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Utilizing Experiential Collaboration to Enhance Facilitation Skills

Nancy Surrett Headlee
University of Tennessee - Knoxville

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Nancy Surrett Headlee entitled "Utilizing Experiential Collaboration to Enhance Facilitation Skills." I have examined the final electronic 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 Philosophy, with a major in Education.

Katherine H. Greenberg, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Vincent A. Anfara Jr., Joel F. Diambra, Gene A. Hayes

Accepted for the Council:
Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges
_____
Vice Provost and Dean of the
Graduate School

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Utilizing Experiential Collaboration to Enhance Facilitation Skills

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

Nancy Surrett Headlee
May 2008

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughters:

Laura Elizabeth Headlee

Lyndsay Giffin Headlee

and

Malinda Helen Headlee

Your love and support gave me the strength to persist to the end.

I love you dearly and thank you for standing by me.

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I wish to acknowledge the many people who have accompanied me on this academic journey.

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Dr. Katherine Greenberg, Chair, provided the wisdom and guidance that kept me on the pathway toward my goal. Thank you for your many contributions to my learning experience, for your time, encouragement, friendship, and motivation.

Dr. Vince Anfara, **J**r. provided scholarly guidance that continually challenged me to maintain a higher standard of professionalism. Thank you for pointing me toward that higher academic plane.

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And, most importantly, to God, upon whose strength and guidance I rely every day and whose plan for my life's journey continues in wondrous ways.

ABSTRACT

Collaborative learning has the potential to produce changes in perspectives in an ever-changing world; experiential learning has the potential to contribute to creating a collaborative environment. Both of these processes utilize effective facilitation. This action research study examined the experiences of a training group for which I served as the facilitator and explored the question, “How do participants in a group for which I serve as a facilitator of collaborative learning within an experiential learning framework describe their experience?” Additionally, the study examined the question, “How do the research participants’ experiences inform my professional practice of facilitation of collaborative learning? “

Twenty college-age young adults in the training group provided data from multiple qualitative sources. Hermeneutic analysis of data focused on: (1) the participants’ descriptions of their experiences along with their perceptions and reflections of those experiences; and (2) their experiences with me as their facilitator. Findings of the study addressed the participants’ desires to learn from their training experience (transformative learning), detailed their struggles to push past personal boundaries (constructs of competence and control), and explored the supportive relationships that developed within the group (mutuality and reciprocity).

Hermeneutic data analysis also provided insights into my practice of facilitation and gave support to the strength and structure that utilization of the experiential learning model brought to the group. The relationship between the intense experiential learning activities and the transfer of that learning to other activities and responsibilities was demonstrated through the participants’ descriptions as they noted their transformation

into the role of facilitators. The practice of facilitation was enlightened by examining the constructs of problem solving, competence and control, and intensity of transfer of learning.

Implications of this research study identify collaborative learning and experiential learning to be dynamic learning processes that are best achieved in a safe environment within a planned framework of intentionality that includes iterative cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning.* Given the current trend of reduced training time, the resulting higher levels of transfer of learning can produce an increase in training results for participants and more effective facilitation skills for training facilitators.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Chapter Introduction

Every individual brings to each situation knowledge and experience that contributes not only to their own personal needs, but may also contribute to another individual's needs. If a collaborative environment is present, they may join together to combine their knowledge and resources in ways that can provide significantly better results than their individual efforts alone could have produced. However, their encounter may not be conducive to collaborative learning unless an environment exists that will support such an exchange. The challenge lies in recognizing that the potential to collaborate is present and acknowledging that both individuals' contributions are invited to be part of the collaborative effort.

The purpose of this study was to examine my practice as a facilitator of collaborative learning using an experiential learning approach. The experiences of the participants in a group for which I served as the facilitator would inform my practice. Collaborative learning has the potential to produce changes in perspectives in an ever-changing world; experiential learning has the potential to contribute to building a collaborative environment. Both of these processes can best be achieved through effective facilitation.

This chapter presents an overview of the concepts that comprise the premise that, through effective facilitation, collaborative learning as approached through an experiential learning model can be a successful means of achieving changes in perspectives. Included are introductions to and definitions of collaborative learning, the

experiential learning model, and the role of the facilitator. The reader will be introduced to my practice and the research study as situated within the context of my practical theory. Insight into the *what, why,* and *how* of this research study are provided so as to fully immerse the reader into this exploration of facilitating collaborative learning through an experiential learning framework.

Collaborative learning provides resources that can pave the way for positive growth in the face of life's inevitable changes, but it does not usually happen unless approached with intentional effort. Effective facilitation, by its very nature, provides intentional effort to ensure that an environment in which collaborative learning may take place is present. Priest, Gass, & Gillis (2000) asserted that appropriate facilitation not only creates opportunities for learning and change, but also works to remove barriers that can hinder learning and change. As will be discussed further in the study, facilitation plays an essential role in collaborative learning.

This premise, then, gives rise to many questions: What characterizes a collaborative environment? What characteristics should one include to effectively facilitate it? How is it best facilitated? What is the role of a facilitator in collaborative learning? What models may serve as examples to assist in achieving effective facilitation of collaborative learning? Is there a model that best matches my facilitation skills and style that would serve as an effective guide for facilitation of collaborative learning?

In order to answer these questions, I began to explore the nature and process of collaborative learning, to identify common characteristics of a collaborative learning environment, and to explore the facilitation of collaborative learning in my own practice. As I reflected upon the facilitation techniques that I most often use and with which I am

most comfortable, I decided to incorporate an experiential learning model because it provided a framework conducive to activities and methods that were hands-on and highly interactive. Although I felt that experiential learning provided a highly effective theoretical foundation, I wanted to study it in a more scholarly fashion; therefore, I looked to action research as a methodology to accomplish such study.

Experiential learning is the model most often associated with low-ropes courses and challenge initiatives, activities from which I have gained significant personal growth. As both a group member and a facilitator in such endeavors, I have participated in a substantive repertoire of activities that required communication, critical thinking, and a high level of involved interaction on the part of all participants. This has usually been achieved through observation and continual guiding by the facilitator as dictated by the needs of the group. Additionally, activities used by experiential learning proponents can be utilized in both classroom settings and outdoor settings, which gave me greater flexibility in planning specific activities to be included in the research study. By incorporating the experiential learning aspect into the study, I hoped that all participants could be thoroughly engaged in the collaborative process, but I needed to study that belief in a more scholarly manner.

This research study, in the broader perspective, adds to literature related to collaborative learning and facilitation, but using the experiential learning approach as a theoretical framework provided an additional dimension to the study. All learning can, to a certain extent, be considered “experiential” (Greenberg, 2008) in that we all learn by doing. As the oft-quoted ancient Chinese proverb says, “Tell me and I will forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I will understand.” A similar idea of the

importance of experience in learning is illustrated in a quote attributed to renowned psychologist William Glasser:

> We learn 10% of what we read, 20% of what we hear, 30% of what we see, 50% of what we see and hear, 70% of what we discuss, 80% of what we experience, and 95% of what we teach others.

Learning from an experience obviously has impact at the moment, but to what extent will that learning remain? The difference in learning that is based simply on *learning by "doing"* (the action of an experience) versus *experiential learning* is the inclusion of elements of reflection and transfer that assist the learner to gain more deeply from that experience. Experiential learning is both a philosophy and a methodology whereby practitioners purposefully engage with learners in "direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values" (Association for Experiential Education, 2007). Beard and Wilson (2006) defined experiential learning as "the sense-making process of active engagement between the inner world of the person and the outer world of the environment" (p.19). Priest and Gass (2005) defined it as "learning by doing combined with reflection" (p. 136) and concluded that the experiential learning process is not passive but active, requiring participants to be engaged and self-motivated learners. The experiential learning model revolves around key concepts of an experience that include action, elements of reflection, transfer, and support.

To further illustrate the difference between experience and experiential learning, think about the following scenario. A group of learners may be taken to a low ropes course, given brief descriptions of the activities, and then told, "Go have fun!" Each

participant would, conceivably, gain knowledge and insight just from their participation in the activities. However, using an experiential learning model, the group facilitator would sequentially guide the group from activity to activity (action), providing the appropriate level of introduction and instruction along with eliciting feedback from the participants during the activity (support), and completing each individual activity with a time for debriefing that includes what was done/learned and how that may be applied to other settings (reflection and transfer of learning). The day would ideally culminate with a time for sharing and reflection on the overall experience, providing closure for all of the group participants. The experiential learning approach in this scenario would be much more conducive to collaborative learning and would require a higher level of facilitation skills, thus enhancing the learning gained from the experience.

My review of literature related to collaborative learning, experiential learning, and facilitation revealed information that focused on each separate topic in a distinct way with some referral to the other topics. However, research that specifically looked at the commonalities and linkage between these three concepts was more limited, exposing a distinct gap in the literature that this dissertation may help to fill.

My Practice

My practice for the past 16 years has been to work with middle school and high school students as a teacher, school counselor, mentor, encourager, and nurturer in both professional and personal settings. My initial introduction to the broader concepts of collaborative learning, experiential learning, and facilitation came about when, as a new school counselor, I discovered an available resource called *Beyond The Limits* (BTL).

This program was funded through a Safe and Drug Free (SDF) state grant award that all schools in Tennessee could access by using some of their allotted SDF money. BTL provided a counselor to work with a small group of at-risk students during weekly meetings at the school. The approach used by BTL was one of experiential learning and consisted of activities that were specifically sequenced to achieve the goals as set by the student participants in the group. Near the end of the 12-week program, the group would have as a reward for their work together a trip outside the classroom setting that provided an opportunity for challenge and personal growth. As the school counselor, I had the opportunity to observe each weekly meeting and to go on the trip with my students.

One of my earliest memories of the BTL groups was the positive environment that was established by the group leader. There was an acceptance and an unconditional feeling of positive regard for each member of the group. Students were encouraged to express their own feelings, and to value and respect the feelings of every other group member. On the reward trip to a low ropes course, the level of experiential learning was intensified through highly challenging activities. Every student was encouraged to participate to his or her best level with an acknowledgement that each individual's level would be different, but that all persons were fully valued regardless of their participation level. I observed that my students gained immensely from the opportunity to participate in a group experience where failure was never an issue and acceptance was the rule.

As a result of that first highly positive experience, I began to explore this learning model and to utilize these experiential learning strategies and techniques in my developmental guidance classes throughout all grade levels within the school. In order learn more about the experiential learning techniques, I began to train with the BTL

counselors. I found that processes such as giving and receiving feedback, checking in with all other group members, and valuing each person's efforts and contributions in an unconditional way emerged as common denominators for ways of being in such groups. I determined to explore them at a greater depth.

As these ways of being became fully ingrained in my ways of relating to others, I found that my personal confidence, along with my critical thinking skills and problem solving abilities, were greatly increased. Such personal growth, I believe, came because I had experienced it for myself as part of a caring, collaborative group that had formed through an experiential learning approach. Using the key concepts of critical thinking and problem solving found in experiential learning, we created a safe environment where each participant could grow and develop in response to his or her individual needs.

As I continued to practice these new-found skills, I felt my personal confidence growing. Having somewhat of a perfectionist nature, I had always believed that anything I was doing had to be perfectly planned and perfectly executed. If it wasn't, then I had failed in my responsibilities. From my perspective, the burden of success or failure was always resting on me alone.

However, through this collaborative environment formed through the theoretical model of experiential learning, I began to find that by gathering my materials or "tools," setting up a framework for an activity, and establishing an open and supportive environment in which all were engaged, I was free to have greater interaction with all participants in a group and they were free to have greater interaction with each other. Each individual's contribution to the group effort proved to enhance the activity and the

results were owned by all participants. Success or failure was not measured by my actions alone, but rather determined by the group.

The change in participants' perspectives as a result of participation in an experiential learning group was a defining moment in my personal perspective. Initially, student participants in the BTL groups were those who were making failing grades, had behavioral problems, or came from extremely troubled home environments since those were the factors identified as being most closely associated with at-risk students.

As I observed changes in the majority of my students' attitudes, it seemed that experiential learning offered a way to effectively engage students in positive changes and I became interested in finding additional ways of using such strategies as part of my professional practice. Students responded to opportunities in which they could have their voice and participation recognized and appreciated. They began to step up and speak out more. They seemed to benefit from the opportunity to be part of a group in which each person is valued. I conducted no formal follow-up evaluations, but merely continued to use these observations in formulating programming for my students. Based on these observations, I was able to form other student groups whose defining characteristics were not necessarily associated with at-risk factors as I continued to search for more information and ways to incorporate experiential learning methods.

One of my most memorable experiences was with a group of talented and gifted students. In the normal hierarchy of teaching levels, the "smart" kids are usually not considered at-risk, but are thought to be able to excel academically regardless of the quality of instruction. By working with a group of gifted students, I learned that each of them had their own fears and pressures, mostly self-imposed, that would, at times,

overwhelm them. Most of the students felt very isolated and misunderstood because of the “smart kid” label that each was carrying, whether real or self-imposed. Participation in a collaborative group where they could open up and talk about their common concerns and fears proved to be a freeing experience for them.

Additionally, when these students and their parents participated in a low ropes course with activities that utilized the experiential learning model, their parents came away with a greater understanding of their children and the magnitude of their abilities. An inherent component in experiential learning is introducing an element of challenge and we achieved that by simply having all participants in an unfamiliar outdoor setting rather than in a more familiar classroom setting. All participants were on equally unfamiliar ground that required that they shift their thinking into a more exploratory mode. The most often-heard comments from their parents were, “I never knew that s/he felt that way” and “I would never have thought about doing it that way.” At the conclusion of the experience, parents also expressed a heightened sense of confidence in their child’s abilities that opened up possibilities for further growth. The opportunity to share in a collaborative group brought about a change in perspective for both the students and their parents.

I took my training and experience with collaborative groups with me in my transition from public schools to TRIO programs, where I have worked for the past 10 years. At The University of Tennessee (UT) in Knoxville, there are three U. S. Department of Education Title IV grant-funded Upward Bound projects that provide outreach services to low-income high school students who do not have a background of college attendance in their families (usually termed “first generation” college attendees).

They are part of a group of programs generally referred to as TRIO programs that were enacted under the Higher Education Act of 1965. Oversight and monitoring comes under the auspices of the Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education.

At UT, the three projects are Academic Enrichment Upward Bound (AEUB), Math and Science Regional Center Upward Bound (MSRC), and Pre-College Upward Bound (PCUB). The purpose, objectives, and services provided by each of these projects are basically the same as mandated by the Department of Education, but the differentiating factor is the target population locations. AEUB and PCUB serve students from selected high schools in Knox County and three counties adjacent to UT; MSRC serves students from selected high schools in the local area and from seven additional Southeastern states, with the majority of participants coming from out of state.

The target population for the Upward Bound projects is low-income high school students who are potentially the first ones in their families who will attend college. The common characteristic among such students is a lack of self-confidence driven by a false personal perspective that college attendance is not an attainable goal for them. Like the students in my school groups, these students are, at times, isolated by their fears and doubts and overwhelmed by their limited perspectives.

Having appreciated being empowered as a participant in collaborative group settings and having seen the difference that a collaborative environment could make in my public school groups, I made it my goal to also empower others as I began to facilitate groups in the TRIO programs setting. A major component in these programs is a six-week residential summer component that includes a wide range of leadership, team building, critical thinking, and problem solving activities. My observation was that

students who experienced such activities in an environment that included elements of collaborative learning and personal involvement appeared to reap significant benefits that transferred to all aspects of their lives. Active participation that engaged all group members seemed to nurture opportunities for students to practice critical thinking and problem solving in actual, applicable situations where they could immediately see the consequences of their thoughts and actions. If it worked, they could accomplish the goal of the activity; if it did not work, they had to evaluate, replan, and act again. Approaching collaborative learning through an experiential learning framework appeared to offer valuable lessons that students could use as they continued to build their critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Again, however, I conducted no formal evaluation to confirm my observations and I had found no literature references that linked the two together. It was, for the most part, simply pulling together the things that I had learned and experienced and hoping that the results would be equally as beneficial for the students as they had been for me.

Through my current practice, I watch as the majority of these high school students come to the university campus knowing only a few other students, leaving their homes for the first time in their lives. They are bombarded with challenges from all sides. Learning to live with roommates, walking up and down hills for classes, being responsible for their own schedules, money, and accountability are just a few of their initial challenges. As the time goes on, the students must learn to work together with the other members of their team and their other classmates. By the end of the program, the students usually report that they have formed strong, meaningful bonds that will continue to impact their lives in the future. I have observed evidence of the continuation of the

strong bonds formed at that time through the ensuing years as students have continued to keep in touch with each other and with me.

As the person who has the administrative responsibility for the program, I strive very intentionally to facilitate the establishment of an atmosphere that will be conducive to collaborative learning and mindfully incorporate experiential learning opportunities that will lead the students toward a collaborative way of being. I work to encourage all of the students to actively pursue interaction with their peers, approaching each other without prejudice and leaving their preconceived ideas about others behind them. I strive to create an environment that honors the diverse perspectives and backgrounds of all program participants. The results as reported by the students are usually informative as they reflect on their experiences with each other at the close of the program. They report a broadening of perspectives and a greater depth of understanding of other ethnicities and cultures, along with a deeper appreciation of their own personal heritage and traditions. Their reports, however, do not provide explanations as to what may have specifically influenced their changes in perspectives. I began to realize that a formal study was needed to truly bring their experiences to light and my review of research methods pointed me toward action research as a means for me to find out more definitive information about their experiences.

By the end of the summer residential time, the students seem to be thoroughly bonded to one another and report that they find themselves being much more trusting, respectful, and accepting of others. The students appear to be more appreciative of other races and cultures, more willing to explore and problem-solve, more open to new ideas, and more eager to take on new challenges with a higher level of confidence and

motivation. In program evaluations and informal follow up, they comment that their participation in the residential program was “life-changing,” and that they feel as though they have formed a new extended “family.” And although I may strive to intentionally facilitate a collaborative environment, I think that it is ultimately their willingness and effort within that environment that makes the difference for each of them. It appears that as a result of the intensity of this experience, many students remain in contact with each other and with me for years beyond their initial experience together. The question still remained, however, as to what part my facilitation might have played in their experiences.

In addition to my practice as an educator/program administrator, I work on a contractual basis with a company that provides a program of challenge course initiatives for team building, problem solving, and corporate development to a wide variety of clients. The company utilizes an experiential learning approach as their framework for guiding group experiences. I believe strongly in the power of such experiences, therefore, I continue to be involved in the facilitation of experiential learning at multiple levels. I think that this continuing practice has allowed me to keep my facilitation skills sharper and continually challenges me to grow as a collaborative facilitator. Within this setting, I also bring into play my past experiences and methods of facilitation, but I have had no means of confirming the effectiveness of my facilitation.

As a result of my practice over the past several years, my perspective has been influenced by my experiences with other individuals. My horizons have been broadened and my understanding of the world around me has expanded. I knew from my personal experiences in the past that the elements of action, reflection, transfer, and support were

reflected in my facilitation skills and could provide for me possible sources that would help me to improve and strengthen my skills. Additionally, my own participation in experiential learning had provided for me the some of the most memorable and lasting changes in ways of working with and relating to others.

As a facilitator, I have the potential to guide group participants toward that same broadening of understanding through the social construction of meaning and knowledge in a collaborative way. Because of the nature of collaborative learning, I have the privilege of becoming a colearner even while I facilitate the experience for the group participants. Each group for which I serve as a facilitator provides new insights into my practice of facilitation as they utilize their ideas and past experiences to find solutions for present situations. I find myself drawing on my experiential learning background in every situation where I serve as a facilitator, but I have had no formal inquiry and found no reference in the literature as to the effectiveness of blending collaborative and experiential learning approaches.

Assisting others in forming collaborative groups has been and continues to be a focus of my daily practice. My efforts at facilitation vary from experience to experience, as do the outcomes. Exploring this concept of facilitation and the role of the facilitator in this process would allow me to not only improve my practice, but would also allow me to examine how best to ensure that I demonstrate and model collaborative facilitation so as to empower others to utilize this way of being. For that reason, I decided to pursue study that would explore the relationship between collaborative learning and facilitation through an experiential learning approach.

Statement of the Problem: Facilitation of Collaborative Learning through an Experiential Learning Framework

I knew from my own practice that my methods for approaching effective facilitation of collaborative learning through an experiential learning approach often went well, but I wanted to know more about ways to improve my practice. I wanted to gain more insight into the actual factors that went in to the framework. I wanted to know if there were any specific aspects that were essential for me as a facilitator to use to promote a higher level of involvement of group members in a collaborative learning setting. I knew that often I would be caught up in the dynamics of the situation and resolution would come in multiple ways that grew out of the involvement of the participants. There was a sense of structure about my methods that was based on my training in experiential learning, but was that the best way to approach facilitation so as to ensure a greater consistency in positive results? I determined to explore such a possibility.

I began my exploration for information by examining literature related to a wide variety of interpretations and applications for collaborative learning. There I found critical attributes within approaches to collaborative learning that appeared to be similar, but were without linkage to other areas. Collaborative learning for the purposes of teamwork, project development, and management are utilized in business (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth, & Smith, 1999) and also in educational settings (Fullan, 2001b). Critical attributes such as trust, openness, flexibility, and high levels of communication frequently appeared to be prerequisites for effective facilitation of collaborative learning in a variety of multiple settings (Cain & Joliff, 1998; McGill &

Brockbank, 2004; Priest & Gass, 2005). Within literature in the educational arena, I found evidence that these same critical attributes were considered prerequisite for teachers as they formed collaborative teaching teams and as they sought to implement collaborative learning in their classrooms for instructional purposes. Other literature pointed to the need to include collaborative learning methods as an aspect of the training that should be included in teacher preparation programs (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2001a; Little, Horn, & Bartlett, 2000; Lyman, 1993).

As I searched to find sources that would inform my understanding and practice of facilitating collaborative learning, I found that literature related to the experiential learning model identified critical attributes similar to those identified in collaborative learning. These critical attributes were also evident in applications that crossed multiple disciplines and diverse settings including classroom education and teacher preparation (both K-12 and higher education), corporate training, adjudicated youth, and therapeutic treatment settings (Priest & Gass, 2005; Schoel & Maizell, 2002; Schoel, Prouty, & Radcliffe, 1988). I also found that the body of research in the experiential learning field was not extensive, but is growing at a slow pace since it is the nature of practitioners of this model to "do" rather than write (Association for Experiential Education, 2007; Hirsch, 2007; Neill, 2002).

The similarities in critical attributes for both experiential learning and collaborative learning enticed me to "dig deeper" to study how I could more effectively facilitate collaborative learning through an experiential learning approach. I wanted to examine both experiential learning and collaborative learning in such a way as to focus on the processes involved in their facilitation and to explore how the integration of the

two approaches could be strengthened through effective facilitation. In addition to the potential for improving my practice, further study could also contribute new information that would help to bridge the gap in research literature as related to collaborative learning and experiential learning.

Development of a Practical Theory

My precursory explorations found both experiential learning and collaborative learning to be viable approaches for "being" in this broad and ever-changing 21st century world. Continued exploration suggested that both collaborative learning and experiential learning require a significant degree of facilitation in order to happen at a meaningful level. I looked to relevant literature related to both collaborative learning and experiential learning to provide more in-depth information about both approaches and as to how they could best be facilitated. My review of literature related to the theories inherent in collaborative learning and experiential learning are summarized in the following pages and conclude with subsections that address the application of the experiential learning theory and the role of the facilitator in experiential learning. This discussion of theories as presented here represents the literature that served to further inform the development of my practical theory.

Collaborative Learning

Fullan (1999) discussed the environment of today's complex culture and set forth parameters that help to shape the "space" needed for collaborative learning. In his view, characteristics deemed necessary for a collaborative environment are those that foster diversity while building trust; provoke anxiety and contain it within the collaborative

space; engage in knowledge creation (tacit to explicit, explicit to explicit; combine connectedness with openendedness; and fuse the spiritual, political and intellectual. Current reality and the future dictate the need to develop collaborative skills. Art Costa, writing about intellectual behaviors in *Schools That Learn* (2000), best summarized this in the following observation:

> Probably the foremost intellectual behavior for postindustrial society will be heightened ability to think in concert with others. Problem-solving has become so complex that no one person can do it alone. No one has access to all the data needed to make critical decisions; no one person can consider as many alternatives as several people could. Working in groups requires the ability to justify ideas and test the feasibility of solution strategies on others. (p. 204)

The process and practice of collaborative learning holds the potential for change in multiple settings—in schools, businesses, politics, religion, medicine, and on and on. The combining of resources and knowledge in an atmosphere of dialogue committed to a common purpose holds a power that is unparalleled (Isaacs, 1999; McNamee & Gergen, 1999; Randolph, 2006; Roberts, 2004). It is a process that can bring out the best of each participant who chooses to be engaged. It serves to empower them and motivate them to continue in more collaborative ways of being. Through practice, reflection, and more practice, the process is refined and becomes internalized, yielding richer results with each cycle (Schon, 1983).

In focusing on collaborative learning, Villa and Thousand (2000) characterized a collaborative team as a group of people who agree to focus their work on consensual goals, share a belief system that values all group members and each individual's input,

demonstrate parity, and practice shared leadership. However, Nicholson, Artz, Armitage, and Fagan (2000) conducted research utilizing six case studies set in three different programs from which they concluded that there is no "cut-and-dried" model for collaborative practice, but that common elements do exist. They identified the most frequently recurring elements of collaborative practice to be organizational structure, cooperation, roles, communication, leadership, decision-making, conflict, and attention to collaborative process. Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton, and Kleiner (2000) identified core concepts that are found in continuous learning organizations that promulgate collaborative learning. He asserts that the underlying basis that defines an organization's potential for collaborative learning is the way that its members think and interact.

A review of studies done by researchers in the field of collaborative learning (Armstrong, 1999; Brickey, 2001; Collins, 2002; Cotter, 2001; Fazio, 2003; Henry, 2006; Merrill, 2003; Muth, 2004; Naujock, 2002; Randolph, 2006; Roberts, 2004; Williams, 2005) suggested that a collaborative environment contains characteristics that are pervasive across multiple settings from education to business. The studies of Armstrong, Cotter, Merrill, and Randolph were conducted in higher education settings, while Collins and Williams focused more on the mediated learning aspects of collaborative learning with K-12 students and teachers. Brickey, Naujock, and Roberts examined collaborative learning in varied business settings. Fazio, Henry, and Muth studied collaborative learning in widely diverse settings—agriculture, women in male-dominated professions, and land use and management, respectively.

These qualitative studies reflected a wide range of diverse settings and, as such,

they affirmed that collaborative learning is a viable approach for learning that extends across multiple work and life issues. The literature brought clarity to specific concepts as related to the significance, purpose, and theoretical framework of collaborative learning. Brickey, Roberts, and Williams all explored elements of facilitation within their studies. However, none of the studies addressed the facilitation of collaborative learning through an experiential learning model.

My personal experiences combined with my review of relevant literature led me to believe that participation in collaborative learning requires certain conditions and/or understandings. The critical attributes to enhance collaborative learning appeared to include the ability to:

- *really* listen, turning off that voice inside our heads that is instructing us as to how we need to respond or what we need to say next;
- clearly express one's own ideas;
- suspend assumptions about others' ideas;
- ask questions that elicit more information and clarify what has been said;
- understand that there is no "one right answer;"
- accept that it is permissible to "mess about" with ideas;
- appreciate that all voices have value in a dialogue;
- acknowledge that resolution may not provide a solution, but that the process rather than the outcome may be the most valuable result of the encounter.

As I reflected on what I learned about the facilitation of collaborative learning, I recognized many aspects and attributes that were inherent in the experiential learning model that I had been integrating into my personal style of facilitation. I began to wonder

if blending the two learning approaches could result in improving my practice. From my own personal history, I reflected that I had been most empowered through experiential learning and that those resulting changes had made the most significant and long-lasting contributions to my development as a person. Sharing the acquisition of such skills with groups for which I serve as a facilitator could contribute to positive growth for all. Therefore, I concluded that I needed to thoroughly examine the aspects and attributes of experiential learning and the role of facilitation within that model in order to fully develop my practical theory for improving my practice of facilitation.

Experiential Learning

Recognizing the need to continually assess and meet the needs of any group for which I am a facilitator, I examined more closely the concepts that are found in experiential learning. I discovered that there appeared to be many similarities in theory and contextual framework that would merit the positioning of experiential learning as the theoretical foundation for my approach to the facilitation of collaborative learning as examined in this research study.

I first looked to the field of education and found that John Dewey is considered an early proponent of experiential learning. A prolific advocate of progressive education, Dewey encouraged educators to assist individuals to develop their full potential as human beings and contended that genuine experience was an integral part of achieving that development. In *Experience and Education* (1938), he wrote:

> Experience is educative only to the degree that it rests upon continuity of significant knowledge and to the degree that this knowledge modifies or "modulates" the learner's outlook, attitude, and skill. The true learning situation,

> then, has longitudinal and lateral dimensions. It is both historical and social. It is orderly and dynamic. (p. 10)

Sarason (1996b) contended that Dewey understood then, even more than educators today, that theories should "derive from practice" and should "change with practice" (p. 34).

Knapp (1992) described experiential learning as consisting of four distinct segments: "(a) active student involvement in a meaningful and challenging experience, (b) reflection upon the experience individually and in a group, (c) the development of new knowledge about the world, and (d) application of this knowledge to a new situation" (pp. 36-37). These distinct segments are reflected in key concepts that include action, elements of reflection, transfer, and support.

Upon examination of literature that is dedicated to experiential learning, I found that *Islands of Healing* (Schoel et al., 1988) and its successor, *Exploring Islands of Healing* (Schoell & Maizell, 2002) are definitive works in the field. Both chronicle the history and development of the experiential learning model, as well as provide insight to the concepts, philosophy, processes, and applications within the discipline. It is within these two references that the Project Adventure model for facilitating experiential learning is thoroughly detailed. This is the approach that I have used within my practice and the model that formed the theoretical foundation for this study.

According to Schoel and Maizell (2002), Kurt Hahn is considered to be the pioneer of experiential education. He incorporated his learn-by-doing model into the classical private schools of Germany and Britain as early as the 1920s. His philosophy encompassed the development of the total person to include not only academic

achievement, but also the meeting of a range of athletic standards, completion of a long-term project as well as an expedition by sea or land, and involvement in service to others.

During World War II, Hahn was deported to England where he helped to train young British soldiers who were surviving at much lower rates than their older, more experienced comrades. It was said that these more experienced sailors survived the rigors of the North Atlantic seas because they shared their experience and knowledge in a collaborative learning fashion with each other rather than relying solely on their individual physical prowess as the younger, stronger sailors tried to do.

Out of this training model developed by Hahn came the foundation of the present-day Outward Bound organization, an international program of experiential learning that now spans the globe with schools in over 30 countries on six continents (Martin, Franc, & Zounkova, 2004; Outward Bound, 2008; Sakofs & Armstrong, 1996). Figure 1 depicts the initial active learning cycle as interpreted by Sakofs and Armstrong. This active learning cycle was applied to the facilitation of experiential learning activities in classroom settings, as well as in outdoor adventure settings. It has served as the basis for adaptation as the field of experiential learning has expanded into other disciples.

As seen in Figure 1, the departure point for the Outward Bound active learning cycle was a relevant experience or task that had meaning and real-world application for the learner. Inherent in the experience were short- and long-term outcomes that were understood and acknowledged by the learner. These outcomes could be achieved through a variety of ways, not just one “right” answer. The engagement of the learner in the cognitive processes necessary to achieve the task paired with the action of completing the task served as an empowerment for the learner’s emotional and intellectual growth.

