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Conversations in the zone : collaborative learning in the counselor/student relationship

Mark S. Cotter

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mark S. Cotter entitled "Conversations in the zone : collaborative learning in the counselor/student relationship." 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 Education.

John Peters, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Katherine Greenberg, Howard Pollio, Marianne Woodside, Ronald McFadden

Accepted for the Council:

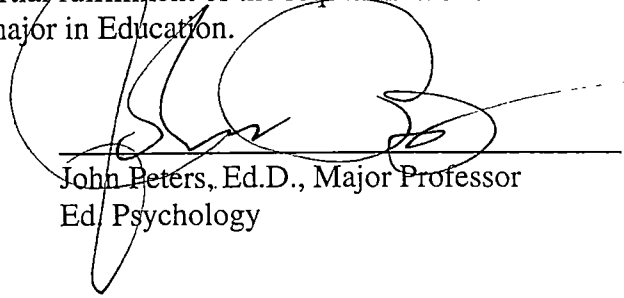
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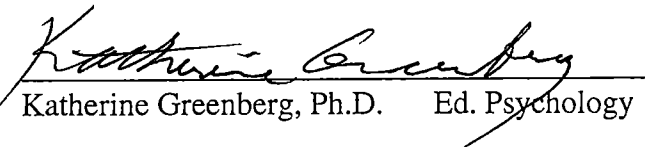
To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Mark Steven Cotter entitled "Conversations in the Zone: Collaborative Learning in the Counselor/Student Relationship." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Education.

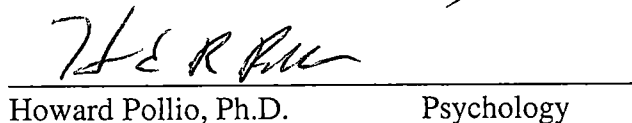


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Ed. Psychology

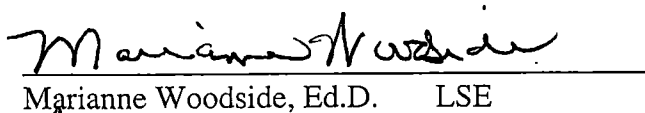
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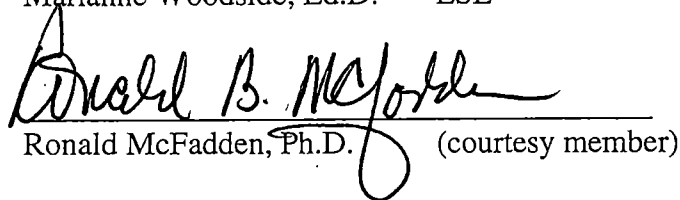
Katherine Greenberg, Ph.D. Ed. Psychology



Howard Pollio, Ph.D. Psychology

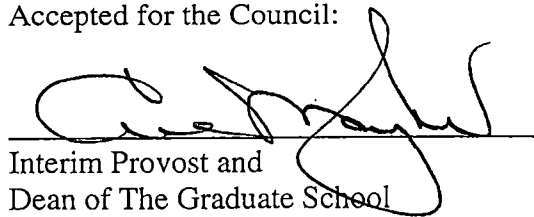


Marianne Woodside, Ed.D. LSE



Ronald McFadden, Ph.D. (courtesy member)

Accepted for the Council:



Interim Provost and
Dean of The Graduate School

CONVERSATIONS IN THE ZONE:
COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN THE COUNSELOR/STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

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

Mark S. Cotter

May 2001

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Cindy, and to my daughters, Caitlin and Megan. I love them more than life itself, and I plan to make our future together worthy of the all sacrifices they made toward this endeavor. I also dedicate this to my parents, Bill and Winnie, who paved the way and gave me more than they will ever know.

Acknowledgement

I owe thanks to many people for their assistance, patience, and, above all, collaborative spirit. I especially want to thank Dr. John Peters, who chaired my committee, put up with my jokes, and guided this incredible program. I thank Dr. Ron McFadden for giving me a job I love doing and for making this opportunity possible. I also want to thank my other committee members: Dr. Kathy Greenberg for her gentle support and guidance, Dr. Howard Pollio for his excellent wisdom and his indefatigable humor, Dr. McFadden for his passion for intellectual pursuits, and Dr. Marianne Woodside for her willingness to help whenever I needed it.

I also want to express my gratitude to those courageous first-generation college students who gave their time and shared their stories and knowledge with me. They made this dissertation a joy and make my job something I look forward to every day.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my classmates--my cohort of collaborative learners--for our time together. This is as much your dissertation as it is mine.

