty (1962) would call it, "is not in time, because it takes up or lives time, and merges with the cohesion of a life" (p. 422).

Chapter Eight

Theorize and Act

I integrated my findings into my practice and decided how will I go on in light of the findings

I initiated this action research project, focused on collaborative learning, with some of the social service leaders of Jellico, Tennessee. I had some ideas about community development and I wanted to do two things: First, to describe the process of collaborative learning experienced by my co-researchers and selected community service leaders in Campbell County, Tennessee; Secondly, to describe my experience as a facilitator of collaborative learning in the Campbell County context. I believed that together we could build relationships that could contain and sustain us while we examined serious social issues and improve our professional skills and practices. My intent was also to conduct research “with people,” not “on them” (Marshall and Reason, 1994). I had my suspicions that engaging in a collaborative learning experience would help all of us better understand *our* life experiences, form relationships that might be beneficial, and have some lasting, positive effect on everyone involved in the research. Finally, I believed that my research would add to my understanding of collaborative learning and that it would contribute to the growing body of literature in this new area of study and practice.

When evaluating the success of an action research event, Reason and Bradbury (2001) advise practitioners to ask pragmatic questions and examine the *value* of any outcomes: “Was the work useful/helpful?” “Do people whose reputations and livelihoods are affected act differently as a result of the inquiry?” (p. 449). They go on to say that the answers to such questions are not always straightforward but that these

informs the relational process” (p. 448). In keeping with Reason and Bradbury’s criteria and the first objective of my study, I thought it prudent to return to the participants and ask them to reflect on their experience and the impact, if any, that continues to be felt in their lives and work.

I waited until after our meetings were concluded and then asked the participants to respond to my interpretation of the findings, make corrections and contribute any further reflections they might have. I also asked them about any new actions that occurred among the groups since our meetings. Representatives of four out of five participating organizations replied.

Participants’ responses

Mary of Woodland Trust said that the experience for her was as I had described. She spoke of our meetings as good and as reminders of “how much we could do if we stayed together.” She mentioned that being able to “just come to get refreshed and stimulated was the kind of treat we all needed,” and she commented that she hoped the groups would continue their work together.

I also learned that there were several projects in which the Woodland Trust, the Parent Resource Center and MWE are going to coordinate their efforts to support the community. One example of such an effort is with regard to their Christmas gift projects. In the past they have not had a system in place to track families who receive gifts during the holiday season. This means that families could receive gifts from several of the centers and potentially, take advantage of the offering.

A representative from Woodland Trust also contacted the ARC and St. James’ about donating new clothes that they can “sell” in their commissary to teens who are

earning community certificate credits for hours of positive participation donated to their community. These decisions and the contact from Woodland are a direct result of the relationships that were formed or rekindled in our meetings.

Betty from Crazy Quilt also confirmed that my representation of our meetings was “pretty much what we had discussed.” Just days before the completion of this dissertation I received word that the Crazy Quilt building was destroyed by fire. While the building and its contents were a complete loss, no one was harmed by the fire which occurred during the night. This news causes me great concern, particularly because the community around Crazy Quilt has been recently ravaged by tornadoes. Crazy Quilt has been known as the service agency in the region for years, and the loss, temporary or not, will be sorely felt by the local people in need. Wilma has offered space in the MWE building for Crazy Quilt’s use as decisions are made about the future. The ARC is also standing by to hear how they can help the organization recover, and the National Episcopal Church has sent financial aid at the request of the ARC.

I asked Julie from Youth for Christ to describe her experience of the meetings. She said that the “group experience was good for me” and that it was “good to get to know the other leaders and to hear about their organizations.” She also went on to say that “only time will tell how helpful the meetings were” in getting the groups to coordinate their efforts. Her comments did not reveal that any new collaborative actions had occurred.

When I asked Wilma from MWE about any joint efforts with the other organizational leaders are involved, she told me that she had scheduled a meeting for all the organizations to discuss the creation of a community food pantry. It seems that Wilma

is supportive of cooperative efforts and may take on the role of facilitator for such events. The food pantry is the first issue that the group will jointly address under her leadership. Wilma said she has no expectations of how the food pantry would operate except that all of the groups should be able to benefit from it. She says she is willing to consider using MWE as a drop-off and collection site for all the organizations. The groups could make referrals to the food pantry or they could use it as their stockpile. Wilma indicated she is looking forward to everyone's working together to decide how to proceed.

After our meetings I contacted Jane and emailed her my findings. When I asked her to comment on her experience, she said she would; however, she did not do so. Other than the information about how her organization is going to coordinate with MWE and Woodland on projects and what she shared in our meetings about her experience, I am uncertain about any subsequent actions resulting from our meetings. The ARC has continued to support this organization both financially and materially since our summer meetings.

I also asked my co-researchers to share their impressions and to update me on any collaborative events that have developed since our meetings. Their impressions of the experience are very different because they were involved to different degrees and Frank was not able to attend the last meeting. Their interaction in the community is also different in character. Herb is much more active with families in his ongoing work in the mountains. Frank is more involved on advisory boards of the organizations and through the ARC located outside of the community. Their comments about their experience reflect the level and kind of involvement they share in the mountains.