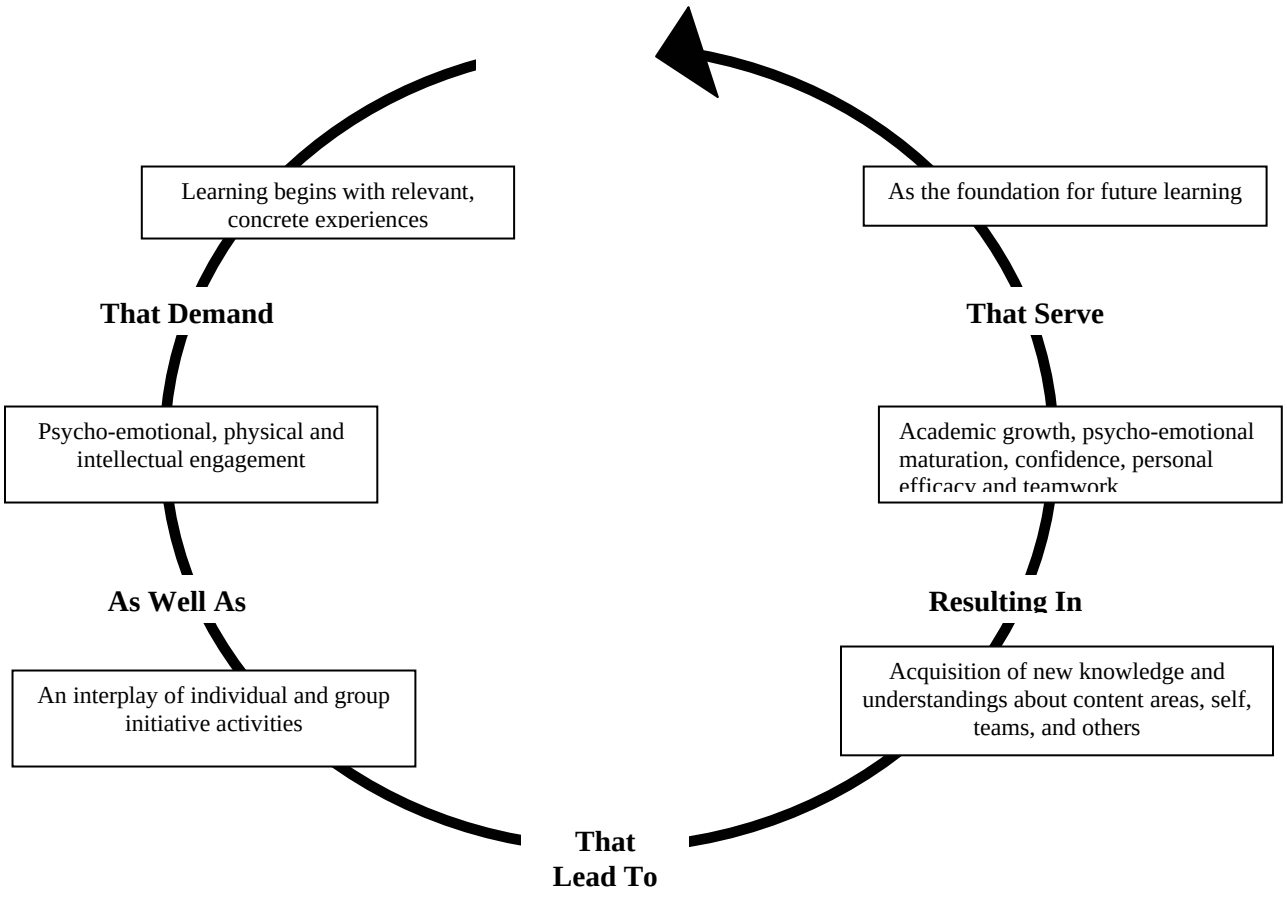

Figure 1. The Active Learning Cycle as Initially Developed by Outward Bound to Illustrate Experiential Learning. Source: Sakofs & Armstrong (1996).

Thirty years after the founding of Outward Bound, educator Jerry Pieh, an Outward Bound enthusiast, wanted to bring the experiential learning model into the high school curriculum where he was principal. He accomplished this by adapting the core elements of Outward Bound into a program that he called Project Adventure, which focused on serving all students in a comprehensive high school. Out of this initial effort, program applications were developed that targeted students who were having trouble succeeding in school and students with special needs. Since its beginning in 1971, Project Adventure has continued to develop curriculum, training courses, and equipment that apply the original Outward Bound philosophy and experiential learning approach in a variety of educational settings, therapeutic treatment centers, and at-risk youth programs (Schoel & Maizell, 2002).

The experiential learning model developed by Project Adventure is woven together by the theories inherent in experiential learning. It has been enhanced and expanded to become the most frequently used application process for experiential learning in multiple settings. The following description of the application of the PA experiential learning model contains the sequencing, procedures, and theories that are intertwined to form the model upon which the theoretical foundation for this study rests.

Application of the Project Adventure Experiential Learning Model

The Project Adventure (PA) model (Schoel & Maizell, 2002; Schoel et al., 1988) provides a detailed framework to illustrate the sequencing and application of the experiential learning model. The central core for embarking upon an activity using this experiential learning framework begins with the *Full Value Contract.*

In the initial formation of a group, two basic agreements are established by the group members: (1) mutual respect, which involves an agreement by all participants not to "devalue" themselves or others, and (2) an agreement that the group will set goals and support each other in working toward accomplishing those goals (Schoel & Maizell, 2002). In actual application, the contract is not necessarily a paper document, but is a consensual agreement crafted by group members through the facilitation of the group leader. In the field, it is most often an oral consensus agreement to which group members "sign" their names on an imaginary paper.

After the *Full Value Contract* is established, the next concept introduced to the group is *Challenge by Choice*. In the PA model, participants may select their own level of challenge without coercion so as to feel empowered rather than overwhelmed by the impending activity. Participation in the activity is necessary—opting out is not a choice, but the level of the challenge is dictated by the individual's personal needs. For example, in a high ropes activity, fear of heights is often a factor. For some participants, simply putting on the required equipment (such as a belay harness) and taking just a few steps up the ladder may be a sufficient challenge. For others, the challenge may come further along in the activity as they work to achieve a different, self-selected goal that has been set based on the individual's level of challenge.

The PA framework for experiential learning acknowledges that there are stages in which learners find optimum room for growth and new knowledge. It points to definition of these stages by referring to the classifications for group development as defined by Tuckman (1965). His delineation of these stages provides a widely used classification for group development and included five specific levels as summarized below:

- ***forming***—a time during which members are exploring each other to determine initial leader and follower roles;
- ***storming***—alliances between group members are framed and control and power issues are tested;
- ***norming***—the phase of development when the group begins to function in cohesion and finds ways to positively address any conflicts within the group;
- ***performing***—characterized by unity within the group and the emergence of a group identity, resulting in high productivity and motivation; and
- ***transforming***—representing the stage of group development where behaviors begin to focus on the terminating of the group as a result of goal completion.

Corey and Corey (2006) provided an in-depth review of the progressive stages of group development that parallel the Tuckman classification.

Another description that applies to individual learning spaces or "zones" is classified within the PA experiential model (Schoel & Maizell, 2002). When one is functioning within the realm of the familiar, one is in the *comfort zone*. Little challenge is found here—status quo is maintained. Beyond that is a realm of risk-taking known as the *stretch zone* wherein optimal growth may occur. The learner is challenged in new ways that produce growth and understanding, paving the way for expanded abilities and knowledge that are just beyond their comfort zone. When the level of challenge pushes the learner into feelings of uncertainty, doubt, and fear, the *panic zone* is reached and survival becomes the main focus. Growth is replaced with a "shutting down" or retreat so as to distance one from the situation and affect a return to a safer environment. This process relates to collaborative learning in the need to establish a "space" where

collaborative learning is fostered and can potentially grow.

In a group setting that functions within the *Challenge by Choice* philosophy (the second concept that is introduced in the PA model), each individual's participation in the activity and his or her effort toward achieving their personal goal is valued within the group. Additionally, all group members contribute toward achieving the overarching goal as initially agreed upon by the group. This supportive and caring environment allows individuals to challenge themselves to the maximum limit—engage in "safe" risk-taking—without fear of reprisals or failure.

Metaphors are often used in the experiential learning setting to create a mental picture or framework for an impending activity or initiative. Like storytelling or sharing critical incidents with members in a collaborative learning group, metaphors provide a way for all group members to connect in both interpersonal and intrapersonal ways. PA has utilized the metaphor concept in adding to its model the *Adventure Wave*.

As described in Schoel and Maizell's (2002) delineation of the PA model, "the action and energy within the workings of a wave (whether on the ocean or within the transmission of a signal) …has become a metaphor for the holistic process of Adventure" (p. 15). The *Adventure Wave* begins with *briefing*, which includes preactivity guidelines and safety considerations, followed by *doing* as necessitated to achieve the goal of the activity, and concluded by *debriefing*, which includes reflection and transfer of learning.

The *Adventure Wave* is the part of PA's experiential learning model that parallels the collaborative learning model in that it contains cycles of action and reflection. The briefing/doing/debriefing cycle is incorporated into the processing of the experience by using a planned pattern for reflection that includes asking three questions: (1) *What*?

(2) *So what*? and (3) *Now what*? The goal is to allow the group participants to reflect on what they did in the experience (what?), interpret the experience (so what?), and connect with their learnings (now what?), both in the present moment and as related to real-world applications.

As described above, there is a definite sequence in the experiential learning model. This sequence does not occur on its own, but relies on the skills of one who sees and understands to overarching process that is interwoven in the model. That person is most often referred to as the facilitator.

The Facilitator's Role in the Experiential Learning Model

The term *facilitator* is used to describe someone who has the responsibility of creating a specific environment or assisting with the implementation of an experience or an event. Two explicit tasks of a facilitator are to lead individuals toward the formation of a group that will set goals and to help the group move toward achievement of those goals (The Grove Consultants, 2005). Lyman and Foyle (1990) included in their definition of the term that the facilitator designs group activities that will provide maximum positive interaction. Leadership of the group is accomplished by modeling skills and behaviors that support group development, and embedding principles and practices within the process that will move the group toward self-facilitation.

Priest and Gass (2005) contended that techniques used in facilitation of experiential learning have evolved in experiential programming beginning in the 1940s and continuing through the 1990s. Priest (1997) asserted that facilitation is used to guide participants in setting goals that will enhance the quality of the learning experience and create changes that are lasting and transferable. Sakofs and Armstrong (1996) noted that

facilitation is a dynamic rather than a linear process that parallels group development and, as such, requires participants to cycle through developmental phases. Beard and Wilson (2006) suggested that experiential learning facilitation techniques include having the facilitator set up an experience through questions and key points so that the participants are provided with knowledge toward the task at hand that will allow them to change during the course of the experience rather than after it.

Schwarz, Davidson, Carlson, and McKinney (2005) explored the use of facilitative skills in multiple roles and concluded that facilitators may adopt a basic set of core values, principles, and ground rules that can be applied to work with different groups. Ghais (2005) proposed a general framework for the basics of facilitating group processes. Schoel and Maizell (2002) noted that facilitators must develop their own "voice" from their personal experiences, through practice and reflection, and through openness to new ideas and approaches in order that they may draw on internalized confidence as they lead groups with differing needs.

Priest and Gass (2005) explored essential characteristics of facilitation as applied in experiential, corporate, educational, therapeutic, and recreational settings. They noted that groups evolve through a series of progressive stages and that the facilitator plays a critical role in the development of a group through these stages. These references, along with other research that will be explored further in this study, contribute to the foundation for linking the concepts of collaborative learning, facilitation, and experiential learning.

Facilitation practices involve ways of helping establish the environment of a group that will influence the development of group dynamics. Heron (1990) conducted extensive research into facilitator interventions and found that selection of such

interventions had a significant effect on the development of the group. Beard and Wilson (2006) concluded that the facilitator assists the group to focus on the gap between their current position and the desired future position. Carlson (2005) noted that "the facilitator assumes the primary responsibility for attending to the group's process" (p. 115).

The goal is for each participant to feel welcomed in the group and invited to share their thoughts and ideas. An environment to support this goal would include the establishment of ground rules such as one person talking at a time; allowing the speaker to complete their point without interruption; and giving and receiving feedback in a positive, constructive way. Authentic listening means seeking to understand what another person is saying rather than formulating a response in your mind while that person is speaking, which has the effect of reducing the listener's level of comprehension (Arrien, 1993; Covey, 1989; Isaacs, 1999). Assurance of a collaborative dialogical space in which significant growth may occur is best developed through skilled facilitation led by an individual who has knowledge of specific attributes and processes that promote such space. This facilitation is a part of my current practice and was, therefore, an area of focus for me.

As has been noted in collaborative learning, experiential learning does not simply "happen," but is more assured to happen when an effective facilitator is working with the group. Facilitators serve as a resource for the group by encouraging, supporting, and providing helpful assistance where possible (Cain & Joliff, 1998). Setting the tone, modeling appropriate behaviors and attitudes, sequencing events within the experience or series of experiences, and assisting participants past "sticking points" all contribute to a safe environment wherein every member of the group feels accepted, valued, and

welcomed to participate. To that end, the practitioners in the field who have continued to expand the PA model have developed the GRABBSS assessment tool.

GRABBSS is an acronym for "*G*oals, *R*eadiness, *A*ssessment, *B*ehavior, *B*ody, *S*etting, and *S*tage of development" (Schoel & Maizell, 2002, p. 14). Although developed as an intake and ongoing assessment tool for use with Adventure-Based Counseling groups, it also serves the facilitator as a reference or checklist in working with a group. The series of questions relevant to each of the steps listed in the tool keeps the facilitator on track in sequencing and assessing the group's progress. The actual tool, as detailed by Schoel and Maizell, allows the facilitator to select questions that connect with the group's needs and activities. For example, a facilitator whose group struggles with goal setting may choose to focus in on that specific set of questions so as to guide her toward planning and facilitating next-step activities, as well as suggesting appropriate questions for discussion during debrief.

Throughout the two definitive sources for the experiential learning model (Schoel & Maizell, 2002; Schoel et al., 1988), I found no specific references listed for *facilitator*, but extensive references to the *group leader* and the role of the *leader* in implementation of experiential learning. The literature clearly indicated a need for the experiential learning model to include the presence of one who could serve in a role that parallels that of a facilitator in a collaborative learning group.

Foundation for a Theoretical Framework

The research project that I proposed involved training the resident assistants (RAs) for the intensive residential time during which they supervise the Upward Bound (UB) high school students. As I looked toward setting up the actual research study, I

identified three distinct activity components that I felt should comprise the study design: ***Self-Exploration***, ***Application,*** and ***Empowerment***. The three components were supported by relevant literature and research from the field of educational psychology that dealt with acquisition of knowledge in an educational setting. These theoretical constructs provided rationale in selecting the activities that comprised each component of the study. Knowledge and experience gained from each component provided insight and reference upon which the subsequent component was built. Activities within each component provided a sequential, progressive movement from an internal to an external focus, along with a movement from directive to minimal facilitation on my part.

The first essential component of ***Self-Exploration*** was designed to provide an opportunity for all of the participants to learn more about themselves as individuals and about how they could relate to the group as a whole. The underlying rationale for this component are found in two types of self-beliefs—competence and control. Schunk and Zimmerman (2006) define competence beliefs as "students' perceptions about their means, processes, and capabilities to accomplish certain tasks" and control beliefs as "students' perceptions about the likelihood of accomplishing desired ends or outcomes under certain conditions" (p. 349). The research participants were faced with the task of learning how best to serve as RAs. In doing so, they needed to identify what their individual strengths and weaknesses were and what resources they might possess to accomplish that task. This knowledge would contribute to their expectations of themselves and of the group.

Competency and control beliefs play a prominent role in several contemporary psychological theories including achievement motivation theory, goal theory, and self-

determination theory (Anderman, Austin, & Johnson, 2002; Elliot & Church, 1997; Kuhl & Blankenship, 1979; Smith & Reio, 2006). As the research participants prepared to approach their task of learning how best to be RAs, they needed to be motivated to achieve the goals that they would set during their training, and be determined to do so even in the face of inevitable obstacles.

Another concept within competence beliefs is self-efficacy, first defined by Bandura (1977), as "people's beliefs about their capacity to learn or perform actions at designated levels" (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006, p. 356). My rationale was that acknowledging and affirming the personal traits and abilities of each participant would serve to enhance the self-efficacy of each participant and that of the group as a whole as they approached the training activities and ultimately their job as RAs. Studies by Pajares (1996), Schunk (1995), and Schunk and Pajares (2004), indicated that self-efficacy is a strong and consistent predictor of motivation and performance, thus proving it to be a key variable in predicting learning, motivation, and achievement.

Additionally within the ***Self-Exploration*** component, I felt it was important to help the participants to identify their personal resources that each brought to share in the group. We had a wide range of experiences and skills among the group members; collaborative learning with others has the potential to bring about change when such information is shared. Murphy and Mason (2006) assert that "it is essential to take into account the quantity and quality of prior knowledge in order to know what, and to what extent, preexisting information facilitates or impedes change processes" (p. 314).

As is identified in the cyclical spiral of action research and the experiential learning model, I planned activities for the purpose of:

(1) sequentially focusing on learning about self strengths and weaknesses;

(2) providing opportunities to see how each individual's characteristics related within both their assigned RA team and within the larger RA group as a whole; and

(3) ensuring that opportunities for *planning*, *action* and *observing*, *reflection*, and *replanning* were included at all junctures.

As identified within the theoretical framework, this first component needed to be followed with opportunities to put these learnings into action. Activities were incorporated into the design that would allow for me to facilitate increasingly more interaction between and among all group members.

The second component within the research design, ***Application***, was formulated to provide opportunities for action in a highly engaging, outdoor setting. I planned a trip to a low ropes course for the RAs that would provide opportunities for interaction, challenge, and bonding. Inherent in a ropes course experience are elements of discomfort, risk, and fun, along with the necessity for communication, critical thinking, and problem solving. Participants usually find it necessary to stretch beyond their normal comfort limits, finding themselves in unfamiliar situations, both physically and mentally. In this case, the RAs would be sharing this experience with other group members that they had only met on the previous day. As with the first component, this part of the action research study was designed to include multiple cycles of *planning*, *action* and *observing*, *reflection*, and *replanning* at all junctures.

The constructs of competence and control also undergirded the activities in the ***Application*** component of the study. I had hoped that the learning activities in the ***Self-***

Exploration component would help to establish an environment conducive to collaborative learning. Building upon that environment, the research participants would be better prepared to engage in the problem solving that was necessary to successfully complete the experiential learning activities of the ropes course.

Lovett (2002) defines problem solving as a cognitive process that is directed toward achieving a goal when the problem solver has no apparent solution. Mayer and Wittrock (2006) note that problem solving has four main characteristics:

- It is cognitive, requiring the problem solver to think internally without any obvious external behavior.
- It is a process that requires the problem solver to manipulate knowledge internally within his cognitive system.
- It is directed in that the problem solver's cognitive processing is aimed toward a distinctive goal.
- It is personal in that the problem solver's knowledge and past experiences contribute to the formation of solutions, thus helping to determine the degree of ease or difficulty that obstacles may be overcome.

Mayer and Wittrock (2006) conclude that "problem solving is cognitive processing directed at transforming a given situation into a goal situation when no obvious method of solution is available" (p. 287).

The third component of the study, ***Empowerment,*** was designed to emphasize collaborative learning among all group members and would specifically target a high level of leadership and interaction on the part of the research study participants. Within a very short period of time, the RAs would become the facilitators as they worked with the

UB high school students. Therefore, the final component of our training time was planned to provide opportunities for peer facilitation. Materials and equipment were provided, along with ideas for games and initiatives, so that each project team of RAs could facilitate a set of activities for the entire group.

Within this third component lies the critical issue of transfer of learning. Mayer and Wittrock (2006) define transfer as "the ability to use what was learned in new situations" and continue to note that it "can be assessed using a variety of problem-solving items" (p. 289). Nesbit and Hadwin (2006) assert that the transfer of learning from one context to another is of central importance when seeking to increase the cogency of an experience. Bereiter and Scardamalia (2006) observe that when moving from one situation to another, it is not the skill itself that fails to transfer but the intelligent use of it. They contend that:

> through continued participation in a particular sphere of action one's actions become increasingly well adapted, resourceful, and flexible—in a word, intelligent—but in a different situation one has to start over learning the ropes, mastering what constitutes intelligent action in the new context. (p. 698)

Cormier and Hagman (1987) suggest that successful transfer of learning requires that training content be relevant to the task, that the learner must learn the training content, and that the learner must be motivated.

My Practical Theory

My review of the theories and practices that are inherent within collaborative learning and experiential learning, as well as the facilitation processes therein, presented numerous commonalities. These attributes were derived from my analysis of literature related to both experiential learning and collaborative learning, as well as incorporating

elements of PA's experiential learning model. When woven together, they provided for me a way to approach improvement of my practice as a facilitator who utilizes an experiential learning approach in facilitating collaborative learning. Therefore, it was a natural fit to link them together in my practical theory and the design of this study.

As shown in Figure 2, experiential learning provided the theoretical framework through which I approached the facilitation of collaborative learning for this research study. I adapted the interative cycles of the experiential learning model as laid out by Outward Bound (Figure 1) and incorporated into the PA model. PA's Adventure Wave processing metaphor (*what, so what, now what)* served to identify the anchoring points for guiding the development of the research group. Collaborative learning cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting were woven throughout, supporting the iterative cycles of experiential learning. Intermingled were the threads of the critical attributes of collaborative learning as described in the relevant literature—valuing all voices, listening, suspending assumptions, open dialogue, and asking questions to elicit more information. These critical attributes formed the collaborative ground upon which the experiential learning framework rests. The binding edges of this tapestry of learning were created through the structure of facilitation, without which the formation of the experiential collaborative learning group could potentially unravel.

Figure 2 illustrates that experiential learning is situated as the theoretical framework through which the facilitation of collaborative learning is approached. This integrated model incorporated the essential concepts for the study—experiential learning, collaborative learning, and facilitation. With this visual depiction of my theoretical framework in mind, I proceeded to design the research study.

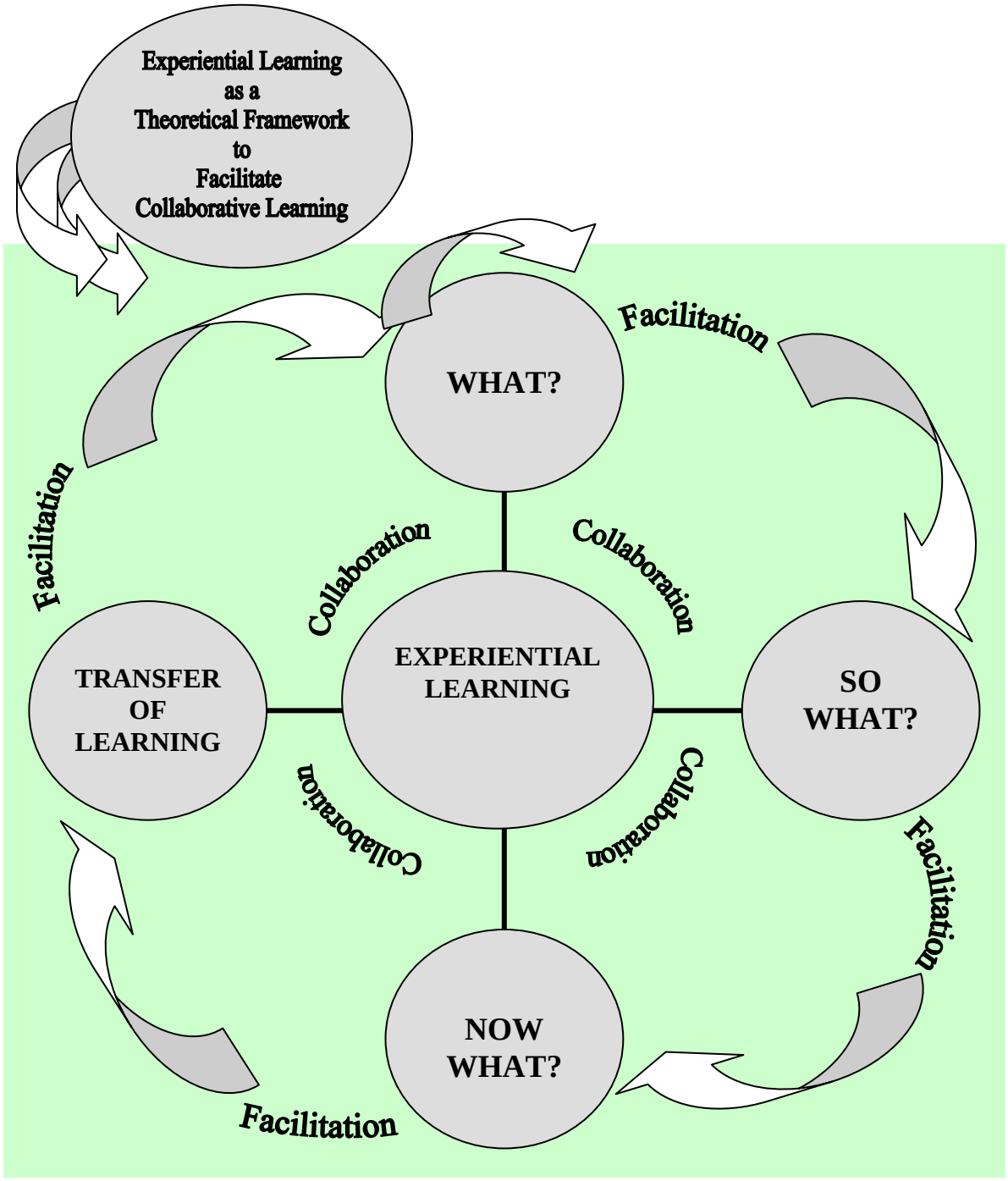

Figure 2. Theoretical Framework for the Study: Experiential Learning as a Framework to Facilitate Collaborative learning

The Research

As part of my practice, I serve as the Project Director of Pre-College Upward Bound (PCUB) and, as such, have the opportunity to design and implement the training for all UT Upward Bound resident assistant staff members (RAs) that serve as supervisory staff for our high school students during the summer residential component. The expectation for the job is that the RAs, usually undergraduate college students (ages 20-25), serve as activity facilitators, role models, and mentors to the high school students. By using an action research model, I could collect data regarding the experience of these RAs as we worked together to prepare them to serve as collaborative facilitators for these students. This provided an ideal setting for me to put my practical theory regarding the facilitation of collaborative learning through an experiential learning model to the test.

I have had success in the past at creating nurturing environments and I could identify certain techniques and activities that seemed to have worked to help me build such an environment, but the information that was missing was the participants' perspectives regarding the success of my efforts. Through this study, I planned to reflect on my own practice and evaluate myself in the hope that I would better understand whether or not there are any prerequisite factors that are essential to the formation of an effective collaborative learning group and to pair that with the participants' reflections to achieve an in-depth evaluation of my facilitation techniques used to support the development of collaborative learning. Employing an experiential learning model would provide a framework for the study and a focus for future practice.

The experiential learning framework is one that I have found to be effective in training RAs in the past, but that was based solely on my personal perception. As a

facilitator, action research could provide the vehicle for determining the effectiveness of this approach from the participants' perspectives and, as such, could provide information to improve my professional practice. In the greater sense, this research could contribute to the greater body of knowledge about the facilitation of collaborative learning using experiential learning as the theoretical framework.

The Research Questions

After looking at the multiple factors to be included, I determined that there were two basic questions that should be addressed through the research study. The first research question to be examined in this study was,

(1) How do participants in a group for which I serve as a facilitator of collaborative learning within an experiential learning framework describe their experience?

Learning about the experience of the participants led me to seek to further examine how I could best utilize that knowledge. Therefore, the second research question for this study was:

(2) How do the research participants' experiences inform my professional practice of facilitation of collaborative learning?

As an action researcher, I wanted to know about the participants' actual experiences, but I also wanted to investigate their perceptions of their experiences. Because my facilitation of collaborative activities incorporated the use of experiential learning, I wanted to gather from the participants what aspects of these experiential activities that they may have shared in common and wanted to see if my intended focus on collaborative learning stood out for them.

I felt that the best methodology to use to achieve this purpose was within the structure of qualitative action research as delineated by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), who described action research as having a "spiral of self-reflective cycles" (p. 563). The elements within the cyclical spiral are *planning*, *acting* and *observing*, *reflecting*, and *replanning*. These cycles are continually repeated and, through this process, individuals engaged in action research derive new skills and insights. I hoped that this would allow me to explore more fully my own facilitative gifts.

By examining my practice and the experiences of those in the training group, I wanted to be able to determine ways of co-constructing knowledge within a collaborative training group that would bring all to the table in an equal way and would contribute to the skills of the RAs who would, in turn, model for their high school charges ways of relating to one another. Through this study, it was hoped that any weaknesses would also be brought to light so that they could be addressed to strengthen and improve my facilitation skills.

Implications and findings from this study will serve to inform and expand not only my practice, but also the practices of my fellow study participants, and could potentially be incorporated into the development of a more efficient and effective staff training model for future part-time staff members. Additionally, results could potentially be applied across disciplines that utilize collaborative learning and facilitation skills and could add to the literature linking theory with practice as approached through an experiential learning framework.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Creswell (2002, 2003) identifies the need to narrow the scope of a research study and use those boundary lines to set parameters around the interpretation of the findings. Inclusion of such boundaries results in limitations and delimitations. Creswell (2002) defines limitations as "potential weaknesses of the study or problems with the study that are identified by the researcher" (p. 253). Delimitations address how the study will be narrowed in scope. In this research project, *time available for training* served as both a limitation and a delimitation of the study. The nature of the research setting dictated that only a short amount of time—three actual training days—would be available for the study, thereby creating a limitation within the study.

In addition to time, another limitation of the study was created by the fact that some of the research participants were completing final assignments for interim college classes—known as "mini-term"—that caused them to have to miss portions of the activities throughout the three days of training. This produced a gap in their individual experiences and also created a gap in group development dynamics.

Time available for training served as a delimitation of the study in that the amount of time allotted for training dictated the number of activities, the opportunities for reflection, and the extent of the repetitions of the experiential learning cycles. The restriction of time alloted for training demanded that the research activities be highly focused for this brief duration of time. Such intensity could be likened to the burst of energy needed by a runner in the homestretch of a race—the resident assistants had to be ready for the arrival of the high school students and our time together was the "homestretch" of their preparation. This narrowed the opportunities for application of

learning and for practice of modifications that came out of reflections about things that went well and those that needed improvement. There was also a narrow window of time that would allow the examination of the transfer of learning into other areas by each individual participant.

A delimitation of the study was also found in the number of research participants. The hiring needs and budgetary restraints of the Upward Bound projects determined the number of RAs, therefore, the number of participants in the research study was also capped to meet these external factors. This delimitation defined the extent of the research and reduced the generalizability of the study.

The scope of the study was also delimited by the ultimate target audience. The research participants were focused on developing their personal leadership skills and abilities toward the high school students, as dictated by the nature of the research setting. This delimitation provided a consensus of focus for the participants and for the focus of the research.

Another delimitation of the study was the focus on the facilitation of collaborative learning through an experiential learning framework. There are other models of facilitating collaborative learning that might have been employed for study, but the focus of this particular study was explicitly on the experiential learning model. Thus, the framework focus served to narrow the scope of the research.

Outline of Dissertation

Merriam (2002) stated that “there is no standard format for reporting qualitative research...there is a diversity of styles, some of which are quite creative” (p. 14). Given

that standard, an outline of this dissertation is herewith provided so as to allow the reader a clearer road map for the action research pathway that I undertook.

Following the introduction to the research study in Chapter 1, the research methodology and procedures utilized within the study are addressed in Chapter 2. Action research is the chosen methodology, therefore, the research design is presented and includes literature to support the rationale for choosing that particular method. Action research has unique qualities that differ from other kinds of research and, as such, entails specific research components that are described in this chapter. The research setting, the research participants, and researcher's role in the study are introduced to the reader. The procedures included in the design of the study are discussed, along with aspects of data collection, data analysis, reliability and validity of the data, and application of the data.

Chapter 3 provides a closer look into the "heart" of the study. A unique feature of action research is that it allows the researcher to provide a thick description of all aspects of the actual research. In this case, the reader is presented with detailed descriptions of the experiential learning approach and the workshop activities that I facilitated. These thick descriptions are presented in order to assist the reader to better understand the theoretical framework of the study and the actual methods and procedures used to carry out the activities.

Chapters 4 and 5 present detailed analysis of the data as derived from the participants' descriptions of their experiences. Chapter Four describes the participants' experiences and connects them with overarching constructs using the participants' own words. Chapter Five looks at these same constructs through the lens of the facilitator. In keeping with the unique qualities of action research, data are presented about the

participants' experiences and my facilitation within those experiences. These data provided insight and focus on my professional practice as a facilitator of collaborative learning in the manner described by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005). Appropriate references are woven throughout both chapters so as to create stronger connections between the participants' experiences and relevant literature.