ABSTRACT

This study was an action research project using collaborative learning to inquire into my practice as a counselor working with nine first-generation college students in a federal TRIO Student Support Services (SSS) program at a land-grant university. The study followed the description of the history and parameters of my practice, my assumptions and reasons for interest in the initiative, a practical theory for addressing issues, and the reasons I believe collaborative learning reconciles practical and formal theories.

My goal in this work was to move beyond an information-gathering role with students to a dialogical relationship in which we jointly construct knowledge. To this end, I initiated a phenomenological interview as part of the intake process for students applying to the SSS program and then followed this with a dialogue with students.

Three students participated in the summer semester of 2000, and six in the fall semester of 2000. A change in procedure from the summer to fall semesters enhanced the sought-after conversational qualities I define as "in the zone." I found elements of our dialogue that help to define this type of conversation--speech that carries its own momentum, playing with concepts, and use of images and metaphor. Experiential knowledge was also co-constructed within the zone.

The study revealed phenomenological interviews to be an enlightening experience for students and myself. It also demonstrated that in-depth and image-rich conversations can help develop responsive relationships while preserving our respective roles. Results indicated that participants interpreted experiences through meaning perspectives and that

the criteria for dialogue and expectations of participants had an effect on the quality of our conversations. An analysis of the action research project indicated that it does meet the criteria set out by Helen Bradbury and Peter Reason in the Handbook of Action Research. Beyond providing new knowledge and meeting quality standards, the study contributed to my practice by helping me to transcend a fear of engagement and thereby to be open to the experiences of others.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

I learn most about myself by observing myself in relation to others. When I examine myself by myself I am actually examining the results of a previous encounter.

**Perceptions are not of things but of relationships. Nothing, including me, exists by itself—this is an illusion of words.
I am a relationship, ever-changing.
(Prather, 1970)**

Counseling is a special relationship created between two people and is unique to each set of participants. More importantly, this type of relationship is something that can be a source of learning for both parties. The things that I have learned, though, are essentially the interpretations of actual events—recollections of an experience gathered from a particular point of view. This learning is also a part of a position I assume in relation to another. It is a state of equilibrium that gives me comfort. Critical reflection may reveal assumptions and disrupt that state of equilibrium, but a renewed examination of events and relationships may yield more knowledge for me and, hopefully, illuminate similar processes and experiences within the world of the reader.

Questions of Relationship

To reduce our vulnerability, we disconnect from students, from subjects, and even from ourselves. We build a wall between inner truth and outer performance, and we play-act the teacher's part. Our words, spoken at remove from our hearts, become 'the balloon speech in cartoons,' and we become caricatures of ourselves. We distance ourselves from students and subject to minimize the danger—forgetting that distance makes life more dangerous still by isolating the self. (Palmer, 1998, p. 17)

Midway in my professional life, I directed a group home for adolescent boys who were transitioning out of state custody. A regular part of the independent-living counseling group was an Albert Brooks movie called "Defending Your Life". The film was a romantic comedy about judgement in the afterlife and the resultant progression to a more intelligent life form or the return to earth as a human (or as the judges call us, a "little-brain"). The premise of the movie concerned the way fear keeps us from experiencing life to its fullest. The concepts in the story were a springboard for group discussions about our foibles and the missed opportunities that came about because we were afraid of looking stupid, weak, or inadequate in some way. As I contemplate my present professional practice, I think back on these discussions and sense a fear of feeling incompetent or not in control. I then must examine what practices I have established to insulate myself from that fear. I also must contemplate what could be if I face the fear and make a change to be more genuine.

For more than four years, I have worked as a counselor for the Educational Advancement Program (EAP), one of the federal Department of Education programs

known as TRIO. The EAP is commonly called Student Support Services (SSS) on other campuses and is charged with improving the retention rates and grade point averages of first-generation, low-income, and/or disabled college students. It is within this practice that I have instituted an action research project designed to improve my effectiveness as a counselor and to illuminate aspects of the practice that may be of interest to other practitioners in this field.

For the most part, college students are a fascinating group--a group I would like to know better and to identify with. I am, after all, a college student myself at the moment. As a counselor for this program I instituted an intake interview that explores the perceptions of students applying to the program. This interview was part of an earlier research project and was something that I grew to enjoy doing. As part of this research, I followed up with participants to see if the themes made sense to them. I entered into this dialogue with the participant with an intent to validate my learning. I found, though, that the second interview about the experience was as revealing or more so than the first. In this exchange we had the opportunity to explore the assumptions that we brought to the interview and the perceptions of the program. At the time I was not looking at this dialogue with scrutiny; however, this was when we were engaged in collaborative learning--students and I had were equals in terms of expertise about our experience. This collaborative learning experience caught my attention as significant to my practice. With the information-gathering phase (somewhat) behind me, I could move my focus to those aspects of the project that are most relevant to my practice.