Herb wrote me about the joint activities that three of the five organizations, MWE, Woodland Trust, and the Parent Resource Center, have organized to continue working together to reach their goals. One of the projects was the Christmas project previously mentioned. Additionally, all five of the organizations have agreed to help Herb create a database of information that more accurately reflects the economic needs of the region. At this time they are considering types of data they want for inclusion. Herb also told me that Woodland and the Parent Resource Center are evaluating the future use of the Egan School, perhaps as a training center for teenagers. A former director of Save the Children is pushing the effort.

My co-researcher Frank wrote that,

It was most interesting to note that “things” did happen. This was not readily apparent during the course of the meetings. Of course, in the context of a study we are given the luxury of reviewing transcripts of meetings and picking out pieces which we can then...analyze...but, in the process it’s hard to recognize that this meeting is adding value – that is to say, giving me knowledge that is going to enhance my ability to accomplish my mission.

Frank’s comment is one that I hear frequently from people in the professional world about the potential benefits of collaborative learning for business. Frank found that the experience of reflecting on the process of meeting and not just focusing on the product was beneficial. We learned by doing and by reflecting on what we were doing. It was not always evident, nor was I as skilled as I might have been in “catching us learning.” But there was benefit that came about by engaging in the process of analysis, as Frank calls it, to improve what we do and how we do it.

There was one subsequent event that did not come together as I would have wished. It involved Youth for Christ and MWE. When I asked Julie whether any joint

efforts had occurred since our meetings, she told me that she had planned some teen meetings to be held in the MWE building. Julie had talked to Wilma about which night would work the best for her group to arrive, and Wilma had suggested Tuesday. However, when the Youth for Christ group arrived for their meeting, they found another group meeting in progress. Wilma then suggested that Thursday would be a better night. Julie rescheduled her meeting, but again when her group of forty showed up, another group was meeting in the large room. The other rooms in the building are considerably smaller, and the group that was meeting in the large room had only about ten people in attendance. Julie asked them if they would consider moving to one of the smaller meeting rooms; they refused, saying they had a contract and had been meeting there longer. Julie and her group of forty met in a small room and decided to relocate their future meetings to the community center. They were asked to leave that building because they talk about God and religious matters. They now meet in the public library. Julie spoke of being “very disappointed” with the difficulty she faced holding a meeting at MWE, wondering “how they think we can put a youth center together” in such circumstances. Julie said that she had “expectations for Wilma because of our meetings” which were “let’s work together.” Julie says she has “no idea of what would get people working together” adding that she “wants to work with the other groups but doesn’t know how.”

When I talked to Wilma she told me that she was sorry about the difficulty that Julie had experienced at MWE, and she shared her perspective of the story. Wilma clarified that the group that was meeting when Julie arrived is a large group of thirty-five to forty college students and perhaps all of them had not arrived when Julie was there. But they were not able to relocate to another area of the building because, like Julie, they

also needed the large room. It was regrettable that the groups could not be scheduled on different nights. It is laudable, however, that the building is providing meeting space for so many groups. Administrating the coordination of a building is not easy, but it surely can be worked out for the success and benefit of all involved.

What stands out to me from this story is how important participation in the process of collaborative learning is for forming relationships that can support future joint action. The person that Julie came into conflict with at the MWE over meeting rooms had not been involved in our meetings. This person could not be aware of Julie's collaborative relationship with Wilma or of Julie's expectations for what would be extended to her as a result of that relationship. I believe this example points out the necessity for further work within the organizations. While all the participants in our meetings expressed a desire and willingness to collaboratively work together in the future, each of them faces challenges in extending this understanding to the rest of their organizations.

Reconsidering my practical theory

Five major themes were revealed in an analysis of the data. The data included transcripts of our four summer meetings, my reflective journals, and field notes that my co-researchers and I recorded after the meetings. The first theme, Communication and Sharing, describes the process of the group members' getting to know each other. Reflective Thinking relates the groups' reflections on their work and their conversations during the four meetings. The third theme, Forming Collaborative Relationships, relates to discourse, particularly dialogue, about areas of common interest. The fourth theme, Participation in the Process of Collaborative Learning, describes the group's experience

in jointly constructing new knowledge. The fifth theme, Facilitating Collaborative Learning, focuses on what I did to introduce and facilitate collaborative learning. Two additional themes served as a kind of background to these major themes. The first is the element of time as it relates to the process of collaborative learning; the second is the concept of safety or security experienced by members of the group. The first four themes are descriptive of the process of collaborative learning that community leaders, my co-researchers and I experienced during our four meetings, and as such they satisfy my first research objective: to describe participants' experiences with collaborative learning. The fifth theme is about my experience as facilitator of collaborative learning, and this theme relates most closely to my second research objective: to describe my experience as facilitator of this collaborative learning experience. I discussed these themes in previous chapters, so what remains is to consider how these themes, combined with the results of interviews with participants, relate to the theory that I initially used to frame my study.

