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Opportunities for Deer Lodge, Tennessee: Community Development and Land Stewardship by a Collaborative Learning Community Group

Allyson Brownlee Muth
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Allyson Brownlee Muth entitled "Opportunities for Deer Lodge, Tennessee: Community Development and Land Stewardship by a Collaborative Learning Community Group." 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 Education, with a major in Educational Psychology.

John M. Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Wayne K. Clatterbuck, J. Mark Fly, David M. Ostermeier, Howard R. Pollio

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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

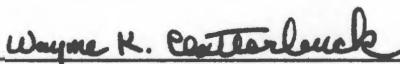
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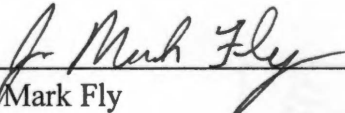


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**OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEER LODGE, TENNESSEE:
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND LAND STEWARDSHIP
BY A COLLABORATIVE LEARNING
COMMUNITY GROUP**

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

**Allyson Brownlee Muth
August 2004**

Thesis
2004b
.m88

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Norris Z. Muth, without whose love and support I never would have found my way, and to my parents, Porter and Diane Brownlee, who taught me to love learning.

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There are so many people whose support and influence have been integral to this learning experience. The following are just a few of the many.

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Thanks to the Initiative for Future Agriculture and Food Systems (IFAFS) "Sustaining Natural Resources on Private Lands in the Central Hardwoods Region" project and to the investigators on the project for extending me an offer to work with a community in a collaborative learning way and for supporting my research.

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ABSTRACT

This study describes an action research inquiry into my practice as a collaborative learning community group facilitator. The Deer Lodge Community Group of private landowners, natural resource professionals and community stakeholders, met monthly to address natural resource and community issues of concern. I facilitated these meetings through the frame of collaborative learning with attention to its elements of dialogue, co-construction, multiple ways of knowing, cycles of action and reflection, place, and fellowship. My intentions were to foster group interactions that acknowledge the significance of lived experience, orient interactions and information transfers towards democratic and participatory exchanges, and create a network of resources for learning and evaluating options for land management.

In order to inquire into the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group, I collected qualitative data in the form of interviews, field notes, and reflective journaling. Experiential themes for community members and stakeholders reflected positive outcomes in terms of relationship building. Community members experienced the group as allowing disparate groups to come together to learn, interact, and see their community in a new way, while lacking structure and direction. Community stakeholders, who saw their own roles as that of outside resources, perceived the group as lacking a unifying focus. Field notes, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews supported these themes.

My study indicates that I was successful in achieving my goal of enabling group members to engage with each other in new and productive ways, to learn about each other and their community, and to develop new visions for the community and the larger

region. Some group members, however, held additional goals of achieving specific actions which were not met. This inquiry points to changes in my practice of a natural resources collaborative learning community group facilitator.

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INTRODUCTION

The field of natural resources is ever changing. Practitioners who entered the field, as I did, to spend their days in a fire tower away from civilization keeping watch over the land, are finding that more and more this practice is associated with people. Our training and academic institutions, however, have been slow to respond to practitioners' new roles as educators, advisors, and managers, in addition to those of foresters, biologists, botanists, and ecologists. This study represents a deeper inquiry into what it means to be a natural resources professional in close relationship with people and their communities, and my efforts to facilitate that relationship to produce new ways of going forward together. In many respects I too am a natural resources professional. This work follows my shift to a community group facilitator in order to inform other natural resource professionals and the people and the communities they serve.

I have worked to influence the relationship between natural resource professionals and private forest landowners in order to create a new means of working together, especially when professionals work with groups to influence individual actions. The goal of my approach is to create more holistic and cooperative outcomes to decisions and action on the land, recognizing the value that individual members of groups bring to the relationship. This study represents an inquiry into creating an environment in which natural resource professional and private forest landowner interactions can change, through the facilitation of collaborative learning in one such group.

Collaborative learning presented itself as a guiding frame for altering the nature of interactions between natural resource professionals and the landowners, communities, and resources they serve. I came to collaborative learning after a search to figure out

how I, as a natural resources professional, could better reach forest landowners and help them to create beneficial solutions to problems and practices on their land.

I facilitated collaborative learning in a group including private forest landowners, natural resource professionals, and community stakeholders. My intent was to create new group and individual knowledge and to improve human connections through the process of dialogue, cycles of reflection and action, and a focus on the different types of knowing and information each participant brings to the group. This was not to be an intrusive and directed form of interaction, but was rather to be based in participants' experiences. My goal was to facilitate a collaborative learning environment for a group of landowners and natural resource professionals to illuminate and clarify "interconnections and tensions between elements of a setting in terms that participants themselves regard as authentic" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000, p.573) and to establish new ways of going on together. I sought to study my effort in order to inform my future practice in the field. I was also interested in contributing to the literature that helps inform other practitioners and researchers in the fields of community development and forestry.

Action research provided the major methodology for investigating my practice. The collaborative learning elements – dialogue, focus on construction, multiple ways of knowing, cycles of action and reflection, the provision of a comfortable place, and fellowship – helped frame my facilitation of the community group. These elements and my interest in studying what I do helped me to approach community group start-up, development and process with a different intent than traditionally seen in natural resources or community development work. The format of this research and its reporting

followed the action research protocol developed by Peters (2002), the DATA-DATA Model.

DATA-DATA outlines a process of reflection and action as a practitioner undertakes an inquiry into her practice. The first DATA is essentially reflective practice, a systematic yet informal inquiry into a practice, its context, and situations or concerns that arise therein. The second DATA represents a more commonly understood research methodology for investigating one's practice (Peters, 2002). This approach to action research "adds the element of context, inclusive of the situation in which theorizing is done and further action is taken" (Peters, 2002, p.3), places the practitioner within her practice, and positions her as a subject of her research. This model for action research is cyclic and iterative. Each letter in the model designates a different reflection or action step. The undertaking of and the reporting of this research followed the DATA-DATA model (Peters, 1999; 2002) outlined below and expanded in more detail in Appendix A:

- **DATA-DATA** – Describe – What is my practice? Describe the situation in which I find myself. What is the problem or the context of my practice?
- **DATA-DATA** – Analyze – Why is the situation as it is? What are my assumptions about the situation and the reasons for the way I practice within the situation?
- **DATA-DATA** – Theorize – Based on the analysis, related research and theory, and my own experience, what do I think will address the situation as I understand it?
- **DATA-DATA** – Act – How am I going to carry out my practical theory?
- **DATA-DATA** – Design – How will I study my practice?
- **DATA-DATA** – Analyze – What do the results say?

- **DATA-DATA – Theorize** – What do these results mean in terms of my theory of practice?
- **DATA-DATA – Act** – Based on my revised theory, what do I do next?

CHAPTER ONE THE SITUATION AND THE PRACTICE

Reflecting on my practice and my studies led me to create and facilitate natural resources collaborative learning community groups as a means of promoting interaction by natural resource professionals and private forest landowners. In this chapter I discuss my reflections on my practice, attempts to inform my practice based on what I had experienced and was learning in my program of study, and the practical theory that I developed. My theory reflected my belief that a community group, brought together to pursue better land awareness and care, and facilitated in a collaborative learning way, would promote improved interactions between natural resource professionals and private forest landowners and create new growth opportunities for the community in which they live and work.

I became interested in seeking to improve the relationships between private forest landowners and natural resource professionals in ways that acknowledge the expertise of the lived experience of the landowners, orient the interactions and information transfers towards democratic and participatory exchanges, and facilitate the creation of a network of resources. Landowners could then become well informed as to options and outcomes of options for making management decisions for their lands. I saw the need for a non-directed, time-intensive, sustainable, community-based process that would promote understanding leading to action and mutual learning opportunities. This effort stemmed from a striking moment in my former work environment, in which I realized that as a forest industry professional I was being asked to manage private lands in accordance with industry practices rather than listening to and incorporating the ideas of landowners. As

a result I began to pay particular attention in my forestry graduate program to language that seemed to indicate we were being trained to give answers and tell landowners what *should* be done rather than to collaborate and help them to reach outcomes beneficial to them and the larger society. Therefore I became interested in seeking ways to collaborate with landowners and sought to facilitate a different interaction between landowners and resource professionals.

Describe – What Was My Practice?

The Big Picture

Natural resources are both publicly and privately held environmentally-derived goods with public use and benefit. Natural resource professionals work with natural resource owners to assist the landowner and the land without harm to the larger societal good. Depending upon their practice, natural resource management professionals infrequently find themselves engaged within communities when making management decisions. Instead, they interact with landowners on an individual level, providing advice and technical assistance for the management of resources on privately held land. This advice and assistance is rendered in light of the landowner's desires and objectives for the land and its products; these objectives may be neither explicit nor the best alternative as a land practice. Natural resource professionals find themselves operating as educators, advisors, managers, and operators, wearing a myriad of hats that must be interchangeable at any time and with any individual. In a relationship where each party has a responsibility to the other, these interactions strive to promote an outcome that is best for the professional, the landowner, the land, and the larger society.

In this work I looked at natural resource professionals and their interactions with landowners through the lenses of forestry and forest management. I have experience and education in this field and plan to continue my work in this realm. In my attempts to better understand the situation and my striking moment that served as the impetus for this research project, I looked at the fields of forestry, community development, grassroots environmental groups, and the contribution each made to the situation as I understand it.

Forestry. Experience and research (Muth, Pavey, Steiner, Ostermeier, & Fly, 2002; Parker, 1992; Geiger & Voegelé, 2003) indicate the relationships between natural resource professionals and private forest landowners may be problematic since each is trying to do their best for the other without always understanding the other's objectives, driving influences, and actions. Private forest landowners are under immense pressure from many sources. The market system is the primary driving factor for changes impacting private forests by providing the economic basis for activities. These market pressures will continue to increase because of our increasing use of wood products and the turn towards private lands to supply these products. At the regional level forestland use and management have effects beyond the individual's land, impacting areas across political and ownership boundaries. Within our society the concern for environmental quality will continue to rise as the general public becomes more aware, and the tension between the private ownership of the land and the public nature of the resources will grow (Ostermeier, Fly, Muth, Pavey & Steiner, 2002). These factors result in a dilemma for private forest landowners: how should they manage for their own desired objectives, respond to market incentives, and yet deal with the growing demands and pressures from government and the larger society?

The fundamental premise of many forestry professionals working with private forest landowners is that “Knowledge leads to better forestry decisions by landowners” (Jones, Glover, Finley, Jacobson & Reed, 2001, p.4). The idea that education makes for better decision-makers has informed most educational efforts for private forest landowners, without any consideration of other factors that could be improved upon to change the experience. In the summer of 1994, researchers in Indiana and Utah undertook a survey to “reveal [landowners’] demographics, landownership characteristics, and management practices...” (Kuhns, Brunson & Roberts, 1998, p.38). One question asked respondents to choose among preferred educational methods from a list developed by the researchers. Answers, in order of preference from most preferred to least were as follows: brochures, booklets, fact sheets; periodic newsletters; personal assistance from forester; newspaper or magazine articles; classes or workshops; videotapes or videoconferences; broadcasts on radio or TV; books from library; other educational videotapes; videoconferences held near home; and computer bulletin boards (Kuhns, et al., 1998). When I looked at this list I noticed that only one (personal assistance) or perhaps two (classes or workshops) included interactions with other people in the learning process. The idea that education is best achieved through an impersonal transfer of knowledge on an individual basis has historically informed many private forest landowner educational efforts. And in this same scenario, the natural resource professional is established as the conveyor of knowledge and resources, getting his or her word out through impersonal means.

The Cooperative Extension Service is the traditional vehicle to get research from universities and natural resource professionals to individuals who need the information to

make land management decisions (Biles, 2001; Barden, Jones & Biles, 1996). Extension agents can be found in almost every county in the U.S.; as private forest landowners expand their base and desire to learn more, Extension has been called upon to play an important role in education and outreach for forest landowners. Early Extension efforts took the form of lectures and question-and-answer sessions on topics as presented by the Extension agents or other experts. Now Extension is becoming more hands-on, offering new opportunities for learning while still trying to maximize contact with the receptive public. Field days and on-line programs provide resources for reaching large numbers of people.

In their further attempts to provide assistance and educational efforts to landowners, extension agents and other natural resource professionals have facilitated the development of landowner associations. These associations are often begun in order to foster a link between private landowners and public agencies (Nagubadi, McNamara, Hoover, & Mills, 1996) but have also begun as lobbying groups to oppose burdensome legislation or to gain assistance from professionals. Landowner associations usually urge members to seek forestry advice from “consulting foresters, service foresters, forestry extension educational materials, and industry landowner assistance personnel” (Argow, 1996, p.33). These groups, led by the landowners involved, continue to look to resource professionals as experts and provide a conduit through which these two groups can meet.

Natural resource professionals in the forestry world have an outside-expert orientation. They have technical training, academic expertise, and resources that allow them to provide solutions to on-the-ground issues or objectives. In interactions with landowners, there is a one-way transfer of information from natural resource

professionals to landowners for land management options and activities. At times, and depending upon the person, this outside-expert orientation has set up a hierarchy between landowners and natural resource professionals. Landowners perceive themselves as lacking understanding because they lack technical training. In valuing technical resources over experiential understanding, natural resource professionals may create situations where they provide all the answers. I do not wish to deny the importance of the resources these professionals possess through technical and educational experiences but rather to convey the idea that this outside-expert orientation has created problematic scenarios in landowner-professional interactions.

Grassroots groups. In my attempts to understand the situation of outsider-expert professional and landowner interactions more fully, I looked at the opposite situation, the formation of grassroots environmental groups. In the context of the term's use in environmental sociology and the context of this work, a grassroots group is a citizen-initiated and citizen-led group for collective action to address a local environmental issue. Outsiders and government agency personnel are not involved in grassroots groups. Grassroots groups tend to form in response to a grievance or when the capital accumulation functions of the government take precedence over its citizen protection functions (Walsh, 1981; Cable & Benson, 1993; Krauss, 1989). A grievance is a suddenly imposed or abruptly realized environmental health issue resulting from poor human decisions or negligence that affect a community or part of a community (Walsh, 1981; Gould, 1993). These grievances often revolve around toxic wastes, nuclear energy, and environmental and personal health issues due to past and current environmental

abuse. Grassroots group formation focuses on the mobilization of citizens as a result of environmental concerns (Brown & Mikkelsen, 1997).

Grassroots groups are formed by small groups of people who are directly affected by a perceived environmental health hazard in their community (Freudenberg & Steinsapir, 1992). They represent informal control systems to apply pressure on the government or corporate environmental offenders and demand reform and action for a specific locality-based problem (Cable & Benson, 1993; Freudenberg & Steinsapir, 1992; Brown & Ferguson, 1995; Brown & Mikkelsen, 1997). Focusing on societal concerns and cooperating to promote collective action result in personal efficacy and group empowerment (Brown & Mikkelsen, 1997; Brown & Ferguson, 1995). Through grassroots groups, concerned citizenry have access to social support, information about environmental polluters, the results of environmental abuse on personal and environmental health, and the power of a collective voice to make itself heard by those with regulatory control (Brown, 1992; Brown & Mikkelsen, 1997).

As a result of participation in grassroots groups, citizens gain positive personal and societal level outcomes beyond gaining recourse for an environmental health issue. Participants report a new connectedness to their community and members within their community as a result of collective action (Brown & Masterson-Allen, 1994; Brown & Ferguson, 1995). Participants also note accomplishments and the feeling that they are contributing to a better world for themselves and the next generation (Freudenberg, 1984).

Grassroots groups are citizen-initiated groups that promote cooperation among affected community members. These groups serve to develop individual skills through

the search for understanding of the environmental grievances, to promote leadership from within as citizens have direct concern with the grievance, and to enable collective action through the expertise and energy of the group.

Community development. Community development literature promotes the role of an outsider somewhere in-between where natural resource professionals have traditionally oriented themselves as sole expert and where grassroots groups exclude outsiders. According to community development, leadership and expertise should be developed in or come from the community. The outside expert can serve as a catalyst or facilitator (Richardson, 2000), but leadership should be developed in place. Community development acknowledges the resources and expertise all participants bring to the interaction and strives to enable community members and stakeholders to work together to improve the community.

Community development can be defined as “trying to help the local people in the local situation (according to what their definition of the local situation is) make a change in ways that they desire” (C. Cleland, personal communication, 9/11/02). It must develop from the ground up, involve local leadership, and gain support from the people in the area to continue (Wilkinson, 1999). Community development is a means to “assist communities [in] improv[ing] their quality of life by building leadership and local identification, increasing local involvement, strengthening local ties, and making vertical ties work for the community” (Ilvento, 1996, p.100). Poor relationships between community members can present barriers to successful community development. On the other hand, strengthening connections among community members creates social capital through which the community can address issues of concern (Luloff & Swanson, 1995).

Many communities are turning to collaborative community development processes to increase opportunities for involvement and to create a space for diverse viewpoints to be discussed. Over time, these processes can help to rebuild trust and the interactions needed to move forward (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Another way of looking at strengthening the community is through community cultural development which “pursues the establishment of a safe environment within which groups of people may work together collaboratively to engage with the decision-making that impacts on their personal and community lives” (Burden, 2003).

Within community development, depending upon the resources available to a community, outsiders may need to play a guiding role as facilitators to address the creation of a network of resources. Although community development is seen as a locally driven approach involving local people, the community developer who is outside the community can assist change through one of three approaches: self-help (providing training and leadership development to prepare community members for responding to their own community issues); technical assistance (providing technical support for efforts such as needs assessment surveys, focus groups, economic development planning, and grant writing); and conflict resolution (organizing the ‘have-nots,’ helping some members of the community have a greater role in matters that affect their lives) (Ilvento, 1996).

Through interactions among community members and outsider experts, there are efforts to:

- Foster broad citizen participation through the promotion of active and representative citizen participation so that community members can meaningfully influence decisions that affect their lives and thereby foster responsibility, ownership, and commitment.

- Create new opportunities for interaction through a holistic, participatory, and engaging process.
- Develop the community both economically and socially by helping community leaders to understand the economic, social, political, environmental, and psychological impact associated with alternative solutions.
- Assist community members in designing and implementing a plan to solve agreed-upon problems by emphasizing shared leadership and active citizen participation in that process.
- Actively work to increase leadership capacity (skills, confidence, aspirations) in the community.
- Build on common ground established by a common vision, shared goals or fears, a sense of place, or the unique aspects of the local community (Ilvento, 1996; Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

Collaborative forestry. While not quite addressing the natural resource professional outside-expert orientation, there have been attempts to introduce collaboration to forest management efforts and to incorporate some ideals of community development and grassroots groups. Recent forest management efforts have emphasized collaborative planning processes that focus on creating civility, fostering dialogue, and building common ground; for example, through the use of place meaning as a way of understanding and reducing conflict between long-term residents and newcomers in the Rocky Mountain Front in Montana (Yung, Freimund, & Belsky, 2003). Collaborative natural resource management has also been viewed as a way to build social capital, allow environmental, social, and economic issues to be addressed together, and produce better decisions (Conley & Moote, 2003).

These collaborative natural resource groups are also known as partnerships, consensus groups, watershed efforts, alternative problem-solving efforts, collaborative

conservation, community forestry, community-based ecosystem management, grassroots ecosystem management, community-based environmental protection, and coordinated resource management (Moote, Conley, Firehock & Dukes, 2000). In essence these are groups from a local community brought together by a shared desire to influence the protection and use of natural resources. These groups use a participatory decision-making process to focus on and affect resource management issues involving public land, publicly owned natural resources (Moote, et al., 2000) or, in this case, the management of a private resource with a public benefit and nature. All of these groups use outsiders as resources but not as the sole source of information. Two of these community-based collaborative natural resource groups are discussed in more detail below.

The idea of community forestry has spread to the U.S. from many third world countries. Local communities engaged in community forestry formalize an understanding of the relationship between local forests and the communities that rely on them, through the purchase of the land, partnership with private institutions, or cooperation with government-owned lands. The relationship is deliberately developed such that “All community members have a means of direct involvement in the management of the forests, with a goal of benefiting the whole community” (Duinker, Matakala, Chege & Bouthillier, 1994, p.713). Community forestry stresses the importance of the forest as a resource to the entire community, and enables all with a stake to participate in decisions around the forest. While education is not an expressed objective, community members become experts as they relate to the forest through their experience.

Another community-based collaborative group that has become more prevalent recently is the community-based forest ecosystem management groups. These groups serve as a means of approaching land stewardship through the identifiable social unit of community. Stewardship is defined as “a commitment to maintaining and restoring the health of the land” (Gray, Enzer & Kusel, 2001, p.3). Community-based forest ecosystem management combines democratic and participatory civic relationships within a holistic and ecological approach to land management, recognizing that sustainable communities are dependent upon sustainable natural resources (Cortner & Moote, 1999; Gray, et al., 2001). Community-based forest ecosystem management most closely approximates a process which I saw as creating beneficial outcomes to interactions between landowners, communities, and natural resource professionals.

My Practice

I have worked as a forester for both private consulting firms and the paper industry. Although I interacted minimally with forest landowners living in rural areas, I became concerned with how landowners and foresters related, and how few private forest landowners had an understanding of the outcome of their actions on their land and their neighbors. Through my work and studies in the Collaborative Learning program at the University of Tennessee, I sought to find a better way of working with private forest landowners to help them take care of their land in a relationally responsible way. My effort soon extended into community and economic development theories once I began to facilitate a community group in Deer Lodge, Tennessee and noticed that participants expressed concerns beyond those related to forests and natural resources.

Through a project at the University of Tennessee, Department of Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries, a group of students and faculty have been working to address issues of stewardship on private lands within Morgan County, Tennessee, and to educate landowners and community members in the area on what it means to be a good steward of the land. Funded by the USDA Initiative for Future Agricultural and Food Systems and titled “Sustaining Natural Resources on Private Lands in the Central Hardwoods Region,” this project is a collaborative research effort across three universities – the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, the University of Missouri, Columbia, and Purdue University in Indiana. In Tennessee, this project started with creating the base for community development through enhancing human connections based on landowners’ experiences and practical understandings. This situation seemed to lend itself to a collaborative learning approach to address natural resource and community concerns, and I decided to facilitate such an effort.

Analyze – Why Was the Situation as It Was?