I wanted to know what it is like for first-generation college students to go through an intake process that includes a phenomenological interview. In a counseling interview, I place value on understanding the student's point of reference--the way each student interprets experiences and makes sense of the environment. Vincent Tinto (1986) states that a student enters college with a certain set of expectations and the "accuracy" of these precepts may have a profound bearing on subsequent socialization, work habits, and the affective state of the student. While I have found phenomenological interviewing to be a rewarding experience for me as the counselor, I must take into consideration that the intake process is not for my benefit. I approach the interview with the intent of shifting my role from that of the expert--the bearer of knowledge--to that of a co-participant in learning. The question of the research thus focuses on what stands out for both the student and myself in this experience of collaborative learning.

What I wanted to know about the experience is what is going on when such learning takes place. There are several questions within this question: What are the forms of the dialogue?; What is the nature of our relationship as we move from one form of dialogue to another?; What makes the form of dialogue what it is? In relation to my practice I want to know how my actions fit within the framework of my values, the values of the institution in which I practice, and the values of the profession.

Importance of the Study

A lot is riding on the way colleges interact with first-generation college students--financially, personally, and (possibly most important) culturally. The merit of any culture is determined by

the willingness of society to distribute, without discrimination, those occupational, monetary and other rewards that it claims to distribute to its citizens on the basis of educational qualifications. (Ogbu, p.258)

If there are barriers to attaining educational qualifications, our culture is not realizing its full democratic potential. Apparently this thinking has translated into action in our society. Student Support Services, a federal TRIO program, is part of the \$720 million annual investment made by Congress since 1965 in working with first-generation, low-income, and disabled college students. There are approximately 7,000 TRIO programs serving students at various levels of the educational process (middle school, high school, and college), and other countries are now looking to TRIO models for their emerging populations of first-generation college students.

In the United States, nearly one-third of entering freshman are the first in their families to attend college (Terenzini, 1996). There is some reason for concern that this population is not adequately prepared for college. These students do not typically enjoy the advantages of growing up in a family culture that views college as a natural part of life and prepares the student for its social and academic demands (Kitt, 1998). In some instances, first-generation college students perceive themselves as alienated from their culture of origin and occasionally are dissuaded from attending college by their parents (London, 1992). The cultural and familial experiences of college

administrators and the staff who deal with such students may often be very different from the student who is struggling in college because of non-cognitive factors such as feelings of anomie from both family and the college culture. The meeting of two different cultures need not assume that one is wrong and the other right. What is called for is a greater understanding of the experiences and assumptions held by each. Informed decisions by both students and counselors should emerge from such collaboratively constructed knowledge.

Approach to the Study

What follows is the logical progression of ideas in a framework that details how I came to make changes in my practice. I have constructed this dissertation to show, first, the nature of the practice in which I am engaged and initiatives I wish to make and, second, the inquiry into these initiatives.

The nature of an action research project can take a variety of forms, depending on the questions the researcher wishes to answer. A convenient model for outlining the progression of thought involved in the action research has followed the DATA model proposed by John Peters (Peters, 1991) and later expanded to the DATA-DATA model (Peters, 1997) as follows:

DATA I

- **Describe:** provide a description of the area of the practice on which the practitioner hopes to improve and the practitioner's role in it
- **Analyze:** identify the underlying assumptions that have contributed to the present area of the proposed initiative and proposed strategy and the reason for having interest
- **Theorize:** derive a practical theory for addressing issues of interest and examine these in light of the formal theories behind the practice, the practical theories guiding what actually is done, and the questions that guide inquiry into action

- **Act:** put informed practical theories into actions

DATA II

- **Design:** establish a guiding methodology and procedures for collecting information
- **Analyze:** critically reflect on and analyze information
- **Theorize:** refine the practical theory
- **Act:** initiate the methodology as part of the practice, modify it, or possibly reject it, depending on what is learned and inquire into this action.

The structure of a DATA-DATA approach is reflected in the work that is to follow.

DATA I is seen in the exploration of the practice, its historical roots and philosophies, and the ways of negotiating practice at the institutional and counselor level. DATA II spells out the way I have chosen to inquire into that practice. I choose this design because it establishes the links connecting the researcher's philosophical stance, the established theories of the practice, the process of decision-making, and the learning that takes place.

This model follows the natural order of the process of taking action, but does it under more rigorous, informed examination. Most of us go about our daily business guided by the cultural, historical, and personal forces that surround us. We don't give these forces much thought--it takes up too much energy and tends to disrupt the flow of our routine. For whatever reason, though, sometimes we do stop and reflect on what is going on and ask ourselves if something might be done differently. We might choose some course of action but usually find that it is best to do a little checking before we do anything. Once we are satisfied that what we are going to do has a pretty good chance of working we take action. If we are smart, we will also set up a strategy

that will inform us of how this action affects us and those around us. This study is organized in just that way.