Part of my theory was drawn from the work of Peters and Armstrong (1998), who describe three types of teaching and learning. Their Type III, collaborative learning, was the focus of my study. Peters (2002) later elaborated on collaborative learning in terms of the essential elements of the process involved when people labor together to create new knowledge. These elements are: (1) dialogical space, (2) cycles of action and reflection, (3) multiple ways of knowing, and (4) a focus on construction. I incorporated these elements into my practical theory of collaborative learning, discussed in detail in chapter one. My theory also included assumptions about the people in the area who are served by the agencies participating in this study, and about the leaders themselves. I also include my assumptions of the needs and interests of people in the area and the role and

responsibilities of a community developer in addressing those needs. Thus, my practical theory was constituted of aspects of formal theory relating to collaborative learning and my own assumptions about my practice and its context. The next section of this chapter is given over to how the results relate to collaborative learning theory and my own practical theory.

I examined the five major themes and the two background themes that emerged from my data. These results indicate that participants' experiences, including my own, closely relate to the elements that Peters (2002) describes as being essential to a successful collaborative learning experience. The four themes address how participants in this study experienced the collaborative learning process. The themes can be understood in their own terms and in terms of how they relate to my role as facilitator of collaborative learning; i.e., the fifth theme. The two background themes, time and safety or security, add depth to meaning of the major themes as they intersect to describe the particular collaborative learning experience of participants in my study.

I revisit the themes that I discussed in chapters three through seven in the light of Peters and Armstrong's (1998) theory of collaborative learning – particularly Peters' (2002) elements of collaborative learning – and then turn back to some of my assumptions about the people and places involved in my study. I then take another look at my original theory against the background of these results.

The following is a brief summary of Peters' (2002) four elements of collaborative learning:

- **A dialogical space** – establishing an environment that fosters trust, respect, openness, sharing, and support that is developed and maintained by group members;
- **Cycles of action and reflection** – engaging in the cycles of action and reflection as part of the group practice to examine assumptions, improve awareness of learning and process, etc.;
- **Focus on construction** – integrating process and content by approaching a task or a topic with the intention of creating new knowledge and understanding;
- **Multiple ways of knowing** – recognizing, valuing, and calling upon the various ways of knowing each person brings as a result of previous experiences.

The first element, dialogical space, refers to the conditions that are conducive to dialogue and participants' interest in understanding each another. Such conditions include participants' expressions of trust and respect for their co-learners. Isaacs (1999) identified four qualities of what he referred to as a "container," a concept similar to what Peters calls a dialogical space:

- Listening for what others might be thinking.
- Respecting others' views, even if we do not agree with what they are saying.
- Suspending opinions in a way that lets participants understand them.
- Voicing what is true for us, regardless of influences that might be brought to bear.

Isaacs' container holds the context as well as the participants of a dialogue. "Within the dialogical space, the group members balance advocacy with inquiry. This allows a better understanding of problems and issues, thereby expanding the group's ability to develop effective solutions" (Peters, Creekmore and Duncan 2002, p. 4). Peters, Creekmore and Duncan (2002) add this feature to their understanding of the nature of a dialogical space:

There must be a sense of safety in the relationship that allows the participants to share their ideas without fear of the others judging them or betraying their confidence with others outside of the group. Each person must be able to openly share, question, and join the others in the creative process (p. 4).

Dialogue is the principal mode of discourse in collaborative learning, and it is this mode that must be developed and sustained by the participants in a collaborative learning experience. We don't always know the outcome and certainly not the ending of our use of words in a dialogue; only the beginning of dialogue is certain. To be effective in dialogue, we need to set aside our preconceptions and judgments as we open ourselves to understanding what meaning exists between us and for us.

The facilitator can serve as a model of this approach by asking questions while showing respect for others' responses and helping participants to ask similar questions. Attending to these aspects of dialogue brings the group closer together and helps develop relationships conducive to collaborative learning. Those engaging in dialogue often report that they have been attended to, heard and affirmed by others.

Although it is primarily the facilitator's task to help participants initiate and sustain their dialogue, ultimately it becomes the responsibility of all participants. Otherwise, the dialogical space cannot be sustained and collaborative learning will not happen.

The themes that relate most closely to this element are communication and sharing and forming collaborative relationships; these are themes that refer to participants getting to know each other, forming relationships, and engaging in dialogue. The group spent a lot of time talking in a very ordinary way about their ordinary life experiences. They also discussed their professional challenges and organizational purposes. All of this

supplied a good deal of practical information and became the basis for establishing relationships that were compassionate, respectful and supportive. That the participants felt a sense of safety in the group was indicated by what they revealed of themselves through dialogue, and the risks they took in revealing themselves suggested a sense of trust among the participants. In his study of a group learning to dialogue, Alderton (1999) noted the relationship between risk taking and the development of trust: "This show of trust was a result of participants taking risks in the groups and having their risks met with respect from other participants" (p. 94). Tisue (1999), who studied the process of collaborative learning by owners of a family business, wrote that "Safety in a group means that it is okay to be vulnerable without fear of negative consequences" (p. 72). Armstrong (1999), who studied the experience of graduate students in a course on reflective practice, reported that the development of trust and respect was related to effective group process and the ability of group members to engage in collaborative learning. In studies of groups operating in a variety of settings, similar results were reported by Crosse (2001), Merrill (2002), Brickey (2001), and Naujock (2002).