Few efforts have been made in our region to build community around natural resource issues. Tennessee has historically used other means like brochures, field days, or outreach opportunities aimed at reaching private forest landowners to address issues of concern. These methods have generally targeted private forest landowners with the assumption that the natural resource professionals transfer information that will alter behaviors on the land. Additionally there have been no efforts in which a collaborative community of learners has been created around natural resource issues.

Realizing the historical outsider-expert orientation of natural resource professionals through their training and education created a disconnect for me in the manner in which I perceived we should be working with landowners. Through my practice and education I have learned about grassroots groups and community development and their goals of acting in more collaborative ways. This disconnect helped to better explain my initial striking experience. Grassroots groups focus on the creation of skills and the value of lived experience to develop effective and active community members. In forest management activities, natural resource professionals place little value on developing skills or incorporating lived experience into devising land management activities to address specific issues or objectives. Natural resource professionals often work in one-on-one situations with landowners. Through the lens of community development, more is accomplished when experts and community members work together to make use of the expertise and ideas of all. This scenario became problematic because natural resource professionals do not often work with communities despite recent efforts to promote across-boundary landscape level or ecosystem management.

Given what I have learned about adult education and collaborative learning, a new dilemma presented itself when I considered that natural resource professionals have added to their repertoire the roles of educators and advisors. Adults learn by relating new information to lived experience. “How does this new thing make sense in terms of what I already know and have experienced?” Adult learning occurs in more informal settings outside the walls of academia and great value is placed on the experience of peers.

From my point-of-view, the current situation of natural resource professionals as the outside-expert is problematic because there is little interaction between natural resource professionals and landowners in informal settings. There is no promotion of learning from peers, especially when it comes to decisions about land management. Nor is there value placed in the interaction on learning gained through life experiences, i.e., what landowners have seen or experienced on their land over the years. All of this combines to set up the practical questions for my work.

Practical Questions for My Work

- Can I facilitate a community natural resources group to improve communication and action between landowners and natural resource professionals?
- Will successful group process and collaboration influence the larger natural resource community and improve on the ways in which natural resources professionals interact with private landowners?

The goal of this action research project was to inform my practice as a natural resources community group facilitator. I sought out experiences and education where emphasis was placed on democratizing the interaction between natural resource professionals and private forest landowners. I tried to help private forest landowners realize their expertise in their own experience on their land, to give them time to reflect on activities available and their outcomes around land management and/or conservation, and to enable them to make decisions based on the best understanding available to them. I wanted to facilitate an interaction wherein a collaborative learning environment could promote new opportunities to inform my future work with private forest landowners and natural resource professionals.

Theorize – What Did I Think Would Address the Situation?

I proposed to facilitate an interaction between private forest landowners, natural resource professionals, and community members in ways that would acknowledge the expertise of lived experiences, orient the interactions and information transfers towards democratic and participatory exchanges, and create a network of resources for learning and evaluating options for land management. I also perceived that this interaction would promote understanding leading to action and mutual learning through a non-directed, time-intensive, sustainable, community-based process.

The frame within which I proposed to structure the facilitation of new interactions between natural resource professionals and private forest landowners was that of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning calls upon participants to engage in a multi-faceted process of making meaning. It requires participants to be truly present, to possess a mind open to new ideas, to be willing to participate, and to display relationally responsible interactions with others in the group. These elements, while they may occur separately in our day-to-day lives, become something else within the context of collaborative learning. Collaborative learning creates a continuing flow of movement within the conversation as participants struggle to create something that is more than the sum of individual contributions. My aim was to create a community of social resources (Katz, Conant, Inui, Baron, & Bar, 2000; Katz & Shotter, 1999) available to all participants for shared inquiry and shared learning.

My experiences in collaborative learning and the fields of forestry and rural and environmental sociology led me to believe that collaborative community groups, by incorporating the resources and experiences of community members, landowners, and

natural resource professionals, would foster improved interactions and innovations. I sought to approach landowners and communities as a facilitator and resource person, rather than positioning myself as the sole expert (Seitz, et al., 2002). This did not imply denying the expertise of natural resource professionals, but rather positioning myself such that I could help landowners and other stakeholders to recognize expertise in their own lives and experience. Each participant brings to the group their own valuable history and perspective.

Within my experience, I found that providing a space for all to have a voice and to share their ideas allows people to feel heard, establishes respect and trusting behavior, and provides a foundation through which the group can go on together. “A collaborative learning environment where a learner’s input can shape goals and activities is more conducive to constructing meaningful knowledge” (Garrison, 1997, p.23). Empowered community members seek expertise from a diversity of perspectives and resources, both from within and outside the community. Local decisions are directed towards shaping broader public policy and affecting government action (Richardson, 2000). This facilitation style may be characterized as “helping people help themselves” (Richardson, 2000, p.40).

To more closely examine the framework through which I proposed initiating and facilitating a community collaborative learning group, the different aspects of collaborative learning are examined in more detail below. I tried to pay attention to each element in the facilitation of the community group.

Collaborative Learning

For people to pattern their lives according to a single pre-existing order, or for them to have their lives patterned for them in such a way, is to ignore the necessity for people always to respond to the actions of the others around them, in ways 'fitting' their own unique circumstances, according to their own unique use of the resources socially available to them (Shotter, 1993a, p.14).

Learning can be defined as a way in which individuals or groups “acquire, interpret, reorganize, change, or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills, and feelings. It is also primary to the way in which people construct meaning in their personal and shared... lives” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p.4). Learning is a qualitative and quantitative change in the way of seeing, experiencing, or understanding something in the real world (Matthews & Candy, 1999). Another definition of learning comes from Peter Senge: “Learning occurs when people engage in complicated undertakings and find a way to reflect on how they’re doing it – and perhaps engage a coach or mentor who has some tools and methods for learning” (Zemke, 1999, p.48). Collaborative learning occurs through interactions with others. It is dynamic and creative.

Collaborative learning refers to a way of being – a means of making meaning in the world. Its focus and sources of creativity are derived from relationships that occur between people. It is an intentional, conscious, reflective moment out of which something new is created – something that was not already present in the individuals themselves or the group.

Peters defines collaborative learning as “to labor together in order to produce knowledge, and frequently, to take action on the basis of new knowledge” (1995, p. 269). While this may seem basic, it is a process through which new meanings are created. It is a respect-filled, creative, open, intentional, fluid, dynamic, emergent process based in the

relationships, interactions, and experience each brings to and creates within the group, out of which arises something greater than and other than the sum of its parts. There is in collaborative learning a “drive to meaning, where meaning is understood as something still in the process of creation, something still bending toward the future as opposed to that which is already completed” (Holquist, 1997, p.23). In the moment all that is known is the relationship, the interaction, “being aware of and mutually reflecting one another” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.91). Creation usually comes in an “a-ha” moment at which participants can say, “Look what we did!” They point back to an act within collaborative learning. The event of collaborative learning presents itself in a moment, looked for, sought after, but not forced. In this work I approached collaborative learning as a way of being that would be capable of creating a space in which its elements and generative moments could occur.

There are several elements integral to collaborative learning: dialogue, cycles of reflection and action, a focus on construction, and multiple ways of knowing (Peters & Ragland, 2002). Through my own experiences and the work of colleagues (Fazio, 2003), I have added two more components: place and fellowship. A discussion of each element and its contribution to collaborative learning follows.

Dialogue

In the experience of dialogue, there is constituted between the other person and myself a common ground; my thoughts and his are interwoven into a single fabric, my words and those of my interlocutor are called forth by the state of the discussion, and they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator ... we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2000, p.354).

In collaborative learning the search is for “ways of going on together” (Gergen, McNamee, & Barrett, unpublished paper, p.3), in which we emerge “not as a relatively fixed end product, but as [people who are] constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which [we] participate” (Davies & Harré, 2001, p.3). Dialogue is the process by which “a communal ‘space of resources’ between all those involved” (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p.242) is created. It is open conversation, making space for others, being a member of a group, not hierarchical but equal, a flow, a dance, a meeting of others in hopes of engendering something new. In a dialogical relationship, one person is spontaneously responsive to another. Understanding does not equate to imagining the same picture in each other’s heads. It is responding through words or actions. The response to an other’s utterance is what understanding is all about (J. Shotter, personal communication, 2002).

Genuine dialogue occurs “where each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself [sic] and them” (Buber, 1972, p.19). “In a dialogue, people are not just interacting, but creating together” (Isaacs, 1999, p.174). Dialogue has been likened to a conversation without sides (Isaacs, 1999), a dance, an inquiry.

Dialogue is a stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us. This will make possible a flow of meaning in the whole group, out of which may emerge some new understanding. It’s something new, which may not have been in the starting point at all. It’s something creative. And this shared meaning is the ‘glue’ or ‘cement’ that holds people and societies together (Bohm, 1996, p.6).

Sharing through dialogue enables not only the creation of new understandings, but also a better understanding of existence, outreach, and relationships (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001).

Isaacs says that there are four stages through which members of a group get to dialogue (1999). Politeness, the first stage, is characterized by conversation on impersonal or non-conflictual matters. The second stage, Breakdown, is where conflict occurs as participants begin to disagree on ideas and opinions. Isaacs has noted that this stage is necessary in getting to dialogue. Without conflict there is no means by which to call assumptions into question so that they can be examined. Inquiry, the third stage, is a reflective stage in which participants inquire into assumptions raised during conflict with intent to understand them and learn from them. The fourth stage of dialogue is Flow. Flow represents the generative area of dialogue where, called forth through group inquiry, new understandings are developed, new meanings are made, and new outcomes occur (Isaacs, 1999).

Cycles of Reflection and Action

Cycles of reflection and action enable participants to act, reflect on their actions, act upon those reflections, and then reflect upon the actions in a continuous cycle of doing and being with others and as a result of theirs and others' participation in the group. "Discerning reflection is the first step to... the opening of new visions and alternative futures" (Gergen, 1999, p.63). Reflection serves to redirect actions as well as to provide a means to examine and challenge the assumptions guiding actions (Marchel & Gaddis, 1998).

Cycles of action and reflection are included in what is termed reflective practice. Reflective practice involves “identifying one’s assumptions and feelings associated with [the group], theorizing about how these assumptions and feelings are functionally or dysfunctionally associated with [the group and its] practice, and acting on the basis of the resulting theory...” (Peters, 1991, p.89). Acting, thinking about, or reflecting on what one is doing and, in the process, evolving the way of doing it (Schön, 1983) can “serve as a corrective to overlearning. Through reflection [one] can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experience of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness which [one] may allow [one’s self] to experience” (Schön, 1983, p.61). Reflective practice involves formalizing the ways in which practice is thought about and plans are made for moving ahead in a job, within a conversation, or in ordinary life.

Focus on Construction

The reality of everyday life is shared with others (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 28).

A focus on construction encapsulates two ideas: the creation of new meanings and understandings in collaborative learning experiences, and the recognition of a social construction of knowledge within and outside of collaborative learning. In essence, new meanings are socially constructed from within the group.

The process of making new meaning in the group occurs through social construction. Within social construction practitioners assume that all knowledge is socially constructed, that is, comes from relationship. The way we define it within

collaborative learning group members co-construct new understanding out of the experiences and knowledge individuals bring to the group. “Social constructionism is a means of bracketing or suspending any pronouncement of the real, the reasonable, or the right. In its generative moment, constructionism offers an orientation toward creating new futures, an impetus to societal transformation” (Gergen, preliminary draft, p.2).

“Man is biologically predestined to construct and to inhabit a world with others... In the dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world the human organism itself is transformed. In this same dialectic man produces reality and thereby produces himself” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p.183). Social construction is always going on, it is never-ending, as long as one is in contact with others. “We are alive,” says John Shotter (personal communication, 2001) and thereby “always in relation with an other, fundamentally embedded in a ceaseless flow of relationally-responsive activity... between us and the others... around us” (Katz & Shotter, 1999, p.3). And through that relation something new for ourselves and for our group will always be socially constructed. “We participate in our world, so that the ‘reality’ we experience is a co-creation that involves the primal givenness of the cosmos and human feeling and construing” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.6). Of greatest importance, “Constructionism invites us to see persons as constituted within relationship. To proceed further, if it is a process of relationship that furnishes the basis for all meaning, then relationship becomes the font of all that we hold dear, all human value” (Gergen, 1997, p. 198). Recognizing the importance of relationships in meaning making creates a certain responsibility to the interaction because of its potential. Gergen has termed this relational responsibility (2001).

A focus on construction of new ways of being supports the idea that collaborative learning effects a change in behavior, a change in relating to self and others, that will make itself known between members of the group, in what individuals do in the group, and in what they take away from the group. These new ways of being will be developed between group members as they learn with and from each other, and through the relationships they build between themselves and within their community.

The focus on construction makes clear the importance of relationships as the basis for new meanings and new ways of going on together, and implies the generative nature of collaborative learning. One does not have to consciously be a social constructionist to practice a collaborative learning way of being, but one must be able to recognize the importance of relationships with others as an integral part of daily life. Human life cannot be isolated from interactions with others as relationships are integral to one's movement through the world.

Multiple Ways of Knowing

If we force [new knowledge], it will disappear, but if we approach its diversity and complexity with an open spirit of humility, a willingness to be permeated, that new knowledge also reveals itself to us. Humility helps us to grow, to listen, to share, and to know how to give and to receive. It teaches us how to create a knowledge that is 'ours', not 'yours' or 'mine' – to create not only a 'you' or 'me', but a 'we'. We remember that the more open we are, the more able we are to listen (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001, p. 381).

The element of multiple ways of knowing is important to collaborative learning because it helps us to recognize the value in experience, skills, learned knowledge and what is created within a group, and to equalize positioning within the group. All ways of knowing are valid; therefore, we are all experts in our own life experiences. Valuing

multiple ways of knowing allows group members to function as equals by helping them to feel they have a contribution to make from their own expertise and experience.

Multiple ways of knowing include knowing-that, knowing-how, and knowing-from-within. Knowing-that is usually associated with formal knowledge such as theory, rules, and facts (Ryle, 1949; Shotter, 1993b). Knowing-how includes practical knowing, or how to do something, a skill or craft (Ryle, 1949). Knowing-from-within comes from within an interaction and is a part of the interaction. It is knowing through the relationships with others, that which is only brought out in a group. “It is a joint kind of knowledge, a knowledge held in common with others, and judged by them in the process of its use. It is its own kind of knowledge, *sui generis*, that cannot be reduced to either of the other two” (Shotter, 1994, p.1). This type of knowing also occurs through direct interaction with a place or object. It is knowing through immediate contact with an other, including objects.

Knowing-from-within is the most difficult to point to, yet it is crucial to group interaction. It could be considered a sensitivity or tacit knowledge about the group as a whole. It is an intuitive action that derives from the unstated sensitivities of the group. Knowing-from-within makes the background out of which the group operates present but not necessarily visible. “It is the kind of knowledge one has *only from within a social situation*, a group, or an institution, and which thus takes into account (and is accountable to) the *others* in the social situation within which it is known” [italics in original] (Shotter, 1993b, p.7). It is a space in which each “become[s] a part of each other’s responsive community” (Katz et al., 2000, p. 857).

Knowing-from-within derives from knowing-that and knowing-how. Practical, theoretical, and lived experiences create an understanding that guides how we make meaning from knowing-from-within. Knowing-from-within influences how group members interact. An utterance, for example, occurs out of knowing-from-within. “It takes place between speakers, and is therefore drenched in social factors. This means that the utterance is also on the border between what is said and what is not said, since, as a social phenomenon *par excellence*, the utterance is shaped by speakers who assume that the values of their particular community are shared, and thus do not need to be spelled out in what they say” [italics in original] (Holquist, 1997, p. 61). In other words, the “immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine – and determine from within – the structure of an utterance” (Voloshinov, 1986, p. 86) and by extension the interaction. These types of knowing are evidenced in collaborative groups as they develop and delve deeply into questions and understandings, in this case, around issues as they relate to them, their interaction, and the future.

Place

Intimate places are places of nurture where our fundamental needs are heeded and cared for without fuss (Tuan, 1977, p.137).

Place represents the physical environment in which collaborative learning occurs. It is a safe space (Tuan, 1977), an area in which interaction can happen. “Collaborative place is constructed out of the physical location where collaborators come together to engage in collaborative learning” (Fazio, 2003, p.70).

Through a physical coming together of a group there is the potential for the creation of a safe place, a container in which dialogic space is made, a place for others to interact. This place must be one of “inviting and providing opportunities for all voices” (Anderson, 1999, p.67), and one of acceptance, response, and engagement. Making space for all to have a voice can be somewhat difficult, especially if the group is large; however, a physical place allows other forms of communication, such as body language and eye contact, to be used. Physical togetherness allows for energy to develop and possibilities to be created in a safe place (Isaacs, 1999).

Through my own experiences in the field I have come to realize the need for physical togetherness – a place in which a group can hear each other’s voices, see each other’s faces, share in the witness that contributes to real communication. Physical togetherness occurs in the created place of interactions. “Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me” (Buber, 1958 as quoted in Smith, 2000), physically present. The creation of something new for me and for the group cannot occur unless I am present within a safe, collaborative place.

Fellowship

The act of sharing gives us new knowledge about where we ‘fit’ in relationship to others. And in turn, that knowledge strengthens us as individuals because it deepens our understanding of who we are and what we have to offer (Pyrch & Castillo, 2001, p. 381).

Fellowship arises through relaying stories, laughing, sharing a meal, having the space and time for friendly conversation, and catching up. Researchers have noticed that

eating together as a group allows initial connections and fellowship to occur. “The importance of food in bringing people together is a serious matter... where simple nutritious, locally produced food is provided for all to share, then somehow more people are attracted to the meetings, and many barriers can be broken down. The offering of food also sets a casual, friendly tone and can diffuse potentially tense situations” (Richardson, 2000, p.223).

Time and space for fellowship work to establish a personal connection through identification and resonance with the experience of others through personal stories. Sharing by willing participants committed to the collaborative learning process helps create a safe environment, a possibility for going on together that makes collaborative learning happen. Without a personal connection on which to initiate going on together, collaborative learning cannot occur. Collaborative learning takes depth and commitment, often lacking without personal connection.

Reciprocity and mutuality are integral to fellowship. “I hear what you say, now let me tell you what that triggers in me” becomes fundamental to the dialogue process. Katz and Shotter describe it this way: “To be spontaneously responsive with others in this way, such that they can sense that the activity going out from us toward them is in answer to the activity emanating from them toward us, and vice-versa, could be described in terms of us as resonating to each other” (1999, p.8). Fellowship can lead to resonating with. However, to be truly a part of an interaction, to resonate with others requires that one’s own voice be heard. “If my position – what I truly think and feel – is not voiced, there is no dialogue” (Gergen et al., unpublished paper, p.10). Reciprocity and mutuality

do not occur without fellowship, without hearing the voice, or seeing the communication, of one's self and others.

This fellowship, the grounds on which to establish a deeper relationship, warrants a discussion of Buber's I-It and I-Thou. These two ways of seeing an other determine the success or failure of a collaborative learning experience. I-It is an objectification of an other. "I-It involves distancing. Differences are accentuated" (Smith, 2000), the "I" relates to "everything in his or her world as an object" (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997, p.139) to be used. My understanding of Buber is that he does not say this is a bad thing, rather it is commonplace in our day-to-day life with so many others. I-It allows for self-protection. A person cannot give all of herself to everyone she comes in contact with. However, the truly relational nature of collaborative learning requires the other type of awareness of an other, the I-Thou relationship. "I-Thou is a domain of 'pure relation' where all there is, is relating" (Pollio et al., 1997, p.139). This presentness and awareness of an other as a "Thou" is called out through sharing and being relational – the essence of fellowship.

My Theory

As a practitioner initially trying to educate private forest landowners to address natural resource issues on a community basis, based upon my understanding and experience of past educational efforts, and the need for new interactions between landowners and natural resource professionals, I saw an opportunity for a different approach. I saw a need for facilitation to help to identify the expertise of group members, to ease their sharing with the group, to enable the group to work through conflict, and to

provide the connections to outside experts to allow for a new understanding and relationships to be built around issues of concern for community members. The goal was to facilitate a forum “in which diverse ideas are expressed respectfully, trust is developed, and shared learning occurs. [This] learning can result from either success or failure, from things that work as expected or things that do not work” (Rolle, 2002, p.7). A natural resource community group facilitated in a collaborative learning way seemed an approach that would enable all to be equal participants and co-learners working to build their community and to learn from their interactions.

CHAPTER TWO ACT – HOW DID I CARRY OUT MY PRACTICAL THEORY?

Selecting the Community and Background Research

The Deer Lodge, Tennessee, natural resources collaborative learning community group (Deer Lodge Community Group) was an effort to revitalize a rural community through a grassroots effort. My goal was to foster the creation and development of community capacity in the community's attempt to address change proactively. In our start-up phases, researchers approached all private forest landowners, natural resource professionals, and stakeholders with concerns in the Deer Lodge area to invite them to participate in a learning and action opportunity to address community issues.

The community was identified from eighteen key informant interviews undertaken to establish an understanding of the region in which the “Sustaining Natural Resources...” project sought to work. Key informants were people who were identified as knowledgeable about their region (Elmendorf & Luloff, 2001) – landowners, county executives, natural resource professionals, Chamber of Commerce personnel, etc. Researchers working on the larger project searched for a community with a history of connection to the forestland in the region and a history of past cooperative efforts within the community. Historical action became important because a group that has at least attempted community action has built up the capability to work together and may show increased willingness and success in future efforts (Luloff & Swanson, 1995; Wilkinson, 1999). Key informant interviews also identified potential lapses in information in order to ensure that resources for assistance could be identified.

Key informant interviews indicated an overwhelming concern about impending change in the region. Three areas of perceived change were: 1) effects of the recent southern pine beetle epidemic that destroyed many of the pine forests in the region; 2) changing activities of the forest industry as it strives to maintain economic viability in the world; and 3) changing pressures coming from development and an influx of newcomers with values different from those of the longer-term residents of the region (Ostermeier, et al., 2002). Researchers were also interested in the perceived future of the area. Results of the interview analysis indicated that there was no agreed-on vision for the future of the region's natural resources and that the region's capacity to address change and provide a direction for the future was limited by low civic participation.