CHAPTER TWO

ASSUMPTIONS AND THEORIES

Background to the Practice

My first step, in the DATA-DATA model, is to take a look around to examine what has brought me to the current situation and what has informed my practice to this point.

TRIO history

Individual practice is influenced by the historical ethos of predecessors, the values of the profession at large, and the pragmatic dictates of satisfying the goals of one's organization and thereby ensuring continuation of the program. The roots of my own profession shed light on factors that serve to perpetuate practices within this profession. The movement toward TRIO programs began with a shift to greater democratization within the educational sphere. One of the most pronounced changes in American culture came about as the result of the "G.I. Bill" following World War II. This legislation allowed millions of returning veterans--most of whom came from traditional working class families--to attend college. Prior to this time, college was viewed as primarily a finishing school for the wealthy elite (and mainly white, male) student. This action spawned phenomenal growth of colleges and universities and altered the culture of campus life. The country also was faced with expansion of its technological economy that placed demands on higher education to produce workers. The move from a largely agrarian and rural population to a more urban and "white-

collar” industrial base meant that college would serve as the primary place of transition for students coming from families of farming or factory-work backgrounds.

I believe colleges initially were surprised to find that this new class of student was able to perform quite well academically. The increased emphasis on the sciences meant a shift from the traditional liberal arts concentration to sciences and engineering, fields where a working class background could provide some preparation, even advantage (Brewer, Marmon, and Coates, 2000). Cultures are slow to change, however, and the culture of higher education is one that is especially entrenched in customs and rituals designed to maintain class structure. The turbulent confrontation to this culture took place in the 1960’s. The children of the G.I. Bill veterans began to arrive on campuses amid a call for civil rights and equality. The spirit of the movement was evidenced within the halls of Congress with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Educational Opportunity Act of 1964, the original War on Poverty statute, which created the Upward Bound program (Wolanin, 1996). This was followed closely by the Higher Education Act of 1965, the act that created Talent Search, the second of the TRIO programs.

The term TRIO comes from the three original educational support programs designed to assist first-generation, low-income, and physically challenged students (Hewitt, 1998). These programs--Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Services (originally Special Services)--were in place in the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1968. Upward Bound was designed to help low-income high school students prepare for college by giving instruction in literature, composition,

mathematics, and sciences on college campuses. Talent Search served to counsel low-income middle and high school students and provide them with information on applying to college and locating financial aid. Student Support Services provides tutoring, counseling, academic advising, cultural opportunities and other services to low-income and physically disabled college students (Hewitt, 1998). Since 1965, however, various amendments to the Higher Education Act have created four additional programs. Two programs are variations on Upward Bound designed to serve particular population needs: Veterans' Upward Bound and Upward Bound Math and Science. The other two programs are Educational Opportunity Centers (established in 1972) and Ronald McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program (established in 1986). Educational Opportunity Centers serve displaced or under-employed workers, and the Ronald McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program assists low-income minorities and other under-represented undergraduate students aspiring to achieve a doctoral degree and teach at the college level. In 1980, the reauthorization added an eligibility criteria of first-generation status, recognizing that need transcends financial barriers to the impact of family and culture. It also served to expand the political base for TRIO (Wolanin, 1996)

Programs that originated from the civil rights movement and President Johnson's "War on Poverty" may be expected to experience periods of political scrutiny as new administrations take the reigns of power. TRIO programs were placed under the administration of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare by 1970, and they saw periods of decentralization under President Nixon. The center of

administration was moved from Washington, D.C. to ten regional centers throughout the country. The effort was seen as a way to send federal money directly to state capitals and, consequently, to save money at the federal level (Hewitt, 2000). Though TRIO programs experienced growth in congressional appropriations--growing from \$100 million to its present \$720 million--it continued to be a hot topic, especially under the administrations of Presidents Reagan and Bush whose directors of the Department of Education (William Bennett and Lamar Alexander) sought to do away with their own department (Hewitt, 2000). TRIO programs have continued to exist throughout a contentious political climate largely because of a strong and vocal grassroots political base. The threats to the survival of the programs have also solidified the philosophical underpinnings of TRIO, which go back to the roots of the civil rights movement.