Being able to listen between sessions to the tape recordings of each meeting was tremendously valuable and provided me an opportunity to learn about myself as a facilitator. In the first two meetings, as I typed up the transcripts and listened to the tapes, I was often appalled at the lack of listening that I was doing and stunned by the words that came out of my mouth. I became aware, as I reviewed each transcript and my field notes, of the occasions in which I replied to what another participant said with a comment that had nothing to do with his or her statement. The job of the collaborative learning facilitator is not to be a business consultant, wizard or genie. But, there were times,

caught on tape, when my desire to share my knowledge and solve the group's problems was blatantly obvious. When this happened, the dialogue stopped and I began to work my own agenda. In the first two meetings there were several times when I did not reflect what was being said by the group. I asked questions that led the dialogue to the answer that I considered correct, a technique that was never successful in generating dialogue and often shut down the group process. But, because I was reviewing the tape recording of each session, I was able to return to the group at the next meeting with more focus and an intention to improve my dialogical skills.

By listening to these tapes, I also became aware of how some individuals tended to dominate the conversations. Each time I returned to the group, I made an effort to ensure that there was more even participation by the group members. I also learned that I could return the dialogue to previously asked questions or comments that were ignored or "plowed over" in our discussions. In this way I improved my facilitative skills and showed more responsibility for the group relationships. Eventually I was able to sharpen my awareness so that I could notice subtle aspects of the group while remaining active in the moment of our meetings. I became better able to attend to the balance of the group's participation, as well as what was being said, and to respond in a way that invited deeper exploration through dialogue. As I improved, I found myself more engaged and more settled in the group experience. Initiating and engaging a group in a collaborative experience and require an awareness of others that must be attended to and developed by any facilitator.

The second element, cycles of action and reflection, involves individuals and the group in a careful examination of their assumptions and their actions while engaged in

collaborative learning. Reflection can be in the moment or during periods in which they pause to think about what they are doing and why. The depth of their reflections can vary from a mindfulness of what is going on in the moment of learning (Merrill, 2002), to a systematic stepwise procedure that leads to revisions of one's practical theory (Peters, 1991), to a form of critically reflective thinking that involves participants in an examination of their meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991).

During a dialogue the facilitator or other participant can encourage reflection by "stopping the music" and asking participants to talk about what they are saying and how they are saying it. It is during such a reflective moment that the group is encouraged to catch themselves learning, that is, to examine how well they are doing with respect to expressing their dialogical skills and meaning making. In this way, participants are encouraged to reflect on what the experience is like for them and to seek additional meaning of the group experience.

The theme reflective thinking relates most closely to this element of collaborative learning. Through our dialogues and by listening in order to understand and be influenced, as Brickey (2001) calls it, I began to develop an awareness of how my own actions and attitudes were linked to the problems in the region and I began to take responsibility for them. But I did these things privately and did not make my new personal awareness explicit through dialogue in the group. Collaborative learning participants engage in critical reflection about their motives and their personal assumptions to protect the integrity of the experience. To some extent we were successful in developing the skills necessary to perceive these things as they were happening. According to Shotter and Katz (1996),

Simply by saying 'Look at that; 'Look at this', can lead others to notice certain crucial features of their circumstances that, although in fact readily apparent, would otherwise escape our attention (p. 5).

As I discussed in chapter one, the participants in the four summer meetings learned the skills of dialogue and improved our relationships by listening and watching the way we behaved. Sometimes I carefully followed the thread of a topic someone in the group had introduced and I asked questions in order to encourage members to explore a topic further and with greater depth. Sometimes the participants did this much better than I, demonstrating participant leadership which I welcomed and encouraged. As the group gained more experience, members were able to recall and an idea for further reflection and discussion. Members also took risks as they challenged each other to think about the assumptions they held regarding a subject and encouraged each other to share their thinking with the group. I also maintained communication with the group between our meetings through electronic mail and provided transcriptions of our meetings to encourage participants to think about their experience between our meetings. I invited their responses, corrections and reflections about how I was interpreting the events. In this way we were continually involved in acting and reflecting on our actions.

I would like to continue to develop my skills as a facilitator and improve my ability to see the group learning. I feel awkward calling the attention of the group to "catch itself" learning, and I feel that I did not push the group far enough when they dealt with very sensitive issues. I would like to feel confident in stopping the group to "point out" the group process. There is a subtlety to this practice that I do not yet possess.

The fourth element of collaborative learning, multiple ways of knowing, can be understood as recognizing, valuing, and calling upon the various ways of knowing that

each person brings experiences. Understood by this definition, this element relates to all of the themes identified in the data and supports both objectives of this paper. The three ways of knowing described by Shotter (1993) represent one of several typologies of knowing discussed in literature that supports the study of collaborative learning. While Shotter's description of knowing that, knowing how, and knowing from within is similar in several aspects to Heron and Reason's (2001) four ways of knowing (propositional, experiential, presentational and practical) and Park's (2001) representational, relational and reflective knowing, it is in Shotter's terms that I understand the various ways of knowing we experienced in this instance.

Knowing that refers to the form of factual or theoretical knowledge, knowing how is a form of practical knowledge, and knowing from within is a kind of knowing "that one has only from within a social situation, a group, or an institution, and which thus takes into account and is accountable to the others in the social situation within which it is known" (Shotter, 1993, p. 7).