Subsequent focus groups in the Deer Lodge community expanded upon those issues of concern and began to help us as facilitators and researchers search for ways in which to help the community move forward. Focus group participants were broken down into five groups: natural resource professionals, conservation-oriented stakeholders (e.g., The Nature Conservancy, Save Our Cumberland Mountains, etc.), industry-oriented stakeholders (e.g., Farm Bureau, Forest Industry, etc.), landowners who had expressed an interest in timber management on their land, and landowners who had objectives other than timber management on their land. Questions created by researchers focused on four areas of inquiry: 1) forest-related concerns and how they differ across groups; 2) challenges faced by groups to influence or make land management decisions; 3) hopes about the future of the forests in the area and how they differ across groups; and 4) ideas people have about how to ensure hopes are realized and applied in communities.

The focus groups found that interviewees shared a concern about the effects of highgrading practices on the quality of hardwoods in their county, and some of the groups were especially concerned about encroaching development. Overall, participants in the five groups hoped for a future that included the existence of healthy, profitable forests in Morgan County. Participants mentioned several programs or incentives that might encourage private landowners to engage in practices that would lead to the realization of the hopes that they had described. Simplifying and making improvements to cost share programs were noted in all five groups. The development of more landowner education programs and demonstration projects was mentioned in every group except the non-timber landowners (Pavey, Muth, Steiner, Ostermeier, & Fly, 2003).

Planned Process of the Group

My initial goal was to open up the field of options available to forest landowners and community stakeholders through the creation of an empowered group capable of making decisions for their community. In the interest of testing my practical theory that a space wherein new interactions between natural resource professionals, forest landowners, and community stakeholders were facilitated would create new possibilities for landowners and the community, I made some plans for how the group would progress and develop. I planned to hold a series of community meetings to promote education and action, using the expertise of natural resource professionals and providing space for the participants to make sense of what was heard in terms of their own experience.

Early meetings were to introduce participants to each other, to lay some groundwork for how group participants would interact with each other, and to identify

areas of participant interest or concern in anticipation of addressing those concerns. I proposed to find speakers from within the group of participants, seeking resources from without if necessary, to educate us further around those interests and concerns. Monthly meetings with a speaker were to include time for presentations, as well as for sitting down at the table, and engaging with participants as we attempted to make sense of the information presented in terms of our own situations. Two weeks later a second, reflective meeting was proposed to dialogue around thoughts, experiences, and presentation-derived ideas that may have occurred in the intervening period. This meeting was structured to have greater potential for dialogue, creating new knowledge around the issues, and taking action through enabling participants to reflect on what we had learned.

This plan was structured to allow for a great deal of flexibility depending upon the resources the group needed and the desires of the group for outcomes of their learning and action. My overall goals for this plan of action were to allow for space and time for participants to dialogue and to reflect on their learning and together to create new ways of going on within the community.

Deer Lodge Community Group Overview

In acting on my practical theory to facilitate a collaborative learning space, I discovered new opportunities. The specific facilitation of the Deer Lodge Community Group incorporated components of community and economic development, reflection in the meeting rather than later, and continual re-adjustment as to where the group desired to act. I acted in roles befitting both a participant and a researcher, and I refer to the Deer

Lodge Community Group as our effort. “We” and “us” refer to all participants (myself included) in the group. To facilitate the group and help participants feel a continued part of the process, I sent out monthly newsletters with summaries of previous meetings. I also prepared food and created rough outlines to help focus the group should the need arise for each gathering. Newsletters, preparations, and the process of the monthly meetings as I acted on my practical theory are expanded on below.

Newsletters

I sent letters of invitation to all landowners who had been identified as owning at least ten acres of forested or farm land in the Deer Lodge area. I also sent letters to natural resource professionals and community stakeholders who had participated in the key informant interviews and focus groups. These letters laid out the idea that we would be creating a learning space in which people could freely question information and make sense of new information in terms of their own and their neighbors’ experiences. Over time, these monthly letters of invitation turned into newsletters (with generic greetings) summarizing what had occurred in the previous meeting and laying out the overview for the next meeting. These letters are included in Appendix B.

Preparations

In advance of each monthly meeting, I prepared an idea of directions the conversations could go, should conversation lag. These initial scripts were very detailed, since there was a great deal of information I felt it necessary to convey. As the group became more comfortable interacting and recognizing the need to make space for

conversations, these scripts became almost non-existent, to the point of just planning ahead as to how introductions would take place. I provided paper and pencils for participants to take notes.

Over the first half of our year of meetings, I provided dinner for participants to give people another reason for coming. Food and fellowship were an important draw to the community group meeting. My provision of a meal enabled participants to come enjoy dinner and participate in the group. As our groups grew larger, and pursuing the idea of fellowship (plus my realization that some of my meals challenged the comfort level of some participants by exposing them to foods outside their taste experiences), we decided to make our meetings potluck. I usually provided the main course and some side dishes, in case participants had little time to prepare something, but most people brought a dish.

From the very beginning I was very aware that this was a research project and that I would be taking information from them to get to a better understanding about the community, the process, and my practice. Being aware of my “taking,” I tried to ensure that I gave something back to them. This was accomplished in the form of food and handouts that provided additional resources for further information and education. Over the year of meeting, I found myself extremely uncomfortable with the realization that this natural resources collaborative learning community group was begun and facilitated to inform my practice and serve my needs as a graduate student, rather than as a magnanimous gesture on my part. This feeling of serving my own needs strongly informed my role and actions within the community group, and helped me to be more aware of giving something back to the community wherever I could.

Meeting Overview

The Deer Lodge Community Group began meeting in February 2003. At the initial group meeting we talked about creating a space in which participants could freely question, share their own experiences and knowledge, learn more about and address natural resource issues, and make personal sense of information shared with participants through interactions with each other and with experts. Early participants were persons who took part in the focus groups and a couple who was interviewed by Miriam Steiner-Davis in her non-participant landowner phenomenological interviews (see Steiner, 2003). Through the course of the group meetings, participation spread to other interested community members and stakeholders through word of mouth and my newsletters. I presented myself as a co-learner and facilitator and tried to be as inclusive and non-directive as possible.

Some forestry and natural resource issues of concern arose out of the group's initial discussions, although the focus of concern quickly grew much larger than just natural resources. Group concerns covered county infrastructure, education, sprawl, development pressures, economic development, welfare, and issues of taxation. Participants expressed a desire to continue the conversations begun with each other at this meeting to subsequent meetings because they felt they had not often been given the opportunity to really think deeply about and inquire into what they felt was important in their community. With the expansion of the issues of concern beyond the natural world, the field for education and action was greatly expanded, and the group wanted to explore those options for inquiry in depth. The group agreed to meet on a monthly basis and to

look for ways in which we could proactively and effectively address community change against a background of natural resources.

In the March meeting we continued discussions on larger community concerns in order to reach a common understanding around the causes of our issues and to discover where energies would be most effective in addressing these issues. We provided time and space for everyone to have a say on issues. I asked them to think about connections and help me to understand what was important for them. Out of this we developed a concept map to show the interconnected nature of the issues and which is included as Figure 1. Through their conversations and the energy present with the group, participants felt they were ready to move into action. I asked them to hold back in order to do more relationship building and to develop a good understanding of the community and its issues – my idea being that we needed to build human resources before moving into addressing issues. Instead, I proposed more of an educational opportunity for the next meeting to invite other groups to inform us about their work and concerns so more time could be spent for participants to get to know one another, and to understand each other's concerns.

In April, the Deer Lodge Community Group invited representatives from other organizations working within the county to share their objectives and activities with the group and to seek out areas where groups could dovetail efforts. Representatives of the Emory-Obed Forum spoke to us about their efforts to promote eco-tourism in the county, as a way to address community development and natural resource conservation. This meeting proved to be engaging and participants began thinking about what actions they

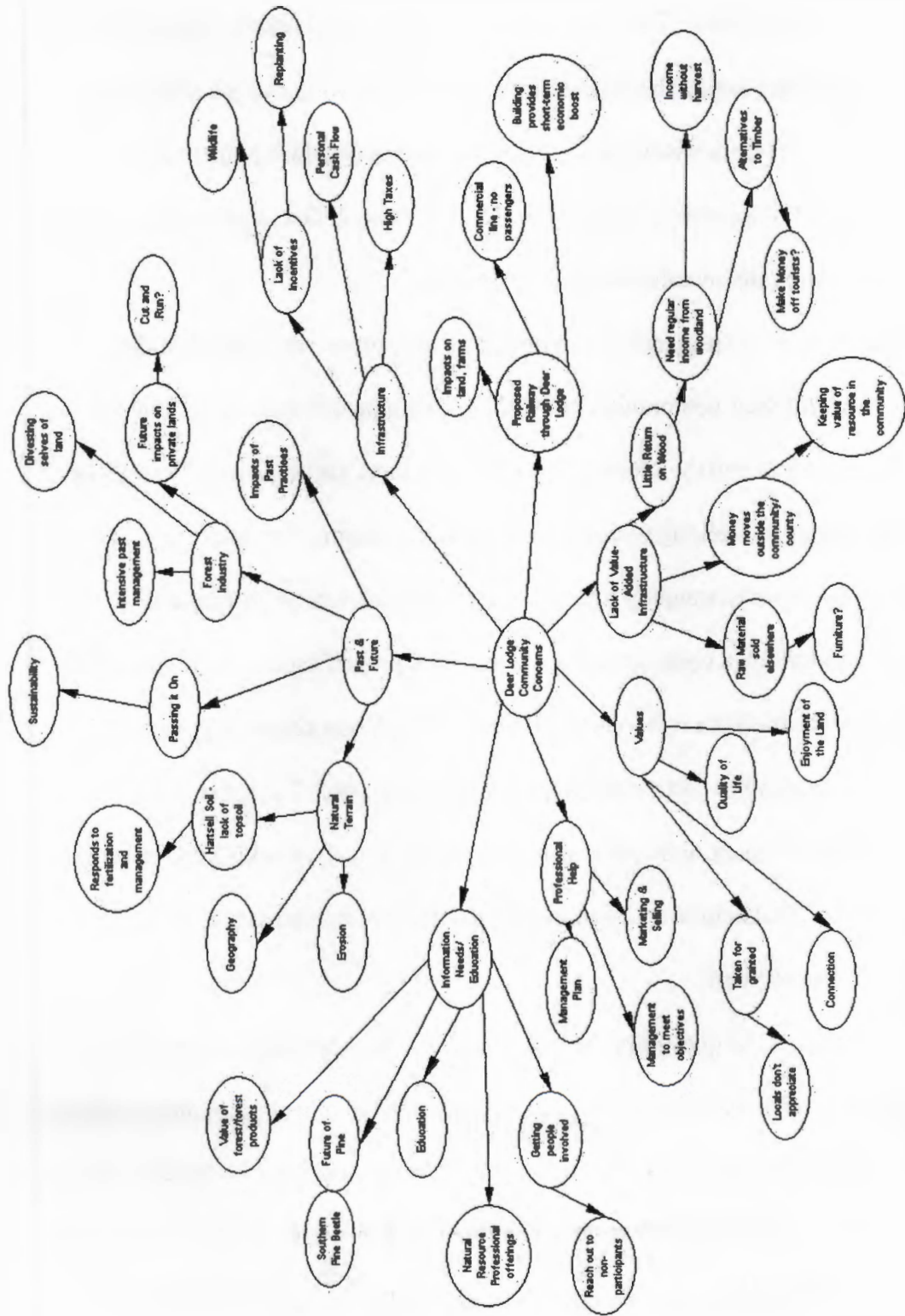


Figure 1. Concept map of the issues facing Deer Lodge, Tennessee.

could take on their own land. Towards the end of the meeting, I asked people to reflect on what they had heard during the course of the evening and what had meaning for them. Participants reflected on surprising things that they had learned during the meeting. Through conversations I gathered that people felt excited, included, and convinced of the need for other community members to become involved.

Group members expressed their optimism in the process and their confidence in making decisions for their community, rather than having people make decisions for them. When we considered the future and the need for more participation, ideas about using the local paper and talking with others one-on-one became very important. To ensure that the group understanding reflected the larger community, participants developed and undertook a community inquiry research project using a semi-structured questionnaire to ascertain the opinions of members of the larger community who had been unable or unwilling to participate in the community group. The questionnaire addressed likes and dislikes, and concerns for the future, as well as asking where efforts should be directed. It also informed community members of our activities and assessed their willingness to take part.

The creation of the questionnaire took place over the May and June meetings. Additionally we created a handout that could be distributed to other community members to help them understand our goals. Public outreach became important because of a rumor going around town that community members participating in our group were being asked to open up their private land to public access. By providing alternative information we hoped to dispel the rumor. We planned to use the town Fourth of July celebration to interview community members and reach out to others.

The community inquiry interviews served as a conduit for outreach to the larger community, as group members discussed concerns and visions with their friends and neighbors. The interviews further ensured that we were not excluding any important community concerns or ideas. Due to time constraints, few group participants interviewed their neighbors and friends. Therefore, rather than participants undertaking the interviews one-on-one, we took advantage of a large meeting (thirty-five or more participants who came as a result of a press release in the county newspaper) to gather the information as a group. The collected information was used to focus the direction of the group's activities and to identify some workable projects and goals that the group could undertake. Out of this experience came the group's motto, "Local People Making Positive Local Change."

As a result of our collective inquiry and desire for action, in two August meetings the group developed a proposal and applied for grants to investigate and develop a market niche around sustainable agriculture and/or sustainable natural resource activities. Despite our subsequent lack of success with the grant application, the Deer Lodge Community Group proceeded as we had outlined in the grant proposal to investigate possible marketable products that would promote some local economic development. We invited entrepreneurs from within the county to join the group and share their own experiences with small business start-up and developing a marketable product. A local organic meat and poultry farmer and a regional soap-maker came to our September and October meetings to share their expertise with the group. The Community Group perceived the grant as a way to bring in some small cottage industries that would help

promote local economic resources and enhance the community's economic position within the county and its ability to plan for encroaching development.

During the latter part of the year, the group experienced a substantial decline in participation. Our November meeting was held in conjunction with a Morgan County Forestry Development Association meeting on non-timber forest products. Prior to that meeting I learned we had not received the grant, and I was able to share that with Deer Lodge Community Group members who attended. At our December 2003 and January 2004 meetings, many participants were absent. It became apparent through lack of participation and conversations with those group members who did attend that the group was in a state of decline and that perhaps this group should come to an end. It became too much to ask of the regular attendees to continue attending and working towards their community's future, without the support of the larger community. We decided that the group would cease as a functioning unit and that members would try to stay in touch and support each other in other forums. Despite my disappointment, I respected the wishes of the community members and the group ceased meeting in late January 2004. Further details of the process of the community group can be found in the newsletters included in Appendix B.

CHAPTER THREE DESIGN – HOW DID I STUDY MY PRACTICE?

Action Research

Action research refers to a variety of strategies and procedures that enable practitioners, alone or in collaboration with others, to develop informed changes in their practice. Action research may also be undertaken by members of an organization in order to improve functions of the organization, by members of a community who seek to improve aspects of community life, or by participants who engage in action research in order to change their own lives and practice, with or without the involvement of professionals (J. Peters, personal communication 1/10/2001; Smyth, 1984).

Action research is a systemic and critical study of their work by individual practitioners, groups or organizations, the aim being to revise their practical theories in light of these findings plus the context of their practice, and to act on subsequently revised theories in the interest of improving their practices (Peters, 2002, p.3).

Action research involves a study of one's practice. Such a study can vary in degrees of formality but begins with a deep reflective understanding of the context in which the practice, or problems within the practice, occur. Based on what is known or theorized about the practice and the larger field, actions are proposed that will improve or change the practice. One's practical theory and related actions as ways of improving the practice or solving problems are subjected to formal investigation. Reflection upon the outcomes of the actions and their impact follows, with the intent to change the practice in some way. Acting to change one's practice according to the outcomes of the study is the final stage. This cycle may involve many iterations, as continued reflection and action allow for continuous change to the practice.

In addition to improvements in the conduct of the individual's practice, there may be relational components in action research. Action research is:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview ... [and] seek[ing] to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason & Bradbury, 2001, p.1).

Action research is any mode of inquiry into one's own practice with the intent of improving it. It involves research "conducted *with* people, rather than *on* people" (Heron & Reason, 2001, p.179); or it could also be called, "research of the people, by the people and for the people" (Park, 2001, p.81).

Action research involves working from within a practice to improve the practice. Action research requires "the willingness to forego the authority of professionalism and the domination of situations through objectivity..." (D. Greenwood as quoted in Maguire, 2001, p.61). The phrase action research comes from researching a practice in order to take action on the basis of research and thus to improve the practice; action of some form, whether studying one's practice or acting upon one's hunches, is the outcome. "A basic tenet of action research is that any new understanding must be grounded in experience/experiment" (Bradbury & Reason, 2001, p.448). Beginning with one's practice is a requirement included in the research, for, as Pynch and Castillo make the obvious statement, "we can only think wisely about what we actually know well" (2001, p.379).

Reasons for Practitioners to Do Action Research

A practitioner engages in action research to orient herself outside the practice to examine it, as well as her role in the practice and the context in which it occurs. She may then attempt new solutions that derive from her reflection. Taking a step back from the practice and examining it in its context allows a practitioner to seek a new perspective towards the practice and/or the larger field. This stepping back enables the practitioner to articulate and examine the practical mastery (Bourdieu, 2000) with which she engages in the everyday conduct of her practice. “Insight into how our beliefs have shaped our thinking and action in the past can help us identify the obstacles we face in changing the ideas that no longer work and how existing ideas that do work might be the base on which to build new understanding and new modes of action” (Parker, 1992, p.22). Such inquiry allows for reflection, continual learning, and seeking new solutions to difficult problems.

Defense of the Genre

I chose action research as a qualitative methodology to study my practice because I had an active role in the facilitation of change in relationships between group members, and I guided the inquiry into the experience. Further, this research was based in the values and experience of the participants, and the goal of the investigation was to better understand what it is like for private forest landowners to operate with improved connections to their neighbors, natural resource professionals, and other community members. At the same time action research allowed me to investigate my own role as facilitator, participant, and researcher in the process, in order to be more fully informed

about my role and to develop a future workable practice for effecting change (Smyth, 1984) in the realm of stewardship on private forestlands and on development work with natural resource communities.

Politically and ideologically, action research best fit my own worldview. As I progressed through my doctoral career my ontology came to reflect a social construction ideal that there are multiple realities that are jointly constructed through experience. This ontology was reflected in my epistemological way of moving through the world as I recognized the importance of experience and recognized that human knowledge is jointly created. Through my Collaborative Learning program I became aware of my role in the social construction of knowledge and reflected deeply on its creation in the world at large. These experiences led me to identify myself as operating in a constructionist paradigm with the idea that multiple realities are created and that I as researcher and participant had a role in the co-construction of new understandings.

Additionally I chose to work within action research to study my practice because I did not want to be seen as a leader who had all the answers for the community. I positioned myself as a facilitator and participant. I was not trying to direct participants in where they should go in their learning and as a community. That stance would have denied the importance of an individual's lived experience, a value that I often feel is left out of many professions in preference to academic experience. With this in mind, action research allowed me to operate both in a role of a participating group member and as facilitator. I had the impetus to get the group started, but ultimately tried to release control and encourage others to facilitate the process.

Alternative Approaches

Other methodologies that I investigated in planning for this research include ethnography and case study. Both had characteristics that would lend themselves to certain aspects of the research, but neither allowed me the freedom in which to act in studying the process of the research itself, my role in the practice and the research, and the outcome of the potential change within the participants of the group.

Ethnography is a description and interpretation of a cultural or social group or system, or specific events and encounters, in order to generate a richer understanding (Tedlock, 2000; Creswell, 1998) of the group, system, or event. It involves observations and interviews during an extended time in the field (Creswell, 1998) from a researcher's point of view. Due to the limited time in which this study could occur, the fact that we jointly created a new field in which learning and "going on" took place, and my positioning such that I acted in the roles of both researcher and participant, ethnography did not fit with the goals of my research.

A case study is an exploration into a bounded system or case in order to better understand that specific case and perhaps apply that understanding to similar situations or to illustrate other bounded systems (Stake, 2000; Creswell, 1998). The case study allows for multiple means of investigation; however, the limitation of a bounded system made this methodology less applicable for the goals of my research. There was a possibility that the community group would grow beyond a community of learners around natural resources thus changing the boundaries of the system as the research progressed. A case study also did not allow me as participant and researcher to study my own role in the undertaking.

Study Site – Deer Lodge, Tennessee

The unincorporated town of Deer Lodge lies in northwest Morgan County, a relatively rural county within two hours of Knoxville, Tennessee. The county, sited entirely on the Cumberland Plateau, falls within the Emory-Obed watershed. Deer Lodge lies in close proximity to the Obed Wild and Scenic River and the Catoosa State Wildlife Management Area. There are 19,757 residents in Morgan County (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Deer Lodge has fewer than 500 residents.

The first known settler moved to the Deer Lodge region in 1810. In 1813 his farm was sold to a man who introduced the first industry to the area – a water-driven grist and saw mill (Freytag & Ott, 1971). In 1884, a 600-acre tract, including the sawmill, was sold to Abner Ross who began planning a new town. Ross is now known as the “father” of Deer Lodge (Freytag & Ott, 1971) after he imported deer from the northern parts of the Cumberland Plateau (Dickinson, 1987). Deer Lodge was initially advertised as a health resort, “the invalid’s paradise” (Dickinson, 1987). Other early businesses included a grocer, carpentry and general mechanics, real estate brokerage, and the Mountain View Hotel, designed to be a health spa (Freytag & Ott, 1971).

By 1930 the Deer Lodge population had dwindled to only 155 people; many of whom were Polish immigrants from other parts of the U.S. (Dickinson, 1987). The town gained electrical service by 1950, and by the late 1960s Deer Lodge was a small town with a post office, an elementary school, and three churches (Freytag & Ott, 1971). In 1979, town members lobbied for and successfully opened a satellite health center (Dickinson, 1987). In recent years, the elementary school was closed and children are now bussed approximately seven miles to the town of Sunbright. Currently, Deer Lodge

has a post office, three churches, a community center (the old school), a small clothing store, a health center, and a volunteer fire department.

Most residents, if employed, work outside the town. Occupations in Morgan County (specific occupation and employment data is only available on a county wide basis) occur primarily in production and transportation positions. Twenty-seven percent of employed residents work in these fields. Fewer than five percent of county residents are employed in the fields of forestry, farming, or fisheries. This low percentage reflects that logging the area's high-graded hardwood remains unprofitable due to a lack of markets for extractable timber products, the decline of the tobacco industry, and the general difficulties in supporting a full-time family farm (US Census Bureau, 2000; Focus Group Participant, personal communication, 2002). Morgan County is an area of high poverty, lagging behind state averages for family, household and per capita income breakdowns (US Census Bureau, 2000).