TRIO programs value excellence in academic pursuits and go to great lengths to highlight scholarship as an intellectually uplifting endeavor. These values sometimes are at odds with the population of first-generation, low-income students participating in TRIO programs. More often than not, the goal of the first child in the family to attend college is to get a job that will enhance the financial status of the family. Colleges and universities, however, have traditionally served as a resource for the transmission of *higher* culture--a culture based on the moral and philosophical tenets of largely western ideals. In this model, professors and instructors assume the role of mediators who seek to illuminate new concepts and engender an openness of mind to alternative paradigms important to some idealized culture. Paulo Freire and

Myles Horton, advocates of popular schools and proponents of the emancipatory goals of education, assert that the teacher must also serve a political role but one that is tempered by a dialogical relationship that places a high value on jointly derived rules for knowing (Peters & Armstrong, 1998; Bell, Gaventa, & Peters, 1991; Freire, 1970). Both educators emphasize that a change must come about in the mediator as well as the other person. Many colleges and universities, however, with the willing support of industry, have shifted from their traditional role as mediator to that of service provider with students as customers. In the customer/provider model, both parties are objectified and subject to mutual manipulation rather than mutual connectedness. This results in a system that rewards those who enter with a more competitive edge and relegates others to the margins.

TRIO programs, in contrast, arose from a decade of upheaval and an impetus of social amelioration. This change was to come about by “advantaging” at-risk students on par with other college students. The goal was, and is, to raise first-generation college students to a level of performance that equals or exceeds more affluent students raised within the culture of college. Inclusion of non-traditional students, then, should entail an enhancement of intellectual climate rather than a regression to mediocrity. If TRIO counselors treat students as consumers, we attenuate the possibility of this mediational and mutually advantageous relationship.

TRIO professionals participate in state, regional, and national organizations with a strong ethic toward equality in educational opportunity. Annual conferences stress the history of the movement and focus on TRIO participants who have become

successful and are expected to give back to the community. The ethos of the TRIO community is a leveling of the playing field for marginalized students. As Brewer, Marmon, and Coates (2000, p. 134) suggested, "The goal must be the emancipation of disadvantaged persons through the helpful intervention of peers, institutions, and significant others."

These programs provide a variety of services such as academic advising, personal counseling, tutors, cultural/mentoring activities, and career counseling. The role of the counselor in Student Support Services is to orient participants to the program, assess their needs through intake interviews, and provide EAP students with counseling and referral services. The initial contact with the student sets the stage for future interaction--it is the link in a chain of objectives eventually leading to the larger goal of academic achievement defined by higher grades and graduation from college. This is the part of my professional practice where I hope to gain an authentic, dialogical relationship with the student.

Institutional climate

The site for this Student Support Services program is located in a relatively large, land-grant university (26,000 students) in the Southeast. The university presents its own set of cultural variables that affect the professional practice. It is the flagship institution in a state system that draws students primarily from the immediate geographical region of southern Appalachia. This provides some unique conundrums for me as a counselor who is asked to mediate between the conflicting values of students' communities of origin and the values of the faculty and administration. A

university of this size struggles to define its culture, its mission, and its identity. It is primarily a research institution, but its faculties are called upon to teach.

Undergraduate students are removed from the research conducted at the university, and, while many students come here expecting to be taught, faculty have expectations of students being more independent and proactive learners. Students and faculty often disappoint each other in this regard. This distinction between an institutional mission to teach and a mission to provide an opportunity for learning is apparent in the advice given in the form letters to students who are academically dismissed--failing students are instructed to take a year at a two-year community college before reapplying to the university. The community college is not necessarily an easier school but one with a singular mission to teach. My assigned goal as a counselor, however, is to increase retention at this university and not to advise students to change to a college that is more in line with their learning expectations.

In addition to these duties, I regularly teach a section of a freshman course that is an introduction to the university, and every year I make a point to have a discussion about the culture of the university. The most prevalent theme in these discussions is the domination of big-money sports on campus and the dual system of values this imposes on the student body. Like most American universities, the artifacts that represent this university are symbols of athletics and team colors that adorn every conceivable type of clothing, furniture, writing implement, Christmas ornament, or drinking glass. While this serves as a source of pride for one segment of the student body, it is an affront to some students who resent what they see as a violation of the

culture of academia. Many students also view the distribution of funding to athletics as inequitable and evidence of duplicity in the university's stated mission towards excellence in educational standards.

For the students in my classes and in my daily contact, the juxtaposition of the university's stated standards to its practices extends beyond athletics and academics. The reputation of the university is one of both religious and political conservatism: however, it has been ranked by Princeton Review (2001) as one of the top ten "party schools" in the country. This stands in contrast to the thirty-plus religious organizations recognized by the university and the popularity of religious chorale and Bible-study groups. The climate of the university serves as a draw each summer to a number of Christian conferences that include several thousand participants.

This fact seems tied to another student observation that there is a lack of diversity. In fact, in a university handbook, the Muslim Students Association is listed under "International Organizations." Diversity for some students was cited as one reason for attending such a large institution, and for many students, the university is much more diverse than the home community. The student population is, however, only eleven percent minority students and the university is under pressure to recruit African-American (currently comprising six percent of the population) and other minority students to come into compliance with federal court actions to alleviate the "separate but equal" status of the state higher education system. In contrast to the overall student population, thirty percent of the Student Support Services Program participants are African-American, a fact that should make the SSS counselors more

aware of minority cultural issues and could contribute to the unique sub-culture of the program.