Chapter 6 concludes the study by summarizing the findings and exploring reflections on those findings. It completes the action research cycle of the study by looking at the initial concepts that framed the study and comparing them to the findings. Also examined are the areas that have the potential to be illuminated by further study.

Another departure from the traditional structure of research dissertations is in the review of relevant literature. Patton (2002) noted that in qualitative studies, reviewing the literature prior to the study has the potential to predisposition the researcher's thinking, which could diminish openness to developments that occur during the study. Therefore, he suggests that an alternative approach is that "the literature review may go on simultaneously with the fieldwork, permitting a creative interplay among the processes of data collection, literature review, and researcher introspection" (p. 226).

In this qualitative action research study, relevant literature serves as the *warp* and *woof* that weaves the fabric of the study together. Creating a pattern in a fabric may necessitate the addition of another color or texture of thread along the way. In this same way, an action research study is dynamic and changes as new insights are revealed. This necessitates adding relevant literature as such insights are brought to light. For that reason, literature that is appropriate for these insights is introduced alongside the discovery, rather than having a traditional separate review of literature chapter. The

rationale is that the finished fabric of research will be woven together in a stronger, more connected way.

Summary

Every project has its underpinnings that support the additional elements of design that create a finished product. This chapter has presented such underpinnings by providing insight into the concepts that frame my practice, the problem, and the development of a practical theory. This was followed by an introduction to the context of the research, the research questions that serve to focus the direction of the study, and a discussion of the limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter 2 will build upon this foundation with a discussion regarding the methods and procedures that served to further develop the design of the study.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

Chapter Introduction

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated that "*methodology* focuses on the best means for acquiring knowledge about the world" (p. 183). Greenwood and Levin (2007) referred to methodology as the "theory of how inquiry should proceed" (p. 90). Henry (2006) noted that methodology is the interpretive framework that guides a particular research project. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to define the context of the study and to situate it within the methodology used to explore my own experience and that of the participants. It is organized into eight sections that will provide for the reader descriptions of: (1) action research as the chosen methodology, (2) the research setting, (3) the participants, (4) my role as facilitator in the study, (5) data collection, (6) data analysis, (7) reliability and validity of data, and (8) application of data as derived through action research methods.

Action Research as Methodology

Investigation as to a method for exploration of my practical theory brought me to action research. Carr and Kemmis (1986) defined action research as "research into practice by practitioners" (p. 199). It involves cycles of inquiry, action and reflection that address a particular issue or subject and allows for all participants to reflect on the previous action in order to plan the next one (Dick, 1993). Action research embraces the belief that "all people—professional action researchers included—accumulate, organize, and use complex knowledge continuously in everyday life" (Greenwood & Levin, 2007,

p. 4). The individuals engaged in the research derive from this process new skills and insights.

The action research methodology departs from other research traditions in that it is an iterative process that involves distinctive steps that are normally linked to planning, acting, observing, and evaluating (McTaggart, 1991). The number of steps and the identified name of each step varies from author to author, but the reflection stage in all of the schemes signals for a new plan of action to be formulated, thus beginning a new cycle (Dick, 1993; Jarvis, 1998; McNiff, 1988; Peters, 1994; Ziegler, 2001).

Levin and Greenwood (2001) observed that action research differs from other research traditions that focus mainly on theoretical work in that it seeks to "create a research situation where active manipulation of the material and social world defines the inquiry process" (p. 107). In this way, new knowledge gained through action research is created through active experimentation, tested in real life, and validated through workability.

Specifically, Kemmis and McTaggart (2005) delineated action research as having a "spiral of self-reflective cycles" (p. 563). The elements within the cyclical spiral are *planning*, *acting* and *observing*, *reflecting*, and *replanning*. These cycles are continually repeated and, through this process, individuals engaged in action research derive new skills and insights. As opposed to other research traditions, it is a dynamic rather than linear process, allowing for adaptations and interventions along the way that can serve to tailor aspects within the research as brought to light through the reflecting cycle.

Reason and Bradbury (2001) stated that there is no brief, succinct definition for action research, but conclude that a basic, working definition can be established as a

departure point for understanding the methodology. To that end, they describe action research as:

> ...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. (p. 1)

Reason and Bradbury's stance on action research acknowledges that action research serves to enable participants to work toward practical outcomes and new forms of understanding since "action without reflection and understanding is blind just as theory without action is meaningless" (p. 2).

The framework for action research rests upon the participatory knowledge approach which advocates "inquiry completed 'with' others rather than 'on' or 'to' others" (p. 11) and, as such, engages the participants as active collaborators (Creswell, 2003). As the researcher, my purpose was to study my practice as a facilitator utilizing an experiential learning model, therefore, inquiry that included cycles of action and reflection from both my perspective and the perspectives of the participants were necessary to provide data for evaluation of my current practice and to serve as a baseline for reflection, analysis, and change in that practice.

Within my practice, I have found that my facilitation style is dynamic in that the needs of the group members must be continually assessed so as to tailor activities to address those needs. Action research provided for me a dynamic methodology through which I could examine my practice as a facilitator of experiential collaborative learning.

Specifically, qualitative action research provided a means whereby I could explore my practice as a facilitator by examining the descriptions of participants' experiences and by reflecting on my own thoughts and feelings about those same experiences. Through this perspective, I could better understand the participants' points of view as I analyzed the meaning of their written responses to the questionnaires and the transcribed oral descriptions of their experiences with me as their facilitator. The fluid, ever-changing needs of the research study participants could also be discovered through this shared process of dialogue and reflection.

The diagram presented in Figure 3 illustrates that action research is woven into the research design as the methodology for examining the components of my theoretical framework. For this study, experiential learning is the theoretical framework that is placed upon a ground created by the critical attributes of collaborative learning. The perimeter is bound by facilitation that will serve to shape the fabric of the research.

The overlying cycle of *planning*, *acting* and *observing*, *reflecting*, and *replanning* are interwoven within the cycles in the experiential learning model—the *what*, *so what*, and *now what*—that guide the progression of the model. The fluid arrows denote the continual spirals of collaboration that accompany the iterative cycles inherent in both action research and in the experiential learning model. Facilitation of such cycles must, by its very nature, be fluid and flexible so as to contribute to the learnings derived from the experiences.

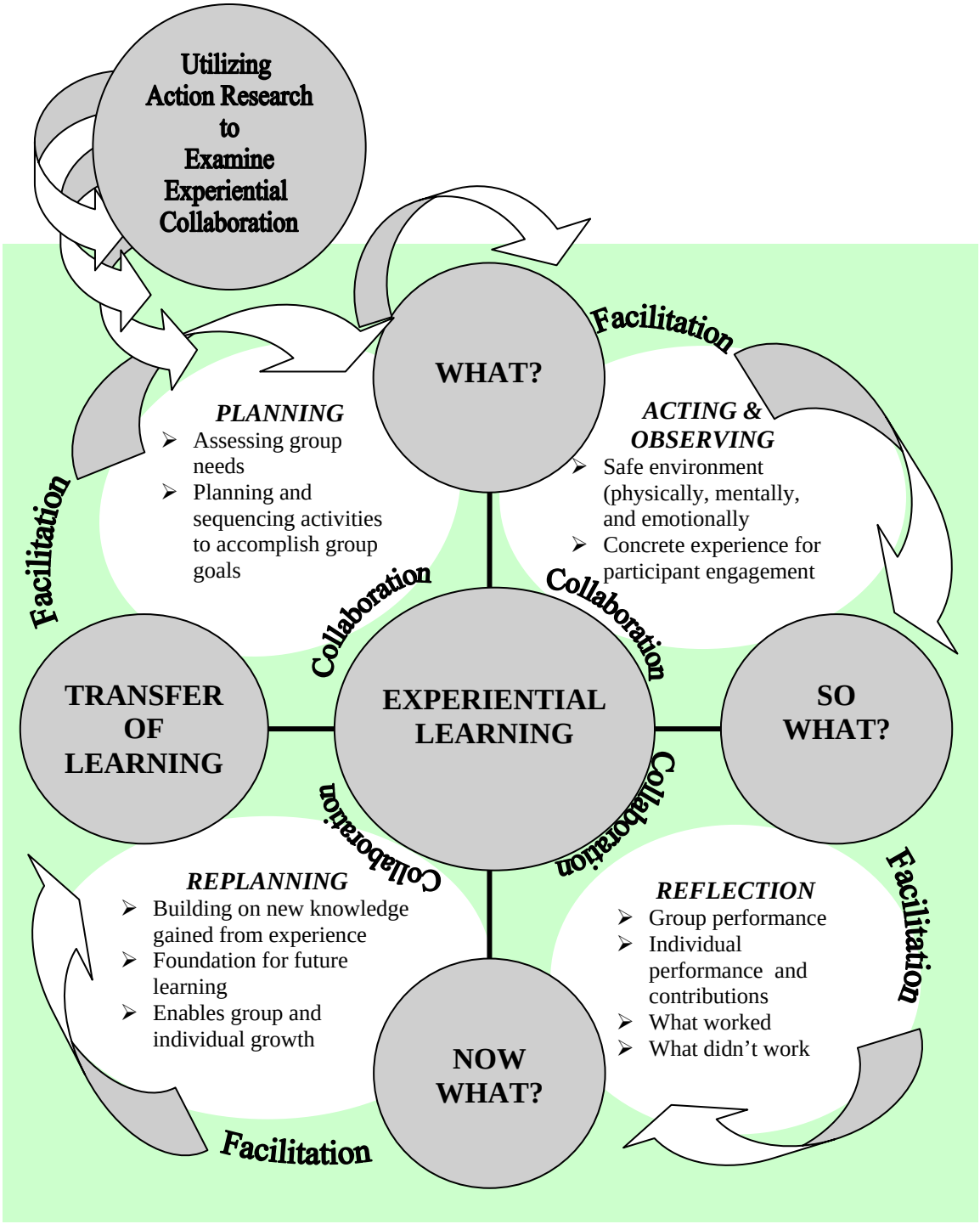

Figure 3. Action Research Integrated Throughout the Exploration of the Theoretical Framework of the Study.

As Randolph (2006) found, action research allowed me to focus on my specific circumstances while including myself as a participant/observer in the collaborative process. I brought my own set of past experiences and knowledge with me to the research study. In that same way, each of the RAs brought with them specific personal experiences, values, and skills. We collectively contributed these varied backgrounds to the research group throughout the training. Each of us completed the training experience with our own individual experience as influenced by our participation. Qualitative action research provided a means to delve into the overall perspectives and reactions that occurred as a result of participation in that training. Action research provided a way for us to examine our experiences and, as Reason and Bradbury (2001) asserted, produce "practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives" (p. 2).

The Research Setting

An essential component of all three of the University of Tennessee's Upward Bound projects is the 6-week summer residential component that provides high school students with the opportunity to live on the campus of a major university. At UT, the supervision for these high school students is accomplished by the professional staffs of the Upward Bound projects and by approximately 20 resident assistants (RAs) who live with the high school students in the campus dormitories, plan and supervise social and cultural activities for the students, and serve as positive role models for them.

The majority of RAs employed for this task of supervising and guiding the Upward Bound students are undergraduate college students who are hired specifically for the duration of the 6-week summer residential component. The amount of time allotted to

such training was usually 1 week in duration. Given the fact that training is considered part of their "paid" time and budgets for these grant projects are limited, we have been fortunate to be able to continue to have that amount of time. In the past, training had been something that was usually done "to" the RA staff as opposed to being done "with" them. The professional staffs of the three Upward Bound projects would get together and divide up the topics that needed to be covered, make handouts, and plan who would cover each topic. RAs were given a notebook containing these handouts. Their job was to follow those guidelines with minimal personal input.

Once hired, the majority of RAs do not know each other or the high school students with whom they will work, but they are expected to come together after this 1-week training experience and function as a team to ensure that the students have a positive and safe simulated college experience. The role of the RA is crucial in creating a supportive environment wherein these high school students may develop the skills and confidence needed to pursue their postsecondary educational goals.

Academic Enrichment Upward Bound (AEUB) and Pre-College Upward Bound (PCUB) employ six RAs per project who supervise 45 participants each and Math and Science Regional Center Upward Bound (MSRC) employs eight RAs who supervise 60 participants. All together, the 20 RAs supervise 150 students during the 6-week period.

Training for these RAs was to occur on the UT campus and involved various locations as appropriate for the activities. Classrooms were reserved for our use throughout the week. Day Two of our training included an off-campus field trip that will be detailed in Chapter Three. We met each day at 9 a.m. and concluded our time together at 5 p.m. An outline of the training schedule is found in Appendix B.

The Participants

The participants in this research study consisted of 20 young adults who were hired to work as RAs for the residential component of the UT Upward Bound projects. All were college students whose ages ranged from 19 to 29 and whose educational pursuits represented a widely varied range of studies. Our UT Upward Bound hiring policy requires that RAs must have completed their second year of postsecondary education so as to ensure that they have had time to adjust to the rigors of college life and may pass that learning on to our high school participants.

The demographics of the research participants are paralled in Table 1 and provide a summary of some of their similarities and differences. Additionally, their accumulated resumes reflected a broad range of experience and activities that would serve as resources for them.

As may be noted below, 35% or 7 of the RAs had previous experience in working as a summer RA with Upward Bound, thus giving them previous knowledge of the job that they were undertaking. Forty-five percent or 9 of the RAs had been high school Upward Bound participants themselves with 45% or 8 being graduates of the UT UB projects. Fifteen percent or 3 of the RAs had experience in working on their respective college campuses as residence hall assistants.

Individually, the research participants brought to the study a wide range of backgrounds and experience, coloring their expectations, behaviors, and approaches to our collaborative learning group. A brief introduction to each research participant provides a deeper understanding of each individual and helps to give a snapshot of the unique and talented people that came together to form our group. All names are

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Research Study Participants

Demographic Characteristics	**Number N=20**	**Percentage**
Gender		
▪ Male	10	50%
▪ Female	10	50%
Ethnicity/Cultural Heritage		
▪ African American	10	50%
▪ Asian	1	5%
▪ Caucasian	6	30%
▪ Middle Eastern	3	15%
Age		
▪ 19-21	7	35%
▪ 22-29	13	65%
School		
▪ University of Tennessee	17	85%
▪ Other colleges or universities	3	15%
Previous RA Experience		
▪ UT Upward Bound	7	35%
▪ University RA	3	15%
▪ No previous RA experience	10	50%
Low-Income/First Generation (eligibility criteria of the Upward Bound high school students)	11	55%
*Participated in Upward Bound while in High School***	9	45%
** 8 of the 9 who had participated in Upward Bound while they were in high school had done so in one of the UT programs; 1 was a participant at her home high school in a program administered through another university.		

pseudonyms and only cursory characteristics of each individual are provided so as to maintain the confidentiality of each specific individual in the research group.

- ***Abby*** was a rising junior of Middle Eastern heritage. She had minimal experience in working with high school students, but was excited about the opportunity to develop her leadership skills and was eager to learn.
- ***Alison*** was a Caucasian female who was a rising senior at a private, all-female postsecondary institution in another state. Although she attended a local high school, she had chosen to leave her home environment to attend college. She came to the group having just completed a challenging semester-long study abroad in a Middle Eastern country.
- ***Ann*** was an African American female and a rising senior at UT. She had served as a resident assistant in the campus dormitories throughout the preceding year. She brought with her a distinctive sense of enthusiasm and energy.
- ***Carrie*** was an African American female who had been a student participant in the MSRC program. She was from a very large, urban city in a neighboring state and knew from personal experience some of the adaptations required of high school students in a summer residential program.
- ***Christy*** had worked with one of the Upward Bound programs during the preceding summer and was familiar with the duties of an RA. An African American female, she was a rising senior at UT.
- ***Cindy*** had been a former student participant in the UT MSRC program, therefore, she had a good understanding of the important role that the RAs play

within the summer residential component. An African American female, she was a rising junior at UT.

- ***Dan*** was the youngest member of our group and was an African American male who was a rising junior at UT. He had come to UT from a large urban city.
- ***Dave*** had been a student participant in one of the Upward Bound programs. He was of Middle Eastern ethnicity and was approaching his senior year at UT. He had attended a more rural high school and, in that setting, found his cultural heritage to be something that set him apart from the majority of students there. This made him very sensitive to the task of helping all of the UB students find their "place" during the summer residential component.
- ***Derrick*** was an African American male who had the greatest amount of experience in working as an RA. He had served as an RA with the UT Upward Bound programs for multiple summers and had been through training sessions as a part of each of those summers. As such, he displayed strong leadership skills and was eager to share his experience with the others.
- ***Elizabeth*** was a Caucasian female who was serving as an RA for the first time. She was a rising junior at UT. She brought a significant energy and cooperative spirit to the group.
- ***Ellen*** had been a student participant in an Upward Bound program on another postsecondary campus during her high school years. That program was structured somewhat differently from the UT programs, giving her a different frame of reference about the summer component. She was a rising junior of African American ethnicity.

- ***Kyle*** was a Caucasian male who had been a student participant in one of the UT Upward Bound programs. A local native, he was a rising senior at UT and had served as an RA during the preceding summer residential component. He often served as a volunteer leader with Upward Bound during the academic year component.
- ***Mike*** was a rising senior at UT of African American ethnicity who had served as an RA during the preceding summer residential component. He brought with him a significant amount of experience in working with high school students through his involvement with a youth leadership program in his home city. His mature, comfortable nature enhanced his natural leadership qualities and others looked to him for guidance.
- ***Nathan*** had been a student participant in UT's MSRC program, coming from a neighboring state. As such, he had experienced being totally immersed in the program with no visits home throughout the entire residential time. He attended a postsecondary institution in a state other than his home state and chose to serve as an RA to "give back" to the program. He was of Caucasian ethnicity.
- ***Norris*** was from a small, rural town and had been a student participant in the MSRC program. A Caucasian male, he was a rising senior with plans to continue his education to achieve a career in the medical field.
- ***Rachel*** was a Caucasian female who was the oldest member of the group. A college graduate, she brought with her experience from the world of retail business. She worked as an RA as an interim position while making a career transition.

- ***Ryan*** was an African American male who had come to study at UT from a large, urban city in the Northeast U.S. A junior in his credit standings, he brought with him the experience of serving as a summer camp counselor with inner city youth.
- ***Sam*** was a male of Middle Eastern ethnicity. He was serving as an RA for the first time. He was a rising senior at UT and was beginning his studies to take his entrance exams for medical school.
- ***Stan*** had served as an Upward Bound RA during the preceding summer. An African American male, he was preparing to graduate from UT and move into his chosen career.
- ***Yvonne*** was a rising junior at another postsecondary institution who was of Asian ethnicity. She had been a student participant in the MSRC program, having come from a large, urban city on the opposite side of the state. As such, she brought with her personal experience in being a high school student in a simulated college experience far from home.

In summary, the research participants were a widely varied group of intelligent, thoughtful, and talented young adults who shared the common desire to work with the Upward Bound high school students.

My Role as Facilitator in the Study

Randolph (2006) found in her action research study on the facilitation of collaborative learning that her group participants grew to regard her facilitative presence as a "guide from the side" (p. 72). In this study, my role as the facilitator/researcher was

to increasingly reduce my influence on the group members from center stage to the *guide from the side* within a collaborative learning environment.

This development is in keeping with the growth of a collaborative learning group in which the participants increasingly take ownership for the direction of the group and the facilitator becomes a contributing member with decreased influence toward the group process. In this way, the group members are empowered to step into leadership roles and there forms a more equitable distribution of power and control within the group.

My exposure to the literature surrounding collaborative learning, facilitation, and the experiential learning model convinced me that spending time building a collaborative environment wherein the RAs formed relationships and shared experiences would benefit both them and our high school students throughout the residential time. My rationale was that I wanted to facilitate their empowerment as role models, effective group leaders, and competent supervisors. I hoped that when problems arose, as they inevitably do throughout the summer, the RAs would feel confident in dealing with them. Toward that same end, I hoped that I could help to facilitate the establishment of relationships among them that would allow them to utilize each others' strengths in all situations, especially in their problem-solving efforts.

The components within the research study were sequentially planned and the framework for activities and interventions was set in place. With these essential elements of the research design in place, the next step was to decide how to capture the essence of the participants' experiences so as to be able to best explore them.

Data Collection

In discussing qualitative data collection, Polkinghorne (2005) noted that

"the unit of analysis in qualitative research is experience, not individuals or groups" (p.139). My goal in this action research study was to examine the experiences of the research group participants and to explore the relationship between those experiences and my practice of facilitating collaborative learning through an experiential learning approach. In action research, there are many different types of evidence that may provide data according to Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). Randolph (2006) noted that the "researcher practitioner depends on the participants for data and evidence in order to check how her practice might be influencing the participants" (p. 30). This goal dictated that I find ways to collect data that would shed light on those experiences.

In order to ensure sufficient analysis and reflection, the research participants were asked to support by documentary evidence their perspectives about their experiences throughout the training. The five qualitative techniques that I chose for collecting data are described below and copies of each worksheet are found in Appendix C:

- **Questionnaires**—Each research group participant (RA) completed questionnaires at intervals throughout the training as listed in Table 2.
- **Daily Reflection Sheets**—Each research group participant (RA) completed a daily reflection sheet after each day's training activities.
- **Focus Group Interviews**—Each of the three Upward Bound project teams of RAs took part in a focus group interview.
- **Individual Interviews**—All of the RAs were invited to take part in a one-to-one interview with me as the action research practitioner.
- **Field Notes**—Throughout the research study I recorded my observations and reflections of the research study activities and experiences.

Table 2. Data Collection Sources and Descriptions of Methods and Frequency

Data Source/Method	***Description***
1. Questionnaires	▪ Initial (at the initial outset of first training day) ▪ Subsequent #1 (end of initial training) ▪ Subsequent #2 (end-of-summer residential component)
2. Daily Reflections Sheet	▪ Single one-page document with questions to promote reflection of the day's training activities – given daily to all research study participants
3. Focus Groups	▪ Research participants will be divided by project assignment into three separate focus groups ▪ Researcher to take notes ▪ Audiotaped to be transcribed for data analysis
4. One-to-One Personal Interviews	▪ Semistructured to include open-ended questions. ▪ Audiotaped to be transcribed for analysis
5. Field Notes	The researcher will keep a record of her reflections and observations during each of the 4 training days and during the subsequent data collection segments (interviews, etc.).

The mixture of both written data and interview data provided a means of triangulating data among the various sources. The data techniques and collection methods are summarized in Table 2. These written documents had the twofold benefit of prompting reflection on the part of each participant as they engaged in the action of writing, as well as providing data for analysis. Comments derived from daily reflection sheets and questionnaires were submitted anonymously on those documents and, therefore, are not attributed to any specific participant.

The taped and transcribed focus group and one-to-one interviews provided additional insight and documentary evidence as to the experiences of the research group

participants. The focus group interviews were conducted following the training session, but prior to the arrival of the high school students, thus giving insight into the experience of the RAs in training and their expectations for working with the students. One-to-one interviews took place at the end of the residential time and provided insight into both "before and after" expectations and experiences, as guided by the interview protocol that is described in detail later in this chapter. Patterns of the quotes within the interview transcripts served as guides for deriving the themes since the interviews provided opportunities for expanded comments by identifiable participants. Participant quotes were checked against the transcripts for accuracy. To maintain the confidentiality agreement of the research, the names associated with specific quotes are pseudonyms that were given to personalize the text, but not to reveal the actual identity of the participant.

When it became apparent that photographs of the specific experiential learning activities would greatly enhance the reader's understanding of each activity, I sought approval to include them. This is a departure from traditional dissertation studies, but the visual images provided a vivid description of each activity within the research study, thus enriching the understanding of the intensity of the experiences as described by the research participants' comments. All research participants were aware that photographs were taken throughout the training sessions (some were taken by the participants themselves rather than the researcher), and an electronic copy of all photographs had been made available to all participants.

I already had in place an additional approval from UT's Office of Research Institutional Review Board (Human Research Participants) to follow up via email with the research participants in order to clarify comments and findings. Permission was

granted from that authority to request permission via email from the research participants to include within the body of the dissertation the specific photographic images that were directly related to the experiential activities. In response to the follow up email seeking permission to use the images, no participant denied permission to use the appropriate photographs.

The Initial Questionnaire was provided so that all research participants could examine their own level of self-knowledge as they approached their training. The following questions in Figure 4 were formulated for the purpose of encouraging each participant to reflect on the skills that he believed he currently possessed as determined by his own personal perspective, thus developing a baseline of expectations for his facilitative work with the high school students.

INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **What are your expectations for your Upward Bound training sessions?**
2. **Please list what you believe to be your facilitation skills that you will use in working with the Upward Bound students this summer.**
3. **What do you hope to learn that you didn't know before?**
4. **How will you use this information?**
5. **What are your expectations for me as facilitator?**

Figure 4. Initial Questionnaire: A Written Data Source Within the Study

The questions asked on the Subsequent Questionnaires were designed with a retrospective focus to encourage each participant to reflect on any changes that he or she may have felt that came about as a result of his or her training experiences. Figure 5 illustrates that the questions were the same, but the differentiating factor was the 4-week time span between completion of the training and completion summer residential component that provided a vast number of experiences for each individual RA.

The Daily Reflections sheet (see Appendix B) asked the same questions as those posed by the questionnaire and included one additional question: ***Did any experience in particular push you outside your comfort zone?*** Responses to this question would speak to the immediate impressions and perspectives of the participant's daily experience in this action research based training.

SUBSEQUENT QUESTIONNAIRES

#2 -- Given at the end of Upward Bound RA Training Sessions

#3 -- Given at the end of the Summer Residential Component

1. **What stands out for you about your Upward Bound training sessions?**
2. **Have you developed any new skills that you didn't have before this training?**
3. **What do you know now that you didn't know before?**
4. **How will you use this information?**
5. **What was your experience with me as facilitator?**

Figure 5. Subsequent Questionnaires: Written Data Sources Within the Study

The focus group data collection took place at the end of the 4-day training sessions. In discussing the use of focus groups, Kambreleis and Dimitriadis (2005) identified that this data collection method is particularly suited to gaining insights into people's shared understandings and that it provides a means to gather multiple perspectives on a shared topic. They noted that the key characteristics of focus group data are produced by the interaction between participants.

I conducted a focus group with small groups of research participants based upon their assigned programs. Specifically, AEUB and PCUB each had six RAs, so we scheduled time to get together for approximately 1 hour per group. MSRC had a larger group of eight RAs, therefore, we scheduled a timeframe of 90 minutes to allow for the presence of additional participants. The lead question for each focus group was:

Please share your thoughts about your resident assistant training experience.

The remaining focus group time was directed toward answering the questions:

(1) What was your experience with me as a facilitator?

(2) What are you most excited about as you approach this experience of working with the high school students?

(3) What's your greatest concern as you approach this experience?

As moderator of the focus group, I kept the group members focused on the topic by asking the remaining questions within the protocol so as to clarify their comments about their experience. Additionally, I worked to ensure that all group members had the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Each focus group session was audiotaped and later transcribed for analysis.

According to Polkinghorne (2005), interviews allow the qualitative researcher to

obtain first-person accounts of their experience and are "the most widely used approach to the production of qualitative data" (p. 142). Creswell (2003) noted that interviews with participants provide historical information that enhances understanding. Appreciating the many benefits of personal, one-to-one dialogue as a source of data, I invited the RAs to participate in an interview with me. All expressed a willingness to be interviewed and we made our schedule for interviews to take place during the final week of the program.

As the individual interviews progressed, many of the perceptions and descriptions of each RA's individual experience included similar themes and ideas. After 10 individual interviews were completed, I determined that we had reached a point of saturation. All 10 interviews were transcribed for analysis. Knowing that issues might come up during analysis that needed additional clarification, all 20 participants gave consent to provide additional feedback in the future, either through personal interviews or via email. Because this request was not included in the initial Informed Consent document (Appendix A), an additional request for permission to contact the participants via email was reviewed and approved by UT's Office of Research Compliance (Internal Review Board) to sanction solicitation of follow up and clarification comments. I utilized this on two occasions as I requested permission for the photographs to be used and when I was clarifying some of the findings.

The structure used in this data collection approach was a "standardized open-ended interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 280). Each interview was begun by my asking each interviewee to share with me what stood out for them about their own individual experience. I let the interviewee's responses lead my probing questions that followed so as to elicit clarification of or expansion in relating their perspectives and observations

about their experience. This was in keeping with Randolph's (2006) rationale to glean information that would support the research purpose of improving my practice of facilitation.

Additional informal evaluative data was provided through field notes that I recorded while observing RAs' behaviors during the training sessions and through unstructured, informal conversations with individual group members during break/lunch times. Following each training session, I recorded in my field notes a description of the session, my feelings about how the session went, and my thoughts about how I perceived the RAs' participation in the session. I then read the RAs' daily reflections and reviewed and adapted plans for the following session based on feedback received from the just-completed session. In this way, I was significantly involved in the action research cycle of *planning, action, observing* and *reflection,* followed by *replanning* to best meet the needs for group development that had the potential to change perspectives, beliefs and/or actions for our entire collaborative learning group.

Data Analysis

Merriam (2002) suggested that interpretive qualitative research designs have several key characteristics in common. The first is that the researcher is striving to understand the meaning that people have constructed about an experience; it is looking for a depth of understanding not for the future, but for the present situation, the "here and now" of a setting. The second key characteristic is that "the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and data analysis" (p. 5). Because understanding the human experience is the goal of the research, she concludes that the "human instrument" is the most ideal means of collecting and analyzing data due to the flexibility, adaptiveness, and

immediacy brought to the task by the researcher. This brings inherent biases, but another characteristic of such research is to identify and monitor these biases, thus including their influence on data collection and analysis rather than trying to eliminate them. Finally, Merriam noted that data analysis in an interpretive qualitative research design is an inductive process and is richly descriptive as the text is used to build concepts and theories rather than to deductively test hypotheses.

The interpretive nature of this qualitative action research study is aligned with Merriam's key characteristics. Both the focus group and one-to-one interviews were conducted then transcribed so that the actual words of the participants would provide insight into the experiences and perceptions of the research participants. This documentary evidence within the research study was analyzed using a *hermeneutic* approach. The etymology of the term *hermeneutics* harks back to Greek mythology and refers to the messenger god Hermes, whose task was to understand and interpret what the gods had to say to humans (Patton, 2002).

As advocated by Gadamer (1976), this interpretive approach involves examining text to gain understanding and meaning so as to better understand experiences from another's point of view. Meaning from text as derived through this approach may also lend itself to applying this understanding toward a greater appreciation of the contextual forces that may have influenced their outlook.

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) defined *hermeneutics* as "an approach to the analysis of texts that stresses how prior understandings and prejudices shape the interpretive process (p. 27). Ricoeur (1970) used the term *hermeneutics* in referring to the use of a theory of interpretation. Smith (2003) noted that the early work of Heidegger (1889-

1976) views that all humans live in a world that is interpreted through our individual lens and, as such, we are the interpreters of this world. Paul and Marfo (2001) acknowledged that "hermeneutics as a philosophy and a science of interpretation has generated insights into how ...knowledge creates an understanding of texts, persons, events and situations" (p. 533). Smith asserted that in qualitative research, "the hermeneutic approach provides a new view of the meaning of data" (p. 20).

Pollio, Henley, and Thompson (1997) noted that the hermeneutic approach as put forth by Gadamer is "concerned with explicating relationships between linguistic events (texts) and the ways in which these are interpreted" (p. 349). The purpose of hermeneutical interpretation, as defined by Kvale (1996) is to "obtain a valid and common understanding of the meaning of a text" (p. 46). Graves (2006) concurred with Hawthorne (1989) that utilization of a hermeneutic approach to ascertain the full extent of an experience provides understanding into the life world of our immediate experiences and tends to be interpretive in nature.

Data analysis was done in a process patterned after The University of Tennessee (UT) Applied Phenomenology Studies Colloquy, which was initially developed under the guidance of Dr. Howard Pollio, a distinguished Professor in UT's Department of Psychology. The colloquy is comprised of faculty and students from a variety of academic areas and serves as an interdisciplinary forum to assist researchers with data analysis and methodology. Although the selected methodology for this study was not phenomenological, the hermeneutic analysis process encompasses a similar pattern as used by the colloquy in that interviews are read aloud by members of the group with one serving as the interviewer and one assuming the role of the participant. Each transcript is

read aloud to derive interpretative meaning and look for commonalities that may be found throughout the data. The colloquy process parallels common features in qualitative data analysis as identified by Miles and Huberman (1994) in that there are continual cycles of "sorting and shifting" through the transcripts to "identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences" (p. 9).