The majority of Deer Lodge residents are retired persons who have made their income elsewhere and come to the area to enjoy its natural and scenic beauty (Deer Lodge Community Member, personal communication, 2003). The population of Morgan County as a whole is aging (US Census, 1970; 1980; 1990; 2000) mainly due to this influx of retired newcomers. This development of second and retiree homes is changing the structure of the county with the creation of a new middle class whose values were formed elsewhere. These newcomers have created some conflict with "old-timers" who have made their living through resource-extractive activities such as mining, timber harvesting, and oil drilling, especially since many newcomers have conservation-oriented values (Key Informant Interview Participant, 2002).

Research Questions

To study the implications of my practical theory of facilitating different types of interactions between natural resource professionals and private landowners, I wanted to understand what the experience of the group and my facilitation of the group was like for participants. I had proposed to facilitate a collaborative learning environment to change interactions between group members (both natural resource professionals and private landowners), to allow for mutual learning, and to expand the potential actions the group could undertake together. This latter part is best evaluated at a future date; i.e., actions and outcomes of a group process may not become known in their entirety until many years after the group formed (Richardson, 2000). Based on the timeline, a reflective understanding of the experience and my facilitation of the experience were as far as I felt I could go in this inquiry. Thus my research questions were:

- What was the experience of the members of the Deer Lodge Community Group participating in a community-based collaborative learning effort around natural resource community issues?
- What was my experience of the dual role of facilitator and participant in this effort, and how did group members perceive my actions as the facilitator?

Data Collection Procedures

Within the framework of using action research to study my practice, my data collection procedures served to address both the emic (insider) and the etic (outsider) perspectives on the experience. The emic perspective was addressed through a phenomenological interview with group participants on the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group. The etic perspective derived from observation of my role and the

group process through field notes recorded by a project colleague and my personal reflective journaling on my experience. These three data collection methods served as triangulation for the research and helped to “secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.5).

Additionally project-specific data were gathered to meet the research requirements of the “Sustaining Natural Resources...” project and to allow for methodological and outcome comparison across the three states in the project. One-on-one semi-structured interviews were undertaken with participants to understand perceived value, comfort within the group, change in learning and community interactions, and my skills as a facilitator. Researchers in the three states developed topics for comparison. Individual researchers developed their own questions out of these topics.

Research Participants

Research participants included community members and natural resource professionals who had participated in at least three meetings during the last year. Due to low participation numbers I set three as the minimum number of meetings a participant could have attended in order to have a good understanding of the process of the group and to develop new interactions with group members. Six community members and two community stakeholders met this attendance requirement.

Phenomenological Interviews

Phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of lived experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002; Kvale, 1983; Polkinghorne, 1989). Phenomenology provides an

understanding of how people experience events through their descriptions. Its earliest proponent was Edmund Husserl, who used the term and methodology to indicate a means of investigating those things which are taken for granted in everyday life (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2000; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Combining the phenomenological study of consciousness with the philosophy of existence gave rise to existential phenomenology as developed through the works of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty (Pollio et al., 1997).

Theoretical background. Phenomenology arose as a reaction to the Cartesian mind-body split in psychology of the Western world. Approaches to the study of human existence began to view consciousness as a relationship between the subject and her world (Pollio, et al., 1997) rather than as an event or activity located solely in the thinking mind. “Phenomenology is the study of essences, and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences... But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man and the world from any starting point other than that of their ‘facticity’” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/2000, p.vii). Phenomenology gained acceptance in the West after it was combined with the study of existence, thus becoming existential phenomenology. Existentialism is a philosophy about who humans are and how they come to lead an authentic life (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Existential phenomenology allows one to study consciousness and to produce descriptions of aspects of human lived experience and their underlying meanings. Situating an event and its meaning in the lived experience of a human subject means that her unique experience and the context of the event create a personal interpretation not replicated by others (Pollio, et al., 1997).

This interpretation may be compared to interpretations of others' experiences as representative of similar events.

Methods. Phenomenological data is collected through an interview in which questions invite description rather than explanation. "Phenomenological research... seeks understanding for its own sake and addresses the question what? not why?" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.58). The interview begins with a general question concerning the topic (e.g. What stood out for you in...? Describe a time when you were struck by an event while participating in...) and then flows into a conversation that is directed by the responses of the participant (Pollio, et al., 1997). Throughout the conversation, central relevant issues for the participant will emerge giving substantive phrases indicating the meanings the participants have attached to the event.

Interviewee selection is limited to a participant's having experienced the phenomenon in question and being willing to be interviewed (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Participants are considered co-researchers rather than subjects (Thomas & Pollio, 2002) and the researcher maintains a respectful stance towards the interviewee as she shares her lived experience. Appropriate numbers of participants in the study are determined by the number of interviews done before common themes begin to emerge. These themes may take as few as three interviews to emerge (Pollio, et al., 1997) to as many as 325 interviews (Polkinghorne, 1989). More usually six to twelve interviews are an appropriate number (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

A phenomenological interview consists of a conversation in which the investigator assumes a respectful position in relation to the participant, an expert in her own lived experience, and together they talk about the participant's life experience. This

process allows the speaker to describe her experience, and requires her to clarify its meaning, or realize it for the first time during the conversation (Pollio, et al., 1997). Participants are asked to describe the experience as it was lived rather than giving an abstract account (Polkinghorne, 1989). Responses reflect the participant's perspective on her experiences in the context of the event (Pollio, et al., 1997). Conversation continues around the experience until the story is "done" and the participant feels she has exhausted her description. In many instances the conversations are tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Analysis. In phenomenological analysis, an open way of seeing is employed (Ihde, 1986). The way of seeing is directed at all possible meanings that could be taken from the words of the interviewee, recapturing an "original sense of wonder ... [that] circumvent[s] certain kinds of predefinition" (Ihde, 1986, p.31). Analysis is undertaken, and validity ensured through the hermeneutic circle (Pollio, et al., 1997; Kvale, 1983; Ihde, 1986, Valle, King & Halling, 1989). Researchers look initially at the phenomena of the experience itself, describing it and treating individual phenomena as equally indicative of meaning (Ihde, 1986). In the hermeneutic circle, these interpretive steps are iterative and repetitive, whereby researchers constantly relate parts of the text back to the whole and vice versa helping to develop and look for the significance in those parts of the text (Ihde, 1986; Kvale, 1983; Pollio, et al., 1997). Themes are developed across the interview texts and seek to find ways in which one situation bears an experiential similarity to another (Pollio, et al., 1997).

My methods. In my interviews for this work, participants were asked to "Describe an experience you were struck by while participating in the Deer Lodge Community

Group.” This question was designed to elicit key events in the experience of the group that would enable me to better understand their experience and what was important to them. All interview sessions were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis. Permission to interview and use data as described was granted through participant’s signed consent forms. Prior to undertaking the research, Form B “Application for Review of Research Involving Human Subjects” was approved by the Office of Research at the University of Tennessee. A copy of the consent form is found in Appendix C. All participants’ names were kept in confidence with the creation of pseudonyms.

With my dual role of participant and facilitator, I needed to better understand biases and assumptions I brought to the setting. Prior to the initiation of the meetings, I underwent a bracketing interview to reflect on my perception of my role and my own desires for the work so that I was aware of not forcing my perception and desires on participants (Valle, et al., 1989). “Bracketing refers to an attempt to identify and correct interpretations in which the phenomenological perspective has been coopted by incompatible suppositions” (Pollio, et al., 1997, p.48). Through my bracketing interview I became aware of my expectations for the meetings and their outcomes, the manner in which I expected to facilitate the meetings, and areas in which I might influence the facilitation and study of the Deer Lodge Community Group inappropriately.

I chose to undertake phenomenological interviews of the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group in a group setting, inviting all willing participants to come dialogue together about the experience of the group. This occurred for two reasons. First, the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group occurred within a group. Together the community group learned and acted over the course of a year, and I felt that

as a group they could reflect on the experience. Experiences described as striking built off each other and what had been previously said, much in the same way the collaborative learning facilitation of the group during the year allowed. Second, for some people the experience of a one-on-one interview can be distressing. With the support of peers in a group setting, there are multiple ways in which information can be conveyed in a safe environment. “Because focus groups emphasize the collective, rather than the individual, they foster free expression of ideas, encouraging the members of the group to speak up” (Madriz, 2000, p.838). Participants can spontaneously contribute to the dialogue when they are ready, rather than feeling an obligation to respond to questions. Follow-up one-on-one interviews ensured that participants were able to adequately express their descriptions of the experience and to further illuminate important aspects of their experience.

The information gathered through tape-recorded interviews was analyzed using an analytic procedure for existential phenomenological research developed by the Phenomenology Research Group at the University of Tennessee, College of Nursing. The Nursing research group assisted with the analysis of some interviews; I completed the remainder on my own. In this analytic procedure, some of the descriptions and responses to questions were read aloud in the group, and words, phrases, and sentences were analyzed and thematized. General themes were clustered from all of the descriptions/responses as representative of the experience. Conclusions were drawn regarding the underlying structure that unites the invariant elements of an experience or experiences into a whole. To use the skills of the group most wisely, I shared with them the group interview, an individual follow-up interview I had difficulty with, and

emerging themes once I had analyzed all the interviews. These themes are presented in Chapter Four.

Reflective Journal

I also wrote a journal in which I reflected on my actions, group process and my perceptions of other participants and myself in the meeting sessions. This process provided an outlet for my thoughts and ideas as well as a recording of the group's and my own progress. I recorded a journal entry as soon as possible after the conclusion of each meeting and expanded on what was recorded in the field notes. I paid particular attention to my role and feelings as the facilitator and areas in which I saw myself needing improvement. Notes recorded in the reflective journal and the manner in which they informed my practice are included in Chapter Four.

Field Notes

At each meeting one of my project colleagues recorded descriptive field notes to capture the process of the group. Notes on attendance, issues and concerns, responses to events, and dialogue were included in these notes. My colleague often had the difficult role of being both a participant and an observer. At times her energies and excitement over participating precluded recording notes. As such her notes became more a form of "focused observation" rather than "descriptive observation" (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2000), ignoring the specific text of dialogue, and recording a more general overview of the events and activities of the group. To the extent possible, I recorded my own field notes so that I could help the group reflect on things done or said during each

meeting. Taken together these two sets of notes created a complete recording. Field notes and the group process are summarized in Chapter Two and are shown in more detail through the newsletters in Appendix B.

Field notes and reflective journaling were analyzed to contextualize the experience of natural resource community groups. These notes were coded by events, process, and support of the experience itself. Taken together the reflective journal and the field notes provided the process of the group and the background to the experience as reflected in the interviews.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to gather data that would be comparable across the three states, researchers at the three schools brainstormed areas of interest that would reflect the outcomes of different collaborative group processes. Researchers in the three states used as different facilitation and collaboration methods in their community collaborative work. The topics around which we sought to draw comparison were: facilitation, process, comfort in contributing, learning, interactions within the community, and perceived value of the experience. Topics were drawn from the literature (Blumenthal & Jannink, 2000; Conley & Moote, 2003) and the desired outcomes of our work. Because I was further along in the facilitation of a community group, I was the first to undertake these semi-structured interviews with group participants. Interviews took place in a one-on-one setting and were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. To better understand my role and what I was able to facilitate, I asked the following questions:

- Will you tell me what you saw my role as being? What did I do?

- Did you develop an understanding of how the group would proceed based on your participation in the group? What was that understanding? What did you see us do?
- How willing were you to share you ideas and comments in group discussion?
- How has being a part of the Deer Lodge Community Group changed your perception of your community?
- How has being a part of the Deer Lodge Community Group changed your perception of the region's natural resources?
- How has this group influenced the connections you've made with other people in your community?
- Under what conditions would you be a part of a group like this one again?
- Do you feel that it is worthwhile to get together with other people to do things like this?

Analysis of these interviews sought common themes that recurred across the interviews and noted discrepancies. There may be more complex ways of addressing this data, but I wanted to gain a descriptive understanding of specific elements of their experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group (Silverman, 2000). Words, phrases, and sentences were analyzed and coded by common meanings. I coded answers into different related groupings to seek commonalities and differences in responses about participant's experiences. General themes were clustered from all responses and interpreted according to the context of the group (Silverman, 2000). These themes are presented in Chapter Four.

Summary

This research project served to address the process and experience of a change in how private forest landowners and natural resource professionals interacted through the development of a community of learners based in the experiences of and relationships between group members. Action research was the research methodology that best addressed the process and outcomes of this undertaking and enabled both the experience of participants and my role as facilitator to be studied. Through methods of data collection including phenomenological and semi-structured interviews, field notes, and reflective journaling, I was able to capture a rudimentary understanding of both participants' and my own experiences of this situation.

CHAPTER FOUR ANALYZE – WHAT DID THE RESULTS SAY?

Participant Characteristics

Eight participants met my specifications for participation in the study of the Deer Lodge Community Group. These participants had each attended three or more of the monthly community group meetings. I divided participants into two categories, community members or community stakeholders, depending upon their orientation within the group. Community members were from the surrounding community region and oriented themselves as group participants. Community stakeholders were natural resource professionals and outside experts from the larger region who attended group meetings but did not become actively involved.

Community Members

Andrew is a postmaster for a small rural community in Scott County, Tennessee. He and his wife live near Deer Lodge, and have been very active on the board of the community center in Deer Lodge through her connections. He joined our group with the goal of seeing something happen for the community and the region and his desire to be a part of that process.

Ted is a retired Vocational Technical teacher/administrator. He is a native of the community and has lived in the area for the last thirty-five years. His work took him to neighboring Roane County and involved him with civic organizations there. Ted stays busy in his retirement through building and maintaining rental property, working on his Tree Farm, volunteering through his church and civic clubs, and doing other odd jobs in

the region. Ted saw our group as an opportunity to get re-engaged in his local community.

Louis is a cattle and tobacco farmer who lives near Deer Lodge. He has lived in the area for over fifty years and has been active in other local community enrichment activities, such as recruiting a satellite health care facility for the town.

Rhonda is a relative newcomer to the area. Attracted by the natural resources, wildlife, and natural beauty of the area, she and her husband bought land in the nearby region. Rhonda is a teacher in the Morgan County school system and commutes all over the county for her work. She has a strong environmental ethic and wants to see the region maintain its rural character.

Ruth grew up in the Deer Lodge community. She is the postmaster and president of another local civic group. She is a county commissioner and has served in leadership capacities for the community center and other regional organizations. Ruth and her family are relatively large landowners but have maintained a livelihood off-farm.

Doris Preston and her husband Maurice are also newcomers to the area. They began a successful organic, grass-fed meat and poultry farming operation eight years ago. They have a desire to maintain strong connections to the community in their work and leisure time, but have been limited in their time spent off-farm. Both work full-time jobs in Oak Ridge – forty-five minutes away.

Community Stakeholders

Leonard joined our group as the president of the Morgan County Forestry Development Association. He is a nurseryman and active in county civic organizations.

Leonard saw his role in the group as one of providing assistance for the community group members. He wanted to help them make something happen.

Horton is a forester in Morgan and Roane Counties with the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry. Horton has served in this position for the last eight years after an earlier career in the military. He has become involved with many residents of the county through his efforts to promote forest management on private land.

Phenomenological Interviews

I conducted a group phenomenological interview with six of the eight participants to capture their experience of the group. I did follow-up one-on-one interviews to ensure interviewees had been able to contribute everything they wanted to say. I interviewed the remaining two participants who were unable to join us for the group interview individually.

Themes from the phenomenological group interview and the two individual phenomenological interviews differed according to the position in which participants placed themselves. Two participants, one of whom participated in the group interview and the other interviewed individually, positioned themselves as outsiders who were there as help and support for the group, but did not feel themselves to be group members. The remaining six participants spoke of the experience in terms of their positioning as a group member and participant. Due to the disparity in positioning, there are two sets of themes that arise out of the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group. One group of themes is for “community members,” those group participants who saw themselves as a

member of the community despite not necessarily being geographically located there. The other group of themes is for “community stakeholders,” geographically located and perceiving themselves as outside the community but invited to participate in the community group because of their work or role in other related organizations.

Themes that arose for the community members were: 1) *Opportunity*; 2) *We Never Did Zero In* (lack of direction or structure); and 3) *All the Different People* (participants were disparate). Themes that arose for community stakeholders were: 1) *Passivity / Lack of Enthusiasm*; 2) *I Think There's Potential if Somebody Will Step Up* (leadership not present); 3) *A Pearl, that Something Could Start Around* (no nucleus); and 4) *It's Up to Us to Be Resource People for Them* (outsider positioning). Since community stakeholders saw themselves as observers of the group rather than members, the themes of the two groups are presented separately.

Community Member Themes

Theme One: “Opportunity”

Opportunity was the central theme for the community members participating in the Deer Lodge Community Group. Various sub-themes also became figural for participants: *the group was an Asset for the Community, gaining a Whole Other View about the community, Getting Reacquainted with the Community, and There's a Lot of Opportunities in the Community*. These sub-themes emerged through the group's presenting itself as an asset or benefit to the community or the group's becoming the means through which to become aware of opportunities within the community.

Opportunity sub-theme one: "It's certainly an asset for a community". The Deer Lodge Community Group was experienced as an opportunity for the community to partner with the University of Tennessee and to potentially undertake a project of interest. Participants were surprised that graduate students were coming to work with them, to help them do a project of some kind. Participants noticed and appreciated that their small community was selected out of many in the region. They saw their group and its partnership with the University of Tennessee as an asset for the community:

I finally realized that this community was selected out of, I don't know how, but out of, you know, really a rather large group of communities to have resources of graduate students from a state university to help do some kind of project. And um, when that sunk in it was really a plus (Ted, Group Interview).

Participants were aware of the energy being directed toward their community from an outside source: "I was actually surprised that anybody was even trying to do anything" (Andrew, Group Interview).

Through its existence and as an asset within the community, the group provided a sense of continuity and possibility through its presence. Participants were curious about what was going to happen next and the group created the potential for events to occur:

I kept coming back because I wanted to see something happen positively for the community. And I didn't know if. I didn't care if I had an idea or somebody else had an idea, I'm not that kind of person, if anybody's got an idea and it works, that's fine with me. I could care less. I just want to see something work. You know, so. But the thing is the reason I kept coming back is whether I'm the leader or the doer, doesn't bother me a whole lot, but you're going to need both of them. And I don't care what role, but I want to be a part of the community. (Andrew, Group Interview).

And I kept coming to every meeting to see what would happen next. And I probably would come back to see what would happen further down the road until somebody decides we ain't coming no more (Louis, Group Interview).

Opportunity sub-theme two: Gaining a “whole other view”. Group participants had the opportunity to learn things about their community and each other. In the group interview, Louis noted facts he had learned about the county’s natural resources: “I didn’t realize until starting to come down here how many acres this county is that’s in forestry.” Rhonda learned about other activities of her friends and neighbors: “I got a whole other view of that, I mean I had no idea that they’d gotten that big and that they’re looking for subcontractors and things like that. And the opportunity that is right there... It was helpful for me to learn that, and to get to meet some of you all.” Participants also noted becoming aware of activities of entrepreneurs in the area, and other opportunities that were available to them that they had not known about before.

Opportunity sub-theme three: “Getting reacquainted with the community.” The Deer Lodge Community Group provided an opportunity for participants to meet other people they had not met, to learn more about their friends, a chance to get reacquainted on a personal level, and an opportunity for coming together and building relationships.

Participants experienced meeting people who assisted them in outside endeavors: “Well there’s one person here at this meeting who has helped me personally, Mr. Horton” (Louis, Group Interview). For others the experience of meeting people provided entry into other groups: “I really have enjoyed getting to meet some different people in the community and I think I’ve gotten more involved in the forestry association because of being here” (Rhonda, Group Interview). For most participants the experience of the group was looked on as an opportunity to meet more of their neighbors and to make new relationships.

Participants also experienced the gathering of many people: “Well I think that the coming together of everyone was an experience. Some days it was small, or sometimes it was small groups and one or two times it was very large groups” (Ruth, Individual Interview). Whatever the size there was a core group of community members who participated in most of the meetings:

I guess it would be that there was a core group of people there that stuck with it, and they were there every single time. That's what I, I guess, I was hoping that that would grow and become more, but I was really happy and pleased that there was that group and I really would have liked to see more come (Doris, Individual Interview).

Opportunity sub-theme four: “There's a lot of opportunity in the community.”

The Deer Lodge Community Group provided a means for participants to see possible opportunities for action within their community. The question then became how these opportunities might be realized: “Well like I say, there's just a lot of opportunities here, it's just who wants to take the initiative to do it, you know” (Ruth, Group Interview).

The community and the region are areas of great need, mostly of employment. The group provided an outlet for investigating ways to address the community's needs: “It's pretty obvious that this group explored several of those areas and the ideas that were shared, those potential things is I think what attracted me to meetings” (Ted, Group Interview). The experience of the community group became one of developing ideas around shared needs: “So this has been a forum for people to discuss ideas, and have, um, constructive input, and have your input valued; even if your idea is stupid” (Andrew, Group Interview). Investigating those opportunities of action was exciting, but the sense is that participants were looking to act on those opportunities: “And that has to be

stimulating for an individual as well as the potential for a community to do something” (Ted, Group Interview).

Theme Two: “We Never Did Zero In”

Participants seemed to have expected a bit more structure to the community group. They compared their experience with this group to other groups that had more structure and direction. Many phrases were used to indicate this lack of structure and direction: “I like a little more structure” (Ted, Group Interview); “It’s hard to take a scorecard and measure” (Ted, Group Interview); “Getting on the highway and heading down it” (Rhonda, Group Interview); “The crystal wasn’t flowing and then I don’t think it actually formed anyway” (Doris, individual interview). The perception of the group was that we lacked a concrete direction that we were working towards or an issue that we would specifically address.

Participants experienced the direction of the group as coming from outside the community – that someone should come in and tell them what to do: “I guess the thing I kept thinking was this isn’t going to happen unless we tell the group what we’re working towards” (Doris, Individual Interview). Participants acknowledged my attempts to allow that issue or focus to come from the group, but they did not experience a specific focus or direction emerging:

It just wasn’t kind of rising to the surface and sometimes, you know, after you talk long enough, you can kind of get an idea of certain things where there is a commonality, that everybody feels like they can participate in, but there wasn’t enough... I guess if we could have gotten, had some sort of a, you know a thing to work towards. I almost feel like it wasn’t going to come from any one of us, necessarily, just because everybody else looks so different, you know (Doris, Individual Interview).