A common theme of students at the university is the personal identification with the institution. For most students within the SSS program, there was an expressed distancing from the university that was associated with the number of hours of employment and their age. While students who were older than average or working many hours routinely professed "fitting in" with other students, the university itself took on a role of an impersonal and highly bureaucratic governmental body. In contrast, students who were involved in clubs and organizations (most notably fraternities and sororities) conveyed a sense of pride in the university despite its apparent flaws. What stands out is a sort of duality within the culture of the university--one set of students actively engaged in the institution and another set of students who express anonymity and a lack of connection. Although participants of the SSS represent both sets of students, the majority appears to be those who lack connection to the institution. Given the program goal of increased graduation rates for the participants, this detachment provides a challenge for the counselor, especially considering the logistical hurdles that employed students and older students face towards greater involvement in campus organizations (Tinto, 1987).

As a service provider, I can distance myself from the client in a number of ways. The method I have personally chosen has been to take on the role of the expert. The student comes to me with a problem. As expert, I then ask questions about study habits, note-taking skills, financial pressures, and all of those other things that I, as

expert, know are responsible for the problem at hand. At this point I work with the student to choose a solution he or she can live with and arrange the cure. The formulas for fixing problems are largely successful, but students rarely engage to their full potential once status quo has been achieved. Beyond the pressure to ensure adequate numbers of participants for the grant, this lack of engagement provides an additional stress. Research into Student Support Services programs by Westat (1998) indicates that the efficacy of programs depends on the use of several of these services by the student; therefore, each SSS program has a goal of ensuring that students participate fully in program offerings. Reluctance of students to participate actively is a source of frustration for staff, especially when success of students is the primary criteria for reauthorization of grants; however, the frustration goes far beyond the bottom line.

Assumptions of the Problem

Personal history

The second step of the DATA-DATA model involves an examination of the present context of the problem area as I define it and the exploration of other interpretations (Peters, 1991). My own history as a helping agent began serendipitously. As a recently graduated Psychology major in the late 1970's, I was caught up in the recession. Out of desperation, I took a position as a "Junior Social Counselor" with the Tennessee Department of Human Services. As such, I was assigned a caseload of families with documented histories of physical and sexual abuse and neglect. On my first day, I was given a stack of cases with the instruction to

read the cases and go out to meet the families – that was the extent of my training. My fairly insular, middle-class background did not prepare me for what I was to read, hear, and see. I lasted about one year before transferring to an investigations unit out of frustration with lack of progress in my clients, a problem I saw as a result of dwindling resources and expectations that were often incompatible with the culture of my clients. Part of the problem, too, was that I viewed these families as “clients.”

As an investigator, I learned to listen. I had no training in interviewing skills and, ironically, was more open to what the clients had to say. I responded as an interested party. This was all new to me, and I was eager to hear and take in all that the victims and perpetrators alike had to say. Although the job itself was intense and rapidly taking its toll on my well-being, I was fascinated by the stories of child molesters, thieves, prostitutes, and even fundamentalist ministers. I found, also, that I could work with the client toward a goal of the client’s choosing and get results that were agreeable to both of us. I lasted two years as an investigator and changed jobs when I could no longer muster the adrenaline that should come with a crisis. I became a disability claims examiner, a position in which the performance review had no section for compassion.

The life of a bureaucrat did not suit me. I had met the kind of people who were filing claims for disability, and I knew how tough it was for them to negotiate the culture of forms and rules. I also knew what the consequences were for the clients who were denied benefits or left waiting for a check when food was scarce and bills were piling up. I learned that the attitude of the directors could permeate the work

environment and serve to marginalize the workers in the agency. I organized two quality circles where front-line workers could find solutions to problems affecting them. I never really saw the results of this project. I returned to the Department of Human Services a little more able to appreciate working with people again.

I spent six years working with foster children, eventually specializing in adolescents who were approaching the age of emancipation. I became an independent-living specialist. It was much like when I first began--there was no training and even less direction. I was fortunate that a partner in this position felt as I did, that this void in planning was an opportunity to create a new working environment. We set about working with the teens and their caretakers--rather than dictating terms--to come up with a program to meet our collective needs. In one memorable event, we had called a meeting of the teenagers from various group homes to plan for services. As I stood before them, it occurred to me how arrogant it was for the system--for me--to have some vision for what these young people were to become. I asked them to help me get a grasp of what life was like for them and what they saw as their greatest needs. Several legal pages of notes led me to the conclusion that I would eventually have to leave the system to do what was most reasonable for them--bureaucratic constraints would leave little room for the kind of responsiveness and spontaneity I would need to devote to this project. I worked with some others to create a non-profit agency that would use the designs of the teens to enable them to progress towards their independent life. It was an agency that would have state workers, private institutions,

and teens in their care working together. I resigned my position with the state and took on the position of director of the program.