Thomas and Pollio (2002) noted that "the 'word' theme is used to mean patterns of description that repetitively recur as important aspects of a participant's description of his/her experience" (p. 37). Thomas and Pollio concluded that at the end of analysis of all individual transcripts, the themes that have formed are summarized by the group. The steps that comprised the process used in the hermeneutic data analysis for this study are illustrated in Figure 6.

The UT research group that provided analysis for this study was facilitated by Dr. Katherine Greenberg, who has led and participated in numerous qualitative action research studies and has extensive experience in data analysis through the hermeneutic approach. In keeping with this analysis process, I took the transcripts of the three focus group interviews and three of individual interviews to a series of research group meetings for analytical interpretation. The collaborative analysis process helped to ensure that the themes were directed by the interview text rather than by my perceptions or assumptions. All members of the research group signed a confidentiality pledge as approved by The University of Tennessee's Office of Research Internal Review Board in order to maintain the confidentiality of the research participants, thus enabling us to freely discuss specific comments that were made by the participants.

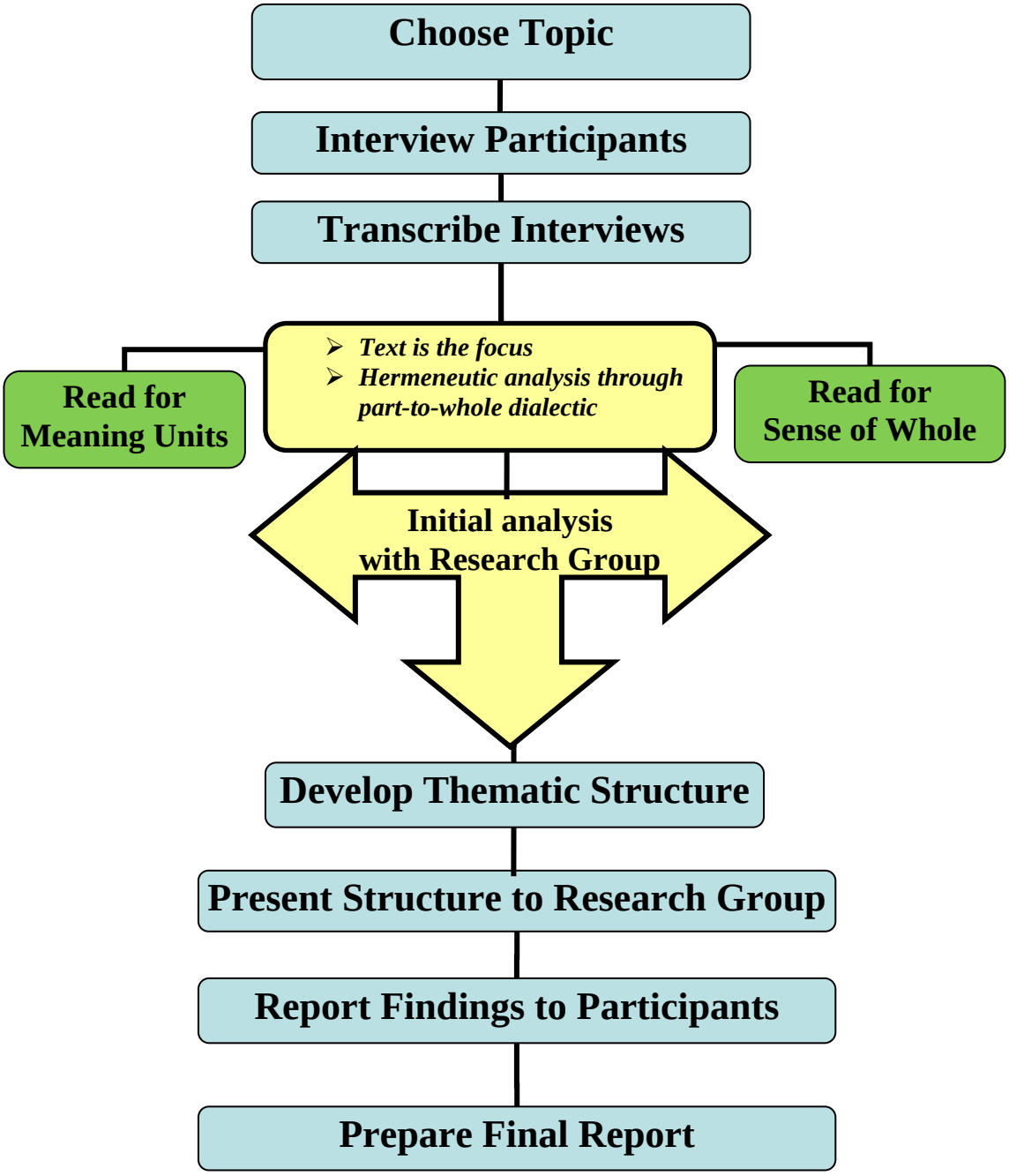

Figure 6. Structural Summary of Hermeneutic Analysis of Data. Adapted from Thomas, S. P., and Pollio, H. R. (2002). *Listening to patients: A phenomenological approach to nursing research and practice.* New York: Springer Publishing.

The research team's careful observations of the multiple nuances contained within each transcript provided thoughtful insight as to the meaning and relationships between data reflections from the research study participants. As part of the process, the research group paused frequently during the reading of an interview transcript to reflect on potential meanings of the text and to discuss possible interrelated connections among meanings. Dialogue ensued around the constructs that were brought forth through the participants' words and meaning units were identified.

Following the research group's initial analysis of the focus group interviews and three of the individual interviews, I examined the remaining seven individual interviews for evidence of common factors through a hermeneutic part-to-whole dialectic. The constructs that had initially been discovered in the research group continued to pervade throughout the remaining transcripts and I continued the analysis by repeatedly checking all interview transcripts for supportive statements. As I read the printed transcript aloud, I highlighted any possible area that provided enlightenment or seemed to be of importance to the experience. This proved to be an iterative process as I checked and rechecked each highlighted area to determine where the commonalities were found.

Using a template that I devised in my computer software program (WORD), I listed the comments that I had highlighted that displayed connectionality so that I could examine them as a collective unit (see Appendix D). In this manner, analysis followed the established pattern of hermeneutic analysis by focusing on the text as a whole and in part for meaning units. Each list provided multiple participant comments that served to support a construct or theme and became a cross-check for commonalities that were identified to be pervasive throughout the participants' experiences across all interviews.

After I completed the analysis of the both the focus group and one-to-one interview transcripts, I then went back to the three questionnaires and the daily reflection sheets that the participants had completed during the research study. Once again, I read through their anonymous comments as recorded on these sheets and highlighted those that evidenced commonalities with the constructs that were already identified through the interview transcripts. Pertinent comments from those data documents were then added to the theme template for further reflection.

The research group was presented with the structure of the themes that had been discovered after all data had been analyzed. The group's discussion allowed for modification of the proposed thematic structure in ways necessary to convey interpretation and understanding of the participants' experiences.

After the final thematic structure was affirmed by the research group, I presented the themes to the research participants for their review. The consensus of the participants who attended the review of research findings was that the thematic structure as presented accurately portrayed their experiences. The constructs and themes presented in Chapters 4 and 5 represent the consensus of the data findings.

The analysis of data also contributed to a report that was provided to The University of Tennessee's Upward Bound projects (AEUB, MSRC, and PCUB) for use in continual programmatic assessment and evaluation. This report was used in modifying strategies and activities to be incorporated into part-time staff training.

Quality and Credibility of Data

The participants' comments as recorded and transcribed in the focus group and

one-to-one interviews were the data used to describe their experiences and could be attributed to each research participant. This enabled the findings from that data source to reflect their individual perspectives and voice. In order to ensure quality and credibility of that data, other data-gathering techniques were used to collect data that contributed to the findings. The research participants completed three questionnaires at different times throughout the study that served to record their experiences and perceptions. They also completed a daily reflection sheet at the close of each training day. These additional data sources provided objective, anonymous responses that served as a means to triangulate the data derived from the interviews.

Creswell (2002) suggested that qualitative researchers may enhance the accuracy of a study by triangulating among different data sources. He defines triangulation as "the process of corroborating evidence" (p. 280) from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection, such as interviews and documents, and noted that these information sources provide evidence to support a theme. Creswell further stated that a research study will be more accurate as a result of this process because information supporting a theme is drawn from multiple sources and processes of data collection, thus ensuring that the report of findings is both accurate and credible.

Patton (2002) suggested that triangulation of data sources "increases the accuracy and credibility of findings" (p. 93) in that every method of data collection has its own limitations, therefore, multiple methods are advisable. Patton concluded by noting that combining several data sources results in data triangulation, a process initially identified by Denzin (1978), and that it is not used to demonstrate that multiple data sources provide the same results, but used to serve as a test for consistency within findings.

In this study, the anonymous written responses of the research participants on the three questionnaires and on the daily reflection sheets allowed the participants to freely describe their experiences and perceptions. These data sources served as objective documentation of the participants' authentic interpretations of their experiences within our research project. No participant would have felt that they had to say or write any "right" answer, nor were they compelled to respond in any way that they thought I, as their facilitator, might want them to respond. This contributed to the trustworthiness of the data derived from other data sources in the study.

In contrast, the focus group and one-to-one interviews provided opportunities for the individual participants to personalize their descriptions of their experience and their perceptions. Data derived through the interview method allowed each participant to share their individual fears, anxieties, hopes, and expectations. For example, a participant that had been in Upward Bound as a high school student was able to connect his experience as a student to his expectations for himself as he served as a resident assistant. Likewise, a participant who had a history of fear of heights was able to relate how that particular fear impacted her experience during our activities at the challenge course. In this way, authenticity of data was addressed.

The pairing of the objective and subjective data derived from all sources served as a test for consistency throughout the constructs that were formulated from the consensus found in these multiple data sources. In order to further examine the reliability and validity of data, I looked to a set of criteria listed by Patton (2002) that sets forth alternative criteria for judging the quality and credibility of qualitative inquiry and answered each criteria with how it was accomplished within the study in Figure 7.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION AND CONSTRUCTIVIST CRITERIA

- Subjectivity acknowledged (discusses and takes into account biases)
  Accomplished through the action research design of the study in which I was a researcher and participant, rather than an outsider in the research.
- Trustworthiness
  Accomplished through the use of objective, anonymous questionnaires and daily reflection sheets.
- Authenticity
  Accomplished through the use of participant comments as identified in both the focus group and one-to-one interviews.
- Triangulation (capturing and respecting multiple perspectives)
  Accomplished through the review of multiple data collection methods.
- Praxis
  Accomplished through the process of putting theoretical knowledge into practice in the experiential learning activities done in the study.
- Enhanced and deepened understanding
  Verstehen—"understanding"; refers to the unique human capacity to make sense of the world (Patton, 2002, p. 52)
  Accomplished through the acknowledged understandings found in the words of the research participants.
- Contribution to dialogue
  Accomplished through the findings that serve to present new information as to the experiences within a collaborative learning group that is facilitated through an experiential learning approach.

Figure 7. An Alternative Set of Criteria for Judging the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative Inquiry. Adapted from: Patton, 2002.

Application of Data Derived Through Action Research

The nature of action research methodology is to allow the practitioner/researcher to participate in the study rather than to serve only as an outside observer. This paralleled my practice as an Upward Bound project director, which required a high level of involvement with the RAs. The dynamic cycles inherent within the action research methods allowed both the research participants and me to reflect on our experiences together as a collaborative group, while the experiential learning framework gave us specific activities upon which to focus. Through this research design, our involvement in

cycles of *planning*, *acting* and *observing*, *reflecting*, and *replanning* provided enlightenment for the research questions that directed this study:

- **How do participants in a group for which I serve as a facilitator of collaborative learning within an experiential learning framework describe their experience?**
- **How do the research participants' experiences inform my professional practice of facilitation of collaborative learning?**

Through the qualitative design of the study, the research participants provided detailed descriptions of both their actual experiences and of their perceptions and interpretations of their experiences. The participants' observations were keen and their comments were candid and insightful, thus providing rich data that contributed to my understanding of their experiences within a collaborative group for which I served as facilitator. The research design allowed us to examine what aspects of these experiential activities that they shared in common. Additionally, I was able, through their comments and observations, to examine my intended focus on collaborative learning and to interpret through data analysis how my focus may have been translated when applied in my practice of facilitation.

The methodology used within the design of the study purposefully included opportunities for flexibility and change, as is the nature of my practice. Therefore, the dynamic rather than static methods and procedures provided a way for me to reflect on my own practice and evaluate myself in the hope that I would better understand whether or not there are any prerequisite factors that are essential to the formation of such a caring network and to pair that with the participants' reflections to

achieve an in-depth evaluation of my collaborative facilitation techniques. By examining my practice and the experiences of those in the training group, I wanted to be able to determine ways of co-constructing knowledge within a collaborative training group that would bring all to the table in an equal way and would contribute to the skills of the RAs who would, in turn, model for their high school charges ways of relating to one another.

Summary

This chapter has presented the context and design of the study. Action research methodology was chosen to explore the theoretical framework as identified in Chapter 1 due to its inherent iterative cycles of planning, acting and observing, reflecting, and replanning. The hermeneutic analysis of data reflected a parallel pattern of continual iterative cycles as data sources were examined in a part-to-whole dialectic. Reliability and validity of data was addressed through the triangulation of multiple data sources. The use of a dynamic research methodology allowed me to integrate flexibility and changes as needed throughout the study.

What follows in Chapter 3 are detailed descriptions of the experiential learning activities that were incorporated into the research study design for the purpose of creating a collaborative learning group. It is hoped that these vivid descriptions will immerse the reader into the cultural context of the study.

CHAPTER 3

THE RESEARCH PROJECT: SELF-EXPLORATION, APPLICATION, AND EMPOWERMENT

Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents detailed descriptions of the specific activities within the research project and provides a look into the cultural context within which the study is set. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) discussed the characteristics and nature of qualitative data and note the following: "Data are not inert. They are not a fixed corpus of materials on which procedures of analysis are performed. We should be using data to think with and think about. That means bringing to bear an active, creative approach" (p. 191). Patton (2002) adds that hermeneutics can inform qualitative inquiry by providing the perspective that "…what something means depends on the cultural context in which it was originally created as well as the cultural context within which it is subsequently interpreted" (p. 113). To that end, this chapter invites the reader to "think with and think about" the components within the training and the cultural context that was the setting for this action research study.

Patton (2002) used the term *thick description*, a phrase he attributes to Geertz (1973) and Denzin (2001), in discussing the task of delineating people and places. He asserted that, "Description forms the bedrock of all qualitative reporting, whether for scholarly inquiry…or for program evaluation" (p. 438). A key concept in facilitating experiential learning activities is to set into motion circumstances that will challenge the participants to shift their usual thought patterns and cause them to seek out alternative solutions, that is, to "think outside the box." This underlying premise is approached by

observing the group and matching opportunities for growth with appropriate activities, support, and guidance.

I also had to be mindful of two underlying objectives for the research: 1) to explore the RAs experience with me as a collaborative facilitator within an experiential framework, 2) through this action research to inform my practice of facilitation. An additional outcome was to prepare the RAs to work with the high school project participants. As I selected activities to be included in the research and training design, I kept in mind the need for the RAs to transfer their learning experience into their own practice of facilitation with the high school students. Therefore, all activities and exercises within the three components of ***Self-Exploration***, ***Application***, and ***Empowerment*** were chosen within this underlying framework.

Another aspect of my underlying rationale was training the RAs to work with the high school students, so I knew that it was imperative that activities were structured to provide optimum opportunity for the RAs learning to be transferred from the training context to the supervisory context. I envisioned that the progression through these three components of activities would parallel the goals that were set for the RAs in working with the high school students. The RAs must get to know their students, assess each individual's strengths and weaknesses, help to provide opportunities wherein all of the high school students may challenge themselves, and empower them to act on their newfound learnings. In summary, both the RAs and the high school students needed to know their own strengths and weaknesses, apply them to their interactions within a variety of group settings, and hopefully leave the summer experience empowered to apply all that they learned toward their future endeavors.

With this underlying rationale as a backdrop, this chapter paints a thick description of the experiential learning activities and invites the reader to share more intimately in our research adventure "outside the box," thus becoming immersed in the context in which our action research took place.

Component One: Self-Exploration

In order to get all of the group members into a more relaxed, collaborative mode, the research participants and I began with some activities to help remove the barriers of unfamiliarity. As commonly acknowledged in training literature, icebreakers are a means of initially engaging participants in a training program. They are also a focus of the experiential learning model as they serve to provide an initial shared experience that can serve as a conversational springboard among strangers (Cain & Joliff, 1998; Priest & Gass, 2005; Schoel & Maizell, 2002).

Self-Exploration Assessments

Our actual training time was limited to 3 days, so I wanted to facilitate a learning opportunity whereby the RAs could begin to swiftly identify the individual strengths and weaknesses of the group members and appreciate the resources that this collaborative group had to offer. The design for this part of the training included the use of two assessments that would provide information for each of the participants to use as a basis for sharing with all members of the group. The first was an informal assessment based on Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (Armstrong, 2000; Gardner, 1993). There is a broad body of literature related to Gardner's work, but for purposes of this study, I will offer only a brief summation.

As set forth by in his multiple intelligences (MI) theory, psychologist Howard Gardner suggested that there is a range of "intelligences" encompassed in all human beings and that each individual manifests a unique configuration that includes varying levels of the different intelligences. Characteristics are identified with each category of intelligence and demonstrate different ways that people are "smart." All intelligences are equally important and an individual's knowledge of his or her specific array of strengths merely aids in self-understanding. Gardner's MI theory has been integrated into educational practice and linked with learning styles that can be put into practice to better address teaching and learning issues with students and adults. In this particular instance, my rationale in using the informal MI assessment was to highlight the strengths that were present within our group and, in a very positive way, to highlight the differences that were also present.

The procedure was that all group members, including the researcher/practitioner, completed a Multiple Intelligences Inventory (see Appendix F). Under each of the 8 intelligence categories were 10 statements that are associated with activities of interest within that particular category. Each person was instructed to read the statements and note his or her interest by checking off each statement that was true for them. At the end of each intelligence category, the number of statements checked off in that category was recorded. After all categories had been read, an individual profile was created by listing the number of checked statements in each intelligence category. If the individual checked off 7 or more statements in the category, it was considered to be an area of "high intelligence." If 6 or less statements were checked off, the category was not considered as one in which the individual ranks high. We shared with each other our areas of "high

intelligence," both in the assigned project RA team (AEUB, MSRC, and PCUB) and with the group as a whole, where we summarized the number of each of us that had ranked high in each individual intelligence category. Our results are shown in Table 3.

The profile of our results provides an overview of the RAs talents and strengths as selected and reported by each individual participant. As we discussed our results, we discovered that 14 (67%) of us ranked ourselves high in the area of *bodily kinesthetics* and, therefore, would benefit from movement and physical activity throughout our training. With slightly over half of us (11/52%) ranking ourselves high in musical intelligence, we determined that including some musical aspects within our training activities would be an enhancement to our learning environment. We also noted that 16 (76%) of us ranked ourselves high in the area of *interpersonal* and, as such, we could expect that the majority of the group would be highly aware of personal interactions and more talkative than others.

In our discussion, we observed that 5 (24%) of us ranked ourselves high in logical/mathematical intelligences and we identified those that would serve as resources to aid us in any pursuit requiring those particular skills. A sense of camaraderie that developed throughout this process as we discussed the positive aspects of each intelligence category. This activity served as the initial foundation for self-exploration and helped to provide insights as to the composite skills and personality of our group.

It should be noted that I, as the researcher/practitioner, also took the assessments with the RAs and revealed my rankings as part of the group report, therefore, $N = 21$ in Table 3. In this way, I could use myself as an example when discussing specific aspects of MI rather than pointing out a specific group member's rankings.

Table 3. Number and Percent of Participants Ranking High in Each Multiple Intelligence Area

MI Intelligence Area:	Key Characteristics:	Number and Percent of RAs Ranking High in Category (*N = 21*)
Linguistic	The capacity to use words effectively, whether orally or in writing; and to manipulate syntax or structure of language, the semantics or meanings of language, and the pragmatic dimensions or practical uses of language	9 (43%)
Logical /Mathematical	The capacity to use numbers effectively, and to reason well; includes sensitivity to logical patterns, and relationships, statements and propositions.	5 (24%)
Spatial/Visual	The ability to perceive the visual-spatial world accurately and to perform transformations on those perceptions; involves sensitivity to color, line, shape, form, space and relationships that exist between these elements.	9 (43%)
Bodily Kinesthetic	Expertise in using one's whole body to express ideas and feelings and facility in using one's hands to produce or transform things; involves specific physical skills such as coordination, balance, dexterity, strength, flexibility, and speed, as well proprioceptive, tactile, and hapatic capacities.	14 (67%)
Musical	The capacity to perceive, discriminate, transform, and express musical forms; includes sensitivity to the rhythm, pitch or melody, and timbre or tone color of a musical piece.	11 (52%)
Interpersonal	The ability to perceive and make distinctions in the moods, intentions, motivations, and feelings of other people; includes sensitivity to facial expressions, voice, and gestures; capacity for discriminating among many different kinds of interpersonal cues; and the ability to respond effectively to those cues in some pragmatic way.	16 (76%)
Intrapersonal	Self-knowledge and the ability to act adaptively on the basis of that knowledge; includes having an accurate picture of oneself (strengths and limitations) awareness of inner moods, intentions, motivations, temperaments and desires, and the capacity for self-discipline, self-understanding, and self-esteem.	7 (33%)
Naturalist	Expertise in the recognition and classification of the numerous species – the flora and fauna – of an individual's environment; includes sensitivity to other natural phenomena (e.g., cloud formations, and mountains) and, in the case of those growing up in an urban environment, the capacity to discriminate among nonliving forms such as cars, sneakers, CD covers, etc.)	1 (less than 1%)

Source: Armstrong, T. (2000). *Multiple intelligences in the classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

We followed the MI assessment with a *True Colors* assessment. Again, as with multiple intelligences, there is a broad range of literature that delves into personality assessment and many instruments that may be utilized in such endeavors, but that is not the focus of this research. The *True Colors* metaphor was developed by Lowry (2007), who cites as sources Jung, Briggs, Briggs-Myers, and Keirsey.

Lowry (2007) contended that a considerable body of information supports the theory that there are patterns of human behavior or temperament that form characteristic groupings. He purported that a growing body of knowledge also supports the theory that identification of these characteristic groupings of human behavior serve as keys to individual self-esteem and personal growth.

The procedure utilized for this assessment was to provide a brief introduction of *True Colors*, followed by the assessment, and complete the process by providing descriptive handouts (see Appendix E) and a time for group interaction. *True Colors* groups personality traits into four color-coded sets of behavioral characteristic preferences, as seen in Table 4. It is stressed that each individual possesses all characteristic preferences to some degree, however, each person operates most frequently from their strongest preferences. The assessment allows each individual to rank their preferences in order from strongest to weakest. Based on this ranking, the group members divided themselves into "color groups," where we explored our own preferences in greater detail. Each group was asked to come up with a list of descriptors to assist them in clarifying their primary preferences in a variety of settings. This enabled each color preference group to better explain their ways of thinking and acting to the remaining color groups. Table 5 denotes the color group members' collaborative work together.

Table 4. Characteristics of Primary Personality Color Groups as Defined in *True Colors* Personality Assessment

Representative Color:	Description:
Blue	This color represents calm. Contemplation of this color pacifies the central nervous system. It creates physiological tranquility and psychological contentment. Those with **Blue** as a Primary Color value balance and harmony. They prefer lives free from tension...settled, united, and secure. Blue represents loyalty and a sense of belonging, and yet, when friends are involved, a vulnerability. Blue corresponds to depth in feeling and a relaxed sensitivity. It is characterized by empathy, aesthetic experiences, and reflective awareness.
Green	This color expresses itself psychologically as human will in operation: as persistence and determination. **Green** is an expression of firmness and consistency. Its strength can lead to a resistance to change if it is not proven that the change will work or is warranted. Those with Green as a Primary Color value their intellect and capabilities above all else. Comfort in these areas creates a sense of personal security and self-esteem. Green characteristics seek to increase the certainty of their own values through being assertive and requiring differences from others in intellectual areas. They are rarely settled in their countenance, since they depend upon information rather than feelings to create a sense of well-being. Green expresses the grounding of theory and data in its practical applications and creative constructs.
Gold	This color is the body's natural perceptions. It represents a need to be responsible, to fulfill duties and obligations, to organize and structure our life and that of others. Those with **Gold** as a Primary Color value being practical and sensible. They believe that people should earn their way in life through work and service to others. Gold reflects a need to belong through carrying a share of the load in all areas of living. It represents stability, maintenance of the culture and the organization, efficiency, and dependability. It embraces the concepts of home and family with fierce loyalty and faithfulness.
Orange	This color represents energy, consuming physiological potency, power, and strength. **Orange** is the expression of vital force, of nervous and glandular activity. Thus, it has the meaning of desire and all forms of appetite and craving. Those with Orange as a Primary Color feel the will to achieve results, to win, to be successful. They desire all things that offer intense living and full experience. Orange generates an impulse toward active doing: sport, struggle, competition and enterprising productivity. In temporal terms, Orange is the present.

Source: Lowry, D. (2007). http://www.truecolors.org. Retrieved May 4, 2007.

Table 5. Personality Preference Descriptions as Determined by Group Members Within Each Primary Color Preference

Primary Color Preference	Joys, Values, & Likes ☺	Stressors, Frustrations, & Upsets ☹	Ways of Resolving Conflict & Stress 😐
Blue	• Positive group dynamics • Helping others • Good communication • Honesty • Self-reliance • Compassion • Trust	• Laziness • Not being listened to • Stupidity • Rudeness • Not having/not knowing the plan • When others take themselves too seriously • People we care for get hurt • Being lied to • Being taken advantage of • Having our kindness being taken for weakness	• Talk it out – don't just let it go • Be honest • Be respectful and listen to our reasons when we disagree • Have fun • Acknowledge our efforts – be appreciative
Green	• Enjoy being around friends & family • R-E-S-P-E-C-T • Open-minded • Understanding • The "little" things • Neutral • Calm, composed, & collected • Versatile • Good days • Attention	• Ignorance • Too many people • Close-mindedness • "Simple" people • Overwhelming school work • One-dimensional people • Unrealistic people • Not being able to explore & experience life & meet new people	• Music • Think (be alone) • Take a break
Gold	• Friends • Organization • Planning • Respect • Schedule • Hygiene • Punctuality	• Disorganization • Not on time • Not consistent • Ineffective leader • Bad planning • Sloppiness • Lack of detail • Laziness • Not Appreciative • Disrespect • No focus	• Confrontation • Personal time • Stress ball • Eating • Cleaning • Talk to someone else
Orange	• Fitness • Health • Food • Chocolate • Friends & family • Money • Sports • Independence	• Bad drivers • Late people • Ignorance • Racist or "redneck" individuals • Laziness	• Meditate • "Me" time • Count to 10 • "Woo-sah" • Smoking • Bubble baths • Massage • Talking

Both the MI and True Colors assessments were used so as to maximize group members' knowledge of each other within a minimum amount of time. A spirited dialogue arose around the commonalities found among the various color groups including punctuality, being/not being organized, intelligence (or lack thereof), respect, communication, and the importance of relationships. In my past experience with RAs, these precisely matched the areas where frustrations and conflicts arose during their work together.

Through the assessments, we were able to identify significant areas of joys, frustrations, and resolutions, thereby giving "voice" to our needs and wants as prerequisites to a successful and fulfilling time of work together. Together, within our collaborative learning group, the RAs and I were able to construct our own set of values and norms of behavior.

Our final activity on Day One of our training was a problem-solving initiative using our high school students as part of a metaphor. Group members verbally listed resources that were needed for our students to succeed in getting to college. For each resource named, they received a section of PVC pipe as a representation of that resource. Once they had offered all of their ideas and had received their "resources," they were given five marbles that represented our students. Their task was to put the PVC pipe pieces together and get the "students" through the "pipeline to college." Ground rules and safety rules were given, as is part of the frontloading technique used at the start of an experiential learning activity.

As the facilitator, I provided only the minimal information necessary and allowed the participants space to plan, act, and analyze. It was at this point that the group

members began to interact. There was much conversation, talking over each other, small groups formed within the large group, and much general confusion. In true experiential learning fashion, the initiative required *planning*, *action*, *analyzing*, and *replanning* in order to accomplish the task. The time allotted for the task came to an end with no resolution of reaching the goal of the task to get the "students into college"—that is, the marbles into a bucket at the end of the PVC pipeline. Figure 8 provides a look at the RAs as they worked together on this initial task. As we debriefed (processed) the activity, several group members verbally expressed some frustration at not being able to complete the task. The entire group determined that they wanted to try the activity again in order to put the knowledge gained from that first experience into action (evidence of *reflecting* and *replanning*).

Figure 8. Research Participants Working Together to Accomplish the Initial Experiential Task in the Research Study

Component Two: Application—Using Experiential Collaboration in Intensive Action

It is at this point that the stages of collaborative group development in an experiential framework need to be addressed. Fullan (2001a) discussed elements that contribute to the establishment of an environment conducive to the formation of collaborative learning groups. Identified are mutual trust, active empathy, access to help, lenience in judgment, and courage. Examination of the developmental sequences of small groups reveal specific, clearly defined stages through which all groups pass with each stage focused on specific elements that contribute toward the formation of collaborative teams. Within the experiential learning model, Tuckman (1965) described clearly defined stages of group development as "forming, norming, storming, and performing" (p. 386).

In her book *Group Processes: A Developmental Perspective,* Wheelan (1994) discussed various comparable stages of group development that have been proposed by a variety of other studies. Wheelan proposed an integrative model of group development that delineates the stages as: (1) dependency and inclusion, (2) counterdependency and fight, (3) trust and structure, (4) work, and (5) termination. Specific affective and cognitive elements are associated with each of these stages. Individual needs include acceptance, belonging, being valued by others in the group, a sense of ownership and purpose, and investment in the process. A summary of group needs includes role definitions, predictability, ground rules/expectations, acknowledgement of the value of the group as a whole (the sum is greater than its parts), equality among group members, and investment of the group as a whole in the collaborative process.

Lyman and Foyle (1990) asserted that, within an educational setting, school climate and morale of colleagues and students are enhanced by positive informal

interactions such as active listening, tone of voice, language, and personal concern. Villa and Thousand (2000) use four levels of social skills to generate an individual and group assessment of collaboration skills. The four levels include trust building, communication and distributed leadership, decision making and creative problem solving, and conflict management.

Gerard (2005) provided a list of phrases used by people who have been engaged in collaborative conversations across a wide variety of settings. Phrases used to describe such conversations include: “a level playing field” where respect for all is found; “space and pace” wherein all may hear and be heard; an exploration of our individual and group assumptions to reveal our thinking and generate new possibilities; “building shared understanding” that is derived from the different viewpoints of group members (p. 336). These descriptive terms parallel the characteristics found in the Project Adventure experiential learning model’s *Full Value Contract* in that mutual respect and mutual support among all group members are part of the central core values. Additionally, group development for both collaborative learning and experiential learning encompass attitudes of unconditional positive regard for all members that provides “spaces” or “zones” wherein optimum growth may occur.

Mountain Challenge

With all of these things in development, our research group approached Day Two of our training, which was to take place at a low ropes course. The ropes course activities were rich with opportunities for individual and group interaction. Issues of self-efficacy, motivation, and determination would inevitably arise. The challenges for the research participants would be in their responses to the problem-solving activities. My challenge

would be to utilize appropriate facilitation skills to assist them in meeting those challenges.

We gathered together to travel in vans to our training location, about 30 minutes away from UT. The setting for this was *Mountain Challenge, LLC.* Founded in 1987, this experiential learning company serves educational groups from elementary through college level, community/church groups, and business/corporate groups from such diverse fields as health care, advertising, food service, banking, and government. UT Upward Bound projects have included a day at *Mountain Challenge* as one of our focus activities for our high school students for the past 8 years. Taking the RAs to *Mountain Challenge* had a dual purpose in that all group members would have an intensive action time to help facilitate their individual learning and would also prepare them to assist their high school students in having that same opportunity for growth. Thirteen of the group members had, at some point, had a ropes course experience that provided a past connection with our upcoming day's activities.