Theme Three: "All the Different People"

Participants in the group were very aware of differences within the group, and between community members who continued to be a part of the group and those who attended only a few meetings or who did not participate at all. Rhonda, a relative newcomer to the area, was very aware of her not being a "local:"

I've lived in enough small communities to know that I can die here sixty years from now and I will never be, you know, from Deer Lodge. I mean, that's, I live out in Chestnut Ridge anyway. You know, I've come to realize that, "Oh you're not from here, you're from Chestnut Ridge." But um, there are things that I will fit in on and be part of the community with and I certainly want to do that but then there are other issues that I've got a different point of view on and maybe it's because I'm not from around here or maybe it's just because I've got a different background, or whatever (Rhonda, Group Interview).

At times this diversity of community members represented different values or perspectives: "And we ain't, I ain't their kind of people" (Louis, Group Interview); "Maybe my goals were at cross purposes with some of the other people in the group" (Rhonda, Individual Interview).

Additionally, within this theme, participants noted a lack of age diversity in the group: "I think one thing that works well in any group is if you have people of different age" (Ruth, Group Interview). The group represented different opinions and position within the community but was similar in participants' ages and stations in life. The lack of youth in the group was noted many times in conversations during the year. Other participants experienced a lack of diversity in that the movers and shakers of the community did not join: "And the people that really, the people that I think would have made the group a success never came. And I can think of people that should have been

there, because they want the same things, but they didn't come. I guess we need new people" (Doris, Individual Interview).

Community Stakeholder Themes

Positioning became very important in the analysis of the two community stakeholders who were active participants in the Deer Lodge Community Group. Within our group, the two community stakeholders placed themselves in the position of observer, providing outside resources and assistance, rather than as a group member. When asked to describe the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group, they reflected on what they perceived occurring within the group rather than on their experience of being a member of the group. Because of the way they positioned themselves and reflected on the experience their themes are presented separately. The themes for the community stakeholders were 1) *Passivity and Lack of Enthusiasm*; 2) *Potential if Somebody Will Step Up* (leadership); 3) *a Pearl that Something Could Start Around* (group needed a nucleus); and 4) *It Is Up to Us to Be Resource People for Them* (We are outsiders). These themes are presented in no particular order; no one theme was dominant or central to the experience of the community stakeholders.

Theme One: "Passivity / Lack of Enthusiasm"

Within this theme, participants reflected on their previous experience in the community and in the larger region in citing evidence for the lack of activity in the area: "And people up in that area and in here too, are, I guess, been disappointed for so long that that's what they look for" (Leonard, Individual Interview); "The thing that struck me,

but didn't surprise me, based on my past experience, is the, uh, the, most of the folks in Morgan County are somewhat passive as to what's happened to them" (Horton, Individual Interview); "Who's the big industry that's going to come in and take care of all their problems?" (Horton, Individual Interview).

This larger level of passivity translated itself into a lack of or waning enthusiasm within the community group: "What stands out in my mind the most is... well I guess an overall perspective I guess, of, when I saw all the enthusiasm at first, but then as, later in the meetings, I saw that sort of dwindle" (Leonard, Individual Interview). Community members did not come to meetings or keep coming. There was not an incentive there for them to come.

According to stakeholders, there was no expectation within the larger community for making things happen. Horton cited this lack of expectations in his reflections on education:

Well, just that nothing is happening. That families, um, grow up and the children leave, because there is nothing going on for them. If they have any education there's no, there's no, there's no family background of education, or little. So children that do get some education then there's not much in the county to bring them back that they can use their education on... There's no expectation to move away, get your education, and come back home (Horton, Individual Interview).

These expectations were perceived as reflected in the actions and activities of the community group.

Theme Two: "I Think There's Potential if Somebody Will Step Up"

Horton and Leonard spoke a lot about leadership, its potential within the community, and its possible sources. Their experience of the group was that the right

leader was not present, nor was I the right leader. Leadership either had to come from outside the group in the form of a savior figure who would do the work, or from other participants in the group who needed to step up.

The concept of an outside rescuer was very strong for Horton. He seemed to feel that the community needed some outside impetus to move forward:

There are people like that that bubble up and they bubble up in all kinds of places and uh. It's amazing to see it sometimes. Just the right person hasn't come along yet... You hear stories about a professional of some sort, a doctor, who comes home and sets up a clinic in his or her former community and have a great, a person who has ultimately a lot of financial potential who says well that's not what I'm interested in. I'm interested in doing this. And they come home or to a place that they've, that's different, that meets their needs, and they start something going. Uh, search for somebody like that... Those kind of people are, I don't know, they just occur. And they come from the strangest backgrounds. So find one (Horton, Group Interview).

Leonard was more focused on the leadership coming from within the group, "I think somebody should step up and take charge and get it going" (Leonard, Individual Interview). That person should be a local but the process definitely needed someone to guide it.

Both stakeholders saw leadership potential within the community, but their perception was that the community members felt someone else should be leading. "I think the resources are there. The leadership is there. There's no one yet stepped forward to; they keep expecting someone else to bring it to them" (Horton, Individual Interview).

Theme Three: "A Pearl, that Something Could Start Around"

The community stakeholders experienced the community group as lacking a nucleus or kernel around which action could take place, structure emerge, and energy be directed:

There's going to need to be something happen around which, you know, something that will act as a seed, or a nucleus, that will cause, that will allow people to, these somewhat passive people to look at that and say, "I can do that." Or, "that's something, that's a little piece of something that I could do, that I could pick up on," and get something going (Horton, Individual Interview).

Stakeholders perceived that nothing struck group members and that nothing caught their attention to keep them coming back. The unifying focus or direction that would engage participants was not present.

The group was experienced as a chance to investigate alternatives for action. Stakeholders deemed the process worthwhile. Ideas were created from within the group, but the group did not follow up on them during our tenure. "I think you still got the people thinking, and you gave them some, um, a lot of alternatives that they could pursue, but... There was a lot of good ideas that came up, and the group had some good ideas, and I hope that they materialize" (Leonard, Individual Interview).

Theme Four: "It's Up to Us to Be Resource People for Them"

The community stakeholders saw themselves as resource people and not motivating factors in the community's efforts to make something happen: "Still I think it's up to us to be resource people for them and they need to pretty much have the motivation to move forward among themselves" (Horton, Individual Interview). The

stakeholders perceived their role as one of offering technical resources or assistance for the community: “If somebody wants to get something started up there, I’d be glad to help out” (Leonard, Individual Interview), rather than an equal participant.

Summary

Participant interviews reflect aspects of the experience that were important or striking to them. Themes for community members and stakeholders reflected positive outcomes of the Deer Lodge Community Group, issues they experienced as limiting or detracting, and individual and group characteristics that were notable in their presence. Taken together these themes represent the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group. For community members the group was experienced as lacking structure and direction, but allowing for disparate groups of people to come together and to learn, interact, and see their community in a new way. Community stakeholders experienced the group as lacking movement and enthusiasm, adequate leadership, or a unifying focus. They saw their own role as outside resources. Follow-up conversations with interview participants indicated that these themes represented their experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The Role of the Semi-Structured Interview

The semi-structured interviews were designed to serve as a source of data that could be used for purposes of comparison across the three states involved in the “Sustaining Natural Resources ...” project. Collaborative planning researchers in other

states were using different means to approach their work with community groups. The process and outcomes of those different methods are to be compared across the region when their community work is complete. To orient ourselves we discussed potential areas of comparison and brainstormed around areas of interest we perceived would demonstrate changes and outcomes through the collaborative group-building and facilitation processes. These topic areas were: facilitation roles, group process, comfort in contributing to conversations, learning about the community, learning about the region's natural resources, changes in interactions, and the intrinsic value of the experience.

Interview Results

Will you tell me what you saw my role as being? What did I do? – Four roles came out of the interviews. These roles were perceived as interchangeable and reflected different positions participants experienced me holding:

- Initiator – my role was to prod, nudge, push, and keep things going. I brought the group together and was the impetus for the group's being together.
- Leader – I started this group and ran the show.
- Moderator – I kept them on track in our conversations around ideas. I supervised.
- Facilitator – My role created the opportunity for things to develop within the group. I developed relationships with the group members and influenced their relationships with each other. I got people thinking, and helped them develop alternatives for action. The frame that I set created an environment conducive to conversation, and provided a direction for things to grow towards. Participants noted that I tried to help them develop something within their community, but that I did not tell them what to do. They expressed gratitude for the latter.

Did you develop an understanding of how the group would proceed based on your participation in the group? What was that understanding? What did you see us do? –

There was no consensus that an identifiable group process occurred. I facilitated the creation of a space in which they could discuss but the participants perceived it differently. The process that I facilitated created the space for participants to learn about themselves and potential opportunities for their community. It allowed people to become better acquainted with their community. The perceived process, in its most simplistic form, was to gather, to talk, and to plan for the future, not necessarily to take action.

The process was perceived as passive and not leading to action. Some people wanted direction from me; others saw the process as encouraging locals to develop their own ideas and plans for action. This response depended on the positioning of the participants. Local community members were inclined to look in the process for structure leading to action. Outside stakeholders saw the process as allowing space for the locals to do what they felt important to their community, but they just did not act on it.

How willing were you to share you ideas and comments in group discussion? –

The creation of a dialogic space in which people felt free to share their opinions and ideas is one area I successfully facilitated. To a person, they all said they were comfortable sharing their ideas, and that perhaps they even talked too much in a group conversation. Despite this feeling, a few said that when it came to offering a direction to the conversation or addressing potentially divisive issues, participants kept their mouths closed. They did not want to create disharmony. Participants were comfortable sharing

ideas and opinions to help the community move forward. However, when it came to airing conflictual topics, participants chose to remain polite and avoid disagreement.

How has being a part of the Deer Lodge Community Group changed your perception of your community? – Participants learned about potential activities in their community. They got to know their community leaders better and gained respect for others in the area. Most expressed surprise by what other Countians were doing in the region. From a process standpoint, some participants said that their perceptions of the community were not changed. Through their previous experiences, they expected the group to be unable to reach action or to be unable to attract a wider swath of community members.

How has being a part of the Deer Lodge Community Group changed your perception of the region's natural resources? – This group was begun to address natural resource issues on private forestlands. Despite moving away from that focus to look at local economic development ideas, the natural resources of the area always remained the background out of which we worked. In my inquiry, I wondered if that had changed at all.

For some participants the experience of the group widened the lens with which they viewed forests and the natural resources of the county. They saw more opportunities, a lack of appropriate management, and a need to consider larger communities or systems when thinking about land management. For others the experience merely confirmed what they already knew about the land and its resources.

How has this group influenced the connections you've made with other people in your community? – Building relationships is an important part of the community. I

wanted to understand if the group had influenced interactions. Results indicated that I could say I brought people together who had not ever had the opportunity to work together before. Participants spoke of meeting individuals who had helped them in other endeavors, getting involved in other groups through meeting members in our group, and being impressed by people and what is going on in the area.

Under what conditions would you be a part of a group like this one again? –

Participants responded that they would join a group working towards community improvement under any conditions – any group that is interested in making something happen for the community. Suggestions for improvement included providing more focus and structure, coordinating time frames so attendance is easier and more is accomplished in a short period of time, and moving the meetings to a different facility.

Do you feel that it is worthwhile to get together with other people to do things like this? – All saw value in operating as a group. In responding to the question, participants cited other examples of groups to which they belong and through which they have fomented change. They expressed the belief that it is only in groups that activities are accomplished. To a person, participants saw worth in groups coming together to undertake action.

Summary

The semi-structured interviews in many ways re-iterated the results of the phenomenological interviews. Learning occurred, interactions were changed, and new ways of perceiving the community were created. The semi-structured interviews also contributed to an understanding of my facilitation role and the type and safety of the

created place. These interviews demonstrate the value participants placed in the group and indicate that future efforts could receive the same, if not more, support.

Reflective Journal

My reflective journal captured my facilitation abilities and setbacks, noted events that reflected my goal of a collaborative learning group, and provided a recording of self-criticisms and congratulations on things done or not done. The recordings in the journal as summarized here represent my facilitation of a natural resources collaborative learning group. Other recordings are presented in the next chapter as support for or lack thereof in regard to my practical theory.

As I am an introvert, facilitation of the Deer Lodge Community Group proved to be one of the more difficult things I have done. I found that when I could keep the focus on the group, I felt more comfortable in the role and moving out of the role. *I tried very hard to pay attention to body language and facial expressions and asked people to share what was on their mind when they looked like they were thinking hard. I guess that's good facilitation. I really wanted to hear from everyone and I think there were some valuable contributions from all* (Reflective Journal, May 27, 2003). But when I was looked to as a leader or for guidance, I had a more difficult time staying within the frame of collaborative learning. I found it difficult to be intentional towards the collaborative learning elements when I felt required to give answers or make something happen. *It was during this conversation that I made my biggest faux pas as a collaborative learning facilitator (I rescind my title). I failed to inquire into the group's response to Joe Smith's really awesome suggestion for a way we could meet the requirements of the grant and do*

community development and education. I was in the moment of trying to wrap up and watching people's body language as they were getting tired and yawning and I felt a need to let them go home. I only realized later what I'd done. I'll definitely have to watch for that in the future (Reflective Journal, July 22, 2003).

At times my journal noted my difficulties in encouraging people to participate. *As a facilitator I'm getting more comfortable, but I have to make people talk. That feels weird (Reflective Journal, August 26, 2003).* Other times I noted the energy and momentum built during conversations that participants wanted to carry into action. *There are also some people with tremendous energy who are willing to be a part, but it feels like they could be pushing too hard. Is that my feeling, or are there group members that feel that way? Am I being pushed to move faster? Maybe we will get to action. My job though is to lay a relational groundwork from which they can work. Do I insist on this, force them to be relational so to speak? I feel crappy and like I won't be able to stay with the CL [collaborative learning] component. This is becoming more about community development than about learning and acting together in new ways (Reflective Journal, March 26, 2003).* I was concerned that we were moving without a solid foundation and would be unable to maintain cohesiveness as a group. I noted my attempts to spend more time in reflection as "half-halts." Equestrians use half-halts, a quick tug on a rein, to say, "Hold on there. Let's pay attention to what we're doing." I felt the same way about my role sometimes. *One of the things I had initially assumed about our group was that we would be able to spend a lot of time on reflection about what we wanted for the community and gelling the group, and that they would need some encouragement to move into action. What has happened is that there are a lot of people in the group who are*

ready to move into action, and get their questions answered and solve problems, and who are moving past the reflection and gelling stage. I feel like I need to keep half-halting (Reflective Journal, April 3, 2003).

My reflective journal also recorded changes in interactions between participants in the community group that were not reflected in the interview results. One example of a different type of interaction that took place between a natural resource professional and a community member occurred during the latter part of our time together. Towards the end of a meeting, as we were wrapping up a conversation occurred that I recorded. *Others had some ideas and comments that they needed to make. Ruth made some suggestions regarding burn permits that Horton said he would take into account. They collaborated on something right in front of our eyes!* (Reflective Journal, October 28, 2003). This interaction was one in which the expertise of a community member was taken into consideration and acknowledged by a community stakeholder. I was pleased to catch a moment in which a different type of interaction took place.

My recorded notes lacked self-objectivity. At times I noted harsh critiques. *But Lordy, there was some tremendous energy and I think that I felt responsible for it, because during the reflections, my teeth started chattering and didn't stop. I had that self-defeating thought of being unable to do this work, be collaborative, and thought to myself at the same time, what the hell am I doing here? I still don't know if I can get this group to be collaborative ...Is this always going to be this hard? Can I really do collaborative learning?* (Reflective Journal, April 22, 2003). Other times I recorded elating events that made me feel good. *I am the grit in the oyster! That's how Norris identified me yesterday evening. I irritate and annoy until Deer Lodge community*

members make something happen. I'd like to think that I've helped people make some connections and start to get excited about things (Reflective Journal, October 28, 2003).

At an invited lecture at the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga, I commented on my facilitation experience in this way, "It's exciting and scary, heart-breaking and elating, rip your hair out stressful, but it does make you feel really good." That about sums it up.

Reflecting after the end of the group, I felt like I could say that I accomplished two things with my work in Deer Lodge. On an individual level, I helped people become more aware of what kinds of opportunities and activities were available in their community, heightening their awareness of possibilities. At a group level, I helped people make connections with other groups and individuals who could further their efforts towards desired goals. I have continued to try to stay engaged with individuals in the community. I've talked about writing a series of articles for the local newspaper on activities and opportunities that are available in the community. I've been working to focus the energies of the remnants of our group on the organic meats and poultry farm enterprise to help that organization accomplish its community-driven goals.

CHAPTER FIVE THEORIZE – WHAT DID THE RESULTS SAY IN TERMS OF MY THEORY OF PRACTICE?

In this chapter I discuss my results through the lenses of my research questions, my practical theory, and my methodology. The chapter includes my reflections on action research, my data collection procedures, and also my recommendations to other natural resource community group practitioners and researchers.

Research Questions Revisited

I conducted this action research to gain a better understanding of my practice and hopefully to improve it. My research questions were:

- What was the experience of the members of the Deer Lodge Community Group participating in a community-based collaborative learning effort around natural resource community issues?
- What was my experience of the dual role of facilitator and participant in this effort, and how did group members perceive my actions as the facilitator?

The Experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group

With respect to my first research question, the group's experiences were dependent upon which group a participant identified him or herself as belonging to: community member or community stakeholder. The results of the community stakeholders' interviews were experiential opposites of the interview results of the community members' descriptions of their experience. I attributed these differences to positioning, orientation, and expectations of the group and its outcomes. Taken together,

the descriptions of the participants' experiences create an understanding of the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group.

Community members experienced the Deer Lodge Community Group as an *Opportunity*, an opportunity to interact with each other in new ways, to learn about their community and the people who live there, to have some energy directed towards their community from an outside source, and to create the potential for new activities that could improve on the economic situation in the region. Community members also experienced the group as a means by which people from different backgrounds and with different opinions could come together to work for the good of the community.

The community members' perception of the group *Never Zeroing In* described an experience of the community group as lacking direction and structure that would support their expectations of taking action. This description, the results of the semi-structured interviews, and my reflective journal strongly implied an expectation for action; this expectation is discussed in more detail below.

Community stakeholders had a perception of the community group somewhat different from that of the community members. I used "perception" in this discussion instead of "experience" because community stakeholders commented on what they observed occurring within the group, rather than what they experienced as a group member. Community stakeholders perceived themselves as outsiders, *Resource People*, present to serve a role of providing assistance or technical advice. In this role, their descriptions became about the group rather than from within the group. Community stakeholders saw the group as *Lacking Enthusiasm or Passive*. This description arose through a perceived lack of energy on the part of community members and was perhaps

related to the stakeholders' prior experiences in the region. Arising out of that *Passivity* was the perception of an absence of leadership. The community group did not invite a leader to emerge from within the group; however, the stakeholders saw *Potential if Somebody Would Step Up*. Finally, the community stakeholders perceived the Deer Lodge Community Group as lacking a nucleus *That Something Could Start Around*. The community stakeholders described the community group as lacking leadership, lacking a unifying focus, passive, and with outsiders only serving the role of providing assistance, which reflected their perception of the community before the community group experience.

As a descriptive whole, phenomenological interview results indicate that the Deer Lodge Community Group was experienced by participants as an opportunity to meet people, learn about the community, and to come together as participants of different backgrounds, and with different expertise (including technical expertise) to make something happen. The group experience was also described as lacking structure, leadership, and a unifying focus that would enable forward movement.

The results of the semi-structured interviews essentially reflect the themes of the phenomenological interviews: learning occurred, interactions were important and/or changed, and there was value in what we tried to do together. The lack of clear process supports the theme of *Never Zeroing In* on an action. If participants saw the Deer Lodge Community Group solely as a group to initiate discussion around possible action, discussion did not move forward. Participants wanted to get to action, and its absence was perceived as an indication of a lack of focus.

The comfort participants felt in sharing their ideas and observations support the formation and changing of connections between group members and within the larger community. A place was created where group members could interact in new ways. Changing perceptions about others and meeting new people expanded the networks available to group members in the larger community. However, participants' reluctance to express conflicting ideas indicated the connections were still fragile.

Despite the initial goal of addressing issues around private forestlands and natural resources in the area, our progress moved us away from that focus and towards economic development for the community. Learning about the region's natural resources was much less noticeable. However, for active land managers, the experience of the community group caused them to widen the lens with which they viewed their land. This new view has implications for the larger society. Creating and taking on a community view when thinking about land management decisions may cause one to look at the outcomes of actions and their impacts prior to undertaking action. This was an early objective of the work that I held and then discarded when the community group began looking at economic development activities.

The Experience of My Facilitation

With regard to my second research question, facilitation was experienced and described through two perspectives – my own and that of the group participants. In my facilitation of the Deer Lodge Community Group, I strove to strengthen local community, to ensure a welcoming process, and to promote collaboration. Therefore, I had to facilitate a situation in which relationships could be created and/or altered through a

process that focused on inclusiveness, accessibility, transparency, mutual learning, and adaptability (Gray, et al., 2001). This group's inclusivity and accessibility were reflected in the community members' description of the experience of *Diversity* – any and all were welcome and a diverse group participated in the community group. Transparency and adaptability were reflected in the community members' description of *Not Zeroing In*. In listening to participants' conversations about the process, I realized that the process was so flexible and open to influence that it was perceived as losing its focus at times.

As the facilitator I had many tasks to undertake, from providing early energy, to motivation, through relationship building, towards helping the group create something from within its interactions. These tasks were reflected in the semi-structured interview responses to my role in the group. I was perceived in the roles of initiator, leader, moderator, and ultimately as a facilitator to help the group interact, learn together, and develop opportunities for action.

Results of the phenomenological interviews indicated group participants expected me to play a role in helping the group to focus (*Not Zeroing In*), assisting them in finding a topic around which to direct their energies (*A Pearl, that Something Could Start Around*), and developing the potential for leadership to emerge (*There's Potential if Somebody Will Step Up*). The first two results were related to my facilitation style. I did not want to direct or determine the group's focus, but rather to help that emerge from the group. Participants' descriptions of these experiences and the absence of focus, leadership, and a unifying concern indicate that my facilitation did not go far enough in

helping participants develop skills where they could create structure, direction, and specific activities as a group and through the development of leaders.