It is interesting that no theme emerging from the data related directly to the element multiple ways of knowing. This was the case even though the leaders, co-researchers and I expressed all three kinds of knowing described by Shotter and other typologies of knowing discussed in this dissertation. For example, participants frequently informed others about their lives their work. Sometimes we talked together until we shared a common understanding. We learned facts about the town of Jellico and opinions about the needs of the community. They learned about many things that were relevant to their lives and role in the community, a form of knowing that.

Participants also learned how to dialogue and how to co-construct new knowledge. They grew in their ability to be relationally responsible for individual and group actions (MacNamee and Gergen, 1999). In short, they gained a good deal of practical knowledge, or knowing how.

The group developed what Kemmis (1996) calls a “second language” or a “language of community” (p. 169). He goes on to write, “Such language is a start toward the articulation of common ground; but standing by itself can readily be dismissed as mere sentimentality” (p. 169). The tape recordings of our sessions did not capture the essence of what was occurring between and among the participants during our meetings. Even the transcriptions seemed flat and lifeless, because these forms of capturing “what happened” were dead. What happened in our meetings had a life of its own, representing our lives together, and its spirit could not be captured on tape, or on paper. It was a form of life that could only be understood from within the group experience.

The fourth element is a focus on construction. What happens in the middle, or the in-between, constitutes the focus of a collaborative learning group. This focus consists of the result of a group’s construction and the process by which the result is achieved; thus it is both process and product that is constructed by the group. Bakhtin (1986) adds this perspective of what happens in between people who co-construct knowledge: “Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (p. 110). Gergen (1999) says this about the function of relationships:

What we take to be true about the world or self is not a product of the individual mind. The individual mind (thought, experience) does not originate meaning...meanings are born of coordinations among persons – agreements,

negotiations, affirmations – nothing exists for us...as an intelligible world of objects and persons, until there are relationships (p. 48).

In other words, meaning does not exist apart from relationships. Participants in this study were able, over time, to develop the kind of relationship that enabled them to co-construct both the relationship itself and some very important new actions and agreements for implementation in their community. For example, it was like the penny dropped, or the group experienced a collective gestalt when Mary challenged the group to come together to create a “new vision” for the community. The group rose to her challenge at that point and began to construct how they wanted the future to be. We decided the main focus of that future would be in “reviving not just surviving.” We continued to reflect on the vision as the dialogue continued. Eventually we were able to see ways the organizational work and missions overlapped. The group talked about the places where this common ground could perhaps be linked. There was talk about placing organizations together in the same buildings, of having clients move in and out of different service agencies to meet their various needs. Ultimately this dialogue led us to a heightened awareness of the potential in our relationships to construct a new way for the organizations to go on. An example of this was the awareness that Herb and others came to about the book-bag project. There were other such actions that happened after our meetings were over, and these are captured in the statements made by participants and summarized at the beginning of this chapter.

It is important to consider what was successful in the *process* of our work together as well as what was successful in terms of the *product* of our work. These outcomes overlap; for example, relationships can be understood as both process and product. It was

through the process of collaborative learning that we developed aspects of our relationships, like trusting, caring, respecting, and admiring one another. It was in the process, the way we were together in our meetings that provided the leaders “a sense of hope,” that made them say they “didn’t feel like you were in a vacuum anymore,” or “that we can all pool our resources...at least collaborate with each other to connect people.” “If we stay together...what could happen with these relationships!” These were products in that they were feelings that came about as a result of the relationships that were formed, of the listening and caring that was present in our relationships. At the same time, it took a certain quality of relationship among participants to enable them to develop these outcomes.

These same relational developments gave the group the courage to engage in critical thinking about the difficult issues we were considering. Through critical thinking the group shifted from focusing and talking *about* the “problems,” to designing joint action that supported their efforts to *act* on them. This shift in perception was no small leap but a giant inroad that led to other actions. By engaging in collaborative learning, the group was able to jointly construct efforts that led to stronger actions on behalf of the community.

A summary of elements and themes

From our very first meeting we set about establishing a dialogical space, where an atmosphere of mutual respect was exhibited. We developed trust and eventually were able to engage in critical reflection together and began to question the way we did things and the perceptions we held. We continued to develop these skills and relationships in our meetings and eventually were able to focus on the construction of new knowledge

from our shared knowledge. Our new knowledge came about as a direct result of our understanding of our relationships to each other as individuals and as organizational leaders. The kind of knowledge that was generated in this experience came from the participants and was based on our multiple ways of knowing and understanding of the social situation. Collaborative learning is generative in that it builds on these multiple ways of knowing and the experience of the individuals involved, but it also goes beyond any individual's knowledge to create new understanding and new knowledge that is understood and can be acted on by the group.