Our agenda for Day Two was to complete a progression of experiential learning activities that would allow the RAs to practice and apply their knowledge gained from the previous day's activities in such a way as to engender collaborative growth and reflection. In keeping with the experiential learning framework and the processes involved with action research, the sequencing of the activities was the responsibility of the facilitator in conjunction with the group members.

When selecting experiential learning activities to be included within the project design, I used several references that provide detailed instructions about all aspects of each activity. Rohnke (1984, 1989) listed scenarios, safety considerations, procedures,

and necessary equipment for a wide variety of games, activities, and challenges that are categorized by age level, group size, social issue (such as trust, decision-making, etc.), and level of difficulty. Schoel et al. (1988) referenced this and other activity books when discussing the specifics of matching activities with group goals and needs to form a progression of experiential learning opportunities.

Moon (2001) emphasized that in designing short-term training courses "attention should be given to thinking about the purposes of the activities in relation to the anticipated outcome of the course" (p. 138). Schoel and Maizell (2002) devoted considerable attention to activity selection, suggesting that the GRABBSS assessment tool can also aid in choosing activities appropriate for group goals and development. They also noted that within the facilitator's selection of activities and formulation of a "game plan," multiple elements (such as communication, critical thinking, etc.) may converge. Cain and Joliff (1998) identified the first step in planning experiential learning activities is to "evaluate the needs and goals of the group" (p. 22).

Our collaborative group discussed expectations for the day and worked to assess our needs in order to formulate our group goals. We determined that, based on the lack of communication during our pipeline activity on Day One, we needed to work on our communication skills—listening, talking one at a time, and hearing ideas from all group members. With this in mind, we set out upon our adventure.

Another member was added to our collaborative group during the ropes course. In order to provide a focal point to enhance transfer of learning, *Egbert,* a fresh egg, was included as one of our group members. The inclusion of a fragile egg is an oft-used metaphor in experiential and adventure based learning activities. Responsibility and care

for Egbert, so named by the group, must be distributed among all participants throughout the day and standards of "care" are discussed at the outset. It is usually required that this fresh, new member of the group participate fully in all activities—definitely not being set aside or lost in a pocket during the day's activities.

Our first activity was a blindfold walk. After going deep into the wooded ropes course area, we stopped. As the facilitator, I asked for two volunteers to lead the group. I took these two aside and explained to them that they would have to lead the group down the remaining pathway, across a log bridge over a small creek, to a nearby clearing (all areas that the main group had not seen as of yet). Using a somewhat elaborate metaphor, I explained that due to fumes from a "chemical spill" (imaginary) their vocal chords were paralyzed and that they would have to lead the group without talking and without touching them. I left them to plan their strategy and returned to the remaining group members whom they could not see at the present moment because they were further down the trail. Again using the "chemical spill" metaphor, I explained to the larger group that their eyes had to be covered in order to protect them from the "fumes," but that their leaders would help them get to safety. And so, all of them donned blindfolds to prepare for their "escape."

A panicked look usually comes across the faces of the volunteer leaders when they return to find their group wearing blindfolds. At that point, they were no longer allowed to talk, even to the facilitator, so they had to find alternative ways to communicate with each other and with the group. It was at this point that the facilitator informed the blindfolded group that their leaders could not talk with them and that they would be leading them in an alternative fashion. This scenario set in motion a rapid

movement into the realm of problem solving and critical thinking on the part of both the volunteer leaders and the blindfolded group members. At that point, the role of the facilitator, in collaborative fashion, was to guide as needed rather than to lead the activity. Figure 9 illustrates the progress of the group in achieving their initial task on Day Two. As seen in the photograph, the participants found solutions to achieve the goal related to this task.

Our next activity involved all group members sitting on a large cantilevered log in such a manner as to balance the log. Again, using a metaphor, I introduced the initiative, provided basic safety considerations, and allowed the group to work together toward accomplishing the task at hand. Figure 10 visually illustrates for the reader the context within which our activity took place.

Figure 9. Research Group Participants—Blindfold Walk

Figure 10. Research Group Participants—Introduction to the Balance Log

This activity brought the group to its pinnacle of frustration. Using Tuckman's (1965) terms, it was at this juncture that the group entered the *storming* phase of its development. There was much discussion regarding ways to approach the task. Within the discussion, alliances formed among the proponents of differing opinions. The physical and mental comfort zones of the participants were being stretched. As the facilitator, I assumed the role of a guide who merely provided the basic facts related to the challenge. Leadership circulated among and between differing members of the group. Cycles of *planning*, *action*, *observing*, *reflecting*, and *replanning* were repeated over and over for a span of approximately an hour and a half.

During the debrief/processing, one participant remarked that he had to "**break the 'me bubble' "** in order to proceed with the task. The idea of broaching one's personal comfort zone and allowing others into that space where collaboration and growth could occur took hold and began to permeate the group's behavior, actions, and attitudes. A clear visual image of the change in perspective is illustrated in Figure 11.

From that turning point, we proceeded through two more sets of experiential learning challenges. The first one involved application of the trust gained in the preceding activity by allowing another into your personal comfort zone while traversing a V-shaped cable that is approximately 2 feet off the ground. This activity is commonly known as *Wild Woosey* (Rohnke, 1989). As facilitator, I explained that the goal of the activity is for the group to link up in pairs of two to form a partnership in which they use each other as balancing resources in order to traverse from the narrow end of the V-shaped cable to the wide end of the V-shaped cable. Figure 12 illustrates the close proximity of the two partners at the start of the activity.

Figure 11. Research Group Participants—Completing the Balance Log Initiative

Figure 12. Two Partners Balance Each Other To Begin Their Walk Down the Cable

The pictures in Figure 13 and Figure 14 demonstrate the widening gap that grew between the partners as they continued to traverse the cable. As facilitator of the activity, I prompted the two participants to lean in toward each other, and put their hands and arms at an "A" or tent angle. The secret to success in this activity is for both participants to form a tent-shaped angle with their bodies, thus using each other's strength to counterbalance each other and continue to traverse the cable as the space between them increases. Other group members are involved in the activity as "spotters," meaning that they stand close beside the pair on the wire so that they may offer assistance as needed. They may not touch the participants, but are there to simply break the fall should they decide to step off the wire or lose their balance. Spotters may also offer verbal suggestions and encouragement, as appropriate.

Figure 13. Participants Rely on Each Other While Traversing the Cable

Figure 14. Participants Demonstrate the Proper Stance Needed to Form the Trust

During the debrief/processing of the activity, we discussed that it is human nature to begin to pull back and retreat from reaching out to our resources during times of trouble or "imbalance." However, just as the physics of leaning on each other allows them to use a counterbalancing principle to complete the task in this activity, we can be most successful when we trust others and lean on them as capable resources who can counterbalance us when we get off track. The dialogue around this activity helped to emphasize the collaborative nature that the RAs would play for each other during their work with the high school students.

The last activity of Day Two was to get the entire group of RAs across a narrow, shallow stream by swinging on a rope while carrying a cup full of "nitro" (water). Known commonly as *Nitro Crossing* (Rohnke, 1984), this activity necessitates that members of the group work together to find ways to assist each other and requires high levels of communication, trust, and problem solving, but is also very physical and usually results in much fun among group members.

In my role of facilitator, I provided for the RAs the basic metaphorical framework in that they were still "escaping" from our earlier chemical spill and that the "water" they were carrying was the antidote that would save everyone in our area from being poisoned by the chemical fumes. The metaphor helps to create the structure of the activity, thus giving explanation as to the rationale for the specific guidelines that are set up by the facilitator for completion of the activity. Figure 15 shows part of the group as they assist one of the team members to cross the creek. As common in experiential learning challenges, I, as the facilitator, made specific adaptations to the activity procedures to tailor the initiative to the group's needs. Within my role as participant/researcher, I also joined in as a participant who faced the challenge of crossing the stream via the rope.

Within the experiential circle that we had formed together, we as colearners began to explore our perceptions and attitudes through the relational responsibility that "lies within the shared attempt to sustain the conditions in which we can join in the construction of meaning and morality." (McNamee & Gergen, 1999, p. xi). Together as collaborative learners in an experiential learning setting, we discussed the influences that we had on each other and our contributions that we made toward each other's understandings throughout the day's activities.

Integral amid each activity were discussions around our strengths and weaknesses—what we could have done better and where our communication and understanding of each other was strong and weak. Integrity and the impact of making ethical choices in helping each other were part of our discussion. Integral within each activity are choices to be made that relate to the ethics and morality of decision making. In trying to accomplish the task at hand, do group members elect to "cheat" and break rules or do their choices of action reflect staying true to "do the right thing"? These kinds of decisions carry forth into the judgements and actions that the RAs would inevitably be forced to make in supervising the high school students. The common commitment toward working together to accomplish a set task laid the foundation for relationships that formed a safe space in which this informative dialogue could take place—a "container" (Isaacs, 1999).

Our van ride back to the UT campus was marked by a significant sense of camaraderie and collegiality, as demonstrated by the laughter and high energy of the conversations among all group members. Many reflections were shared among the participants as they good naturedly joked with each others about the day's activities, particularly related to aspects such as sitting on each other's laps on the balance beam and getting wet as they crossed the stream in the final activity of the day. We ended our training session for that day, ready to take on the new challenges that awaited us with our next training activities.

Figure 15. Participants Work Together to Complete *Nitro Crossing*

Component Three: Empowerment—Enhancing Facilitation Skills through an Experiential Learning Model

Experiential learning provides valuable lessons that the participants derive for themselves from intense repetitive cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning*. Each iteration of the cycle assisted in the continual building of critical thinking and problem solving skills as reflected in the *Adventure Wave* (Schoel & Maizell, 2002) discussed in Chapter 1 (p. 31) that incorporates a planned pattern of reflection. The pattern concludes with a *Now what?* question for the purpose of connecting learnings derived from experiential activities with both the present moment

and to real-world applications. The application of learning from one setting into another setting is often seen as *transfer of learning*, a broad field of study in psychology, education, business, and, basically, in everyday life.

Think for a moment about small children. They touch something hot, it burns, and instantaneously they have learned something about the nature of hot versus cold. As they continue to explore, they encounter many more opportunities to discern the discomfort of touching something hot. The cycle repeats over and over, resulting in application of past experience to present situations. And so it continues as we go through life.

According to Leberman, McDonald, and Doyle (2006), the concept of transfer of learning is pervasive throughout life's everyday experiences and intrinsically linked to our lives in multiple contexts. They provide several interpretations of transfer of learning:

> Real transfer happens when people carry over something they learned in one context to a 'significantly different' context (Fogarty et al., 1992, p. x.)… Transfer is the application of knowledge learned in one setting or for one purpose to another setting and/or purpose (Gagne et al., 1993, p. 235)…In a sense any learning requires a modicum of transfer. (p.1)

Leberman and her colleagues conclude their interpretations with the following quote: "To say that learning has occurred means that the person can display that learning later (Perkins & Salomon, 1996a, p. 423)." (p. 1)

Mayer and Wittrock (1996) defined the concept of problem-solving transfer as the circumstance wherein "a person uses previous problem-solving experience to devise a solution for a new problem" (p. 47). They noted that educational psychologists have for nearly a century investigated the conditions surrounding a student's ability to use prior

learning from a previous situation in a new, unfamiliar situation. Also included in their discussion is a differentiation between *knowledge transfer*, something measured as a correct percentage that then affects new learning by increasing ease of learning, and *problem-solving transfer*, which they define as the use of prior problem-solving experience to help solve a new or different kind of problem. Both Mayer and Wittrock, as well as Leberman et al., acknowledged that the ability to transfer learning from one circumstance to another is an essential skill in today's world.

Action research is designed to engage the research participants, along with the research practitioner, to put prior learning and experience to use in present and future situations. For the RAs who comprised the research participants in this study, the opportunity would come to use their facilitation skills in a very short time—our high school students would be moving into the dorms in a matter of only 2 days. I, along with the RAs, would have multiple opportunities to reflect on the experiences we had together and apply them in a variety of circumstances. In order to emphasize lessons learned from our experiential collaborative learning, I determined that this component should provide maximum opportunity for the research participants to serve as facilitators.

Peer Facilitation

The main goal for our third and final component was to utilize the knowledge gained throughout the preceding components to empower the group members toward a more active role in their own learning. Each project team of RAs was to facilitate an activity or a series of activities for the entire group.

During my own training days, I recalled being somewhat intimidated by those who were seasoned practitioners of experiential learning activities. This was a self-

imposed anxiety that sometimes overshadowed the collaborative environment of mutual respect and support that was a part of our training sessions. My hope was that, although brief in terms of time, the participants in this action research study would have sufficiently developed an environment wherein all participants in each project team of RAs would feel comfortable in putting forth their ideas and planning an activity for their peers.

To support their creativity and enthusiasm for the task at hand, I provided a wide array of equipment and materials—activity books, tennis balls, ropes, tape, markers, etc.—for each group to use as needed. Together, we determined how much planning time should be allotted and the groups went into action.

What developed looked much like Arlene Katz' (2001) definition of collaborative learning:

> People acting as resources for each other in a particular context of interaction. But collaborative learning as such can ONLY be collaboratively defined by those who are involved in it. And with each step, each nuance, each subtlety, we are on the way to creating a community of resourceful learners (online communication, March 30, 2001).

In my field notes, I recorded observations about the high energy demonstrated within each Upward Bound project team of RAs as they eagerly embraced the opportunity to serve in facilitative roles.

The selected activities of each team of RAs reflected their own collective cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning.* My role totally became that of colearner and group participant. Time constraints demanded that each team only take one

turn at facilitating, but maximum time was given for each team to discuss and plan how they wanted to engage their fellow collaborators. The empowerment of the groups was demonstrated in the extensive debriefing that they facilitated following each of their activities. The enhancement of their skills was apparent throughout the process. Figure 3.9 is a view of the participants as they formed a collaborative circle to debrief one of the peer facilitated activities.

Figure 16. Research Participants Interacting in Debriefing Circle During Peer Facilitation Activities

Summary

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide a thick description of the activities that comprised the project so as to immerse the reader in the context of this research study. The three components of ***Self-Exploration, Application,*** and ***Empowerment*** provided many challenges, joys, frustrations, and sheer physical tiredness for the research participants and the research practitioner.

In discussing thick descriptions, Patton (2002) references Denzen's assertion that such descriptions take the reader "beyond mere fact and surface appearances" (p. 503) and provide aspects of detail and context that allow individuals to connect with one another, bringing about emotions and self-feelings. He continued by stating that "thick description sets up and makes possible interpretation" (p. 503). Chapter 4 will present the findings of this research study as grounded within the context of this thick description.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCES

Chapter Introduction

Presented in this chapter are themes based on a shared view among the participants as derived from their own words. Their responses address the question: ***"How do participants in a group for which I serve as a collaborative facilitator within an experiential framework describe their experience?"*** The theme categories that were established from the data were reflected explicitly in all three of the focus group interviews and in at least 5 of the 10 individual interviews with implicit agreement that reached saturation among the remaining interviews. The words of the participants are used to paint a "verbal portrait" (Polkinghorne, 1989) of each theme. These four themes are thoroughly explored in the following pages through the use of relevant literature and participant quotes that are personalized with fictitious names.

Theme One—Transformative Learning: *" …a big learning experience"*

From the outset of the study, participants expressed that they wanted and expected to learn from the opportunities that they believed the RA experience would provide for them from beginning to end. Ellen spoke to the sharing of knowledge among the group participants and stated that, "***…they help*[ed] *me learn more about myself."*** She followed with a comment that seemed to sum up the participants' perspectives of their experience: ***"It was basically a big learning experience."***

On the first questionnaire that participants completed as their initial activity on Day One of the training, responses overwhelmingly reflected a shared expectation for learning how to work with the other RAs and with the high school students. One

participant summed it up by responding, ***"To prepare us to work with each other and the students"*** and another stated***, "I hope to learn how to better deal with the students involved in the program, specifically how to provide a better learning experience for them and myself simultaneously."*** One participant acknowledged the potential for the experience to carry over from the summer by responding, ***"Make new friends, bond with the kids, impact their lives and have them impact mine."***

The comments of the participants alluded to the potential of transformative learning within their experience. Mezirow (1990) set forth the theory that critical reflection around the assumptions, beliefs, and values that one holds can produce insights that assist in making meaning out of common, everyday experiences. This intellectual activity can lead one to change his perspective and that is the key to transformative learning. Smith and Reio (2006) contended that "transformative learning is rooted in life experience and the fundamental human need to make sense of our lives" (p. 127). This removes the finite barriers of one's perceptions and leads to new insights and personal meanings, which lead to new roles and behaviors.

The initial focus of the research study was to examine the experience of the participants in a collaborative group that was facilitated through an experiential framework. The participants' comments as recorded in the subsequent questionnaires addressed the depth of learning that was gained through their individual and collective experiences. Comments included:

- ***"I have learned much more about teamwork and communication that I did not know before."***

- ***"…new skills that I developed are a better leadership view…speaking up, and trusting…"***
- ***"I learned a lot…it was a very knowledgeable experience."***
- ***"I've learned more in these training sessions than I've learned in the past 4 years."***

In the focus group interviews, Abby stated that, ***"I want myself to learn more. I want to learn from this experience, and that's what I really want to get out of it."*** In another focus group, Alison observed, ***"Every activity, everything that we did had a clear point, a clear message, a clear reason we were doing it."*** Nathan commented in his focus group interview that, ***"I think I learned a lot, especially about myself and my fellow colleagues. I learned a lot about different ways to handle different situations."***

The participants frequently referred to the fact that they were excited to be able to learn from each other. Senge (1990) described this optimal space for learning as creative tension. When there is a gap between one's personal vision and current reality, the result is an opportunity and challenge. However, that gap between vision and current reality is also a source of energy. If there were no gap, there would be no need for any action to move toward the vision. "Indeed, the gap is *the* source of creative energy. We call this gap *creative tension"* (p. 150).

The participants' anticipation for learning together reflected educational practices situated in peer learning. O'Donnell (2006) used the term *peer learning* to describe various forms of learning in which peers help one another. She includes cooperative and collaborative learning, peer tutoring, and cross-age tutoring among the many forms in which peers interact to learn from each other. Johnson and Johnson (1991) suggested five

basic elements that assist in promoting learning together: (1) positive interdependence; (2) face-to-face promotive interaction; (3) individual accountability and personal responsibility; (4) interpersonal and small group skills; and (5) group processing. The experiential learning model that formed the central tenet in the theoretical framework of this study contained opportunities for each of those elements, thus establishing an environment conducive to peer learning.

The creative tension and the potential to help each other learn were acknowledged in the focus group discussions when Abby stated, ***"… each person has a different way or attitude with the challenges they come across. So if you come across a problem, they'll bring a different way or different method to help if you need that help."*** The differing levels of experience that each participant brought to the collaborative circle added to the creative tension to provide a reservoir of resources that individuals could call upon as needed to expand their knowledge and skills.

In our interview conversations together, both in focus groups and individually, the participants revealed that part of their initial expectations were that the training would provide opportunities for learning and that the learning would bring along with it changes in understanding and knowledge. In reflections within both the focus groups and the one-to-one interviews, participants acknowledged the changes that they perceived in themselves, their own individual thinking, and within the collaborative group as they progressed through the training.

In his focus group interview, Derrick shared that, overall, ***"…I think that everyone has taken some good key aspects from our training."*** While reflecting within the focus group setting, participants spoke to individual benefits derived from the

training. Cindy commented that her experiences as part of our group ***"…helped me to better my skills, better my leadership skills, better my communication and all that."*** Abby, who was working as an RA for her first time, observed that, ***"…the more experienced people were very open to the less experienced ones, because they*** **[the new ones]** ***came up with new ideas. I felt like 'we don't know this, but how about doing this?' They were very open to our ideas."***

Weil and McGill (1989) observed that in the information age, the challenge for training and educational programs is to assist in developing competent individuals "who have initiative, sensitivity to others and awareness of practical realities, along with sufficient confidence, insight, skill and flexibility to act effectively in a changing world." They assert that experiential learning methods contain myriad opportunities for such skills to be developed, thereby producing "self-motivated, assertive, adaptable, able situation improvers and communicators" (p. 36). The RAs alluded that their experiences in our experiential collaborative group contributed toward developing such skills for them.

When reflecting in the one-to-one interviews, the RAs reported that the experience of training brought with it changes in their perspectives and attitudes. In commenting about the overall experience, Alison stated that***, "…it was the most empowering thing I've done in a long time."*** She continued to disclose that her experience as an RA has given her much to think about and ***"…has sort of completely changed the way I'm thinking about what I do after I graduate…it kind of changed my job prospects."***

In additional reflections from the interviews, the participants implied that there were numerous changes in their perspectives that came out of their experiences and participation in the training. Looking back on her experience within our collaborative group, Ann shared that, ***"There is absolutely no way you can come out the same."*** As Ryan reflected on his learnings from the experience, he commented that ***"…everything I learned in training I basically took with me into facilitating with students."*** Dave summed up his feelings in the following observation:

> ***"The training helped in communicating, getting through with the other RAs, and especially the kids, like how to approach the kids, how to, you know, do it on an individual basis, how to make some sense out of what's going on, and the training definitely helped. I mean, without the training I don't know where I would be."***

These participant comments represented the significance that learning played in the research participants' experiences. As they worked to integrate their experiences into the fabric of their lives, their actions followed by critical reflection contributed to transformative learning—**"a big learning experience."**

Theme Two—Competence and Control: *"…we learned to bridge the 'me bubble' "*

Competence and control are constructs that came into focus through the participants' comments as related to their actual experiential learning activities. Theoretical perspectives that incorporate these constructs are found in theories set forth by Maslow (1954), and Rotter (1966). Maslow's hierarchy of needs noted that basic safety needs are essential before people strive for higher needs such as belonging or esteem. Each person's safety needs are different, based on their personal experiences and

beliefs. As such, each participant in our activities had a different set of boundaries with which to define their level of competence and control which affected their level of comfort and participation. Rotter's theory of locus of control includes issues of outcome expectation or "belief about the anticipated outcomes of actions" (Schunk and Zimmerman, 2006, p. 351). In this case, each participant's sense of control regarding their actions and the group's actions were also factors in their level of comfort and participation.

Early in our second training day, the RAs were confronted with the challenge of balancing every member of the group on a cantilevered log (see Chapter 3, pp. 101-103). Like many things in life, it seemed like a simple task at first appearance—groups often express the assumption that everyone just needs to get on the log and, with a bit of arranging, it will be balanced. The task, however, is usually much harder for groups than they initially assume because it requires a high level of cooperation, communication, and close physical proximity. Given that the RAs were still in the early stages of group formation, they struggled to establish those skills and, thus, achieving the task at hand proved to be difficult until a few of the participants determined that they would simply have to give up their personal space and sit closer on the log. From that point, the group members were squeezed together at various points on the log, eliminating any physical space between them.

In the initial debrief of the balancing log initiative, participants were asked to reflect on the actions and attitudes that served as a turning point for the activity. Sam reflected that, ***"…we kind of learned to bridge that 'me bubble' and once we were able to do that, I think we were much more effective in accomplishing the task ahead."*** The

"me bubble" was quickly adopted as a catch phrase for the remainder of the day's activities.

In follow-up interviews, I asked the participants to say more about the ***"me bubble."*** Sam, who had coined the phrase that day at the ropes course, began the discussion with this reply:

> ***"It's your comfort zone. Some people stand a foot away, some people stand right in your face. There are discrepancies in how comfortable we are when we're close to each other, and I believe that when we adapted to each other's 'me bubble,' we were able to uncomfort ourselves for the sake of the group, and I think that is truly effective."***

It was reflected in participant comments from multiple data sources—daily reflection sheets, the focus group interviews, and the one-to-one interviews—that there was an initial hesitancy toward stepping outside of personal comfort zones. Like a rubber band that, once stretched, does not return to its initial tightness, the participants became more comfortable with each other after the first day, but Day Two's active, experiential activities required stretching that dynamic band of trust much further than it had been stretched on the preceding day. As Ann vividly recounted,

> ***"…we went there like two days after we knew each other, it might've even been a day, and we barely even knew each others' names. And we got on this log—well, first we went on this blindfolded trip— and we were like, "Okay, we don't know each other. Should we trust these people?" And we're talking to each other. And then we got on that log and it was like, "Welcome into my world."***

…It was, I mean, we got to know each other really quickly and that formed a bond…beyond any other type of bond I've developed that quickly in my life. It was amazing."

Other participants spoke to the efforts that they made to move further into a realm of greater comfort with the group. Ellen reflected that, "***…you definitely could not have a personal space bubble at all…that was a huge stretch for me."*** The participants alluded to the necessity that both personally and as a group, efforts had to be made so that the group could better function together. Alison shared that, ***"I had to open up…it just became necessary if I was going to really participate."*** Dan remarked that ***"it was great to see people stretching themselves to different strengths,"*** while Nathan stated, ***"We had to get out of our comfort zone."*** Dave related back to the balancing log initiative when he commented that ***"…we learned so much from that one activity, how important it was to communicate and just being patient and open with each other is really what it was."*** He continued his reflections by saying, ***"…if you want to get these tasks accomplished, you're going to have to sacrifice your own comfort for the good of the whole, for the good of the team."***

The ability to break through personal barriers into a more open and expanded personal comfort zone—bridging that "me bubble" —was enhanced by the establishment of an environment where all group members felt safe. With the application of the Full Value Contract and the Challenge by Choice philosophies as described in the Project Adventure experiential learning model, all participants were assured that their efforts were valued and that their choices regarding level of participation were honored. O'Donnell (2006) described Piaget's constructivist theory of cognitive development in

relation to adapting to new environments and concluded that in such circumstances, an individual's cognitive system becomes off balance. To counteract that disruption, the individual seeks to restore equilibrium. She concluded that "through a process of disequilibrium and reequilibration, students construct new cognitive structures" (p. 785). The RAs found themselves "off balance" as they tried to achieve the activity goal through each individual's existing cognitive structure—their comfort zones. Each individual had to "reequilibrate" by breaking the "me bubble."

The participants were asked in our focus groups to comment on their impressions of the learning environment during the initial stages of group development in our training. They acknowledged their need for a safe environment and provided reflections that revealed their initial anxieties. Ann responded, ***"I was initially scared to death, but after 2 hours in the first day of training, I felt like I could really open up."*** Ellen remarked that, ***"I think everyone knew that there were those with more experience and some that*** **[weren't]** ***experienced, so they*** **[didn't]** ***know what to expect."*** Yvonne shared, ***"I have to admit that before I came, I was really nervous because I've never done work*** **[with]** ***high school level*** **[students]."**

As we continued to reflect in our focus groups, participants shared that anxiety quickly gave way to safety and comfort. Norris described the environment as having a ***"laid back, homey feeling…Like if you have something to say, you don't have to feel scared to say it. Nobody's going to mock you."*** Abby noted a lessening in her anxiety when she shared this reflection:

> ***"I think just getting to know everybody and knowing I could be myself and didn't have to act a certain way, do a certain thing, you know, just being myself***

and knowing that my opinion mattered and, you know, what I had to say mattered and nobody was going to say, 'that's stupid.' "

Abby's reflection was supported by Dave's comment that,

"In the training session, everyone was free to speak their mind and be able to ask questions…Everyone pretty much was given the green light to take a leadership role, especially in the different activities in the icebreaker games. Everyone was given the same opportunities pretty much."

Social participation is a key emphasis in sociocultural theories of learning and Wenger (1998) suggested that learners develop competence when they are engaged in meaningful activities in which all participants have legitimate roles in accomplishing the task. With the application of the Full Value Contract and the Challenge by Choice philosophies, all participants were assured that their efforts were valued and that their choices regarding level of participation were honored. As a by-product, the group may experience collective efficacy (Bandura, 2000).

Breaking the ***"me bubble"*** allowed each individual to speak freely and contributed toward the establishment of a safe environment. That environment, in turn, supported each individual's efforts to stretch his comfort zone so that each could break through and go beyond their own limitations. Within the safe environment, there developed equal opportunities for all to be contributing members in our collaborative group's experiential activities.

Theme Three—Mutuality: *"…we're going to be there for each other"*

Reciprocity and *mutuality* were qualities that appeared to permeate throughout both individual and group experiences. Greenberg and Williams (2002) identified these

qualities as being "necessary for optimal teaching/learning experiences" (p. 95) and also note that "mutuality is a quality of group learning" (p. 99). In our one-to-one interview, Abby noted that,

> ***"I think we're all hoping to achieve one goal. So I think if one of us is going to fail, a lot of us are going down in the same boat…so it's like we're all going to help each other out, we're going to be there for each other… and it's good to have those experienced ones. I heard what they had to say, because some things I didn't think about."***

Greenberg (2000b), defined *reciprocity* as the "positive connection of acceptance, trust, and understanding" that is derived from being in relationship with another (p. 212). *Mutuality* is defined by Greenberg and Williams (2002) as being "dependent upon openness, flexibility, spontaneity, and a willingness to be changed by the relationship" (p. 100). From their observations, they asserted that:

> Reciprocity …provides a dynamic connection between people that sets up a propensity for change; a propensity for movement that might not occur without the interaction. The intent of each participant, the meaning they bring to the experience and share together, and any insight they gain at a level that goes beyond the specific learning experience is determined in many ways by the degree to which they establish effective reciprocity, both in being with and doing for others in the learning experience. (p. 96)

Reciprocity and mutuality, as described above, were pervasive throughout the RAs experiences and, once fully established within the group environment, were an integral part in helping to bring about both individual and group change.

The comments of the research study participants reflect the reciprocity and mutuality that developed within and among the group. On the daily reflection sheets when asked, "What stands out for you about your UB training session today," over half the responses included references to ***teamwork*** and ***bonding*** within the group. One participant specifically wrote that, s***trong connections that were made*** and another wrote, ***the way we all worked together.*** Others pointed to the ***sense of camaraderie*** that developed among the RAs.

In their responses on the initial questionnaire, the participants repeatedly mentioned that they expected to continue the bonding that had begun in training to continue as the RAs worked together to serve the students. Specifically, one participant wrote that she expected to ***"build a partnership/relationship with the group to learn more about facilitation skills."*** Another wrote that he ***"expected to have someone to lean back on when situations become rather overwhelming or out of my range of expertise."***

In the focus group interviews, Abby shared that, ***"I think I've got a good bond with everybody now…if we have that in the beginning, we're going to work more efficiently later*** **[with the students]."** In talking about the experiential activities, Abby also reflected that she felt that the care and bonding increased as the RAs came to know each other better. She said, ***" It got to be more personal…I make sure I'm okay here, and we've got to make sure everybody else in okay."*** Having broken the "me bubble", Sam seemed to feel that a camaraderie and cooperative nature existed within the group. He remarked that, ***"I think it taught us that by working together… we do a better job, we can be more effective as facilitators than we could be individually."***

Stan observed that the personal experiences shared with the other RAs were important to him because, ***"I wouldn't want to go into this cold without having personal experiences. I made some friends I can rely on when I need help."*** Dan added that, ***"You know who has your back, which everybody does."*** Still within the focus group interviews, Abby stated that as she looked toward working with the high school students, ***"…I know some people who have had these experiences and know what to say and so, I'm going to need that help in the beginning, so I already know I can call these people, and they're going to help me."***

Mutuality and reciprocity continued to be a focus for the participants in the one-to-one interviews. Sam reflected that,

> ***"… training was good in that aspect …we're like, 'Okay, you know, this may not be working' or 'I don't know how I could do this better' and you just look to your right, you know,*** **[and talk with another RA and say],** ***'This is what I did. What could I do better?' So that's what I really, really liked about the training."***

Additional evidence of the reciprocity and mutuality that developed among the RAs is found in Derrick's statement, ***"Training was great…with facilitating relationships between RAs, because I think first and foremost that was I think the biggest, biggest factor for the whole program to succeed."*** Alison shared her perspective on her experience in the following comment:

> "***I think it was really important that we had spent time with all the other RAs because I didn't realize how much we would be with the other programs…it was very helpful to have…done some of those introduction/teambuilding activities***

with the RAs from the other programs because it was sort of natural that I became really close friends with them."