In my reflective journal on the process of the Deer Lodge Community Group I was very aware of myself as the facilitator, rather than as an equal participant in the group. I noticed my efforts to encourage the community stakeholders to participate as equal members but was unable to move into that role myself due to my desires to help participants change their interactions. This lack of movement into a participant role limited my abilities to encourage others to take on a facilitator role and prevented their facilitation skills from developing.

My Practical Theory Revisited

To better understand the outcomes of my work, I revisited my practical theory to see what the results said in terms of my theory. Through the frame of collaborative learning I theorized I could facilitate an interaction between private forest landowners, natural resource professionals, and community members in ways that acknowledged the expertise of lived experiences, oriented the interactions and information transfers towards democratic and participatory exchanges, and created a network of resources for learning and evaluating options for land management. I also theorized that this interaction would promote understanding leading to mutual learning and action through a non-directed, time-intensive, sustainable, community-based process.

In the Deer Lodge Community Group I helped to facilitate a space in which group members could speak freely and address issues of concern in a safe and open setting. I

watched changes occur in how participants spoke with one another and about their community, their goals to be proactive about their community's current and future issues, and their willingness to learn about and take actions on new ideas that may help them to make Deer Lodge over in a way they would like it to be. I attempted to "invite community not by telling people what to do, but by looking for common ground and shared interests that encourage people to share a concern for themselves, each other, and the larger community" (Arnett, 1986, p.22). This facilitation style, however, was experienced by participants as lacking direction, lacking leadership, passive, and lacking topics around which the group could grow. To address these themes in my practice, I need to find a balance between being a facilitator and a group member. I could have helped participants to focus more when it became clear they needed direction rather than trying to help a new interaction arise. Additionally I could have focused more on creating leadership and concrete action (Richardson, 2000) that would have enabled the group to accomplish something and become self-sustaining.

On the other hand, I facilitated a group where opportunities did occur. Community members experienced these opportunities for learning, meeting people, and coming to new understandings about the community as positive outcomes. We were also able to work past old-timer – newcomer roles that have precluded positive and constructive interaction in the past. The process of the Deer Lodge Community Group was not clear cut and directed; rather it was messy and flexible and allowed growth to occur within the community group in hopes of affecting the larger community. In the short term, the results of this study indicate some definite areas for improvement that might have helped the experience be more beneficial for the larger community. In the

long run, the outcomes of this work may be beyond my current understanding.

“Outcomes of such efforts will be less easy to measure, the process ‘messier’ than in traditional development activities, and mistakes will be made. Nevertheless, the long-term effects will be more sustainable and more likely to be beneficial” (Richardson, 2000, p.37). To a limited degree, I was able to facilitate a collaborative learning group wherein new interactions occurred and new understandings were created.

New Interactions

Facilitating new interactions between group members was integral to my practical theory. I sought to create a space in which new and democratic interactions between landowners, natural resource professionals, and community members could occur. I expected participants to learn as they engaged in these new interactions and participatory ways of relating to each other. The Deer Lodge Community Group presented an opportunity for community members to learn more about their community, thus working to retrieve a connection (Brown & Masterson-Allen, 1994) that may have been lost due to economic decline. Community members described the group experience as an opportunity to meet people and to change their relationships. They met through different interactions than they had previously, learned more about each other’s interests, activities, and experiences, and related to each other in new ways. Pre-existing relationships within the community provided the nucleus for new relationships. A minimum level of trust and respect through past relationships was present. This trust in each other continued to grow through the realization that participants were active and

participating in the group because they had common interests and goals for the betterment of their community (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000).

In the community members' description of *All the Different People*, I saw that the facilitation of a space for new, participatory and democratic interactions occurred. Participants found themselves stepping out of their usual roles and interacting with other community members in new ways. Had we been able to continue meeting we might have seen the formation of new social roles that could have helped to create new opportunities for the community (Blumenthal & Jannink, 2000). Successful collaborative efforts create the opportunity for those involved to begin breaking down barriers and misperceptions that have hampered interaction in the past (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). Providing the space for a new interaction to occur and the opportunity to relate on a personal level, rather than as old-timer – newcomer, allowed for new patterns of engagement.

In contrast to community members, community stakeholders had a much more difficult time relating to the community group as an opportunity for new interactions. This was evidenced by their outsider positioning in their description of *It's Up to Us to Be Resource People for Them*. The perception of themselves as outsiders was one with which I could empathize. I too was an outsider, but I tried to participate while being aware of my outsider position – acknowledging it, but participating fully wherever I could. To interact appropriately in such a setting, a position change was required of these stakeholders. I asked them to shift from, “technical experts and primary presenters of information to participants who share information, facilitate learning processes... and [to be] learners open to other forms of information” (Gray, et al., 2001, p.13), in other words

to become participating and equal participants. They were unable to, or chose not to, make that shift.

Agency cultures are also a substantial barrier to active participation (Cortner & Moote, 1999). Community stakeholders joined the group expecting to be perceived as different, and they had a professional culture supporting that difference. While community members did not describe them as such, community stakeholders perceived themselves as outsiders. Setting up an interaction wherein a person is very aware of how he or she might be perceived by others can prevent full engagement within a collaborative learning group. My facilitation did not encourage them to participate as equals, thus limiting their experience and the possibilities for the group.

Meeting natural resources professionals and other community members who were active managers of their land enabled participants to seek out experts for advice on land issues and provided entry into other groups through initial introductions in our group. This collaborative space created an opportunity for learning about natural resources to occur through the experience and expertise of colleagues, after a relationship had been formed and strengthened on the basis of other common interests and opportunities. Despite his positioning as an observer, the presence of a natural resource professional willing and able to help the community through his forestry expertise was invaluable in maintaining a connection to the area's natural resources. Horton's presence and opportunities for sharing in an informal manner allowed participants to learn about forestry and natural resources stemming from their own experiences, interests, and concerns, rather than from hearing about issues and ideas applicable to the larger field.

New Understandings

Out of new interactions between landowners, natural resource professionals and community stakeholders, I theorized opportunities for creating new understandings would emerge. The Deer Lodge Community Group proved to be an environment and opportunity for learning to occur. Participants learned about their community, the people within it, and the resources available to them. Similar to grassroots groups, this learning enabled possible action and efficacy in interactions (Brown & Mikkelson, 1997).

Community members experienced the group as an *Opportunity* for learning. Community stakeholders experienced the group as an opportunity for action that was not acted upon through their descriptions of *Passivity/Lack of Enthusiasm* and *A Pearl, that Something Could Start Around*. Community stakeholders recognized my attempt to get an interest or activity to arise from the group. Stakeholders described their experience of a lack of direction and unifying focus as an area of concentration for future efforts. One of the stakeholders noted that the group discovered many alternatives but participants were unable to act upon them during the tenure of the group.

In theorizing about my work, I had expected action to occur but never laid out the form that action would take. I theorized that learning was an action and an outcome suitable to my work. Therefore I was surprised by the emphasis placed on concrete action by participants in the group meetings and described in the interviews. The community members' description of *Never Did Zero In* reflects a perceived lack of direction which limited the group's ability to get to action. However, action did occur: we developed a process to investigate local economic development and wrote a grant proposal. The grant proposal and learning were actions. The grant provided a focus on

local economic development activities that would promote sustainable agriculture and/or natural resources. Despite our focus and activity around the grant proposal, community members did not perceive the effort around it as a unifying event. Other researchers have noted that the monetary reward is not the sole outcome for communities who receive grants, but rather it is an affirmation that “someone outside the town had confidence in their abilities to make their ideas work” (Richardson, 2000, p.6). This lack of a support may have diminished the direction and movement towards action in the eyes of participants that we spent the first half of the year in working towards. Our mutual learning and understanding led us to action, but not of the kind expected by group participants.

Absent in My Practical Theory

Through the application and subsequent study of my practical theory, I became aware of several components of work with communities and developing skills and outcomes that should have been included in my theory. These three areas are: leadership, concrete action, and planned outcomes for the work of the community group. The data indicated that these areas were important for participants; however, I did not account for them in my theory.

Leadership

The literature on collaborative community efforts indicates the importance of a strong leader, developed *in situ*, whose energy drives others to participate. In later stages of collaborative efforts, the leader acts as an organizer and administrator who gathers the

group, keeps it focused, and maintains forward momentum in the face of setbacks (Wondolleck & Yaffee, 2000). This type of leadership must emerge out of the community group. It cannot come from without. An outside leader with drive and agendas risks being seen as pushing her own agenda rather than as working for the good of the community, a danger I was aware of from the beginning. I had assumed that by working as a collaborative group we would have no need for an identified leader – that we could together develop the skills and resources needed for any participant to step forward as leader at any particular time.

Planning for leadership development should be a component of my practical theory, especially when I considered my goal of creating a sustainable group. However I made assumptions about the people who would participate and the group's ability to encourage leadership or facilitator skills in everyone. Those assumptions were not borne out in the time frame of my study.

Concrete Action

In order to satisfy the expectations of the group, I should have planned more concrete actions, something to which participants could point as what the group did. Community development and grassroots group literature indicate the need for concrete action early in the process of group development (Rolle, 2002; Kaye, 2001; Richardson, 2000; Mattessich & Monsey, 1997). Measurable outcomes link group activities to on-the-ground implementation and change (Richardson, 2000). Visible results give participants something in exchange for their participation. Skeptics need to be shown that the group has a purpose and direction (Rolle, 2002). People join groups like this for

a variety of reasons; what keeps them active is a sense that they are making a difference, learning, and contributing, through action, to a better community (Freudenberg, 1984). There must be encouragement for participants to continue to take part in order for the longer-term effects of sustainability and benefit to the larger community to come into being.

The absence of concrete action was an important component in group participants' descriptions of their experience. It gave the impression that little was accomplished. I had made an assumption that learning would be action enough.

Planned Outcomes

In my practical theory, I did not plan for specific outcomes of the group, beyond changing interactions. Participants in the group commented on being unable to evaluate our success or accomplishments because we had no planned outcomes against which to measure. Articulating desired outcomes allows for participants to see movement from where the group has been to where they were able to go.

My plans for the Deer Lodge Community Group did not include tangible outcomes. We constructed relationships and new meanings; we created space for reflection and interaction; we created an awareness of new opportunities within the community. The results of my study showed that an effective change in personal and group understanding resulted through the process and the learning which occurred as a group. The benefit of this process was in coming together as a group rather than in developing specific successful actions. *If I think about it too hard, I'm disappointed. It was a lot of hard work with not much to show for it. But if I think about the people within*

the community who I might have influenced in some way, I see a change in their behaviors, actions, ways of talking and thinking about their community in the last year. I hear them talk about, despite not getting the grant, that it was good to come together and learn about what's going on in their community, and talk to each other in different ways. I can't feel bad about that (Reflective Journal, January 27, 2004).

I approached the natural resources collaborative learning community group facilitation as a means to influence different behaviors within the group that would change their relationships to each other and to the wider community. During the course of this work I became comfortable with being able to say that I helped to create a change in how group participants related to each other and thought about their community, themselves, and their neighbors. Without articulating this expectation in my practical theory, I came to realize that a change in participants' orientations was not only good enough; it was phenomenal. I was humbled to have been a part of that. However, in my future work I need to articulate my own and the group's expectations for outcomes – be they learning or building a building – such that we can say we met our goals and that movement occurred.

Through this experience with the Deer Lodge Community Group, the results of my inquiry, and my reflections on those results, I have come to see a need for leadership development, concrete action, and plans for outcomes against which to measure progress. My future work with community groups must make space for these processes and outcomes to ensure the experience meets or exceeds the expectations of participants.

Collaborative Learning

Since I used collaborative learning as the guiding frame of my facilitation of the Deer Lodge Community Group, I wanted to examine what the results said about it in more detail. I was very aware of collaborative learning as my facilitation frame; therefore, I considered that my role was to help them to create something together, not to tell them what to do. I sought to help them find a common direction and interest which could then empower them towards community action (Arnett, 1986). I was mindful of the elements of collaborative learning in facilitating new interactions which led to new understandings for participants in the community group. Aspects of the elements were included in participants' descriptions as contributing to their experience. In the discussion that follows, I re-examine the elements in terms of participants' experiences.

Dialogue

Results of the interviews suggested that participants did feel comfortable sharing their views in the larger group, but felt limited in bringing up ideas that might present a conflict. The group focused most of its energies on conversations around the community and possibilities for action – developing a common understanding of the community and its possibilities. These conversations, which occurred around the community, the people within the community, and the natural resources of the area, indicated that generative moments were created.

Semi-structured interviews also indicated that participants felt comfortable sharing but not in airing potential conflicts or disparate opinions: “It’s almost like we need to break through all that stuff, and if you have the time to start over now, it would

hopefully work, or it could have a better chance of it” (Doris, Individual Interview).

Conflict is an important part of dialogue and getting to collaborative learning.

Disagreements help to air assumptions and opinions when they are handled in a respectful manner. I came to realize that my inability to facilitate a dialogic space that allowed for conflict reflected my own polite sensibilities and my fears that once conflicts were aired, we would be unable to move past them.

Participants’ engagement in dialogue was a different mode of interaction for community members, as evidenced by their self-reported changes in perceptions. My field notes indicate that participants saw value in hearing disparate opinions to inform their own understanding. They appreciated that community members from different backgrounds and with different expertise came together to do something for the community. This interaction took on characteristics that Dukes related to visioning. “It allows members ... to identify shared values and recognize areas of common concern... It encourages new ways of thinking beyond immediate problems. And it educates participants... about what makes a successful community” (Dukes, 1996, p.67). Our conversations presented themselves as a different way for group members to talk to each other within and around their community as members of a common community culture and created a social group with a shared history (Shotter, 2002).

Cycles of Action and Reflection

Most of our meetings involved creating a space for reflection such that we could come to a common understanding of the Deer Lodge community and its issues. It was very important to me for the group to understand where they had been and where they

were going. Reflection helped the group to learn from what had already occurred, especially in regard to what worked and where new issues lay; this reflection could have informed appropriate action for the group's future. Identifying community concerns in the early meetings allowed us to reflect on what those issues meant to community members. The community inquiry in which the group interviewed neighbors allowed reflection on what others were sharing with us and where we should go in our efforts. The process of writing the grant was both a reflective and an action process. *At about 7:45 I tried to wrap it up, being cognizant of the time – asked everyone to share what had the most meaning for them that they'd heard from our speakers or from each other, something that they were going to take home and think more about. I think some really good stuff came out of this and people commented on each others' reflection. I'd been planning on doing this for a while. I still feel like I'm half-halting, but tried to help people make meaning out of what they heard. That's probably the most important part of this for me* (Reflective Journal, April 22, 2003).

The themes of *Not Zeroing In*, *Leadership Potential*, *Passivity*, and *Something to Grow Around* reflected our difficulties in getting to concrete action. I also made this entry in my journal: *We've been reflecting for a heck of a long time right now (7 months). I don't know if people take how they're interacting in the group away from the group and are acting similarly in other groups or in their day-to-day lives. Our movement into action has most definitely been informed by our reflections to this point. I do ask people to reflect at the end of each meeting so that we have a good understanding together of what went on in the meeting and are thinking about taking our ideas out into the world* (Reflective Journal, August 12, 2003). Cycles of reflection and action occurred in our

gathering information to better understand the situation in the community, but these cycles did not lead to action perceived by group participants.

Focus on Construction

A focus on construction was evident in the importance placed on the new relationships formed in the community group. As the group made meaning through their interactions with each other, they recognized the importance of relationships to meaning making and to day-to-day life thus creating a responsibility for community members to interact in different ways. I recognized this relational responsibility through the new interactions that group participants created. Group members met new people and enjoyed and learned from these interactions. Participants interacted respectfully and looked for ways to go on together to make their community a better place. *Well we're working on some new ideas for me and the group so it is a very definite learning environment – we're constructing a new understanding of the community and through our work will hopefully construct some new ideas about what the group can do together. We're getting good about not perceiving any one person as an expert. I most definitely have diminished my role as a knowledgeable facilitator (knowledgeable being the key word)* (Reflective Journal, August 12, 2003).

These created relationships were something new and viable out of the collaborative learning experience and encapsulate one of the things that was created in our community group. Creating something that is unique to the group, based in the experience and expertise of the group members presents to them an opportunity, something to which they can point and say, “That is ours; we made it.” Participants also

described a constructed awareness of new opportunities for their community and for the creation of multiple alternatives from which action could arise.

Multiple Ways of Knowing

Recognizing and valuing different types of knowing were absent from the descriptions of the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group. Some participants continued to express their lack of knowing despite my focus on their lived experience. Louis, in particular, was critical of his own ways of knowing in comparison with the experiences others brought to the table from their academic and theoretical expertise. *A couple of times last night he made a comment that he didn't know anything about anything. He shared with me his life story and how he made the decision to stay where he was when he could have gone off and done other things. And he made the comment about not being an expert but that he kept coming. My colleague and I both rushed to reassure him that he had more expertise than many people and that we valued tremendously his input* (Reflective Journal, August 26, 2003). I found the absence of the recognition of multiple ways of knowing in our interaction particularly striking. My own bias has been on the value of lived experience and I found myself unable to facilitate a similar respect within the individual participants.

From my field notes, it became apparent that through the course of the year of meeting, participants began to speak about their experience and looked to others for their practical, experiential, and technical advice. Recognizing multiple ways of knowing occurred in practice but was not acknowledged as such. I created a space for and modeled relationally responsible interactions. My encouraging more interaction between

group members rather than between them and me as “expert” caused changes in relationships between group members, particularly in participants working together from their own experience to construct their vision and understanding of the community. “As our ways of relating ourselves to each other start to change, so must our ways of knowing begin to change, too” (Shotter, 1993b, p. 2). *I’m not sure if there is quite a new knowing-from-within the group that has been created. That will take more interaction. It would be helpful if we regularly had the same people, but I can’t demand that. This is something that is important to me so I am doing my best to help group members see that there are different, and equally valid, types of knowledge that we have by coming together* (Reflective Journal, August 12, 2003).

Place

Participants’ comfort level in sharing their ideas in the group conversations showed evidence of the collaborative learning component of place. They felt safe enough to share what they wanted to say, sometimes to the extent of feeling they were sharing too much. I saw the creation of a place in which group members could freely question, discuss, and create new understandings. This place occurred through a process in which a respect-filled inquiry and conversation occurred and imposed a different way of operating for group members. “If individuals are affirmed and exposed in nonthreatening ways to the alternatives presented by different constructions, then one would expect them to develop and be comfortable with the skills of discourse... [gaining] the skill and confidence to take up those possibilities in action” (Harré & Gillett, 1994, p. 127). I tried to facilitate a place for this empowering and inquiry-filled process and to provide a means

for understanding and creation, out of which could have come action. However, participants did not specifically identify place and its impact on the experience.

Fellowship

Making the time for fellowship was an important component to my theory of facilitating new interactions. *After we thanked Anna for coming, people stayed around and chatted for another half hour. THAT HAS NEVER HAPPENED that everyone stayed like that! I really think it was because of my classmates – they are just fun people, but there were some other connections being made. I feel really good about what I've watched happen. I didn't feel very collaborative last night, but I could recognize that I helped pull this group together and made the space for them to interact in this way.*

Yea!!!! (Reflective Journal, October 28, 2003). Through their descriptions participants experienced the opportunities to meet other people and to learn together in our community group. I gleaned a sense of enjoyment in the experience from the interviews with community members. They enjoyed being given the opportunity and time to eat together (trying new foods), to learn about each other and interests in new ways, and to investigate important ideas around their community. I did not foresee the group as being able to interact in new ways without an initial connection on a personal level.

Summary

My journal reflection on our last meeting indicated that by the end of a year of gathering there was some movement towards a collaborative learning way of interacting for group members. *Last night was also probably one of the more collaborative nights*

that we've had. People listened to each other, thought about what each other was saying, reflected on it out loud, and contributed to creating energy and ideas towards something new (in this case, spreading the ideas to other groups and helping them to become more reflective of and contributive to the community). I didn't do much, but ask them what they wanted for the group and from me (Reflective Journal, January 27, 2004).

Out of this experience can I say that the Deer Lodge Community Group engaged in collaborative learning? If I examine the elements separately, yes. The descriptive interview responses, field notes, and reflective journal indicate that we created an environment in which the different elements occurred or could occur. Can I say that the Deer Lodge Community Group had generative collaborative learning moments? Would these collaborative learning moments necessarily lead to action? I am less sure about this. As a group we did not get to perceived action. Participants were unsure of the value of merely learning as opposed to taking action. However, learning, creating the possibility for new opportunities, and creating new relationships are also generative moments in collaborative learning.

Reflections on the Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

Throughout this study, I reflected on the merits of the methodology and data collection procedures and their contributions to my work.

Action Research

Action research provided the frame for my inquiry. Engaging in the reflection phases of DATA-DATA helped me develop my practical theory. By investigating my

practical theory through application and study I was able to evaluate my assumptions and to recognize areas of needed improvement in my work.

The doing and reporting of this action research project required me to step away from my previous training and my expectations of what research writing should look like. Despite this work's representing an inquiry into my practice and an investigation of my practical theory, I had a hard time turning away from a traditional scientific method of analyzing and reporting my results to examining the results of my inquiry in terms of my practice. Action research was not easy. It required a continual inquiry into my actions and my justifications for those actions to examine where biases and previous experiences were influencing actions, and to note where I was truly being open to new possibilities.

Phenomenological Interviews

The phenomenological interviews provided a comfortable means by which participants could tell their story. Participants were wary of the interview's lack of focused questions and its approach as a conversation. They reported that they felt worried about what they were going to say. During the course of the interview, however, everyone seemed to feel comfortable contributing and to enjoy the opportunity to share their own experiences. The group interview was a pleasant interaction for most of the participants and prevented the pressure of a one-on-one interview from limiting their responses.

Follow-up one-on-one phenomenological interviews with participants in the group interview did not add to the descriptions of their experience. Instead participants merely referenced what they had already said. However, I think it was important to be

sure I had provided the opportunity for participants to fully share their thoughts and experiences, and the follow-up interviews provided that space.