It was a marvelous and rewarding experience that, unfortunately, proved to be both economically and politically unsustainable. Changes in personnel at the State brought in different viewpoints on the value of collaboration and empowerment of the foster children. Participation of State workers began to dwindle as youth activity increased. The cooperative was a success in helping the youths achieve some remarkable goals, but it eventually collapsed under the weight of pressure to take away their control. In a pointed confrontation with the board of directors, some members who had been meeting in private divulged that they believed that allowing clients to design their own program was "not good business practice" and was not conducive to the expansion of the organization. Following this meeting I resigned but continued to work with the youth group as a volunteer. The cooperative dissolved quietly within weeks. It was a financial disaster for me, but in terms of education, it was worth every penny. I found what I wanted to be as a counselor, and it is at this point that I reached that midpoint in my career referred to in the beginning of this dissertation.

My own interest in first-generation college students came about through this work with adolescents in foster care and the independent-living initiatives in the State of Tennessee. Research at the time showed that less than 3% of foster children went on to college (Cook and Ansell, 1986). This figure seemed incredibly low considering that foster children were automatically eligible for free college tuition in any college

or university in the Tennessee system in addition to free housing, health care, and other benefits. From my point of view, as someone who struggled to pay his own way through college, this appeared to be an offer no one could turn down. In my roles as director of the cooperative and as advisor to their youth group, I had an opportunity to establish a rapport separate from the role of the “establishment”. While this gave me some insight from the vantage point of an insider, it also alienated me from colleagues suspicious of our clientele and of advocates like myself whom my colleagues perceived as duped by their clientele. I found myself in an awkward position of promoting the somewhat patriarchal values of the foster care system while respecting the assumptions of participants. One area where I didn’t seem to make a connection with these teens was in planning for college. There was a overt theme in their conversations that they perceived college students as “them”--in most cases, despite academic ability, these teens could not envision themselves as college students. Tours of the University of Tennessee and interactions with campus sororities and fraternities had a small measure of success in challenging assumptions, but it was clear that the perceptions had long been established and would be difficult to change. The success in facilitating positive change planted the seed of interest in developing a deeper understanding of my relationship to the population I had chosen to serve.

Critical reflection

I examined my own experiences and assumptions in both my preparation for college and my experience with the assistance of a colleague skilled in the phenomenological interview process. This took place through a bracketing interview.

Bracketing, or critical reflection, consists of identifying the assumptions that underlie our thoughts and actions, scrutinizing the accuracy of these in comparison to our experiences with others in similar contexts, and reconstituting these assumptions to make them more inclusive and integrative (Brookfield, 1990). The bracketing interview provided an opportunity for me to experience the interview that I usually give to incoming students under the premise that within critical reflection the practitioner “must be able to put him- or herself in the role of the respondents (or participants, in my case) and attempt to see the situation from their perspective, rather than impose the world of academia and preconceptions on them” (Fontana and Frey, 1997, p. 367). This phase of analyses entailed participating as an interviewee.

The interviewer began with a question, “So can you think of some times when you’ve been interviewed in order to enter a program? And can you describe that experience?” It was a difficult question to answer, and I related to a need I believe I had to feel independent as an undergraduate student. In fact, I was reminded that I had never met my assigned undergraduate advisor face-to-face since I had my class schedule “all laid out.” The incident involving an interview I had experienced (admission to candidacy for graduate school) brought out themes of feelings of tension and unease along with feeling distanced from the interviewers in the artificial roles we were both assuming for the sake of the interviewing process. That relationship was “sort of feeling outside of myself” and somewhat comical in that regard. There was also discomfort because of knowing that some information about me in the application was not flattering.

Another question that emerged in the bracketing interview was, “describe any times in which you feel you had a dialogical experience in which ...there initially might be a difference in hierarchical relationship?” I recalled an incident when I had conducted an abuse investigation early in my career--the experience was one where I was astounded by the stories the mother and daughter were conveying, and they were gratified to have a worker who responded with, what I remember, was a sense of wonder. This was in contrast to an incident toward the end of that career when (as a “going away” prank by my co-workers) I was given a last-minute emergency abuse referral. Before I realized it was a prank, I muttered, “I’ll believe when I see it.” I identified that as a state of complacency I hope never to have again.