Collaborative learning theory and research

The experience of developing a practical theory and “testing” it through my participation with community leaders afforded me several insights into the nature of collaborative learning theory. The themes that emerged from my data analysis provide further insight into possible areas of study by scholars and practitioners alike. I selected the following to illustrate such possibilities:

- The developmental nature of collaborative learning. In this study, participants gradually developed a relationship that enabled them to work safely and securely with one another in their joint effort to construct new knowledge, plans and actions. This took time, and time has been found to be a factor in the results of a number of related studies (Brickey, 2001; Tisue, 1999; Crosse, 2001; Merrill, 2002; and Alderton, 1999).
- The necessity of engagement in the process. The conflict that occurred between community leaders regarding use of a community facility illustrated how important participation in collaborative learning can become. A relationship

formed by a group changes when participation is sporadic. Absence or lack of engagement on the part of group members shapes the whole group relationship just as surely as regular and intimate forms of interaction shape a group's relationship. For example, Alderton's (1999) study confirmed the importance of regular and full participation by group members intending to learn how to dialogue.

- The role of the facilitator as a power figure. In this study, the facilitator was not a teacher or a formally-designated leader. However, the initiative that I undertook might have positioned me as a leader of the group and thus I would likely have experienced a deference of the kind sometimes given to formal leaders such as teachers or supervisory personnel. My approach was to demonstrate how serious I was in being a co-learner with other participants in order to earn their trust and respect. While the other participants were strong leaders in their own right, none exerted themselves as leaders of the pack and thus risked defeating the purpose of the group's experience.
- An implication for how Peters and Armstrong's types of teaching and learning are understood. Their typology assumes a teaching and learning situation in which there is a teacher or some other such designated person, such as a facilitator. A facilitator may choose to become a member of a group, as a teacher might do in Type III teaching and learning. Alternatively, the facilitator might choose to remain outside the group and conduct the other members' activities, as in Type I or Type II teaching and learning. In my study, I chose to be a facilitator and a member of the group. To remain outside the group would have resulted in a

significant re-positioning of my relationship with the group and would have effectively made it impossible for me to engage in collaborative learning (Type III) with the other participants. What is important here is our understanding of what constitutes a Type III experience and how the facilitator's role is understood in relationship to other members' roles in the experience.

- The critical nature of the context. In this study, I entered the local situation as an outsider. Not only was I not a native of the area, I had a number of presuppositions about the local culture that were potential obstacles to the success of our collaborative learning experience. To overcome this limitation, it was necessary for me to be ever mindful of my own assumptions and be willing to suspend them for all participants to see and experience with me. I was only moderately successful in doing so, although I was able to recognize my assumptions and keep them in perspective as I joined the other participants in developing what became a productive working relationship. This further illustrates the importance of suspending assumptions in dialogue (Isaacs, 1999).
- Working with people in a culture vs. learning through indirect means. In my study, I was able to learn alongside and with members of the local community, getting to know the local culture as I went along. I consider this approach to have major advantages over merely reading about a culture, although such information as demographics and knowledge of the cultural history of a region can be invaluable. The process of collaborative learning is ideally suited to an outsider's need to become familiar with a local situation, as it is in the nature of the process that one participates in forming a sub-culture within a larger culture.

Assumptions about the people and the community

I had many opportunities for learning about myself throughout the process of this research. When I first started working in the mountains and began to learn about issues like poverty, poor education and the lack of health care. I wondered why people tolerated such conditions. I wondered why “they” did not do something to “fix” the situation. In this way I joined the power holders by doing what Gaventa (1982) calls “blaming the victim for his non-participation” (p. 8). It was not until Mary, Betty and Wilma described and critically reflected on the systemic causes of non-participation that I began to understand how power and powerlessness affect the way many people in the area behave: Sometimes they act as helpless victims of their situation.

A good example of this occurred when the group described members of the community as “the have nots.” The participants said these people manifested an attitude of helplessness and hopelessness. Mary shared her critical analysis of this phenomenon by saying that “The knowledge is in the people. They haven’t collectively developed so that they can move on it.” The question that I, as facilitator, should have asked of Mary is how are *we* complicit in keeping “these people” from developing a sense of hope and power.

Another example occurred on the last day of our meetings. Herb had invited a woman to visit our group and sing for us. Her name was Sugar and she was in her early twenties and a native of the area. She knew most of the people in our meeting and everyone was friendly and welcoming of her. Sugar had brought a friend’s mandolin which had only two of the original four strings. It took a lot of encouragement from everyone to get her to sing and play, but her song, even on two strings, was as sweet as

any music I have ever heard. She played and sang one of her original songs, a bluegrass ballad about the drowning death of her brother. In her voice I could hear her pain, the beauty and sorrow of the mountains. I wanted her to be heard; I wanted her to have a chance to sing her song for the world. When she finished the ballad she “showed off a little” on the half-strung mandolin with her fingers racing over the strings, up and down the frets. Sugar was instrumentally self-taught but her understanding of music and her innate musical ability were very impressive. When I asked her about plans for pursuing her music as a career, she said she had an audition in two weeks at The Grand Ole’ Opry in Nashville. I was excited for her but worried and wanted to warn her of all the people in that business and city who would try to take advantage.

It was then that I recalled her history, and the history of the people of the mountains. I remembered their history of oppression, abuse, poverty and social deprivation experienced from the coal operators and absentee landowners who had made millions from the local natural resources. I remembered the words of Maxine Waller (1995) who advised community developers:

Know up front that whatever you give a community is given back to you ten times over. You will receive far more information to guide your life by than you will ever give (p. 330).