Sam also commented that,

"…training really, really gave you…that sense of reinforcement, that you did have somebody behind you, that you did have a connection with others that were kind of endeavoring of the same tasks that you were doing. So, I mean, you had that connection, so you felt like you weren't alone, and you could use them and you did have their support and, of course, their expertise."

Ann reflected that after their shared experiences during training, ***"There was absolutely no doubt that that person would be there for you from that point on."*** She also addressed in her one-to-one interview the application of that same supportive reciprocity and mutuality with her fellow RAs during the time of their work with the high school students. Issues and conflicts did occur among the RAs at times throughout the residential component, but she shared that***, "We put everything out on the table and it was taken care of, no issues…we addressed what we thought was a problem and it was, you know, talked about and resolved."***

Through their comments, the research participants displayed a progressive and ever-growing development toward relational responsibility, as defined by McNamee and Gergen (1999) "…as a term that may enter conversations in ways that might sustain and support the process of constructing meaning as opposed to terminating it" (p. xi). ***"Being there for each other"*** ensured that all group members would continue to have needed support with each other throughout their work with the high school students.

Theme Four—Mentoring and Modeling: *"…if you don't set a good example, they're going to follow that bad example"*

In a longitudinal study that focused on career formation in adolescents, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) found that meaningful role models are essential in assisting young people to develop the characteristics that lead to successful, productive lives. They note that, "Teenagers build shrines in their bedrooms to movie stars and singers in the hope that they too will become rich and famous; few surround themselves with the likenesses of successful engineers or accountants" (p. 15).

Derrick, who had worked as an RA in three previous summers, expressed his insights on serving as a positive role model for the high school students. He shared that:

> ***"…the students are like, they reflect their RAs…they see us acting one way, they want to act the same way as well…if you don't set a good example, they're going to follow that bad example. You don't want to have any bad examples going around."***

The RAs in this research study expressed an expectation and understanding that they would be serving as role models for the high school students and that their role could be either positive or negative, based upon their behaviors and attitudes. In the initial questionnaires, participant responses about their expectations for the training experience included statements such as:

- ***"To gain an understanding of the expectations I need to 'live up to' as an RA."***
- ***"I hope to learn the skills that I need to further the students learning."***

- ***"To learn how to better myself to help better other students on the path to college."***
- ***"To be a better role model for the kids."***
- ***"To be able to better myself in such as way that I inspire someone else."***

According to Holton (2004), the term *role model* was introduced by sociologist Robert Merton in a Columbia study in which Merton asserted that "rather than assuming one status and one role, a person has a whole role-set of expected behavior—and that, within those sets, ambiguities, incompatibilities, and conflicts almost inevitably lurk" (p. 10). The term *role model* has been adapted into common usage and is defined as a person who serves as a model in a particular behavioral or social role for another person to emulate. Values, attitudes, and behaviors are associated with a role and may be termed as either positive or negative. For example, parents may serve as either positive or negative role models for their children, depending on the nature of their interactions.

Benson (2006) reported that researchers have explored the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of teens and have concluded that strong and consistent relationships with adults who serve as positive role models greatly enhances the degree to which adolescents develop positive and healthful ways of being. Individuals such as sports, entertainment, or business figures may distinguish themselves in such a way that others admire and emulate them or may be a source that is referred to as "bad" or negative if their behaviors are seen by society as such (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider, 2000).

In the focus group interviews, Norris commented that, ***"Affecting lives, I think, is probably one of my big things…that's what I want to do…affecting high schoolers, you know, the way that I was in the program. The RAs impacted my life. I'm just kind of***

giving back." Nathan asserted that, ***"I'm looking forward to being a role model for them. Sort of step up as a leader, somebody they look up to."*** With reference to working with the high school students, Kyle, who had also been an Upward Bound high school participant, talked about the positive influences that his RAs were for him. He noted that because of his previous experience as a student, he knew how important it was to be that role model for the current students. He shared that once the residential component began, his focus changed from developing his own personal skills to focusing on his responsibilities as a role model for the students He observed that, ***"you can look around you and be reminded of why you're here—it's all about the kids."***

In the one-to-one interviews, Dave's initial response regarding what stood out for him about the training and the RA experience was:

> ***"It was really rewarding getting to know those kids and just being a part of the summer…they looked up to me…I'm glad I could be there to help them out…just, you know, be a good role model for these kids. I really liked that."***

Dave had been part of the Upward Bound program as a high school student and he continued by sharing that his RA during that time was a positive role model for him and that he wanted to ***"be that type of a role model for my kids, too…just to be a role model for so many kids, that was really unique."*** He also acknowledged that it takes ***"a lot of patience with these kids…having patience, communication…getting along with everyone…just give them a little bit of responsibility and they answer back."***

Subtheme One—Mentoring: A Balancing Act

Within Theme Four's focus of serving as a role model and positive example, there were found two subthemes. The first speaks to the RAs' task of balancing between being

a friend and an authority figure. Sam addressed the delicate balance inherent in the role of RA. He shared that:

> ***"…you wanted to be their guardian, but at the same time you're trying to be their friend…you want to gain their trust, you want them to be able to depend on you…you're trying to balance out an act with them."***

This balancing act inherent in the RA role was explored by Ann, as well. She revealed that,

> ***"I looked at the students like they were… like my own children or my brother and sister, and I was, like, 'How would I want someone to, you know, treat them in this situation?'…And actually, at first, I was like, man, they're going to think, 'Oh, she's trying to be my mom,' and that's not going to work. But it worked really well, really well. I was amazed at some of the…respect I got from some of the students…You know, I didn't expect them to be disrespectful…but they would come to me with problems or come to me with stuff that was just on their minds."***

She shared that her approach in dealing with the high school students was to,

> ***"let them know that I wanted to get to know them as people instead of just being there as an RA…it was amazing how far that approach got me…I didn't want to be too overbearing, you know, about things, but they appreciated it…for them to openly say it to me instead of having an attitude about it, it made my job and my life a lot easier."***

Dave echoed Ann's sentiment about viewing the students as family members. He shared that, ***"…from our training, we learned how to communicate to these kids in a way…as***

if I was talking to my brother or sister. I kind of treated them as my…younger siblings."

Mike also spoke of building personal relationships with the high school students. He described it in this way:

> ***"I didn't want them to feel like they were kids, I wanted them to feel more as students, you know, in the program, and have them open to taking care of their own responsibilities and things like that. So I think the environment that we set up from the beginning has played a key role in that, and letting them know that, 'Yes, you are here to take classes and you're here to do this and that, and we're not going to treat you like kids and we want you to respect us as well as we respect you.' "***

A contributing construct to the subtheme of mentoring is found in relation to expectancy-value theory as derived from Murray's concept of need for achievement (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Perry, Turner, and Meyer (2006) proposed that expectancy-value theory explains motivation "in terms of individuals' expectations that an outcome is likely in a given situation, and the extent to which they value that outcome" (p. 329). The research participants in the study shared similar backgrounds with their high school students and had, in many cases, been the recipient of the benefits of mentoring. This gave increased effort to their efforts of mentoring and added value to the outcome of their efforts.

Nathan reflected that his approach toward balancing relationships with the students included several factors. He commented that, ***"I think if you allow them to know where your standpoint is, sort of befriend them, but also have a mutual respect***

and understanding and be polite…you'll get it back in tenfold…I try to put myself in their shoes."

Ryan acknowledged the importance of balancing relationships when he talked about setting boundaries. He observed that,

> ***"…talking about boundaries was definitely like a key thing because, I mean, you're dealing with kids that are in high school…you definitely have to understand your boundaries and understand what's appropriate and what's not. So it*** **[boundaries]** ***definitely helped me a lot with talking to students and like my behavior around students and stuff."***

In our one-to-one interview, Ryan also shared that in the beginning of the residential component that he,

> ***"…didn't want to be too sympathetic and, like, be too friendly with them and then they can walk all over me, but then I didn't want to be too hard at the same time. And…I caught myself doing both, sometimes being an extremist of being too hard and being an extremist of being too friendly sometimes. So, I mean, it's a tough balancing act, definitely a tough balancing act."***

Yvonne also noted that as an RA and a role model, ***"I have to follow something and…what I do, they look at it, too, you know."*** She continued her reflections by expressing that ***"I had to be there for the kids"*** and within that context she worked to learn how to ***"make it more interesting, how to make it more fun…to talk to them more, get them more involved."*** Mike talked about the importance of establishing trusting relationships with the students so that there was a free flow of communications. He noted that, ***"to just ask or just listen when they have a problem, that can help them***

out a lot…that means they trust you enough or want you to help them out, and that's a real big thing."

As the participants have indicated in these comments, each one struggled to establish an appropriately balanced relationship with the high school students. As in the case with all relationships, the boundaries were dynamic in that they were defined through each individual relationship. Within their relationships with the students, another subtheme was found—that of leading by example.

Subtheme Two—Modeling: Leading By Example

Alison acknowledged her responsibility to serve as a positive role model for her students and indicated that leading by example was a strategy that she frequently employed throughout the summer experience to accomplish that goal. She commented that, in her experience, ***"it became very apparent that the more excited and pumped up that the RAs were and the more comfortable we were doing stuff, the kids were more likely to join in."***

Yvonne shared an anecdotal story that illustrates and supports this subtheme of leading by example. She related that one of the activity nights was a karaoke night, structured like the popular *American Idol* television show, and that initially the students were reluctant to participant. In her words, ***"I went up first*** **[to sing]** ***and I was just kidding around with the song…I was just kind of being goofy…but afterwards everyone…went up and put their names in for a song to sing…I was just really amazed with that."*** She shared that she, ***"never realized how much the kids looked up to me"*** prior to this incident.

These observations of both Alison and Yvonne mirrored that of other RAs whose comments implied that the students followed their lead in both attitude and enthusiasm. They also affirmed Derrick's quote that serves as the title for this theme—the students would follow the example of the RAs. If the RAs approached activities and situations positively, the students would be positive; if the RAs displayed negative attitudes, the students would be negative, as well. This particularly stood out in my observations as the RAs supervised the meal times since the breakfasts and dinners in the campus dining facility were very often not in keeping with the students' preferred choices. It was incumbent on the RAs to help the students to consider the choices as fulfilling good nutritional habits rather than fulfilling their usual "fast food" habits.

Alison also recounted that she observed a change in attitude in her students as the summer evolved. She noted that,

> ***"They had clearly learned that the messages were to encourage one another, think positively, help each other, pull each other in. So that made me really happy that by the end of the program that they were repeating those things back to me all the time…I saw such a change in the students and learned so much from it…I've found it's such a rewarding experience that I definitely want to do it again."***

Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider (2000) noted that it is difficult to predict which expectations are realistic and what skills may be needed by productive adults of the future. They suggest that part of what adolescents must learn in order to assimilate into the evolving nature of being a productive person is "a set of meta-skills: the values and attitudes that will be necessary to meet the challenges of the future no matter what they

turn out to be" (p. 18). Clearly, the research participants revealed that they worked to help provide positive experiences for the high school students so as to empower those teens with increased self-confidence and practice to meet future challenges.

Throughout their comments in both focus group and one-to-one interviews, the research participants acknowledged that they had the potential to serve as positive role models and, in that capacity, could empower their high school students to emulate those same behaviors and attitudes. This provided for the RAs a deep sense of intrinsic motivation with which they approached their training activities and their actual job activities. Sansone and Harackiewicz (2000) found that intrinsic motivation serves to push an individual toward earning a reward or, in this case, satisfying a need to serve the high school students in the best possible way. Perry et al. (2006) concluded that "cognitive theories of motivation privilege intrinsic sources of motivation (e.g., interest, increased knowledge and skill) more than extrinsic rewards, assuming individuals are naturally motivated to develop intellectual and other potentials and take pride in their accomplishments" (p. 329).

The RAs realized that the environment they helped to facilitate for their students needed to be motivational so as to support the students in developing strong, resilient personal characteristics that would sustain them both now and in their futures. The RAs personified the attitude of constantly striving toward each individual's personal best, similar to the adage found in this quote from Aristotle: "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

The balance needed to achieve an environment in which excellence could be nurtured required trust, open and honest communication, and continuous cycles of

observing, *planning*, *acting*, and *reflecting*. It was a dynamic process that assisted the RAs to improve their facilitation skills, thus providing for the high school students myriad opportunities for challenges that would help them to develop more positive perspectives on their lives. As shared in his reflections, Ryan summed it up best when he said that he, ***"really tried to keep that environment up*** **[for the kids],** ***just like always striving for your best and always being your best and knowing that you are the best no matter what else people might say to you."***

Summary

This chapter has presented a summation of the findings of the research study as expressed through the research participants' words. The collection of themes that were derived from a hermeneutic analysis of the data provided insight into the experience as viewed from their perspectives. The research participants' comments painted a landscape within which was found:

- Transformative Learning: ***"…a big learning experience"***— Comments from the participants highlighted myriad opportunities for learning for both the RAs and for the high school students.
- Competence and Control: ***"…we learned to bridge the 'me bubble' "***—Through their comments, the participants shared their initial anxieties about stepping outside personal comfort zones. Within the environment that we established, opportunities for growth and a change in perspectives were provided.
- Mutuality: ***"…we're going to be there for each other"***—Participant comments indicated the formation of an environment that included both reciprocity and

mutuality. Within the group, these qualities served to provide support, confidence, and relational connections.

- Mentoring and Modeling: ***"…if you don't set a good example, they're going to follow that bad example"***—The participants' comments placed significant emphasis on serving as role models to the high school students. They identified leading by example as an essential part of the role of an RA and inherent within that role was the need to balance between being a friend, motivator, facilitator, and authority figure.

One of the goals within the study was, in essence, to examine their experience with an eye toward gaining understanding as to any changes in perspectives and actions resulting from their participation in the study. In an article published on the cusp of the new millennium, Sfard (1998) commented that

> Our ability to prepare ourselves today to deal with new situations we are going to encounter tomorrow is the very essence of learning. Competence means being able to repeat what can be repeated while changing what needs to be changed. (p. 9)

Ten years beyond Sfard's observation, competence in facing new situations is an even greater necessity. The participants in this study demonstrated through their comments that they experienced new understandings about learning, personal comfort levels, and what it means to be part of a collaborative group that is approaching a new situation through an experiential framework. The next chapter will focus on the facilitation concepts, strategies, and techniques that assisted our research participants to form a collaborative group.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: FACILITATION

Chapter Introduction

One of the research questions that served to focus this study was: ***"How do the experiences of the participants in the study inform my practice of facilitation?"*** As in Chapter 4, the words of the research participants are used to present a "verbal portrait" (Polkinghorne, 1989) of the findings as related to that question. The three themes are based on a shared view among the participants as reflected in their words from questionnaires, daily reflection sheets, and interviews as described in Chapter 2. Comments are included from all three focus group interviews and from at least 5 of the 10 individual interviews. As with the findings in Chapter 4, explicitly stated comments are included that are supported by implicit consensus found in other comments. All served to validate these themes and subthemes within the interviews. The pseudonyms assigned to each participant in Chapter 4 continue to be associated with that same participant in this chapter.

This chapter examines my role as facilitator in the research study and looks to the participants' comments to provide a critical analysis of their perceptions of my facilitation. The experiential learning model that served as the basis for my theoretical framework as presented in Chapter 1 guided my practice throughout the research study. The action research iterative cycles of *planning*, *acting* and *observing*, *reflection,* and *replanning* allowed me to critically examine the facilitation techniques that I used to guide the collaborative learning group toward their goals. The steps within the

experiential learning model directed the sequencing of activities, while the focus on collaborative learning kept me mindful of group dynamics.

Prior to any training activities, the participants' expressed their expectations for me as their facilitator through their comments on the initial questionnaire as described in Chapter 2. The participants' written responses were provided anonymously and are provided below:

- ***"Just to be supportive (just be yourself)"***
- ***"To be attentive and listen to the concerns that the RAs may have. To have an open mind and open door policy for the staff."***
- ***"To be positive, happy, and knowledgeable in the area that you are instructing me. I also expect you to help me be prepared for the program."***
- ***"Honesty, outgoing personality, and open-minded."***
- ***"To learn….anything I didn't know today."***
- ***"Help us (RAs) be better at our job."***
- ***"To be on top of the back burner and support the structure, by creating a strong, solid foundation and helping to provide the tools to build from there."***
- ***"I expect someone to lean back on when situations become rather overwhelming or out of my range of expertise.***
- ***"Providing background info and examples of how to handle situations as they arise and to be available when I have questions."***
- ***"To lay out my duties and responsibilities clearly."***
- ***"To have a clear and understanding view of what you expect from us."***

- ***"I expect there to be structure and an overall welcoming and pleasant working environment."***
- ***"Keep us engaged and learning form the period of training."***
- ***"I expect you to be patient and understanding of me as an individual, and to understand I make mistakes and allow me to fix them."***
- ***"To help lead the way, but to also allow to me to take charge as a fellow leader."***
- ***"To teach me!"***
- ***"To help you understand me."***
- ***"To be there whenever needed and to be a strong leader as well."***

Given these responses, it appeared that the participants' expectations for me as a facilitator were matched by my anticipated approach to their training. They expected to form relationships that would be supportive within an environment of trust and open communication—I hoped to help them to establish an environment that would allow that to happen. They wanted a learning environment that included optimal room for discussion and sharing of their own individual skills and talents with me and with the group—I hoped that within a trusting and emotionally safe environment to promote collaboration and dialogue. They wanted space for growth that would emerge from their practice—I hoped that they would be empowered in their facilitation skills through our experiential learning activities and the transfer of learning that could potentially follow those activities. It was within this framework of expectations that, together, we approached the training.

Theme One—Problem Solving: "…you left us room for thought"

In one of our focus group interviews, Alison shared that, "***I liked how you left us room for thought, like you made us think for ourselves. Instead of saying 'this is good for so and so', you make us think and it sticks more and makes more sense. You added input and extra perspective."*** Stan noted that the thing that stood out for him was the experience of minimal rather than maximum instructions so that they could ***"think about how to do it themselves."*** These comments support Henry's (2006) observation that collaborative learning is "group learning and requires a different kind of leadership" (p. 39).Within the experiential learning framework, Cain and Joliff (1998) assert that a facilitator serves as a resource for the group by encouraging, supporting, and providing helpful assistance where possible.

Clarification of one aspect of the role of the facilitator is found in Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (1978b), a theory that suggests that a level of competent performance can be achieved by an individual when supported or mediated by a more competent other. In discussing this theory, O'Donnell (2006) concluded that

> the zone of proximal development is jointly constructed by the interacting participants...and is best accomplished when one partner is aware of the current level of functioning of the other and is able to prompt, hint, or otherwise scaffold the developing competence of the other. (p. 787)

In our research group, I was aware of the level of experience that each participant brought to our group, including my 15 years of facilitating using an experiential learning model. With this knowledge, I was able to scaffold the activities so as to enhance the developing competence of both the group as a whole, as well as the individual group

members.

The participants' anonymous written responses as recorded on their daily reflection sheets addressed their perceptions about the facilitation techniques and strategies that I used with our group. Comments included the following statements:

- ***"The activities were good in helping to get the group to open up."***
- ***"You stood aside and allowed us to make decisions."***
- ***" …very good at allowing us to make group decisions even though we were not necessarily good at making them."***
- ***"…you let us work together and work things out."***

The blended concepts of experiential learning and collaborative learning in the study defined my role as facilitator and are captured in Ann's description of her experience with me as a facilitator. Stated in her own words, she summarized that,

> ***"You made it a lot easier, a whole lot easier. Instead of, you know, coming in like this professor mentality, you know, hard core, 'we're going to do this, and we're going to do this,' pounding us with a whole lot of technical stuff and paperwork and stuff like that, you made it a lot easier. You were like, 'Okay, we're going to do this and this. Then we have these limits.' You gave us open space to be more relaxed and free, rather than boot camp style. You just made it more interesting instead of, you know, being a monotone training where people talk and there's nothing else to do and we fall asleep."***

Other comments that addressed the learning aspect within our collaborative group were:

- ***"…you provided alternative explanations when necessary."***

• **"…[you]** ***got me to pay attention to all the things I know and may not know.***

These comments seemed to relate to Nathan's observation that, ***"You encouraged us to use all the resources that we had available to us…not to be afraid to ask for help from each other…to use each other as resources…and to listen so that you can hear everybody's ideas."***

Collaborative learning and experiential learning both share the characteristic of cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning.* My strategy for facilitation was to continually increase the engagement of all participants within these dynamic cycles. ***"Leaving room for thought"*** created opportunities for growth, but the key to approaching those opportunities was for the participants to accept that challenge by stepping outside their own personal limitations and boundaries.

Theme Two—Competence and Control: "…getting us outside our comfort zones"

Within their written responses to the questionnaires and daily reflection sheets, a verbal portrait of the participants' perceptions of me as a facilitator was drawn. One comment was: ***"You did a great job of getting us outside our comfort zones and helping us to see that we need to trust one another."*** That statement exemplified an important goal that is implicit within the role of a facilitator—creating an environment in which all group members can participate.

As noted in Chapter 4, one of the themes that came out of the participants'data had to do with what the participants called bridging the **"me bubble,"** a concept that addressed going outside an individual's personal comfort zone. The participants' comments, both explicitly and implicitly, contributed to a consensus that there was an initial lack of trust within the group—they did not know each other, they were unsure of

their positions within the group, and they were generally anxious about the situation. Their follow up comments revealed that they quickly grew to a point at which they could expand the boundaries of their personal comfort zones in order to work with all members of the group to accomplish the task at hand. To reiterate from Chapter 4, Sam commented that after learning to bridge the **"me bubble,"** ***"we were much more effective in accomplishing the task ahead"*** and Dave shared that, ***"…if you want to get these tasks accomplished, you're going to have to sacrifice your own comfort for the good of the whole, for the good of the team."***

It was incumbent on me as the facilitator to help the group to establish an environment wherein the members would feel safe enough to step outside their individual comfort zones. Inherent within competence and control beliefs is the construct of self-concept that "reflects one's collective self-perceptions formed through experiences with the environment and interpretations of those experiences and influenced by interactions with significant other persons" (Shavelson & Bolus, 1982, as cited in Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006, p. 352). In this situation, the participants' comments indicated that they believed me to be fair and supportive, thereby contributing the formation of a safe environment that encouraged their full participation and helped to increase their comfort level to the point where they could venture beyond their normal boundaries.

Participant comments provided insight as to their perceptions of me as a facilitator and included characteristics that had the potential to help ensure a safe environment. The participants noted the following:

- ***"As a facilitator, I thought you were very effective, open and caring, basically all the virtues that makes for a great facilitator."***

- ***"...creative and willing to learn as a facilitator…"***
- ***"I felt confident in your knowledge and experience as a facilitator and mentor."***
- ***"I love*(d)*** ***the energy."***
- ***"A great one! Everyday you said something nice to us like 'you're great,' you're awesome' or 'y'all are a wonderful group of people' and it seemed as if you really meant it."***
- ***"You were an awesome facilitator! You…are approachable and available when help is need."***
- ***"You …care about your RAs"***
- ***"You were a great facilitator! You taught us to be a good role model for the students, and I think you are a good role model for us."***

Each of the statements above explicitly denotes positive characteristics that could potentially contribute to the formation of a safe environment. Having confidence in my knowledge and abilities as a facilitator, forming caring relationships, leading by example, and providing positive reinforcement are all characteristics that can contribute toward building a safe environment wherein all group members may grow.

In the experiential learning model, stepping outside one's comfort zone is essential for growth. If bound by perceived personal limitations, individuals within a collaborative learning group may find it difficult to engage with others in the group, thus missing the opportunity to support and be supported in the collaborative circle (Peters & Armstrong, 1998; Priest et al., 2000). Schoel and Maizell (2002) asserted that emotionally growing humans need to be open to experience. "By laying themselves

bare—physically challenging activities, feedback sessions or the process of making difficult emotional connections, participants are making themselves vulnerable. Safety must be the accompaniment to this kind of openness" (p. 48).

In collaborative learning, establishing an environment that will support collaboration depends on the facilitator's skill in creating a safe, nurturing, and accepting atmosphere. Why is safety so important? The answer lies in the hierarchy of human needs as set forth by Maslow (1954) which placed survival and safety as the initial foci for individuals, but identifies the goal of self-actualization as an innermost striving for human beings. As the basic need for humans, it is essential that a participant in a collaborative group feel safe both in the actual physical sense and in the psychological sense in order to reach self-actualization, which represents the highest level of psychological health, and also the full utilization of talents and capacities.

Within the collaborative environment that we established, those who were new to the experience of being an RA indicated through their comments that their confidence was increased through the support and sharing with the experienced RAs. Stan shared his observations of the environment that developed within the group and noted that,

> ***"everyone was free to speak their mind and be able to ask questions. I hadn't seen anything that said...'we only want so and so to speak on this or take over this.' Everyone pretty much was given the green light to take a leadership role…everyone was given the same opportunities pretty much."***

The idea that all of the group members were free to participate within the group was also addressed by Abby, who was a new RA. She shared her reflections about her interactions with the returning RAs in the following comment:

> ***"…the more experienced people were very open to the less experienced ones, because they*** **[the new ones]** ***came up with new ideas. I felt like 'we don't know this, but how about doing this?' They were very open to our ideas."***

Ann also shared that, ***"The fact that you're always so bubbly helps a lot. You have a lot of positive energy and enthusiasm."*** Kyle commented that, ***"Your enthusiasm was good and communication was clear."*** Alison noted that in the training sessions, ***"You're…observing and very much in tune with us, so that's a good thing."*** These comments support that idea that the participants are sensitive to the attitude and approach of the facilitator in a group setting.

Within the safe environment as established by the facilitator and the group, there evolved a space for collaborative exchange of experiences and ideas. The comments of the participants point to the formation of that collaborative space within our group. Alison reflected that discussions among the participants were ***"not just question and answer, it's dialogue."*** Our environment paralleled qualities as addressed by Isaacs (1999) in his discussion of dialogue.

> We can create conditions under which a rich field for interaction is more likely to appear. These conditions make up what we have called the *container* for dialogue, in which deep and transformative listening becomes possible…a setting in which the intensities of human activity can safely emerge…the circle that holds all, that is a symbol of wholeness, and a setting in which creative transformation can take place. (pp. 242-243)

Within the collaborative environment that we formed, those who were returning RAs indicated that they were happy to share their knowledge while accepting the ideas

and previous experiences brought to the group by the "newbies." Derrick, who had previously been an RA, commented that, ***"the new ones bring in ideas that may not have been used before…they help to make it better."***

Another characteristic within the collaborative environment is the shifting role of the facilitator. O'Donnell (2006) discussed the role of the teacher in varying theoretical perspectives on peer learning. She identifies the role of the facilitator to be present in multiple perspectives, including social cohesion, sociocultural, elaboration. She also identified the role of facilitator as being essential and noted that in Vygotskyian terms the role of facilitator is identified as model/guide. Within these varying perspectives, the facilitator works to ensure teambuilding, directing instruction in help-giving, modeling, valuing of contributions, and building a sense of community. Throughout our research study, I found my role as facilitator shifting in similar ways as described by O'Donnell. The inherent cycles of *planning*, *acting* and *observing*, *reflecting*, and *replanning* that were woven throughout my theoretical framework provided opportunities for me to analyze where my role as facilitator needed to be situated in each progressive cycle.

An alternate interpretation of the facilitator's function is through the metaphorical view as that of a *touchstone*. Maurer (1996) related that touchstones are used to test metal purity. When a metal is rubbed on a touchstone, the streak left verifies the purity of the metal. Metaphorically speaking, I saw my role as facilitator for our group culminate as a touchstone by providing a reference point for testing group members' ideas and perceptions as they related to the task of applying knowledge learned toward their peer facilitation activities. As one of the participants noted: ***"You taught me a lot of things and were there whenever I needed something."***

The progression of growth by our group members naturally led the participants to assume higher, more participatory levels of leadership. As their comments in Theme Three illustrate, the RAs demonstrated improved facilitation skills with each increase in leadership. Through this growth progression, the participants became the facilitators.

Theme Three—Transformative Learning: "Today we became the facilitators."

Lyman and Foyle (1990) noted that leadership of a group is accomplished by modeling skills and behaviors that support group development, embedding principles and practices within the process that will move the group toward self-facilitation. As the facilitator, I had built into each day's training activities opportunities for the RAs to assume leadership and provided ways for them to step up into the role of the facilitator. On Day Three of our training, however, the assigned task of the participants was to use their skills to facilitate activities for their peers. As described in Chapter 3, this was designed to be a time that the RAs could utilize all of their skill, training, and experience to select and conduct activities—something that they would be doing for their high school students within just a few days. One participant's comment seemed to underscore the point toward which we as an experiential collaborative learning group were aiming, ***"Today we became the facilitators…you let us take control."***

On the daily reflection sheets for that day, the participants reflected on their experience with me as a facilitator with the following written comments:

- ***"You stood in the background and filled in when needed."***
- ***"…create*(d)** ***a free atmosphere."***
- **"… (the experience)** ***taught me how to be more outspoken."***

Mike has worked as an RA during the previous Upward Bound summer component and reflected on the need for the RAs to have the opportunity to practice their facilitation skills prior to working with the high school students. In our one-to-one interview, Mike shared that,

> ***"I think the best part was the practice with everyone, as far as like giving us an event to do…and then facilitate it, because it gave us…it was our first time working within our own program teams to get an event together and then execute it with, you know, 'students'*** **[the other RAs].** ***So, I think that the practice was really good because that's something that is used daily."***

In my reflective journal, I noted that I observed a distinct increase in collaboration among the participants as they prepared activities for this peer facilitation segment. Initially, when given a task, the group seemed to lapse into confusion with several people talking at once, some becoming frustrated at the lack of clear communication and focus. In contrast, as they were working on their peer facilitation activities, they took turns talking, appeared to have improved their listening skills, and seemed to be building on each other's ideas rather than offering ideas that were without connection to those already being discussed.

The RAs came to me for materials and clarification of specific details within ideas that they formulated among themselves, but not for leadership. I became one of the participants in the research group as they assumed control and shared leadership of the group among themselves. At that point, I was truly *the guide from the side* (Randolph, 2006).

O'Donnell (2006) suggested that in a reciprocal peer tutoring situation, the role of

the teacher as the initial model is essential for a complex cognitive activity. To that end, a skilled teacher "is capable of making her or his thinking visible, allowing students to gradually practice increasingly complex skills, and eventually fading the support needed by the students" (p. 797). I particularly found that to be useful as our research group completed the experiential learning activities at the ropes course. I intentionally put myself in the role of the facilitator for the initial activity, then switched to the role of the teacher in order to make my thinking transparent to the participants.

On the questionnaire given at the end of the training, participants responded that their experience with me as a facilitator provided opportunities for them to expand and refine their facilitation skills:

- ***"You taught us and then allowed us to teach each other and learn by actively participating."***
- ***"Very good, I liked the atmosphere in which we took our turns as being our own leaders and members…when it came down to business we were right on track."***

Sfard (1998) asserted that, "learning transfer means carrying knowledge across contextual boundaries" (p. 9). The RAs had been engaged in a variety of experiential activities that provided learning experiences for them, but, as noted earlier, an inherent outcome of the research project was that the RAs would complete our training time together with the knowledge and confidence to use their facilitation skills in their activities with the high school students during the Upward Bound residential program. Understanding of the job that was ahead was a constant point of reference for the RAs, therefore, they immediately addressed the transfer of their learning during training by

thinking of how it would apply to their work with the students. Some of their responses on the questionnaire that the RAs completed at the end of the training included:

- ***"It was a great training experience, because now I can use what I have learned from you and use it in my techniques for my students."***
- ***"I feel you prepared me well for the challenge at hand. I was ready to be an RA as a result of your training sessions."***

In one-to-one interviews that were conducted at the end of the summer residential program, the participants talked about how their learning during training transferred to their work with the students. Dave shared that,

> ***"The training helped in communicating, getting through with the other RAs, and especially the kids, like how to approach the kids, how to…do it on an individual basis, how to make some sense out of what's going on…I knew exactly what to do at certain times, and then there were certain times I didn't know what to do, but then there were other people there, other RAs that had experience that I could…turn to…training definitely helped in…assessing what I needed to do and gathering myself to…help the kids…and do everything that they needed to do."***

Ann spoke about the fact that the group members had to learn to work together to accomplish the activities and that they had to struggle together to learn how to relate to one another, to communicate, and to have patience with each other. She observed that, ***"we pretty much interacted during training the way we would want the students to interact over the summer."*** As we talked together in our interview, Ann shared with me that her experience in the training and with the high school students helped to bring about

a change in both attitude and actions for her. She had served as a college dormitory resident assistant and brought that experience into the research study setting and planned to return to that job following her Upward Bound summer job. Ann stated, ***"…it will be so much easier now to communicate with the residents. I have a different outlook than I had last year."***

In true collaborative fashion, the research participants took their collective experiences and wove them together to form a human "safety net" of support for one another. Their set up, facilitation, and debriefing of each activity clearly demonstrated their understanding and confidence in serving in the role of facilitator and perfectly reflected the action research cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning.*

In another interview, Sam talked about the conclusion of the training time and stated that after the peer facilitation activities, ***"We were ready to focus on the RA-student relationship because you're coaching them, you're guiding them through all their tasks…as they progress, they trust you more…you build credibility*** **[with them]."** His succinct description of the RAs' approach to their work with the high school students was essentially a parallel description of my role as an experientially collaborative facilitator with them and confirmed the process and product of my facilitation practice with them.