Semi-Structured Interviews

In terms of the value of the semi-structured interviews as a contributing data collection procedure to this research inquiry, there was little to be added to the understanding of the experience from these questions. What was added felt artificial and guided in that the questions had value for us as researchers and what we wanted to hear about the project, but did not necessarily add value to the experience of the participants. Despite positioning as a facilitator/participant, I very easily stepped back into that role of deciding what was important. The semi-structured interviews did meet their objective of collecting comparable data that can be compared by researchers as part of the larger three-state research project.

Field Notes

Field notes served to capture the process of the Deer Lodge Community Group. I was very fortunate to have a project colleague record these notes during the meetings so that I could focus solely on facilitation. In my practice I used the field notes in writing the monthly newsletters to keep absent participants informed of the group's progress. However, there were times when I wished I had used another form of data collection to capture the conversations that occurred during the monthly meetings. I chose not to record meetings for fear that the presence of a tape recorder would inhibit participation. The loss in richness of the recorded conversation was balanced by willing participants.

Additionally I feared that recording conversations in the group meetings would emphasize that this was a research study, rather than an attempt to help participants make something happen for their community.

Reflective Journal

The reflective journal served as a source of self-evaluation of my community group facilitation. Recording thoughts and reflections immediately after the meeting ensured that I could sleep at night, and not waste away the night hours thinking about what I should or should not have done. The reflections also captured some events that were absent in the field notes and enriched my recollections and reflections on the process of the Deer Lodge Community Group.

Summary

Taken together these data collection procedures served to provide data for a complete reflection on the experience of the Deer Lodge Community Group through my action research inquiry into my practice. Upon reflection I cannot say that I would have omitted any one data collection procedure. I looked upon the repetition and redundancy as providing certainty that I was capturing their experience and working from their reality.

Recommendations for Other Practitioners

I always hope that my work has merit beyond solely informing my learning and movement through the world. My study provides a needed opportunity to try a new way

of interacting with natural resource professionals and community members around issues of mutual concern. There were some important outcomes that may serve as lessons for the larger field.

- Participants learned from one another and valued the opportunity to delve deeply into areas of concern for themselves and their community. Their experience and ideas were valued by each other and by the experts who joined in our group.
- Relating initially to natural resource professionals in an informal manner, or to a situation in which all are equal participants, fostered a sense of trust that encouraged landowners to make outside contact and learn about natural resource related issues.
- This was a time intensive process. One year was not long enough to move from creating a strong base of interaction to making substantive community change that derives from within the community.
- Facilitation of the group needed to provide resources for developing leadership within the group.
- Process was just as important as product and a balance of both would have been optimal.

The elements of collaborative learning helped to foster democratic, participatory interactions. Therefore, collaborative learning has the potential to help us as practitioners become more reflective and inclusive and to create generative interactions in our work.

CHAPTER SIX

ACT – BASED ON MY REVISED THEORY, WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

Participants said that the Deer Lodge community group would not have begun without my energies and initial interest, something they seemed glad for. But they perceived the facilitation of the group and the creation of the collaborative space as having much less structure and focus than they desired. Participants perceived a need to focus on developing leadership from within the community participants. The tone a facilitator sets should promote professional development and skill building on the part of the community members and other collaborators, thus inspiring people to take risks, to collaborate, and to share ideas (Richardson, 2000). I needed to focus on helping participants move in and out of facilitation roles such that they were guiding themselves and less reliant on an outside facilitator. I filled the role of a catalyst to trigger and stimulate local action (Richardson, 2000), but in the time frame in which I worked with this community group, I did not move out of that role.

Field notes and reflective journals indicated that participants seemed to feel that I had a good understanding of their community and was sincere and trustworthy in my role. I presented a process which was highly flexible and adaptable and based in their interests. But sometimes their interests were too disparate for consensus to occur. My lack of experience in handling issues of conflict prevented my being able to move us forward through the conflict.

The process of creating a collaborative place from which community action could arise was much less clear to participants. A place was created where they could discuss mutual concerns, but they did not perceive it as contributing to their learning, nor did the

place seem safe enough for conversations around potentially conflictual issues. Learning did occur. “Seeing new opportunities” was a key phrase coming out of the experience. This group helped people to come to an awareness about their community and the people in it. However the process of the group and its lack of getting to action prevented some (primarily the stakeholders) from changing their perception of the community and the abilities of its members. While additional knowledge sometimes helps resolve difficult natural resource issues, better understandings did not necessarily lead to creative action (Yung, et al., 2003). My efforts at getting to a space wherein better understanding could occur did not lead to participants’ expectations of getting to action.

While I hoped for something to emerge out of the group based in a common understanding, I did not seem to allow for people’s preferred goals of getting tangible accomplishments out in the community – something that they could point to and say, “We did this.” The time frame was not long enough for such tangible results to emerge from the group. People saw less value in the interactions than in having outcomes. Community development literature stresses that the most successful outcomes occur when the focus is on product and process concurrently (Mattessich & Monsey, 1997). My field notes and reflective journal emphasized the changing interactions that I observed occurring in all participants. What stood out in the interviews was not those changing interactions but rather that nothing of substance was accomplished.

I need to find a happy medium between providing direction and providing a place for generative moments to occur. Creating that space for interaction wherein landowners and professionals come together as equals to learn from and with each other is good – learning does occur on all sides, although having a focused direction in which to work, an

aim towards which to achieve, is important when working with communities attempting to make their world a better place.

From this study I have learned some things of significance about my practical theories and my future practice. The manner in which I work with people is dictated by what those people want. I facilitated a frame in which they could create something anew, but they wanted direction and leadership to come from me. Perhaps this says some things about comfort levels and helping people get to a point where they can take on working in a collaborative learning way. I was too entrenched in the idea that collaborative learning was something everyone could naturally do, given time and space, and that it could serve as a be-all, end-all means to address my community work, and that acceptable actions would naturally follow.

I learned about working within small rural natural resource communities. There are often issues of contention which are hard to separate from personal issues. It is the role of the facilitator to strive to bring everything to light such that participants can examine their assumptions and move on through them. With regards to my own practice, I have learned to approach it a little more humbly (my way of facilitating was not the answer to all interactional difficulties). I became more aware of the myriad ways in which to facilitate. Now I need to become more reflective in my practice as to which roles it is appropriate for me to fill at any given time and circumstance.

I am, each time, working through a process that will build that trust and willingness to be influenced and open to whatever may come. I am developing a trust in the process that no matter where it goes next, the group will be okay. I will have to trust the process each time I go out into communities and attempt to facilitate new interactions.

Conclusion

This work represents a study of my attempts to facilitate new interactions between private landowners, community members, community stakeholders, and natural resource professionals to create new opportunities for a community and a region. Despite the Deer Lodge Community Group's failure to become a sustainable entity with leadership emerging within the group, there were several positive outcomes which reflect on my practice. I was able to facilitate a group wherein learning occurred, interactions were improved, and new visions for the future were created.

Action research and the DATA-DATA model provided a framework for deep reflection into my goals for my practice and allowed me to study my practical theory in an applied setting. Through this work I revised my practical theory somewhat to reflect the outcomes of my study. Instead of seeing collaborative learning solely as a means to facilitate new interactions and create new possibilities for the future in natural resource communities and assuming that appropriate actions will naturally follow, this study informed my practice to the extent that I now see great benefit in structuring an experience and searching for concrete outcomes in early phases of community work. This structure and outcomes should work in conjunction with creating a foundation for the group to work out of through collaborative learning. I plan to use my new practical theory of being able to serve roles of providing direction and providing a place for generative moments in my future community work.

POST-SCRIPT

Following data collection and during analysis I became aware of some activities, events, and conflicts ongoing in the community which may have influenced the ability of the group to attract participants and prevented individuals from participating fully. While I was not privy to all of the politics and conflicts that were occurring, I learned about some infighting between two community civic organizations that precluded members of one group participating in any activity involving the other.

Both sides of this conflict were shared with me during my data analysis phases, but participants requested confidentiality. However, the underlying presence of this conflict helped me to understand some of the issues we had. Surprisingly group members who were aware of this conflict said that they felt unable to share it with me because they were unsure of my “arrangement” with one civic group for providing a meeting place, or they did not want to share internal conflict. Upon hearing of this conflict I usually responded with the results of the key informant interviews done in 2002 which identified Deer Lodge as a community with real cohesiveness, little internal division, and the capacity to come together and get things done. Participants would answer that was usually the case in their community but that 2003 had been particularly trying.

These comments and learning about the presence of a conflict of which I knew nothing made me very aware that I was an outsider coming into a community. Participants in the Deer Lodge Community Group trusted me, but not as a fully equal group member. I wonder, if I had known about the conflict months earlier, could I have helped members of the group air the conflict in order to move past it or to hold it in

abeyance in order to work for the good of the community. However, that opportunity did not present itself.

The presence of this conflict posed interesting questions in my reflection on my practice. Were there means by which I could have discovered this conflict to help the community address it or to minimize its influence? Arguably I could have conducted a formal survey or an opinion-leader analysis with pointed questions about community conflict. Would that investigation have made explicit the presence of the conflict?

A large part of what I was trying to do was to build relationships between natural resource professionals, private forest landowners, and community members. Essential to relationship building is the element of trust. In the present case, participants had to trust me and to trust each other in order for us to go forward together in a collaborative learning experience. However, we could not have begun our relationship with full trust in one another; we had to build it together over time. Time has been identified by a number of studies as a critical factor in building the kind of relationships that I envisioned for this group (Merrill, 2003; Osborne, 2003). The fact that some community members felt comfortable enough with me to share sensitive information about a community conflict indicated that we had been successful in building trust, arguably a result of our months of working together in a collaborative manner. Therefore, while we will never know what might have happened if I had been aware of the conflict early on, the task of building trust would have remained ours to accomplish.

From a process standpoint, the presence of this conflict might explain something about our inability to attract new participants. A refusal to set foot in a building

precludes participation in any activities going on there. Personality conflicts within a small town are very important.

With regard to my practice, being made aware of this conflict helped me to see the need to have a good understanding of potential conflictual issues for community members both before and during community work. It is important to learn about them so I can help to bring them to light and address them, or to inform myself so as I do not make unwise decisions, such as only holding meetings in one place.

Knowing about the community conflict in advance might not have changed the manner in which I undertook efforts to act on my practical theory. It certainly does not change the results about the process. But it does perhaps remove some of my perceived accountability for an inability to attract more participants. From a community development and grassroots perspective, it does emphasize the importance of creating and developing leadership within the community, giving community members the skills to effectively and respectfully air and address these conflicts, and to help them find a way through the conflicts to work for a greater good.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
THE DATA-DATA MODEL

DATA-DATA is a method created by Peters (2002) to facilitate action research. The first DATA is essentially reflective practice, a systematic yet informal inquiry into a practice, its context, and situations or concerns that arise therein. The second DATA represents a more commonly understood research methodology for investigating one's practice. This approach to action research "adds the element of context, inclusive of the situation in which theorizing is done and further action is taken" (Peters, 2002, p.3), places the practitioner within her practice, and positions her as a subject of her research. This model for action research is cycle and iterative. Each step informs the next and allows for cycling back at any point. Each letter in the model designates a different action step. The model is designed for use by practitioner-researchers as they plan, conduct, and report their research.

Action research starts with an itch, a curiosity, or a perceived problem that engages a practitioner's interest. This itch may prompt the practitioner to reflect on her practice informally, but can lead to a formal study of some aspect of the practice. These reflection and action steps associated with this approach are as follows:

Describe

What is my practice? At this stage I seek to describe what is the situation in which I find myself. What is the problem or the context of my practice? This phase represents an attempt to describe the situation as thoroughly as possible. The goal is to obtain a rich description of the practice and its context and to use this description to inform future phases of reflection and action (Peters, 2002).

Analyze

Why is the situation as it is? What are my assumptions about the situation and the reasons for the way I practice within the situation? The researcher identifies factors contributing to the problem, issue, or initiative, including her own role, that will be the focus of her research and the area around which change might occur.

Theorize

Based on the analysis, related research and theory, and my own experience, what do I think will address the situation as I understand it? In this stage, the researcher lays out how she will make a change in her practice and why. This is an expression of the researcher's practical theory of aspects of the practice she wishes to change, and the theory might be augmented by consideration of formal theories and/or other researchers' theories that are assumed to be related (Peters, 2002).

Act

How am I going to carry out this approach? It is at this stage that, once the researcher-practitioner has decided to implement her new theory, she lays out the specifics of how she will act on her theory.

Design

How will I study my practice? The researcher identifies what it is she wishes to know about her practical theory. She identifies her research questions or objectives and selects the procedures for collecting and analyzing her data (Peters, 2002).

Analyze

What do the results say? Data are analyzed in this phase according to the methodology chosen in the *Design* phase.

Theorize

What do these results mean in terms of my theory of practice? Here the researcher revisits her theory in light of the results of her study (Peters, 2002).

Act

Based on my revised theory, what do I do next? This is the action step in which “the researchers turn back to their practices and go on in terms of what they have learned from reflecting on their revised theories... They are at a junction of having learned, reflected, and now going on with their practice better informed, perhaps a little more skilled, and changed to some extent as researchers of their practice” (Peters, 2002, p.8).

APPENDIX B

**DEER LODGE COMMUNITY GROUP
LETTERS OF INVITATION AND NEWSLETTERS**

APPENDIX B1
LANDOWNER LETTER OF INVITATION

February 13, 2003

Mr. Joe Smith
1234 Main Street
Deer Lodge, TN 37770

Dear Mr. Smith:

We would like to invite you to take part in an education and action opportunity to open up the field of options around forestry and natural resource issues in the Deer Lodge community. We are working on a project to help forestlands work better for their owners, for the people in the community, and for future generations. This also includes increasing the possibilities for how those lands are cared. Part of our project includes developing collaborative groups able and willing to address natural resource issues of concern around private forestlands. This collaborative effort is being initiated in Deer Lodge this month.

How is this different from other groups? We are community focused, and we have been learning from you and your neighbors through interviews and other interactions for over a year. We are inviting your neighbors in the community, along with natural resource professionals and community stakeholders who have an interest in the private forestlands of this community, to be a part of this opportunity. We want to work from the perspectives of community members as we learn together.

The group will invite speakers from within or outside the group to talk about topics of interest to you and other participants. We plan to create a learning space in which people can freely question the information that speakers are sharing in order to make more sense of it, learn from the experience of peers, make personal meaning of that information as it relates to the land, and take potential action on the land in conjunction with neighbors. This back and forth dialogue involving group members is a different way of operating that hasn't been undertaken in this area before.

Our first meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 25, 2003 at 6:00p.m., at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. We will provide supper. This introductory meeting will involve letting you learn about us, we about you, and a chance to work with neighbors and others about forest issues of interest to you. We hope you'll be able to join us. Bring a neighbor or a friend.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to call Allyson Muth at (865) 974-1963. Thank you for your time. We look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,

Allyson Muth
Graduate Research Assistant

David Ostermeier
Professor

APPENDIX B2
STAKEHOLDER LETTER OF INVITATION

February 13, 2003

Dr. Frank Combs
Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry
736 Pine Street
Knoxville, TN 37920

Dear Dr. Combs:

We would like to invite you to take part in an education and action opportunity around forestry and natural resource issues in the Deer Lodge community. We are working on a project to make forestlands work better for their owners, for the people in the community, and for future generations. This also includes increasing the possibilities for how those lands are cared in Tennessee. Part of our project includes developing collaborative groups able and willing to address natural resource issues of concern around private forestlands. This effort is being initiated in Deer Lodge this month.

How is this different from other groups? We are community focused, and have been learning from you, your colleagues, and private landowners through interviews and other interactions for over a year. We are inviting private forest landowners from the community and your natural resource professional and community stakeholder colleagues to be a part of this opportunity. We want to work from the perspectives and reality of community members as we learn together.

The group will invite speakers from within or outside the group to talk about topics of interest to you and other participants. We plan to create a learning space in which people can freely question the information that is shared, learn from the experience of their peers, reach each other in ways that make this information more personal and therefore more applicable, and potentially take action on the land in conjunction with their neighbors. We would like your participation based on your educational and personal experience in natural resources, and as a co-participant and source of additional information to members of the group. This back and forth dialogue involving group members is a new way of operating that hasn't been undertaken in this area before.

Our first meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 25, 2003 at 6:00pm, at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. We will provide supper. This introductory meeting will involve letting you learn about us, we about you, and a chance to work with landowners and others about forest issues of interest to you and the region. We hope you'll be able to join us.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to call Allyson Muth at (865) 974-1963. Thank you for your time. We look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,

Allyson Muth
Graduate Research Assistant

David Ostermeier
Professor

APPENDIX B3
MARCH NEWSLETTER

March 13, 2003

Mr. Joe Smith
1234 Main Street
Deer Lodge, TN 37770

Dear Mr. Smith:

Thank you to those who were able to make the first meeting of an education and action gathering to open up the field of options around forestry and natural resource issues in the Deer Lodge community. The weather and community sorrows regarding a recent death kept others away. We hope all are well.

We wanted to take an opportunity to let you know what happened, how the group decided they wanted to go on, and plans for a future meeting at the end of this month. Several community members and community stakeholders were able to join us in February. We began with introductions, and people talked about how they were connected to the land. Dave and I shared a handout we had generated compiling numerous resources available to forest landowners in the area, and then the group watched a video that talked about how a ranching community in Arizona and New Mexico was dealing with change on the land and in farming practices. Conversation moved into the issues landowners face in the community of Deer Lodge and Morgan County at large in dealing with local change.

The group began by discussing forest and land use issues and then broadened to include other community issues. Out of our initial conversation, the following issues came out, with the understanding that many of these were larger than just the community and larger than forestry and natural resources with which we began. We discussed:

- Clearcutting
- Strip mining
- Southern Pine Beetle
- Incentives for landowners
- County infrastructure improvements
- Size of the local tax base
- Pressure on how people manage their land
- Lack of industry to keep youth around
- Poor roads
- Need for a better educated populous
- Issues of welfare
- Skilled jobs
- Sprawl

- Outsiders
- Sustainability
- Potential for recreation and wildlife
- Cooperation

The group decided that what the community needed was time and space to air out these issues and get to the heart of concerns, in order to work together to address them. It was proposed that at our next meeting we spend more time really talking about these issues and others, sharing experiences with the issues, and thinking how they impact landowners and community members. Dave and I have offered to facilitate these meetings, and participate with the group in figuring out how to go on together and effectively address change. The group agreed that time is needed to think about issues before thoughts turn to how to address them.

Our second meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 25, 2003 at 6:00p.m., at the Weidemann Hotel in Deer Lodge. We will provide supper. This meeting will carry on with a discussion of issues of concern to community members and allow people to talk openly about their experiences and what is really of importance to them. We would like to visually represent these issues and talk about how they are connected to other issues within the community and the larger region, before we begin to think about ways of addressing them. If time allows, we may try to talk about how the forests and natural resources of the region enrich the community. We hope you'll be able to join us. Bring a neighbor or a friend.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to call Allyson at (865) 974-1963 or by email at amuth@utk.edu. Thank you for your time. We look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,

Allyson Muth
Graduate Research Assistant

David Ostermeier
Professor

APPENDIX B4
APRIL NEWSLETTER

April 14, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

Thanks to everyone who has been able to join us at our monthly meetings. There is an overarching relationship out of which we are trying to work – the relationship between people taking care of their community and resources, and the community and resources giving benefits to the people. One of the most tremendous resources of this community is the capacity built by people working together. There is a lot of energy and a lot of vision within this community that really hasn't been tapped.

At our last meeting in March, we spent some time talking more about issues and concerns of community members, but we also talked about actions that can address these issues and concerns. Some issues that came out were:

- *The proposed railway through Deer Lodge* – concern over its impacts on land and farms, its lack of sustained economic development because this is not a passenger line, and balancing that with the short-term economic boost through the construction phases.
- *Concern over the county infrastructure preventing economic and community development* – lack of incentives for landowners to alter their activities, high taxes, and personal cash flow.
- *Lack of value-added infrastructure* – timber is a rich resource in the county; however, there is little return on wood – balancing needs for regular income from the woodland with alternatives to timber harvesting, and striving to keep raw materials manufactured within the county such that the value of the resource stays in the communities.
- *Information and education needs* – getting people involved, reaching out to more people; education over what assistance is available; inquiring into the future of pine with the aftereffects of the Southern Pine Beetle; better understanding of the value of forests and forest products.
- *Past forestry practices and future implications* – impacts of poor practices through erosion and quality of forests; the activities of the forest industry in the area with their intensive management practices and currently divestment of their lands; the future impacts on private lands balancing owners' desires for sustainability and passing it on to future generations.
- *Values* – fears that the riches of the region are taken for granted; how to promote community development and maintain the connection, quality of life, and enjoyment of the land that have drawn and kept people in Morgan County.

Our next meeting is April 22, at 6 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. Dinner will be provided. (How does Mexican sound?)

Angela Gray of the National Parks Conservation Association and the Tennessee Clean Water Network has been invited, along with local partners, to come talk to us about an effort they are working on with local leaders to promote community and economic development across Morgan County, while striving to protect the natural resources. The goal is for them to inform us as to their activities, and for us to provide some input and feedback into their efforts. We hope you'll be able to join us.

If you have any questions, or would like to be removed from or added to this mailing list, please contact Allyson at (865) 974-1963 or by email at amuth@utk.edu. We hope you'll be able to join us.

Sincerely,

Allyson Muth
Graduate Research Assistant

Dave Ostermeier
Professor

APPENDIX B5
MAY NEWSLETTER

May 15, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

Thank you to those who have continued to join us as we learn together about other efforts going on in Morgan County, and as we work to build a common understanding out of which to address our efforts. We have established a core group with tremendous energy and interest in promoting change and identifying a direction to help Deer Lodge grow as a community. We hope others will join this group to share their visions and their expertise with the effort.

This information gathering and problem identification stage in which we are currently operating is important. By learning more about other activities, we are finding out where to direct our energies and dovetail our efforts, and helping to form a vision of what we want this region to be.

At our last meeting in April, we hosted Angela Gray of the Tennessee Clean Water Network, Pete Crispy of the Emory River Watershed Association, and Linda Franks, the Executive Director of the Morgan County Chamber of Commerce. They talked about a group they had formed in Morgan County to work on protecting natural resources at the same time encouraging some economic development. Out of some initial interviews they noted that people here really value the resources – the beauty, the culture, and history of this area – and are interested in ways to preserve that, at the same time trying to create some economic benefit to the county.