Rather than thinking about what advice I could give Sugar, I began to think about what information I was receiving which I could use to guide *my* life. What could I learn from Sugar and the ladies of the mountains? The words of Helen Lewis (1995) finally made sense to me: “My advice to those workers who try to help grass-roots organizations is to do more listening and less telling,” I began to think about how she was excited about pursuing her dreams in *spite* of all the harsh experiences and difficulties of her life. I took

joy in her joy and knew that when others see her they will see her joy as well as her strength and her talent. I also realized that *because* of her life experiences she was worldly in ways I would never be and that she would be able to manage whatever her future holds. And I knew that she would have the strength of place and of her people to fall back on when she met the rejections and hardships that were sure to come. She was not an ignorant hillbilly to be coddled, protected or demeaned because she was not capable. Things shifted in me and I realized that my pejorative attitude, an attitude held by many people like me, was part of the problem for the mountain people. I realized that my goal in the mountains was not to make the people more like me and the people from my social circles. My goal was to support them in their desire to develop themselves as they chose and find ways for them to pursue their dreams and desires. In the meantime, I learned about myself and my hidden agendas, attitudes and perceptions that I had held without an awareness of their existence.

Such self analysis and group analysis is necessary for collaborative learning, and yet there is tremendous skill involved in being aware enough to do this critical reflection as events unfold. It is the job of the facilitator to bring the group to such self-awareness. I believe that I made tremendous improvement in my skills as we went along. I became more relationally responsible by insuring that everyone had could participate in the dialogue. And I began to listen more closely by setting aside my own agenda and attending to the group process.

Life as community developer

I feel I possess some skills as a community developer and I believe that collaborative learning provides an approach to this work that respects the dignity,

knowledge and potential of each person involved in the experience. Hinsdale (1995)

writes that,

My goal in teaching young upwardly mobile undergraduates is to put them in touch with their own power and enable them to contact the wisdom and inherent knowledge of people whom the dominant culture dismisses as “ignorant” or “deviant”: the poor, women, persons of color gays and lesbians, and so forth. ...Helping students to appreciate both the connection with and the difference between “charity” and “justice” has become a guiding theme of my teaching (p. 334).

My professional pedagogy is similar to Hinsdale’s in that, from the beginning of this project, I have been interested in helping groups find the *just* way, not in providing charity in order to fulfill some Christian compunction of my own devising. This experience provided me an opportunity to engage in community development that was non-conventional, and the results were effective in changing the way we, as organizations with a common purpose, will go on together. We accomplished this by telling our stories, sharing our knowledge and life experiences and reflecting on those experiences with an eye for constructing how they we were to go on together. I have learned a considerable amount about myself and about my skills as a facilitator of collaborative learning. I hope to be able to move beyond the traps that have been set for community workers, church groups and others interested in improving conditions in Appalachia. Much of what has held us back or kept us trapped in our efforts to liberate people is the conventional way we use language and the questions we continue to ask about “those people out there.”

People say again and again that philosophy doesn’t really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks....It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions....as long as we continue to talk of a river of time, of an expanse of space, etc., etc., people will keep stumbling over the same puzzling difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up. (Wittgenstein, 1980, p. 15e).

Collaborative learning calls for us to move beyond theory and questions asked at a distance to engaging with people in their lives, in a genuine and honest manner.

My co-researchers and I engaged in collaborative learning and in doing so we shared the experiences of our lives and were changed by our experiences with the people of the mountains. On the basis of our collaborative learning, my co-researchers and I were able to identify how our own charitable actions were contributing to recycling the problems of poverty. I realized things about my own attitudes and the perceptions which I bring to my work as a community developer. After becoming aware of these attitudes, I was able to acknowledge them and either discard them or carry them on in my life and work. In either case, I was much more focused and able to do my work of facilitating as I became more self aware. I am committed to continuing critical reflection as part of my ongoing professional development.

Learning about the region

A topic I would consider worthy of exploration for further dialogue is one that I caught glimpses of during our meetings. There were frequent comments from members of our group about an invisible power oppressing the community and many times the leaders asked each other, “Who is in power?” “Who is getting rich off of us by keeping us poor and uneducated?” The group seemed suspicious of some invisible power that was benefiting from oppressing them. Gaventa (1982) wonders:

How can we study that which does not occur? How can we see the so-called “hidden faces” of power? What about problems of objectivity, of making assumptions about what people might want? (p. viii).

Gaventa (1982) went on to write that power cannot be understood by observation. It is too subtle and not easily detected. The ghostly influence of the powerful was something that the participants seemed to believe in but could not prove. There certainly is historical precedence for this power in the management of the coal mines and the absentee landowners. The group lumped all of their blame for the attitude of hopelessness, the lack of work, environmental destruction, and government dependency on this unseen power, but they did not have a visible target.

Since there was no external visible target I think it might be valuable to collaboratively explore how we, people from the community and outside it, manifest power over one another. Gaventa (1982) comments on this phenomenon and gives advice about how to go about overcoming the effects of oppression:

The powerless must be able to explore their grievances openly, with others similarly situated. They must develop their own notions of interests and actions, and themselves as actors (p. 257).