Summary

This chapter has presented a summation of the findings of the research participants' experience with me as a facilitator. Their observations and insights as expressed through their comments were explored through a hermeneutic analysis.

The three themes that were derived from their collective comments were:

- **Problem Solving**: ***"…you left us room for thought…"***—Participant comments reflected that they felt that there were opportunities for group members to provide input, participate in dialogue, and to engage with one another.
- **Competence and Control: *"…getting us out side our comfort zones…"*** —Quotes from the participants gave insight to the formation of a safe environment wherein the group members felt that they could stretch beyond their normal limitations and challenge themselves through the experiential activities that were included in the research study design.
- **Transformative Learning: *"Today we became the facilitators***." —Within the context of the study, the participants described their experiences as having moved to an increasingly higher level of responsibility for leadership that was accompanied by opportunities to practice their facilitation skills.

The data provided insight into the experience as viewed from the perspectives of the participants and served to enlighten my practice of facilitation. Strategies, techniques, and principles of facilitation that were part of my practice and practical theory were examined within the context of this study and allowed me to experience cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning*. Insights and implications from this study offer much to inform my practice and are explored in detail in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the findings detailed in Chapters 4 and 5 and my reflections on the implications of those findings. The purpose of this study was to examine my practice as a facilitator of collaborative learning using an experiential learning approach. The experiences of the participants in a group for which I served as the facilitator would inform my practice. The research questions that served as the structure for data collection were:

(1) How do participants in a group for which I serve as a facilitator of collaborative learning within an experiential framework describe their experience?

(2) How do the research participants' experiences inform my practice of facilitation?

Data that addressed these questions were provided by the research participants—20 young adults who were selected to serve as resident assistants (RAs) for high school students during a 6-week residential summer component of a federal grant program housed on the campus of a major university. The contextual setting for the study was the training that I facilitated for these RAs by approaching collaborative learning from an experiential learning framework.

Through a hermeneutic analysis of all the data, I have examined multiple aspects of their experiences and perceptions. Their comments have served to inform my practice of facilitation and have provided a portrait of my own strengths and weaknesses as a

facilitator. From these insights, I have a clearer idea as to how I may improve my practice. The structure of this chapter will be: (1) to reflect on findings that came out of the participants' experience, (2) to reflect on findings regarding facilitation, (3) to consider the implications for facilitation of collaborative learning using an experiential learning framework, (4) to explore what the results of this research add to collaborative learning and experiential learning literature, and (5) to suggest recommendations for further study in conjunction with concluding thoughts.

Reflections on Findings

The theoretical framework as introduced in Chapter 1, Figure 2, situated the experiential learning model as the center of this study. Woven throughout were the threads of the critical attributes of collaborative learning as described in my practical theory. Valuing all voices, listening, suspending assumptions, engaging in dialogue, and asking questions to elicit more information formed the collaborative ground upon which the experiential learning model rested. The inclusion of action research, as described by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), as my chosen research methodology brought into the visual framework the iterative cycles of *planning, acting* and *observing, reflecting,* and *replanning.* Facilitation provided the binding threads that helped to maintain the structure of the experiential collaborative learning group.

Characteristics that are commonly found in both collaborative learning and experiential learning appeared to be evident throughout the participants' experience. The combination of the research elements served to enhance the initial intensity of the learning and the participants' transfer of learning that followed. Specific characteristics

and support for each reflection are detailed below.

Participant Experiences

Analysis and comparison of the reported experiences of the research participants revealed common threads running throughout that emphasized the importance of several elements and concepts. Each one is examined in relation to the themes that were derived from analysis of the data.

Transformative Learning: *"...a big learning experience"*—At the outset of the research study and prior to any activities, the research participants provided evidence (as detailed in Chapter 4) that they were looking forward to the opportunities that the training would bring them. My observation was that they brought with them attitudes of openness, coupled with enthusiasm and a willingness to share new experiences with new acquaintances. This essentially "opened the door" for us to begin our training in an environment that was conducive for collaborative learning and had the potential to offer myriad opportunities for learning and growth.

This collaborative environment served to encourage and nurture critical reflection around the assumptions, beliefs, and values of the participants, whose comments demonstrated that new insights were produced which helped them to making meaning out of our shared experiences. Changes in perspective led to transformative learning.

Randolph (2006) observed in her study of facilitation that "a common purpose and acting together to achieve a common purpose" (pp. 79-80) propelled the development of a collaborative learning environment. The members of the research group came together with an express purpose and focus for our learning. Among the participants was

an explicit intentionality toward learning together so that the RAs would be able to successfully guide the high school students during their residential time. Each member was aware that the remainder of the group members brought with them talents and skills from which all could learn. They also knew that as a seasoned Upward Bound veteran, I possessed knowledge that could be shared to enhance the experiences of the group. Together, we intentionally proceeded with our training with a mindset that we had within our grasp opportunities that would teach us better ways of being, both in the present and in the future moments.

Competence and Control: "...we learned to bridge the 'me bubble'"— Participants must feel "safe" in order to engage in collaborative learning (Brickey, 2001; Henry, 2006; Randolph, 2006; Williams, 2005). This translates into a nonthreatening environment where all individuals feel valued and accepted, have a high level of trust, demonstrate openness to ideas, and are supportive of each other.

The competence and control beliefs were supported by the participants' comments as they responded to their expectations for the training and for me as their facilitator. The inclusion of the activities in the Self-Exploration component served to enhance the self-efficacy of both individual participants and the group as a whole.

Interpersonal and intrapersonal elements were woven throughout this action research study. Terms such as *trustworthiness, caring, accepting, respect, support, flexible*, and *fun* are found in participants' comments. Such adjectives were used to describe multiple levels of involvement including participant-to-participant and participant-to-facilitator (interpersonal involvement), as well as participant-to-group and participant-to-reflections (intrapersonal involvement). Feelings of safety, confidence, and

a willingness to accept ideas and support from others were identified through the participants' comments as having been present within our collaborative learning group.

Participants' comments supported the idea that, at different points throughout the training, each individual found himself facing the outermost edge of his comfort zone in some way. The comments further indicated that it was a challenge to break through that limitation and stretch beyond it. Excitement is an inherent part of challenge, as affirmed by the phrases "living on the edge" and "adrenaline junkies" that are commonly used to describe those who love adventure and challenge.

Maximillion Events Ltd., one of the United Kingdom's most highly regarded training and development companies, conducts thousands of teambuilding events both in the UK and around the world. Their public relations and marketing literature emphasizes that the stimulating and engaging nature of experiential activities promote learning development among participants because individuals are operating close to what they believe are the limitations of their abilities (Maximillion, 2008).

The experiential activities within the research design brought the participants to points of decision throughout the training. Based on personal needs, each individual faced the choice of retreating from the group or bridging the ***"me bubble"*** and deepening their engagement with all members of our group. Each individual's choice at that point of decision was influenced by his or her perception of the group environment, which was implicitly defined by the group's formation stage.

Cain (2003) discussed the progression of group formation stages as originally defined by Tuckman (1965). He contended that,

> Since all groups experience these stages, exploration of this phenomena is an ideal way for a new group to understand what lies ahead, and for an existing group to analyze where they are, where they ultimately want to be, and what lies in between (p. 11).

During every debrief/processing time following our activities, the participants commented as to how the group's formation influenced their decision to push the limits of their comfort zone. It was noted that we engaged in the ***forming*** stage through participation in our opening icebreakers and in our personality assessments early on Day One of the training. The group's ***storming*** stage was defined as we experienced conflicts that arose as group members sought to establish their positions within the group. The pipeline activity that closed out the first day of training swiftly pushed the group into competition for leadership roles, resulting in subtle, but polite conflict. On this day, debrief conversations centered on questioning why they were unsuccessful at completing such a seemingly easy task.

The sequence of experiential activities on Day Two of our training brought our group face-to-face with the ***norming*** stage. Specifically, the balancing log required sharing ideas, trust, and group cohesion. To be successful at the task, the group had to involve every member—no one could stand on the sidelines; all had to be sitting on the log in order to achieve the goal. Like a magnetic force, the nature of the experiential task drew all of the group members into the cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning* that are inherent in collaborative learning, experiential learning, and action research.

The remainder of Day Two's activities became a steady progression into the

performing stage that was typified by unity and a sense of emerging group identity resulting in a high level of productivity and motivation. Consensus of the participants' comments indicated that by Day Three, our group had navigated into the ***transforming*** stage, which was marked by recognition that all members were leaders and brought valued contributions to composition of the group.

The participants' comments as extracted from the data indicated that the safety of the group environment, both mentally and physically, contributed to their decision to put aside their comfort zones and embrace the opportunity to become fully engaged with the other members of the group. Each developmental stage of group formation provided the needed sense of safety and security that helped them to stretch individual comfort zones. Together, they built a strong structure that enabled them to ***"bridge the 'me bubble.' "***

Mutuality: "...we're going to be there for each other"— Establishing relationships between and among group members is essential for the creation of a fully functioning, collaborative learning group (Cotter, 2001; Muth, 2004; Naujock, 2002). Merrill (2003) asserted that, "Collaborative learning is born and nurtured in relationships" (p.79). Sharing personal stories and critical incidents built positive rapport among the participants and forged human connections that literally and figuratively opened doors to further learning about and with each other.

Greenberg and Williams (2002) presented examples of reciprocity and mutuality and surmised that there is produced within them a "power…to open an otherwise closed learner to intervention" (p. 102). This power to enable an individual or a group to forge human connections equates with principles put forth by Arrien (1993). She suggested four governing principles "to live in harmony and balance with our environment and with

our own inner nature" (pp. 7-8):

(1) *Show up, or choose to be present*—This principle relates to being aware in the moment at hand. With regard to the RAs, it was necessary that they be fully focused on accessing the human resources within our group as opposed to focusing on extraneous matters.

(2) *Pay attention to what has heart and meaning*—Inherent within this principle is the acknowledgement and appreciation of human resources. For the RAs, recognizing and validating each individual's presence, along with the skills and talents that they brought to the group, gave affirmation to all and helped to create an environment that was supportive of collaborative learning.

(3) *Tell the truth without blame or judgment*—Genuine and authentic feedback are the basis of this principle. As the RAs progressed through the group formation stages and engaged in the cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning,* authentic feedback was a bedrock foundation for improving group communication and interaction.

(4) *Be open to outcome, not attached to outcome*—The human resources of wisdom and objectivity comprise this principle. A prime example within the research was the experience of the participants on the balancing log. Once they escaped the restrictions of their own individual comfort zones, the RAs stopped focusing on their own needs and were able to objectively focus on the task at hand as an outcome that was owned by the group rather than by individuals.

The participants in the research group indicated through their comments in both interviews and in written responses that the majority of them initially brought with them

some sense of anxiety regarding their training and the job of RA. Ann's comment that she was ***"initially scared to death"*** and Yvonne's acknowledgement that ***"before I came, I was really nervous"*** were representative of the consensus of the group members' feelings of nervousness as they began their training together. The RAs' comments also spoke to the resolution of that anxiety as they described our learning environment as being ***"laid back, homey feeling"*** and one in which ***"everyone was free to speak their mind and be able to ask questions."*** This open atmosphere helped to build strong lines of communication among the RAs that they began to use during the training and strengthened during the residential time.

In an informal follow up conversation with Dave during the residential time in the summer, he shared that the anxieties that he initially brought with him to the job of RA were melted away due to the relationships that he built during the training activities. He continued to share that it was the "open lines of communication" with the other RAs that helped him to cope when he got tired, lost patience, or just needed to vent about any difficulties or problems that he had encountered with his group of high school students.

Dave's same acknowledgement of the important role that the positive relationships among the RAs had for him were also echoed in a separate follow up conversation with Ann. She talked about the fact after the summer residential time was over, she planned to adapt her learnings from the training to her continuing work as a college resident assistant. She shared that she found valuable strength and support in her relationships with her fellow RAs and that she planned to work to establish those same kinds of relationships as she worked with college RAs in the fall.

Acknowledging that each individual brings to a discussion his or her own

knowledge and perception and valuing each person's contribution creates space for multiple ways of knowing. Listening and respecting each other builds a cooperative rather than competitive atmosphere that enhances the free exchange of ideas and information and allows the group to construct knowledge that would not have been done by the individuals alone. The comments that came together to support this theme gave insight to the relationships that were built among the group members and gave them confidence that ***"we're going to be there for each other."***

Mentoring and Modeling: *"...if you don't set a good example, they're going to follow that bad example"*—The participants recognized early on that an implicit and explicit responsibility of their job was to serve as role models for the high school students. Their comments as presented in Chapter 4 demonstrated a clear understanding of the significant impact that they could potentially have in the lives of the students. This belief is supported by Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider's (2000) research with adolescents that acknowledged the importance of positive role models to help teens formulate positive career and educational goals.

In several cases, the RAs who had been in the program while in high school related back to their previous experiences with their RAs and connected with the positive influences involved with those memories. In our focus group and one-to-one interviews, several other RAs alluded to the strong positive role that other caring adults from their past had played in their lives. Derrick's assertion that, ***"…if you don't set a good example, they're going to follow that bad example,"*** summed up the participants' acknowledgement that both positively and negatively, their students would be watching them. Given that fact, they also acknowledged that they would have to monitor their own

behaviors to ensure that the unspoken messages conveyed to the students would be of a positive nature. I was pleasantly surprised by the RAs clear grasp of the necessity for boundaries that came out in the participants' comments.

In Chapter 1, I stated my belief that the 6-week summer residential component of Upward Bound has, in many cases, provided life-changing experience for both the high school students and their college-age RAs. This belief came from my observations over the past 10 years. The participants' comments and my observations surrounding the summer residential component that served as the setting for this research study continued to strengthen that belief. Prior to this study, this belief had no substantiation.

Reflecting upon the participants' comments, I found evidence that the RAs took away new perspectives, attitudes, and valuable learning from their experiences with the high school students. In her one-to-one interview, Alison said of her experience, **"…it has sort of completely changed the way I'm thinking about what I do after I graduate…it kind of changed my job prospects."** Ann's remarks seemed to capture the group's consensus of opinion when she shared that, ***"There is absolutely no way you can come out the same."***

Facilitation

While certain elements might naturally occur to some extent between individuals, collaborative learning in its richest and fullest meaning requires intentionality as supported by a facilitator. The facilitator role actually encompasses multiple roles such as guide, colearner, participant, listener, questioner, observer, and scribe. An essential quality for an effective facilitator is to determine which "role" she needs to assume at a given point in the group's development and to be flexible enough to

switch roles as appropriate at any given time (Beard & Wilson, 2006; Priest et al, 2000). The findings related to facilitation within this study highlight that need for movement among a variety of roles if the group is to develop to its highest potential.

Problem Solving: *"...you left us room for thought"*—As the facilitator for the group, I observed the initial interactions among the participants. Their behaviors provided insights that allowed me to enter into the action research cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning* for the purpose of tailoring circumstances and situations to best meet the needs of the participants (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).

In my role as facilitator, I had to continually be aware of what Cain and Joliff (1998) contended are "teachable" moments to help group members understand the dynamics and the results of their interactions within the group. In order to facilitate an optimal learning experience, the tasks within my role included clarifying and focusing group members' comments, pointing out details that group members' may have overlooked, and providing assistance where possible to help the processing of the group be as complete as possible.

The theoretical framework of experiential learning that was used in this study to facilitate collaborative learning appeared to have enabled the participants to create strong bonds among all group members. These bonds, in turn, wove a sense of safety and comfort into the environment that supported the participants as they faced the challenges presented by the experiential activities.

Cain (2003) suggested that unless the basics within Maslow's concept of a hierarchy of needs are provided, the possibility of group participants achieving self esteem and fulfillment are reduced, but when provided, these basics build a basis for

progress toward higher levels of learning and learning retention. While self-actualization may not necessarily be achieved through a collaborative group process, the experiences from that group can contribute toward the fulfillment of a higher psychological health.

Competence and Control: *"...getting us outside our comfort zones"*—When a collaborative facilitator is aware of reciprocity and mutuality, she may intentionally put into play practices and behaviors that involve ways of helping establish those same qualities to form within the environment of a group (Greenberg, 2000a; Randolph, 2006; Williams, 2005). Such practices may influence the development of group dynamics so as to highlight reciprocity and mutuality among group members. The goal is for each participant to feel welcomed in the group and invited to share their thoughts and ideas.

Behaviors to be modeled by the facilitator in a collaborative learning group include, among others already mentioned, showing consideration, appreciation, positive remarks, and respect (Lyman & Foyle, 1990, McGill & Brockbank, 2004; Priest et al., 2000). These behaviors are also affirmed when one reviews the role of the facilitator in an experiential learning model, such as the Project Adventure model that was described in Chapter 1.

Throughout my practice, I had implicitly made an "internal list" of ways of being that had enhanced my experiences with collaborative learning and tried to emulate those within my facilitation strategies. My personal list matched those mentioned above, but I had no research to verify what I thought were appropriate behaviors, only my instinct. The participants' comments as presented in Chapter 5 validated what I had always felt and confirmed that the group members observed those behaviors to be exhibited by me in my practice of facilitation. A comment that validated my facilitation strategy was, ***"You***

did a great job of getting us outside our comfort zones and helping us to see that we need to trust one another." That statement exemplified an important goal that is implicit within the role of a facilitator—creating an environment in which all group members can participate.

As I reflected on the findings regarding competence and control, I discovered an additional insight. Our group of RAs was made up of a wide variety of cultures and ethnicities and, as such, each one had differing interpretations and boundaries regarding physical proximity, eye contact, and physical contact (shaking hands, hugging, etc.). The social and cultural traditions inherent within each individual's worldview dictated their levels of comfort and behavior. Our time spent in the Self-Exploration component of our training not only helped each individual participant to learn more about their own personal preferences and personality, but also helped me to learn about them. This knowledge was valuable to me as the facilitator as I continued to plan and adapt our activities to the needs of the group. An "ah-ha" moment for me was the realization that these broad cultural differences required intentional mediating if all group members were to expand their experiential comfort zone beyond their usual boundaries.

The use of action research as the methodology in this study strengthened my understanding of this "ah-ha" moment due to the iterative cycles of *planning, acting* and *observing, reflecting,* and *replanning*. Somekh (2006) asserted that "action research involves the development of knowledge and understanding of a unique kind...[and] involves a high level of reflexivity and sensitivity...in mediating the whole research process" (p. 7). Exploring collaborative learning through an experiential learning framework brought about opportunities for me, as the researcher, to utilize the action

research cycles to strengthen my facilitation skills in mediating all participants toward more growth.

Transformative learning: "...Today we became the facilitators."—Williams (2005) discussed the role of the facilitator in aiding the process of movement from one view to another. She suggested the following:

> A facilitator is a process guide, someone who makes a process easier or more convenient. Facilitation is about movement, moving something from A to B….As a facilitator, I believe it is my responsibility to help generate valid and useful information to create conditions in which people can make informed choices and to help people develop a commitment to those choices. (p. 78)

Like Williams, my role as a facilitator was to move the research participants from A to B. In this case the "A" was lack of readiness and the "B" was preparedness so that they could successfully work with the high school students. Examining the experiences of the participants in this setting generated information that assisted me in creating conditions that would support and enhance the RAs' training.

In my reflective journal, I noted that I observed a distinct increase in collaborative learning among the participants as they prepared activities for this peer facilitation segment. Initially, when given a task, the group seemed to lapse into confusion with several people talking at once, some becoming frustrated at the lack of clear communication and focus. In contrast, as they were working on their peer facilitation activities, they took turns talking, appeared to have improved their listening skills, and seemed to be building on each other's ideas rather than offering ideas that were without connection to those already being discussed within the group's planning time. As one

participant commented, ***"I liked the atmosphere in which we took our turns as being our own leaders and members…when it came down to business we were right on track."***

My reflections on this comparison lead me to surmise that there were several factors that contributed to the change in behaviors. Stages of psychosocial development as articulated by Erikson (1980) hold that the young adult stage, encompassing the ages of 19-34, emphasizes the continuing formation of personal identity. As such, young adults strive to blend their identities with friends—they want to fit in while still maintaining a strong sense of self-identity. The RAs were working to establish their place within the group which involved being seen by their peers in the way that best matched their view of their own self-identity. Some may have wanted to be seen as smart, some as funny, some as being leaders—whatever characteristic that matched their vision of the identity that they wanted to project within the group dictated the behaviors that they exhibited during that first activity. As a result, each RA's focus was directed inwardly toward personal issues rather than outwardly toward group goals.

Additionally, as described in Tuckman's (1965) ***forming*** stage, it is characteristic of a newly developing group to tentatively explore roles and relationships among members. Although several of the RAs were acquainted with each other, this particular assemblage of young adults was new and behavioral norms within the group were yet to be established.

Finally, I have observed through my years of working with and parenting young adults that part of the nature of "twenty-somethings" is a greater tendency to approach new situations with a self-assured confidence that comes from being young and feeling

that anything can be accomplished. I believe that that self-assurance contributed into the initial boldness that each RA exhibited. To put it very plainly in nonscholarly terms, each of them had to "show their stuff" initially. Metaphorically speaking, just as a peacock spreads its colorful array of feathers so that all may admire, the individual RAs felt the need to establish their existence in the group by exhibiting a highly confident and capable presence. It was a testament to their intelligence and maturity that they were able to quickly move past that "strutting" stage to one wherein they could focus on the goals and put their own needs aside.

The statements that best support the transformative nature of learning that the participants experienced were:

- ***"You taught us and then allowed us to teach each other and learn by actively participating."***
- ***"It was a great training experience, because now I can use what I have learned from you and use it in my techniques for my students."***

Implications for Facilitation of Collaborative Learning and Experiential Learning

Henry (2006) maintained that collaborative learning is neither individual learning (though individuals will learn) nor follow-the-leader learning (though there will be a leader of a type). It is group learning and requires a different kind of leadership. Experiential learning mirrors that same premise regarding the leadership within a group (Schoel & Maizell, 2002).

As seen in the participant comments, the RAs gathered for their training with varying degrees of confidence and familiarity, both with each other as individuals and

with the job at hand. There was a sense of exploration of the environment until it could be established that trust and acceptance were present and unconditionally available for all. Our short time span for training did not allow for a gradual building of relationships, but rather brought to the forefront situations that forced all participants to immediately determine their own individual level of trust.

Comments by Ann, as presented in Chapter 4, are reiterated here because they so vividly recounted the intensity that the experiential activities brought to our collaborative training: "***…It was, I mean, we got to know each other really quickly and that formed a bond…beyond any other type of bond I've developed that quickly in my life. It was amazing.*** Implicit consensus to support Ann's observation was found throughout the data.

Using the experiential learning model, it is incumbent upon me as the facilitator to answer for myself the second question in the debriefing process: ***So what?*** — What did I learn from all of this? My overall summation of knowledge gained through this research can be found in these overarching points:

- The facilitation of collaborative learning was achieved through ***a planned framework*** of intentionality. The experiential learning model (Schoel & Maizell, 2002) possesses such a framework and serves as an appropriate guide for such facilitation, providing benchmarks along the way. Metaphorically speaking, my journey toward collaborative learning was accomplished through the roadmap provided by the experiential learning model. I would liken it to the difference between stopping by a gas station and asking for directions (my past practice) versus getting a roadmap, following the directions, and arriving at my destination

armed with verification of the landmarks and detours along the way (findings from my research). Intentionality provided a focus that aided me in reaching my goals as a facilitator. I have learned from this study that planning intentionally and intentionally planning are habits that I can adopt to ensure that my practice of facilitation is tailored to meet the needs of the specific group for whom I am serving as a facilitator.

- The specific nature of the facilitation techniques within the experiential learning model was a ***dynamic process*** that paralleled the action research methodology. The cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning* provided the structure needed to continuously reevaluate the formation of the group. As the facilitator, my observations of the interactions between and among the participants were crucial in helping me to assess the needs of both the group and the individuals within the group. My reflections on my observations led to replanning that allowed me to adapt and modify activities in order to enhance opportunities for growth.
- The emphasis on ***a safe environment***, both physically and mentally, appeared to provide encouragement for individuals to leave their comfort zone in order to experience higher levels of challenge from which came new areas of growth. Reciprocity and mutuality contribute toward building strong connections among group members and these connections forge links that provide support, motivation, and inspiration for all who are members of the group.
- ***Time*** is a factor in the facilitation of collaborative learning and must be considered as the facilitator plans toward assisting the development of a

collaborative learning group. Throughout this research study, I was drawn to reflect back on my experiential learning training, which usually consisted of at least a full week time period for each training. Additionally, I had the benefit of observing a more knowledgeable other as I watched the Beyond The Limits counselor work with the student groups over a 12-week period of time. This lengthy and gradual approach toward collaborative learning through an experiential learning model built progressively toward a higher level of skills and greater degree of learning transfer. Training time was much shorter for the participants in this research study. However, the intensity of the experiential learning activities immersed the participants in the essential aspects of collaborative learning, thereby accelerating the learning and the transfer of that learning from the immediate setting into alternative settings. A parallel example would be the comparison of learning a foreign language through a year-long study course versus learning it as a visitor in a foreign country by using it daily for everyday living activities.

- Experiential learning is a powerful mechanism that provides opportunities for intense learning that brings with it significant ***transfer of learning***. Moon (2004) suggests that sequencing and structuring of activities can lead to optimum transfer of learning from context to context. Leberman et al. (2006) recommended that there is a need for further research to be conducted that more closely examines the impact of setting and duration of training on the transfer of learning. The participants' comments as related in the findings of this study indicated that there was a swift and intense immersion into the activities that comprised the

experiential learning interventions within the training. To paraphrase Ann, the RAs did not even know each other's names on the first day and then, less than 24 hours later, they were sitting in each other's laps (on the balancing log). They went from mere acquaintances to highly relational team members who were taking care of each other in just a few short hours. The intensity of the experiential learning activities created a bond among the RAs that was solidified during the training and maintained throughout the 6-week residential program. Subsequent reports from the RAs after the end of the program indicated that many of them were continuing to stay in contact with each other without benefit of the common structure provided by the Upward Bound programs.

This summation of points is an overall reflection of the research findings but, within each broad point, there are myriad nuances of learning, observation, and "ah-ha" moments that occurred throughout the research study. Exploration of each point continues to bring with it new reflections. Like light through a prism, new patterns develop and new observations may be made with each movement that changes the interaction between light and prism. So it is with my learnings from this research study.

Collaborative Learning and Experiential Learning Literature: New Patterns in the Prism

Peters and Armstrong (1998) stated that "collaboration means that people labor together in order to construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborator" (p. 75). In further writings, Armstrong and Peters (2000) have expanded on the idea of collaborative learning as one that fosters the connection and dialogue of the participants,

resulting in heightened energy within the group, the construction of knowledge, with an outcome that is greater than the sum of its parts—greater than, and perhaps different from, the original intent/imagining.

Collaborative learning is clearly a concept that continues to be more highly embraced in this fast-paced world of the 21st century, but how it is best accomplished remains a question to be answered. Cain (2003) contributed this to the discussion:

> Based on the collected works of conventional wisdom and business gurus of the 20th and 21st centuries, there seems to be three underlying components that all groups require to perform at their highest levels. This is true of corporations and institutions of all kinds, including educational institutions…These three components include: (1) A clearly identified, articulated and worthy task; (2) The opportunity for growth, advancement and building new skills; (3) The opportunity to create and maintain relationships with other members of the group. Sometimes referred to as the "social capital" of the organization. (p. 5)

Cain (2003) continued this discussion by surmising that traditional learning environments address the first two components, but "it takes specific planning to create the setting, opportunity and social climate necessary to promote the development, growth and maintenance of relationships within the group." He observes that within the corporate perspective, it is the development and nurture of human relationships that is the hardest to achieve. He concludes that, "specific attention needs to be given to the planning and delivery of training, staff development, and group learning opportunities as well as maintenance of the social capital of the group" (p. 5).

This research study demonstrates that using experiential learning as the theoretical framework to facilitate collaborative learning addresses the development and maintenance of human relationships to which Cain referred. The inherent cycles of *planning, action, observing, reflecting,* and *replanning* provide a continual spiral of opportunities for human connections. The repeated interactions supply needed practice and reinforcement toward a connectional way of being. The framework inherent in the experiential learning model provides a roadmap for facilitators to use in their journey to become the "*guide from the side*" (Randolph, 2006).

As I reviewed relevant literature for this study, I found a wide range of approaches had been used to explore collaborative learning. However, no studies were found that looked at collaborative learning through an experiential learning framework. To that end, this study adds to the body of collaborative learning literature by providing a fresh look at the critical attributes that contribute to the facilitation of collaborative learning. This new perspective can serve to inform practitioners who strive to bring people together in varied settings for the purpose of learning collaboratively together.

Hirsch (2007) noted in an address to the Symposium on Experiential Education Research (SEER) that practitioners of experiential education tend to "do" rather than write, indicating that viable research topics are available, but that practitioners do not necessarily choose to conduct research to inform the field. As such, opportunities to validate practices grounded in the theories found within experiential learning have not been supported by formal research studies to the fullest extent possible.

Within the literature relative to experiential learning, much of what I found explored *outcomes* rather than the *experience* itself. The objective of many of these

studies that were conducted was to inform funding agencies and, as such, dealt with quantifiable data such as interventions for adjudicated youth, rates of recidivism, corporate return on training investment, and other settings focused on outcomes. The pairing of collaborative learning and experiential learning directed the focus of this study on the *actual experience* of the participants—their expectations, their feelings, their perspectives, their challenges—and how that experience may have influenced changes in their perspectives and behaviors. Again, as with collaborative learning, utilizing an experiential learning framework to facilitate collaborative learning provided a fresh look and added to the body of relevant experiential learning literature.

The findings of this study imply that pairing experiential learning with action research can produce viable results to inform the field. It is suggested that situating experiential learning as the theoretical framework to approach collaborative learning in this study provides a workable match with action research. This integrated approach could be a method readily employable by those practitioners in the field who might choose to do research if they believed that the findings would be practical and applicable to their everyday practice. Through action research, additional insight could be derived that would assist in furthering investigation of the interwoven qualities that stretch across these disciplines.

Recommendations for Further Study and Concluding Thoughts

As business, industry, and education take on a more global perspective, the need for groups to develop the skills necessary for collaborative learning is increasing. Sensitivity toward perspectives, cultures, and personalities has the potential to open up avenues for collaborative learning. As in Peters and Armstrong's assertion that is quoted

above, people often find themselves in circumstances where they must labor together in order to construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborators.

The Experiential Training and Development (ETD) Alliance (2008) noted in a recent article that usage of and demand for training that incorporates hands-on, experiential activities has increased. They assert that "these 'activity-based' training approaches have become increasingly diverse, high-profile and occasionally controversial as they are applied in more settings by more mainstream trainers and consultants" (p. 1), accounting for an estimated $100 million to $200 million in the overall business training industry in 1999.

These developments provide a rationale for further study into the facilitation of collaborative learning. As more and more practitioners use activity-based approaches, the need for validation of results arises. Examination of facilitation techniques that promote collaborative learning and help to produce more consistent results could be incorporated into training models in a variety of settings from industry to education. As explored through this study, the experiential learning framework contributes to the facilitation of collaborative learning as well as providing formal documentation of the changes in perspective that can come about through the use of an experiential learning framework. Although this is not a cause and effect study, the findings indicate that participants found meaning in the training activities that stood out for them in a similar fashion when they worked to facilitate collaborative learning with their Upward Bound students.