The Tennessee Clean Water Network, the National Park Conservation Association, and the Nature Conservancy partnered with Pete and Linda to look into ways to maintain and improve upon the natural resources, at the same time increasing benefits to the economy. Eco-tourism was an answer they came up with. The group is working to develop a program called, “Morgan County Challenge,” wherein tourists would attempt to complete challenges, at this time mostly recreational, and upon completion would earn a patch or cap. For example, to earn the Adventure Morgan County Challenge Patch, one would be required to paddle a stretch of Clear Creek, mountain bike at Lone Mountain State Forest, hike a trail along the Obed Wild & Scenic River, and hike at Frozen Head State Park. At our meeting, the group talked about other opportunities for challenge events, like historical- or current event-community based.

Group discussion centered on how efforts like this meet the needs for injecting money into the region, and continued on to infrastructure that would be needed to support tourism – lodges, river shuttles, hiking trail maps, markets for supplies, etc – giving people a reason to stay or to help them in coming back. Participants expressed interest in the Morgan County Challenge and similar efforts.

At our next meeting, Tuesday, May 27, we will be hosting Robert Moore, the Director of Conservation Planning for the Nature Conservancy. Robert will be talking with us about the Cumberlands Initiative, a Doris Duke Foundation funded effort to protect biodiversity within the Cumberland Region, and the Nature Conservancy Forest Bank Program. In order to take advantage of longer days, while still remaining sensitive to getting people home at a decent hour, we're going to move this next meeting back to 6:30 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel. Dinner will be provided.

If you have any questions, or would like to be removed from or added to this mailing list, please contact Allyson at (865) 974-1963 or by email at amuth@utk.edu. We hope you'll be able to join us.

Sincerely,

Allyson Muth

Dave Ostermeier

APPENDIX B6
JUNE NEWSLETTER

June 6, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Member and Friend,

Thanks so much to those who continue to come to our meetings. We welcomed some new faces at our May meeting. Their insights and energies added to the group.

At our May meeting our speaker was unable to join us, and our group took the opportunity to discuss the possibility of reaching out to the Deer Lodge community. The idea is for our group to talk to Deer Lodge neighbors about what we have discussed the last several meetings: What it is about our community we like; what are our concerns and problems; and what visions do we hold for the future of this community. This will help us inform other community members about our group and what we have been doing. It will also help us pull together a community-wide view of our issues and visions. The community-wide view is important so that we can construct a community vision, and plan for projects and activities, which will then help the group to set goals. This vision of action requires community input so that we have common interests towards which to direct our energies, and a means of approaching funding organizations.

We spent a great deal of time talking about the importance of such an inquiry and brainstorming ideas and concepts that should be included to gather all the information needed. Topics for questions centered around:

- Likes and dislikes within the community
- Personal vision for the community
- How the community enriches the community members
- What is important to retain in the community
- What could be given up
- Change, if any, that would be acceptable or preferred
- Where help is needed
- Activities that can be undertaken
- Issue importance

I am going to spend some time drafting questions, which will be presented to the group at our next meeting, Monday June 16, 2003 at 6:00 pm at the Weideman Hotel. We will spend that time finalizing the questionnaire and setting guidelines for when we would like to have information gathered.

For dinner, we will be having a cookout featuring locally raised, organic beef. We'll provide some accoutrements. If you have local produce or local recipes that you would like to share, please contribute to the feast.

If you haven't been able to join our group, please take the time to share your insight and views with community members when they approach you. Your concerns and cares are important. To those who are able, we hope to see you at our next meeting. Bring a neighbor and a friend.

Cheers,

Allyson Muth

Dave Ostermeier

APPENDIX B7
JULY NEWSLETTER

July 11, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Member and Friend,

Thank you to those of you who have continued to participate in our community group. We are working towards accomplishing some exciting things for the community of Deer Lodge and your energy and experience are valuable assets.

We're coming up on a half-year of meeting together, and I wanted to quickly dispel a rumor that has been circulating about who we are and what we are doing. This group is composed of Deer Lodge residents, natural resource professionals, and other community interests who have come together to discuss ways to plan for and work towards a desired future in the community and the region. The goal of the group is to find out, and to help make happen, what people want here in the west end of Morgan County. Participation in the group involves nothing more than sharing your vision, experiences, and expertise with group members to work towards community goals. You are not asked to open your land or other resources to public access, nor asked to undertake any particular activity on your land. I sincerely hope that this or other misperceptions have not kept people away.

At our last meeting in June we developed a questionnaire to gather additional information from community members about what they would like to see happen in the Deer Lodge community. The group was concerned that we were missing views and visions of the larger community, and the survey was created to remedy that. Group members have spent some time having conversations and completing the questionnaire with their Deer Lodge friends and neighbors to find out what people desire and are concerned about in the community.

We will be discussing and learning from what group members heard in these conversations at our July 22 meeting. The information will help us to construct a community vision and objectives for actions that community members would like to see happen. These things can potentially be used to approach funding agencies for financial assistance.

Our next meeting is July 22, 2003 at 6 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. Dinner will be provided. Come share your visions and experiences and hear about what we've learned from community members. Bring a neighbor and a friend.

Cheers,

Allyson Muth

APPENDIX B8
AUGUST NEWSLETTER

August 4, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Member and Friend,

We had an excellent turnout for our July 22 meeting. Over thirty people showed up to learn more about what the community group is doing and talk about what people would like to see happen in the community. It was very encouraging and there is some great energy to get something accomplished. We had representatives from the Abner Ross Community Center, the Deer Lodge Fire Department, and the Deer Lodge Historical Society, as well as interested county residents from other communities.

We spent the majority of the meeting talking through the questions in the community inquiry that we had sent out. Resoundingly, one of the major things most people were concerned about was the lack of economic opportunities to enable children and young families to remain in the community, and the lack of recreational and community opportunities for the young people of the area. People talked about valuing the rural nature of the community – the peace, quiet, and strong connections to neighbors – but didn't want to see the community "becoming another Gatlinburg". We talked about the need for niche markets or local industry that could create some local jobs and the fear of random, uncontrolled development occurring in the community in the future and how we could address that.

These topics led us into a conversation around a *Sustainable Community Initiative Grant* proposal that we would like to apply for. This grant funds projects which link sustainable agriculture and natural resources efforts and community development. A decision was made to apply for this grant as a community and we spent some time brainstorming on possibilities that would fall under the grant requirements. Several ideas were shared, and, after a phone call to the grant coordinators (the Southern Region Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE)), the idea that most closely fits the grant requirements is an effort to investigate a community market niche related to the natural resources and/or agricultural efforts that are present in the community, and to develop and implement a strategy to promote that niche and the marketing of it – an investigative and start-up effort, if you will. The grant also requires educational outcomes of the funded project. We would need to develop pamphlets or brochures that could be used to share our efforts with other communities and partner with other organizations in and around the community.

It was decided that we would have a working meeting in which to write the grant on Tuesday, August 12, 2003 at 6 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. We will be developing a project proposal and budget as well as identifying partner organizations that may benefit from, and help us with, the project as well. Please come if you are interested

in helping us to specify what it is the community would like to do and to write the grant proposal.

Our next regularly scheduled meeting is Tuesday, August 26, at 6 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel. We will be finalizing the grant proposal (submission deadline is Sept 5, 2003), and talking about activities we can undertake in the meantime to move us in a desired direction. Due to large numbers that have expressed interest in joining the group, let's make this meeting and our meal together a potluck. Please bring a little something that you would like to share with your friends and neighbors. I'll provide a main dish of sorts (I'm waiting for inspiration).

As always, anyone and everyone are welcome at one or both meetings. We hope you'll come. Bring a neighbor and a friend.

Cheers,

Allyson Muth

APPENDIX B9
SEPTEMBER NEWSLETTER

September 12, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

I hope this finds you well and enjoying the reprieve from summer weather. We have continued to have a fairly consistent group of people join us at our meetings. Thank you all for your effort and ideas that you put into the grant proposal. Thanks also to those who wrote letters of support for our work.

As many of you know, the group has submitted a grant application to promote some local economic development through the identification and development of a local market niche. We wrote a proposal to find a marketable product that would be sustainable, utilize the agricultural and/or natural resources in a renewable way, and create local jobs and income for the community and the region. The group developed a process in which an investigation and analysis of possible economic opportunities would occur through conversations with local entrepreneurs and field visits to farms and forests where people are developing their products. The second phase of the process looks at possibilities in terms of what resources are currently available or easily attained to find the best match for the community, or members within the community. The final phase of the project is to develop business plans and seek out technical and financial assistance to help establish a business or businesses. This would include things like conversations around patenting products, how to market products using the Internet, where to seek out grant or other funding opportunities, etc. Keep your fingers crossed. We'll know something by late November.

In light of the process the group created and the energy and desire to go ahead with this before we hear about the application, the group decided that they would like to invite regional entrepreneurs to come share their experiences with us so that we can learn from their successes and stumbling blocks.

At our next meeting, Tuesday, September 23, we have invited Doris and Maurice Preston of West Wind Farms to come speak to us. The Prestons grow and market organic, grass-fed meats and poultry. They will give a short talk about their farm and then we'll have a discussion around their efforts and what others have experienced elsewhere. We hope you'll join us.

In light of our varying numbers each meeting, and my inability to meet everyone's food preferences, we are starting to make our gatherings a potluck occasion. Please bring something to share with your friends and neighbors. If you have any questions please contact Allyson at (865) 974-1963 or by email amuth@utk.edu.

We'll hope to see you on Tuesday, September 23, 2003 at 6 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. Bring a neighbor and a friend.

Cheers,

Allyson Muth

APPENDIX B10
OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

October 17, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

Fall is here and I hope this finds you well. Thanks to our dedicated group participants who continue to take time out of busy schedules to join us. We had some new faces at our September meeting, which is always exciting, and we've got a plan for our meetings through the end of the year. We'll be finding out about our grant proposal soon, and we're continuing with learning from other entrepreneurs about what it takes to start up and sustain a local enterprise.

A big thank you goes to Doris Preston who came to talk with us in September about West Wind Farms – a grass-fed, organic meats and poultry farm in Deer Lodge. Doris, and her husband Maurice, have had their farm for eight years, but have been certified organic for the last two years. They raise chicken, turkey, lamb, pigs, and cattle, and market their products through their Internet site www.westwindfarms.com all over the U.S., and attend farmers markets throughout central and east Tennessee. They built this farm up with little background in farming, just an idea and a receptive marketing niche.

Doris shared with us some of their trials and successes as they have grown and developed their farming operation. She also presented numerous opportunities to group members for other community members to tie into and develop operations for an already established market niche – such as starting chickens, growing out beef cattle, etc. Doris and Maurice have exciting ideas about creating partnerships through the Deer Lodge community. We talked our group making a farm visit to see what it takes to run an operation like theirs, but that'll wait until things slow down for them. We wish them well in their work.

At our next meeting, Tuesday, October 28, we have invited Anna Shotz of Woolly Buzzer Farm to come speak to us. Teri makes and markets handcrafted soaps. You can find out more (and order) the soaps online at www.woollybuzzerfarm.com. In addition, Teri raises shiitake mushrooms for their market garden. She will give a short talk about her operations and then we'll have a discussion around her efforts and what it takes to start up and maintain an entrepreneurial enterprise such as hers. We hope you'll join us.

Don't forget, our meetings are now potluck dinners. Bring something to share with the group. We've been having some excellent food. If you have any questions please contact Allyson at (865) 974-1963 or by email amuth@utk.edu.

We hope to see you on Tuesday, October 28, 2003 at 6 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. Bring a neighbor and a friend.

APPENDIX B11
NOVEMBER NEWSLETTER

November 11, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

The holiday season is rapidly approaching, and so is our finding out about the grant. Keep your fingers crossed. Many thanks to those who continue to make the time to join us and learn from local entrepreneurs about their businesses, and to think together about some possibilities for other new local businesses.

Many thanks go to Anna Shotz of Woolly Bugger Farm who came to speak with us at the October meeting about her soap-making business. Teri was very inspiring for other entrepreneurs-to-be. It's always exciting to hear people speak with such passion about their work, and encourage others in pursuing their own ideas. Thanks for joining us.

We're changing things up for our November meeting. On Thursday, November 20, the Morgan County Forestry Development Association is having their quarterly meeting and offering presentations on alternative forest products. They have offered to let our group join them in Wartburg for their meeting on that Thursday, instead of having our own separate meeting on similar topics during the same week. The program will be:

Mushroom Growing – Anna Shotz, Woolly Bugger Farms
Hunting Leases; Off-Road Vehicles – Samuel Bush, Timberwise
Production of Field Stone; Christmas Trees – Dick Smith, UT Forestry Exp. Stn.
Forest Land Enhancement Program – Horton Hale, TDA, Division of Forestry
Liability – Frank Gregory, Farm Bureau

The meeting will start at **6 p.m. on Thursday, November 20**, in the basement of the **Farm Bureau Building in Wartburg** (just off the Square; behind and to the right of the Post Office and Federal Bldg.). If you would like to join the Morgan County Forestry Development Association, dues are \$10.00 and payable at the meeting. Please call the Morgan County Extension Office at (423) 346-3000 so they can plan the meal. And if you want to bring some food to share, let them know.

So we'll hope to see you on (I'm saying it one more time) **Thursday, November 20 at 6 p.m. at the Farm Bureau Building in Wartburg**. It will be a good evening of learning some new things about forests in Morgan County.

Bring a neighbor and a friend.

All the best,
Allyson Muth

APPENDIX B12
DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

December 5, 2003

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

I hope everyone enjoyed their Thanksgiving. This year has flown by. Can you believe we've been meeting together for almost a year? I hope you all feel good about what we've learned together and what we've done.

Thanks to those of you who joined us at the Morgan County Forestry Development Association meeting on November 20. They presented quite a full program with speakers talking about shiitake mushroom growing, hunting leases and off-road vehicle land usage, producing fieldstone and Christmas trees, the Tennessee Division of Forestry's Forestland Enhancement Program, and issues of liability with others using your land. There was a great deal of information coming out of the meeting, but it hopefully sparked some interest in other opportunities out there, as well as what other groups in the area are doing.

I have some surprising news to report. We did not receive the Community Innovation Grant for which we had applied. They were disappointingly nonspecific in their comments but did say we had presented a well-written proposal that met their goals and objectives. So we're moving on. I have found some other foundations that fund work similar to what our group is trying to do and will be making contact to determine their guidelines and possibilities for us.

At our next meeting we are going to have a Holiday Party. There is nothing formal on the agenda other than to gather together, enjoy good food and each other's company.

While we're gathered I would like to get your ideas for our group's future. If you're willing, I would like to ask your input on where you would like to see this group go in the next year and on moving forward with other grant opportunities, so stop by and share your visions with us.

Our Holiday Party will be Tuesday, December 16, 2003 starting at 6:00 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel. Bring a favorite dish to share with your friends and neighbors. Let's celebrate the holiday season and good friends in a good community.

Anyone and everyone are always welcome.

Happy Holidays,

Allyson Muth

APPENDIX B13
JANUARY NEWSLETTER

January 20, 2004

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

Happy New Year! I hope everyone had enjoyable holidays, and that 2004 has started on a good note for you all.

The Deer Lodge Community Group has been meeting for almost a year now. There have been some tremendous learning opportunities about exciting businesses and activities within the community, new friendships made, and challenging activities undertaken. I have been very grateful to be a part of the Group.

Yet, we have come to a crossroads in the life of the Deer Lodge Community Group and I would like to ask your input about carrying on. There was some strong disappointment when we didn't get the grant (there definitely was on my part), and that has affected the continuity of the group. Since finding out about this particular grant application I have been doing some more research regarding other possible opportunities. But we've come to a point where we need someone from within the community to step forward and help organize things, and we need some input from the community as to what the group could do in the future.

As many of you know, I am a graduate student at UT and will be trying to finish up this summer so as to follow my husband when he moves to New York. Even though I will be leaving in a few short months, I would like to help this group move forward.

In order to determine the future of the Deer Lodge Community Group, I would like to hold a meeting on Tuesday, January 27, 2004 at 6 p.m. at the Weideman Hotel in Deer Lodge. At this meeting we will talk about what group members would like to do in the future and create a plan, if there is interest and leadership, for applying for other grant opportunities.

I hope you can join us for this important meeting. Bring your ideas about future learning opportunities that the Group can undertake, your enthusiasm and ideas about funding for which we can apply, and think about the role you would be willing to play in making this happen. And, in the spirit of fellowship, bring a covered dish to share with your neighbors and your friends.

Hope to see you on Tuesday, January 27, 2004 at 6 p.m. at the Weideman.

Anyone and everyone are always welcome.

Best, Allyson Muth

APPENDIX B14
FINAL NEWSLETTER

March 22, 2004

Dear Deer Lodge Community Members and Friends,

First off, let me express my apologies for my lack of communication as of late. It's been a busy and interesting time of year. I hope this spring is finding you all well.

Secondly, I would like to extend my deepest thanks to those of you who continued to be an active part of the Deer Lodge Community Group. I truly enjoyed getting to know you and your community and I am most thankful that you were willing to take this last year's learning journey with me.

As you may have guessed, based on dwindling participation and a lack of interest from the larger community, the Deer Lodge Community Group has ceased meeting. The disappointment over not receiving the grant and the lack of plans for continuation after my departure may have hastened the end. I hope that those of you who participated saw value in what we did – that you learned things, widened your network of friends, and looked at your community in a new light. It is a tremendous place and has great potential. Together, you have the ability to make things happen for Deer Lodge.

I wanted to take this opportunity to pass on some information about other groups that are active in the area, and whom, if you have the time, you might want to get involved with.

You all know about the Abner Ross Community Center, the Deer Lodge Historical Society, and the Deer Lodge Volunteer Fire Department. These groups add much to the wealth of your community. If anyone were interested in starting new businesses or seeking out grant-funded projects, the support and cooperation of these three community groups would be invaluable through their organizational status.

The Morgan County Forestry Development Association and the Emory-Obed Forum are two regional natural resources organizations that are active within the larger county, and in which several of your friends and neighbors participate. The Morgan County Forestry Development Association is a membership organization of private forest landowners and natural resource professionals in Morgan County. It meets on a quarterly basis and acts as a conduit of information around management options for owners of forest and pastureland. It has connections to a landowner-lobbying group in Nashville (Tennessee Forestry Association) and provides a chance to meet and visit with other forest landowners from around the region. Their next meeting is June 3. If you have questions or are interested in joining, contact David Keyes at 346-8985.

The Emory-Obed Forum is a collective of people throughout Morgan County who have come together to promote local economic development through the wealth of natural

resources in the area, at this point through promoting eco-tourism. They are currently in planning and grant seeking phases, but they welcome any and all involvement with their work. For more information contact Del Scruggs at 319-8242 or dscruggs@utk.edu.

One last thing, if anyone is interested in pursuing grant applications in the next year, I would be more than happy to share the application we wrote for the Community Innovation Grant. It would need some revising to indicate how results would be shared with other communities, and new letters of support that indicate exactly how assistance from agencies and organizations would be given. So that's an opportunity people in the community could pursue towards the middle of this year.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to come to know and be involved with your community. Its people are hospitable, friendly, energetic, and caring. Its backdrop is one of the most spectacular areas in the country. It is a fabulous place.

All my best,

Allyson Muth

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APPENDIX C

HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

APPENDIX C
CONSENT FORM

Collaborative Learning and Private Forest Lands: Addressing Issues of Stewardship through Community-Based Collaborative Groups

You are invited to voluntarily participate in a research project. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of participating in community-based collaborative learning groups around natural resource issues in Deer Lodge, Tennessee. As a participant in the private forest lands education and action forum, you are asked to share a description of this experience with the interviewer. Specifically, you are being asked to engage in the following activities:

Describe an experience that most stands out to you of time when you were struck by the events or process of our group.

Answer semi-structured questions related to the process and outcomes of our educational and action forum.

The interview will be audio tape recorded and is anticipated to take no more than two hours. The nature and direction of your descriptions will be determined by you and in response to questions asked by the interviewer.

After the interview, your descriptions will be transcribed, and your name replaced with a fictitious name. The audio tapes will be destroyed immediately after they are transcribed. Copies of the transcripts will be printed for the research team for analysis. A portion of your description will also be shared with an Applied Phenomenology Group at the University of Tennessee for verification purposes as part of the analysis process developed at the University. Participants in that group will be asked to sign a letter of confidentiality. Transcripts will be kept in a locked file in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries in Ellington Plant Sciences Building on the Knoxville campus of the University of Tennessee for three years after completion of the study, and then destroyed.

No incentives are offered to you for your time and effort in participating; however, you may personally benefit by thinking and talking about your experience of community-based collaborative learning groups around the forests of your community.

You are free to choose not to participate in this study, or you can withdraw from this study at any time by notifying Allyson Muth at the address shown below. If you feel uncomfortable during the interview, you may discontinue your participation and your audiotape will be destroyed.

Any and all information you provide will be kept in confidence. Neither your name nor any identifying information will be used in any reports, although your words may be used to support the interpretation and analysis. At no time will your words be linked or traceable to you.

You may affirm your agreement to participate in this research study by signing below. You will receive a copy of this form. The signed copy will be stored for three years in a secure location on the Knoxville campus of the University of Tennessee.

Signature _____ Date _____

Questions or comments regarding this invitation may be directed to:

Allyson B. Muth, UT, Department of Forestry, Wildlife & Fisheries
274 Ellington Hall
Knoxville, TN 37996
Phone: 865-974-1963, Email: amuth@utk.edu

VITA

Allyson Brownlee Muth was born in Little Rock, Arkansas on September 24, 1973. She was raised in Little Rock and graduated from Little Rock Hall High School in 1991. Allyson left Little Rock to attend college at the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee where she discovered a love for forestry. After receiving her B.S. in natural resources with a forestry concentration in 1995, she moved to Crossett, Arkansas to work for Georgia-Pacific Corporation. Allyson returned to school in 1997 to attend the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies in New Haven, Connecticut where she graduated in 1999. Moving to Tennessee in the summer of 1999, Allyson worked some odd jobs before enrolling in the Collaborative Learning Program at the University of Tennessee in 2000. She was able to combine her interest and inquiry into collaborative learning with her forestry background through a project in the Department of Forestry, Wildlife and Fisheries at the University of Tennessee. Allyson was granted a Doctorate in Education in 2004.

After graduation, Allyson and her husband Norris moved to New England, where Norris is completing his Ph.D. work and Allyson is working to foster better land stewardship and community development through collaborative learning.