By participating in this collaborative research, it became obvious to me that collaborative learning could help us reveal the ghost that lurked around and in each of us. Not a ghost across some distant water, wielding powers affecting the community, but the power in each of us that was affecting the region. Gaventa (1982) advises us to:

Gain strength by alliance with similarly deprived groups, or win intervention on their behalf by power holders elsewhere. Until this happens, the inequalities of the Valley will remain hidden from the political agenda, and the conflict contained in the situation will remain latent there (p. 258).

Further inquiry into this subject through dialogue would be entirely up to the group and not left for me to decide. However, I do wonder about what we could learn together regarding this topic. As we form alliances and come together with intentions that are

based on respect and mutual benefit, we will continue to orchestrate a coalition built on integrity. To do this requires us to examine, with those involved in the situation, the latent consequences of each action we take, to critically examine our actions and the subsequent outcomes of those actions on the people and communities with whom we come into contact.

Next steps

I have introduced the practice of critical reflection to the ARC and have engaged the larger group in continually examining our motives and our assumptions about our work in the region of Appalachia. Fred, Herb and I have reported to the ARC how our experience has made us more clear about how we should engage in our work. As we reflected on our group experience we realized that we had to realign our charitable projects to match the goals of the local organizations. The ARC agreed to provide financial and material support in a way that would enhance local organizational efforts. In this way the ARC can support them in a way that is *just* in carrying out their mission. The ARC and I have agreed to continue to work alongside the organizations to support their ministries, as we bring financial and material support to the region.

I will share this paper with the Episcopal Diocese of East Tennessee through the Appalachian Resource Committee. I will encourage and facilitate a dialogue around my experience in the mountains and I will ask the ARC to reflect on their assumptions and their intentions as they plan future endeavors. I will continue to develop my skills as a facilitator within the ARC by stopping group process in order to “catch” the group learning.

The complexity of the problems of Appalachia should not be overlooked or dismissed in some romantic or nostalgic manner. This is not a situation that ten word answers can fix, heal or repair. No easy sound byte is appropriate and such a solution cheapens the reality of the situation. But together we can begin to tune our instruments, and, with an ear for one another, produce music that brings hope.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Participant Consent Form “Without a Vision”

I understand that I have been invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to document and describe the process of integrating elements of collaborative learning as we form a coalition to understand what it is like to live in the region of Campbell County.

I understand that I will be sharing verbal reflections during our group meetings. These reflections will be audio recorded so the researcher can use my exact words to conduct her analysis. I also understand that the Appalachian Resources Center Task Force (ARCTF) will keep personal field notes during this project and those notes will be reviewed by the principle researcher. Additionally, I will have the opportunity to review the results to ensure that the principle investigator has accurately understood my experience. I understand that I may give feedback on these results during this review.

I understand the information and data I provide will be held in the strictest confidence. The information I provide will be kept confidential. Recordings and transcriptions will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless I specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. Recordings and transcripts will be retained until completion of the study and then destroyed. This signed consent form will be stored for three years past the completion of the study at a UT location.

I understand that participation in this study is completely voluntary and I may terminate my participation at any time without any penalty. I know there are no risks involved by participating in this study and I may benefit by reflecting on the results of the study. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have received a copy of this consent form. I understand that I may receive a copy of the final report upon request.

If I have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, I understand that I may contact the researcher, Mary Nelle Osborne, at the address below. If I have questions about my rights as a participant, I may contact the UT Research Compliance Services section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Name Printed _____

Name Signed _____

Date _____

Principle Investigator: Mary Nelle Osborne

Appendix B

Domain Example

<i>Included Terms</i>	<i>Semantic Relationship</i>	<i>Cover Term</i>
Strict inclusion	x is a kind of	y
Spatial	x is a place in	y
Cause-effect	x is a result of	y
Rationale	x is a reason for doing	y
Location for action	x is a place for doing	y
Function	x is used for	y
Means-end	x is a way to do	y
Sequence	x is a step in	y
Attribution	x is a characteristic of	y

VITA

Mary Nelle Osborne was born in Athens, Tennessee and lived there until the middle of the sixth grade when she and her parents moved to Weston, Connecticut. She graduated from high school and began her college experience at Manhattanville College in White Plains, New York. She completed her college degree at American University in Washington, D.C. with a Bachelor of Performing Arts; Theater degree. Mary Nelle has worked in professional theater as a performer, technician, designer, director and instructor. Her belief in the healing power of the arts led her to pursue her Master of Arts degree from The University of Louisville in Expressive Therapy. Nelle is a board certified art therapist and has practiced privately in the past. Mary Nelle worked for six years as a middle school counselor in a private, college-preparatory, kindergarten through twelfth grade school. In that position she taught a life skills curriculum to students in grades six through eight. In addition, Nelle was a founding member of The Bunbury Theater where she received a lifetime achievement award for her contributions. Nelle moved to Knoxville to pursue her doctorate, never thinking that she would return to live 75 miles from where she was born. She enjoys living in the historic district of 4th and Gill and is on the Neighborhood Association. Nelle is an active soloist at St. James Episcopal Church, and a member of the choir.