In keeping with the knowledge that more and more companies are turning to the inclusion of experiential learning activities, it is also important to note that the current

trend in corporate training is to reduce the amount of time given to training. In today's leaner business economy, an area that is usually the first target for cost reductions is training. Mary Steger, Marketing Director of Mountain Challenge, LLC, reported that companies that have previously requested 2-3 day training workshops have reduced the allotted training time to 1 day or less.

In some instances, budget restraints have resulted in a reduction of the total number of employees, therefore, staff time spent in training takes away from production time. Consequently, training workshops have, by necessity, become shorter in duration. This circumstance dictates that facilitators of such training workshops need to hone their facilitation skills so as to be able to assist the group in an effective and efficient manner.

Given this trend, the intensity of the experience and the high level of transfer that accompanies experiential learning activities as reported by the participants in this study are a means to address this need for reduced training time. As noted by Beard and Wilson (2006), the concepts of experiential learning provide a means of sequencing learning that results in increased effectiveness of the experience, thus adding more value to each training dollar spent. Further study as to the validity of this conjecture would prove to be beneficial to both the companies that need the training and those who provide such training.

Another aspect worthy of additional study is the long-term effects of training that includes intensely focused and highly interactive activities such as those found in experiential learning. I would like to follow up with the research participants to explore if the changes in perspective that were expressed in the findings of this study have remained as an influence in their thinking and behaviors. Have the insights and attitudes reflected

in the data sources of the study been forgotten or have the research participants continued to incorporate the knowledge and changes derived through our training into their current ways of behaving and thinking? Conducting a longitudinal follow-up study could provide insight into the extent of the transfer of learning that can be achieved through facilitating collaborative learning through an experiential learning framework.

Being part of this action research project has given me new lessons in the power of collaboratively learning together and reinforced my belief that experiential learning provides an appropriate and effective means for facilitating a collaborative learning group. The RAs taught me much and I look forward to future opportunities to further explore my practice of facilitation, knowing that it has the power to make a difference for all within that collaborative learning circle.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form for Research Participants and Supplemental Consent for Use of Photographs

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Utilizing Experiential Collaboration to Enhance Facilitation Skills

INTRODUCTION

As a summer resident assistant (RA) for the University of Tennessee's Upward Bound Programs, you have the responsibility for planning and implementing activities for high school students who are participants in three U.S. Department of Education funded projects. These students will be in residence for a 4-week residential component that simulates the actual college experience. In preparation for your duties, Upward Bound will provide training to enhance your skills in leadership, problem solving, decision making, planning and facilitating activities, and serving as a facilitator/mentor.

You are invited to participate in a research study for the purpose of evaluating the Upward Bound training experience. This study is designed to:

- to examine the experiences of the training group participants in this collaborative setting including any change in perspectives and actions resulting from their participation;
- to examine my practice as a facilitator of a collaborative training group;
- to determine if, through this research project, there are specific training strategies that may be applicable for replication in other training settings.

Implications from this study may be used to develop and expand my practice as a collaborative facilitator and may be incorporated into the development of a more efficient and effective staff training model for The University of Tennessee TRIO Programs.

PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY

Participants in this study will initially engage in training sessions over a 4-day time period (total training time 32 hours). Mid-point through the 4-week residential program and at the end of the residential time period, research participants will have a one-to-one interview with Nancy Headlee, Principle Investigator of the research study. Interviews with each participant will involve a time commitment of 3 hours per participant. Each participant will also complete the questionnaire given at the initial training program, once again at the end of the initial training sessions, and at the end of the 4-week residential program. Total time commitment outside each participant's basic training will be approximately 5 hours. To summarize, each participant will be asked to complete the following:

- One Initial Questionnaire
- Two Subsequent Questionnaires
- One Focus Group
- Individual Interview 1 - One-to-one audiotaped interview at mid-point of the 4-week summer program
- Individual Interview 2 - One-to-one audiotaped interview at the end of the 4-week summer program
- Field notes and observations of training activities

Data collected will be transcribed, analyzed, and classified into common themes that run throughout the data sources. After the completion of the 4-week summer residential camp, the researcher will invite all participants to be interviewed individually regarding what the experience was like for that person. After all data have been analyzed, a report of the findings will be presented to the research participants for their review and comment.

RISKS

No foreseeable risks are inherent in your participation in this study.

BENEFITS

It is anticipated that in this study you will

- gain a better understanding of your personal skills such as learning and personality style;
- gain information to help you develop skills and activities that will enhance your performance as a resident assistant in the Upward Bound summer residential camp and will be applicable in other settings and situations in the future;
- gain experience in working collaboratively within a group.

Findings from this study may also be used to develop and expand the training model used by Upward Bound for future summer program staff and may also be incorporated into leadership training program activities for students as a part of my practice and as part of the Upward Bound program.

CONFIDENTIALITY

We will be holding group sessions and confidentiality will be maintained to the best of my ability, however I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of other participants once the group ends. Data will be collected and transcribed so that no names or identifying characteristics are attached to any data source. All one-to-one interviews will be conducted on a strictly volunteer basis; students may choose whether or not to be interviewed. All information gathered from such interviews will be held in strictest confidence with only the principal researcher knowing the nature of the comments made by participants in the interviews. All data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless permission is specifically given in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study unless done so by other students who also participated in the study.

COMPENSATION

Participants in this study will receive no compensation beyond their contractual compensation as agreed upon when hired by Upward Bound. No compensation in any form will be given for your participation in this study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study), you may contact the researcher, Nancy S. Headlee, at The University of Tennessee, Educational Psychology

Department, A517 Claxton Complex, Knoxville, TN 37996, (865) 974-3659. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact Research Compliance Services section of the Office of Research at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; therefore, you may decline to participate with no adverse consequences on your position as a summer Upward Bound resident assistant. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may, if desired, continue your participation in the group with no reprisals or adverse consequences. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, any data identifiable as belonging to you (such as an audiotaped interview) will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

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

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Co-Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Co-Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Co-Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

SUPPLEMENTAL CONSENT FOR USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Sent via email as approved by The University of Tennessee's
Office of Research Compliance (Internal Review Board)

From: Nancy Headlee
Subject: Request for Permission to Use Photos

Greetings to each of you!

Thanks to each of you, I have completed writing my doctoral dissertation entitled, "Utilizing Experiential Collaboration to Enhance Facilitation Skills." I am scheduled to defend this document before my doctoral committee on Thursday, March 6, 2008.

The purpose of this message is to request your permission to use 9 photographs from our RA training in the actual dissertation. The specific photos include:

1) Pipeline activity
2) Blindfold walk
3) Introduction to balance log
4) All RAs on balance log
5) Participants on cable (beginning)
6) Participants on cable (middle)
7) Participants on cable (end)
8) Creek crossing
9) Peer facilitation activity

The reason to include these photographs is to give the reader a better visual understanding of the experiential activities that you completed during the training. As comments were made about specific activities, such as "breaking the 'me bubble'" on the balance log, readers of the dissertation will get a definitive visual picture of the difficulty of the task and its relation to stretching personal comfort boundaries. There are only a select few RAs in each photograph -- the group was too large to include in all photos. Therefore, you will not actually be in all of the pictures.

If you DO NOT grant permission to have your image to be included in the photographs, please email me back by Wednesday, March 5, 2008, and your likeness will be removed from the photographs in which you may appear. If you DO NOT reply, your permission to use the photographs in the dissertation will be considered granted. If you have further questions, please feel free to email me or call me at 865.974.3659. There are no reprisals should you choose not to grant permission for any photograph containing your likeness to be used in this manner. Upon approval by my doctoral committee and the Graduate School, the dissertation will be available in its entirety through The University of Tennessee library under the electronic thesis/dissertation section.

Again, thanks so much to each of you for your participation in my research project. You taught me a great deal about facilitation and served as a wonderful collaborative group!

Best wishes,
Nancy

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Appendix B: Resident Assistant Training Outline

Resident Assistant Training Outline

Date	AM (9:00 until 12 noon)	PM (12 noon until 5:00)
Monday	Location: *Ellington Plant Sciences Auditorium* <u>9 - 10 a.m.</u> **Initial welcome & intro** -- Provide notebook & briefly highlight overview of training agenda for the week. <u>10:15 a.m. - 12:00 noon</u> **Assessments:** 1. Multiple Intelligences Inventory 2. True Colors -- Introduction and initial assessment	**True Colors "Brightening"** 1. Communication 2. Work Style 3. Conflict Closing activity – "Pipeline" 4 - 5 p.m. – Project specific planning
Tuesday .	9 a.m. -- *Ellington Plant Sciences Auditorium* Brief review of assessment characteristics as seen in each identified "group" of personality types. 9:45 a.m. -- Leave for *Mountain Challenge* **Arrival at Mt. Challenge:** 1. Set up with "UB student is..."Activity 2. Use student scenarios as metaphors 3. Lunch	**<u>Challenge Initiatives</u>** ▪ Blindfold Walk ▪ Balance Log ▪ Spotter Techniques ▪ Trust Vee ▪ Nitro Crossing 4 p.m. -- Wrap up and evaluations
Wednesday	Location: *Ellington Plant Sciences Auditorium* **Paperwork/Office/Management** 1. Meet with Humes Hall Director – Jeannie Ford 2. USDA Instructions – Martha Giles 3. Paperwork as applicable to all – time sheets, weekly reports, policies & procedures	**Field Trips** 1. Humes Hall 2. Presidential Food Court -- USDA 3. Student Health Services -- Review of basic first aid -- Review of basic emergency procedures
Thursday	Location: *Ellington Plant Sciences Auditorium* **Wrap Up Training Activities** 1. Reflections discussion 2. Subsequent questionnaire 3. Meet in RA project teams – Review activities 4. Peer facilitation – each RA project team will facilitate an activity for the entire group	**Project Specific Activities** ▪ Door decs ▪ Activity planning ▪ Interest groups
	Focus Groups will be conducted by Nancy throughout the afternoon. Questions to be addressed: - *What are you most excited about as you approach this experience?* - *What's your greatest concern as you approach this experience?* - *RA's will respond to possible scenarios based on past student behaviors and incident.*	
Friday	Location: *25 HPER Building* -- MSRC & PCUB (AEUB will be at Mt. Challenge) **Program Specific Activities** ▪ As needed w/project staff ▪ Moving equipment and supplies to dorm ▪ Putting up door decorations ▪ Van driving lessons -- Campus tour of classes and activity locations	

Appendix C: Data Collection Documents

Utilizing Experiential Collaboration to Enhance Facilitation Skills

INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

FORM # _____

1. **What are your expectations for your Upward Bound training sessions?**

2. **Please list what you believe to be your facilitation skills that you will use in working with the Upward Bound students this summer.**

3. **What do you hope to learn that you didn't know before?**

4. **How will you use this information?**

5. **What are your expectations for me as facilitator?**

SUBSEQUENT QUESTIONNAIRE #1

(End of UB RA Training Sessions)

FORM # _____

1. **What stands out for you about your Upward Bound training sessions?**

2. **Have you developed any new skills that you didn't have before this training?**

3. **What do you know now that you didn't know before?**

4. **How will you use this information?**

5. **What was your experience with me as facilitator?**

SUBSEQUENT QUESTIONNAIRE #2

(End of UB Summer Residential Program)

FORM # _____

1. **What stands out for you about your Upward Bound training sessions?**

2. **Have you developed any new skills that you didn't have before this training?**

3. **What do you know now that you didn't know before?**

4. **How will you use this information?**

5. **What was your experience with me as facilitator?**

UB RA Training
~Daily Reflections~

Please circle the number that reflects your overall experience today.
1 = Poor, 5 = Average, 10 = Outstanding

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Have you developed any new skills that you didn't have before this training?

What stands out for you about your UB training session today?

What do you know now that you didn't know before?

How will you use this information?

What was your experience with me as a facilitator?

Did any experience in particular push you outside your comfort zone?

Focus Group Protocol

The lead question for each focus group was:

Please share your thoughts about your resident assistant training experience.

The remaining focus group time was directed toward answering the questions:

1) ***What was your experience with me as a facilitator?***

2) ***What are you most excited about as you approach this experience of working with the high school students?***

3) ***What's your greatest concern as you approach this experience?***

One-to-One Interview Protocol

The structure used in this data collection approach was a "standardized open-ended interview" (Patton, 2002, p. 280). Each interview was begun by my asking each interviewee to share,

"What stood out for you about your resident assistant training experience?"

I let the interviewee's responses lead my probing questions that followed so as to elicit clarification of or expansion in relating their perspectives and observations about their experiences.

Appendix D: Sample Data Analysis Template

Theme: "A Big Learning Experience" (Source: Focus Group Interview #2, Participant Quote, Line 85)		
Interview #	**Line #**	**Quote**
Focus Group 2	10-11	I think I learned a lot, especially about myself and my fellow colleagues. I learned a lot about different ways to handle different situations.
	22-23	I learned to open up my eyes and think about it.
	33-35	…I think it taught us that by working together, like we do a better job, we can be more effective as facilitators than we could be individually.
	55-56	It kind of helped me with my leadership skills and being able to not only lead but lead by example.
	84	… they help me learn more about myself.
	88-90	…we kind of learned to bridge that *me bubble* and once we were able to do that, I think we were much more effective in accomplishing the task ahead.
Focus Group 1	94-95	I think you helped us by leading by example. I think what you did was "we're going to have to be in your position," and you allowed us to do that every so little.
	260-263	I want myself to learn more. I want to learn from this experience, and that's what I really want to get out of it. You take every experience in stride and know what were the great aspects and what were the bad aspects and what you can do differently. Hopefully, that's pretty much what I want to do is learn.
	319-320	So it's like we're all going to help each other out, we're going to be there for each other, …
	333-334	…taking people's aspects from this whole week, you know who to call, and you know who has your back, which everybody does.
	340-341	…I'm going to need that help in the beginning, so I already know I can call these people, and they're going to help me.
	347-349	So each person has a different way or attitude with the challenges they come across. So if you come across a problem, they'll bring a different way or different method to help if you need that help.
	357-358	…if one of us fails, all of us will probably go down,…
Focus Group 3	27	We had to get out of our comfort zone.
	29	We had to listen to each other…
	106-107 110	Finding out you have a lot of things in common, things like that. It's going to make the job a lot easier… When you find out things you have in common with people, it makes it better.
	226-228	I liked how you left us room for thought, like you made us think for ourselves. Instead of saying "this is good for so and so", you make us think, and it sticks more and makes more sense.
	232	It's not just question and answer, it's dialogue.
	235-236	Every activity, everything that we did had a clear point, a clear message, a clear reason we were doing it,…

Appendix E: *True Colors* Background Handouts

TRUE COLORS

Theory Behind *True Colors*

Source: http://www.truecolors.org/true_colors_theory.html

The theory behind True Colors is not new. It can be traced back to Hippocrates, who identified four different types of human beings; the Sanguine (buoyant, cheerful, hopeful, optimistic, sunny), the Choleric (angry, cantankerous, peevish, irate, testy), the Phlegmatic (languid, lethargic, listless, indifferent, passive), and the Melancholic (dejected, despondent, gloomy, morose). While these definitions are derived from Webster's Thesaurus rather than from Hippocrates, you can see that each refers to very different personality or temperament characteristics.

In more recent years, Carl Jung described personality or temperament differences as a fundamental basis for understanding human beings. When his work, *Psychological Type*, was translated into English in 1923, it had a profound effect on Katherine C. Briggs, who had been studying differences in people for years. As a result, Briggs and her daughter, Isabel Briggs-Myers, developed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), which is used worldwide. Their theory states that much of the random variation in human behavior is actually quite orderly. In their work, they identified and characterized sixteen (16) different types of people.

During the past 35 years, David Keirsey has refined the work of Myers-Briggs. In his publication, *Please Understand Me*, he returned to classifying personality and/or temperament into four types. According to Keirsey, these four different types are different in fundamental ways. They want different things. They have different motives, needs, and drives. They analyze, conceptualize, understand, and learn differently. These differences create natural barriers to interpersonal communication, making understanding between people of different types difficult.

The True Colors metaphor has been developed from the work of Keirsey. Don Lowry's book, *Keys to Personal Success*, translates his theory into simple and practically applied information. It brings complex ideas out of both academia and psychotherapy and sets them in clear, real-life applications.

The Meaning of *True Colors*

Source: http://www.truecolors.org/color_meanings.html

Have you ever had your “colors” done? Do you buy your clothes according to your “color” chart? Have you decorated a room to take advantage of the soothing effects of some colors — or the warming effects of others? Do you wear certain colors because they make you “feel” good? Have you been exposed to statements like “as good as gold,” “true blue,” or “look for the silver lining?” Mystics speak of the aura of color in people’s lives. Manufacturers recognize and take advantage of the effects of colors as they package and market their products. Industrial designers set the mood of working environments through the use of color.

Color has been used to shape and describe our lives, our habits, our values, and our feelings throughout the ages. Research into the physiological effects of color has shown that it truly has an impact on our lives, often in unconscious and mysterious ways. Color can relieve tension and stress. Blue, for instance, is associated with tranquil surroundings. Thus, it is fitting that color provides the “association” between a temperament type and learning tools. How much better it is to refer to and connect with color than with the highly technical formulas, symbols, words, and numbers generally associated with temperament/personality/learning theory.

After reviewing the research data, colors for True Colors were chosen for their direct association with the psychological and physiological needs of people.

Orange represents energy, consuming physiological potency, power, and strength. Orange is the expression of vital force, of nervous and glandular activity. Thus, it has the meaning of desire and all forms of appetite and craving. Those with Orange as a Primary Color feel the will to achieve results, to win, to be successful. They desire all things that offer intense living and full experience.

Orange generates an impulse toward active doing: sport, struggle, competition and enterprising productivity. In temporal terms, Orange is the present.

Gold is the body's natural perceptions. It represents a need to be responsible, to fulfill duties and obligations, to organize and structure our life and that of others. Those with Gold as a Primary Color value being practical and sensible. They believe that people should earn their way in life through work and service to others.

Gold reflects a need to belong through carrying a share of the load in all areas of living. It represents stability, maintenance of the culture and the organization, efficiency, and dependability. It embraces the concepts of home and family with fierce loyalty and faithfulness.

Green expresses itself psychologically as human will in operation: as persistence and determination. Green is an expression of firmness and consistency. Its strength can lead to a resistance to change if it is not proven that the change will work or is warranted. Those with Green as a Primary Color value their intellect and capabilities above all else. Comfort in these areas creates a sense of personal security and self-esteem.

Green characteristics seek to increase the certainty of their own values through being assertive and requiring differences from others in intellectual areas. They are rarely settled in their countenance, since they depend upon information rather than feelings to create a sense of well-being. Green expresses the grounding of theory and data in its practical applications and creative constructs.

Blue represents calm. Contemplation of this color pacifies the central nervous system. It creates physiological tranquility and psychological contentment. Those with Blue as a Primary Color value balance and harmony. They prefer lives free from tension... settled, united, and secure.

Blue represents loyalty and a sense of belonging, and yet, when friends are involved, a vulnerability. Blue corresponds to depth in feeling and a relaxed sensitivity. It is characterized by empathy, aesthetic experiences, and reflective awareness.

Appendix F: Multiple Intelligences Assessment

Multiple Intelligences Assessment

Check ✓ those statements that apply in each intelligence category. Space has been provided at the end of each intelligence for you to write additional information not specifically referred to in the inventory item.

Linguistic Intelligence

_____ Books are very important to me.
_____ I can hear words in my head before I read, speak, or write them down.
_____ I get more out of listening to the radio or a spoken-word cassette than I do from television or films.
_____ I enjoy word games like Scrabble, Anagrams, or Password.
_____ I enjoy entertaining myself or others with tongue twisters, nonsense rhymes, or puns.
_____ Other people sometimes have to stop and ask me to explain the meaning of the words I use in my writing and speaking.
_____ English, social studies, and history were easier for me in school than math and science.
_____ When I drive down a freeway, I pay more attention to the words written on billboards than to the scenery.
_____ My conversation includes frequent references to things that I've read or heard.
_____ I've written something recently that I was particularly proud of or that earned me recognition from others.

Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

_____ I can easily compute numbers in my head.
_____ Math and/or science were among my favorite subjects in school.
_____ I enjoy playing games or solving brainteasers that require logical thinking.
_____ I like to set up little "what if" experiments (for example, "What if I double the amount of water I give to my rosebush each week?")
_____ My mind searches for patterns, regularities, or logical sequences in things.
_____ I'm interested in new developments in science.
_____ I believe that almost everything has a rational explanation.
_____ I sometimes think in clear, abstract, wordless, imageless concepts.
_____ I like finding logical flaws in things that people say and do at home and work.
_____ I feel more comfortable when something has been measured, categorized, analyzed, or quantified in some way.

Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

Spatial Intelligence

_____ I often see clear visual images when I close my eyes.
_____ I'm sensitive to color.
_____ I frequently use a camera or camcorder to record what I see around me.
_____ I enjoy doing jigsaw puzzles, mazes, and other visual puzzles.
_____ I have vivid dreams at night.
_____ I can generally find my way around unfamiliar territory.
_____ I like to draw or doodle.

_____ Geometry was easier for me than algebra in school.
_____ I can comfortably imagine how something might appear if it were looked down upon from directly above in a bird's-eye view.
_____ I prefer looking at reading material that is heavily illustrated.

Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence
_____ I engage in at least one sport or physical activity on a regular basis.
_____ I find it difficult to sit still for long periods of time.
_____ I like working with my hands at concrete activities such as sewing, weaving, carving, carpentry, or model building.
_____ My best ideas often come to me when I'm out for a long walk or a job, or when I'm engaging in some other kind of physical activity.
_____ I often like to spend my free time outdoors.
_____ I frequently use hand gestures or other forms of body language when conversing with someone.
_____ I need to touch things in order to learn more about them.
_____ I enjoy daredevil amusement rides or similar thrilling physical experiences.
_____ I would describe myself as well coordinated.
_____ I need to practice a new skill rather than simply reading about it or seeing a video that describes it.
Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

Musical Intelligence
_____ I have a pleasant singing voice.
_____ I can tell when a musical note is off-key.
_____ I frequently listen to music on radio, records, cassettes, or compact discs.
_____ I play a musical instrument.
_____ My life would be poorer if there were no music in it.
_____ I sometimes catch myself walking down the street with a television jingle or other tune running through my mind.
_____ I can easily keep time to a piece of music with a simple percussion instrument.
_____ I know the tunes to many different songs or musical pieces.
_____ If I hear a musical selection once or twice, I am usually able to sing it back fairly accurately.
_____ I often make tapping sounds or sing little melodies while working, studying, or learning something new.
Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

Interpersonal Intelligence
_____ I'm the sort of person that people come to for advice and counsel at work or in my neighborhood.
_____ I prefer group sports like badminton, volleyball, or softball to solo sports such as swimming and jogging.
_____ When I have a problem, I'm more likely to seek out another person for help than attempt to work it out on my own.
_____ I have at least three close friends.

_____ I favor social pastimes such as Monopoly or bridge over individual recreations such as video games and solitaire.
_____ I enjoy the challenge of teaching another person, or groups of people, what I know how to do.
_____ I consider myself a leader (or others have called me that).
_____ I feel comfortable in the midst of a crowd.
_____ I like to get involved in social activities connected with my work, church, or community.
_____ I would rather spend my evenings at a lively party than stay at home alone.

Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

Intrapersonal Intelligence

_____ I regularly spend time alone meditating, reflecting, or thinking about important life questions.
_____ I have attended counseling sessions or personal growth seminars to learn more about myself.
_____ I am able to respond to setbacks with resilience.
_____ I have a special hobby or interest that I keep pretty much to myself.
_____ I have some important goals for my life that I think about on a regular basis.
_____ I have a realistic view of my strengths and weaknesses (borne out by feedback from other sources).
_____ I would prefer to spend a weekend alone in a cabin in the woods rather than at a fancy resort with lots of people around.
_____ I consider myself to be strong willed or independent minded.
_____ I keep a personal diary or journal to record the events of my inner life.
_____ I am self-employed or have at least thought seriously about starting my own business.

Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

Naturalist Intelligence

____ Volunteers to take care of the classroom plants
____ Draws animals to him/herself
____ Cries when watching Lassie or Bambie
____ Has a collection (rocks, shells, baseball cards) and orders them systematically
____ Likes activities that involve camping, hiking, and/or other outdoor sports
____ Wants to take home every stray animal that runs across the campus
____ Is interested in beginning or maintaining a recycling program in school or home
____ Expresses concern about global warming in conversations; by writing letters or e-mail to local, state, and/or national legislators; etc.
____ Chooses science projects related to plant growth, acid rain, water and/or air pollution
____ Notices changes in seasons and makes comments about the brilliance of colors, buds, and new growth in the spring.

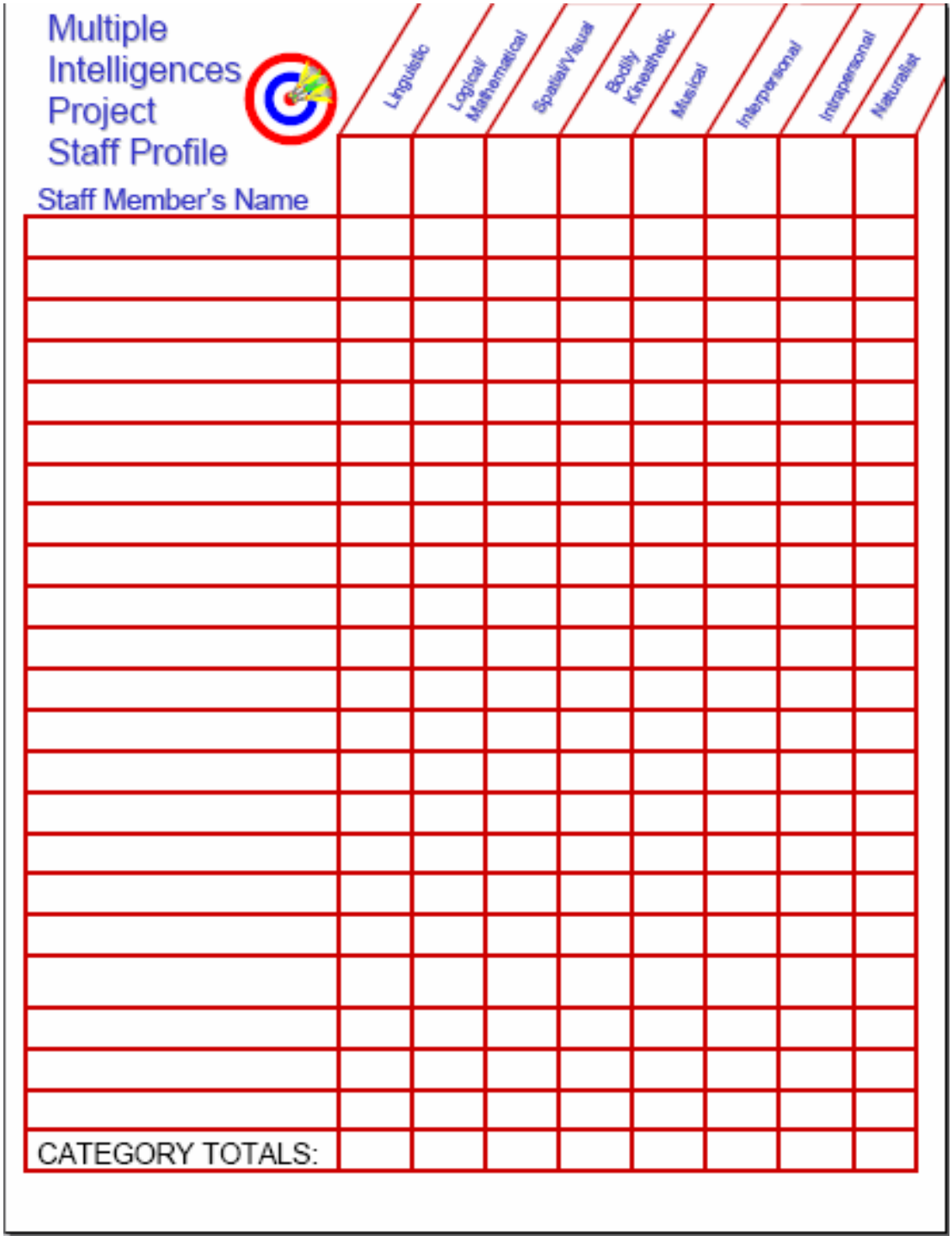
Total the number of items you checked and write that number here: _____

SUMMARY OF MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES PROFILE

Record the total number of items that you checked in each Multiple Intelligence category. Seven or more items were checked in a category is considered a "high" ranking.

Linguistic	Logical-Mathematical	Spatial	Bodily-Kinesthetic	Musical	Interpersonal	Intrapersonal	Naturalist

Multiple Intelligences Summary Profile Form—Used to record each RA team's rankings so as to give an overall summary of each team's strengths and weaknesses.



Appendix G: Informational Handouts for Facilitation

ESSENTIAL GOALS
OF
Experiential Learning

Trusting & competent behavior
accomplished through...

- Trust Building
- Goal Setting
- Problem Solving
- Challenge/Stress
- Humor/Fun
- Peak Experience
- Transfer of Learning

The Role of the Facilitator in Experiential Activities

✓Do's

- ✓ Provide a framework or context for the activity.
- ✓ Set out basic guidelines/rules for the activity (including safety considerations), then allow group members the opportunity to work together to creatively plan/problem solve to reach the goal or objective of the activity.
- ✓ Encourage, support, and provide helpful assistance where possible, but do not "lead" the group – you are the "consultant" rather than the "chairman of the board."
- ✓ Carefully observe behaviors within the group and look for the "teachable" moments where guidance and support can encourage participants to be more than they thought they could be, or to think in new ways, or to consider additional factors.
- ✓ Clarify and focus the comments of the group, providing helpful information, and calling attention to details that they may be overlooking.
- ✓ Assist the group in discovering what they have experienced, not telling them what they have experienced.
- ✓ Remember that, in the end, the performance of the group belongs to the group, NOT the facilitator!

✕ Don'ts

- ✕ Provide too much information at the beginning of the activity so that participants have little left to discover for themselves.
- ✕ Talk more than listen.
- ✕ Lead participants to the "classic" solution instead of allowing them to reach the goal in their own manner.
- ✕ Encourage the group to be creative and then restrict this creativity by unnecessary rules or guidelines.
- ✕ Process the experience in more detail than required.

Quick Guidelines for Processing an Activity

1) **WHAT** – Begin processing by asking group members to describe what they did in the activity. Listen for comments that define what the group accomplished.
2) **SO WHAT** – Elicit more reflection on the performance of the group and individuals by asking, "So what happened when you… or when the group did…"
3) **NOW WHAT** – This is the application or transfer of learning part of processing. How can group members apply in "real life" what they experienced/learned through their participation in the activity? "So, how can you use this at school….at work….with your family…..etc."

VITA

Nancy Surrett Headlee graduated from Loudon High School in Loudon, Tennessee, and began her college studies at Hiwassee College in Madisonville, Tennessee. She graduated cum laude from The University of Tennessee in Knoxville with a Bachelor of Science in Education. During her time as a classroom teacher, her love for working with adolescents prompted her to develop her counseling skills and she followed that desire by earning a Master of Arts degree in Educational Psychology and Counseling from Tennessee Technological University in Cookeville, Tennessee. She served as a school counselor/teacher where she learned to blend counseling and teaching skills to provide a wide variety of learning experiences for her students.

Ms. Headlee's continuing quest for new challenges within the world of education led her to leave public schools and become the Upward Bound Project Director for Hiwassee College in 1996. Her desire to improve her knowledge in administration led her to Lincoln Memorial University where she earned an Educational Specialist degree in Educational Administration and Supervision.

Since coming to The University of Tennessee's Pre-College Enrichment Programs in 1999, Ms. Headlee has worked with a variety of grant projects, has written grant proposals, and is a contributor to *Finding Funding: Grantwriting From Start to Finish Including Project Management and Internet Use* (5th Edition), published in 2008.

Ms. Headlee completed her Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education, with a major in Educational Psychology, in May 2008. She currently continues her work at The University of Tennessee as Project Director of the Pre-College Upward Bound Program.