The assumptions identified through the interview centered on the imbalance of power and the barrier this creates between people in the counseling relationship. An important perception to this assumption is that the maintenance of power creates a culture of duplicity where the student is viewed as a lesser being. The approach to this problem draws on the personal history of keeping a sense of wonder as a way of “staying fresh.” While it is easy to lapse into a quick, fact-gathering interview, a deeper understanding of the person and his or her culture is the preferred route towards a more committed relationship. On a personal level, it is also a way to go beyond the analytical approach to the other.

Proposed Theory of Action

This third step puts forward a possible approach to the practice that I believe could improve the relationship I have with the student. The purpose of the intake

interview has several facets. It is primarily a way to gain information about the student, and the focus at this point is on the student and the student's reason for coming to the program. The interview is also a means to inform the student about who we are and what we do as a program to help the student. The nature of the interview is one of negotiation. As a counselor, I want to get the student to "put all the cards on the table." The student's motives may be uncertain, and the student may be guarding information, only revealing enough to gain desired outcomes. The interview is concluded when we have closed the deal: the program will do certain things for the student if the student will do certain things for the program. I am proposing a method that will satisfy the goals of the intake interview while maintaining a more open, engaged relationship conducive to a deeper understanding of each other and the situation we share.

Phenomenological interviews

The process toward this deeper understanding derives from the philosophy of interviewing proposed by Steinar Kvale (1996) as *inter views*. Kvale details forms of conversation that are different in their balance of power and purpose. The greatest asymmetry of power lies in the professional interview that is defined by the questioning of an individual by the interrogator, therapist, or researcher. The purpose of this form of conversation is for one individual to elicit information from the other. Another form of conversation--in which power is equalized--is philosophical discourse. In this form the subject matter guides the flow of conversation, and it is "no longer the will of the individual that is determinative" (Kvale, 1996, p. 21).

I have proposed using both forms of conversation in my practice. Since I am concerned in my practice with the participants' interpretations of past experiences, I used a professional interview--phenomenological research methods--to gain information about the participants. The method of research relies both on the premise of unstructured interview as outlined by Fontana and Frey (1992) and Kvale (1996). I selected this method of asking open-ended questions to gain the greatest breadth of data by opening up to the whole of the experience, and I gained clarification of responses through "active listening" in the method similar to person-centered therapy (Thompson and Rudolph, 1983). This type of interview served to meet my professional commitments toward the requirements of the federal program.

The rest of the action I did for myself as a practitioner. After the professional interview I moved to philosophical discourse based on the principles of dialogue established by Brown (1995), Isaacs (1993), Bohm (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1999), and Senge (1990). The conversation was centered on an experience that the student and I shared, our previous encounter. The follow-up questions were intended to elicit rich descriptions that were appropriate to what we hoped to learn and to elicit spontaneous, free-flowing dialogue that was illuminating and plausible (Pollio, Henley, and Thompson, 1997). More importantly, attention to the structure of the dialogue was intended to maintain the state of wonder and to call out for a response.

The nature of the probing questions in the conversation covered the dimensions of elaboration, reflection, specificity, attitudes, and understanding (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Kvale, 1996). Examples of these facilitative questions are

respectively: "Tell me more about that"; "How did that feel?"; "Give me an example of a time when that happened."; "What are your thoughts on that?"; or "I hear you saying...". The participant as facilitator looked for clues to topics that are important to the interviewee in his or her intonation and gestures. I believe that, while I can gain the information necessary for the business of the interview with other means, the practice of this methodology creates the environment conducive to the type of engagement where the student and I are looking into each other's life space.

My experience with the phenomenological interview came about from a previous research experience (Cotter, 1999). As an intake process it showed that it was effective in providing new insight about the interviewee. The information from these interviews was consistent with the current literature on first-generation college students. Tinto(1986) has identified ethnicity, high school achievement, parental encouragement, and family socioeconomic status as influential traits students bring with them to college. These were also topics that, to a certain extent, stood out to the students in interviews.

In addition to these factors, Terenzini, et al (1996) found less-developed critical thinking skills, lower degree aspirations, and less socialization with peers and teachers in high school in first-generation students than in traditional students. Other research indicates that it is detrimental when the college does not meet the expectations of incoming students (Braxton, Vesper, and Hossler, 1995), and this seemed to be the case with students coming to the EAP. Predictors of retention in college that were not quite so evident in interviews include parental socioeconomic

status (Barton, 1997), ACT/SAT scores, high school class rank, on-campus housing, full-time status (Mortenson, 1998), and internal locus of control (Pascarella, et al, 1996). What I found through interviewing was that I was dealing with students who, within their first-generation status, held a different worldview than mine. I became acutely aware of this when I interviewed a student who's views seemed so unlike those of the others I had interviewed--and so like my own views--that I finally had to stop the interview to ask again about her status as a first-generation college student. She replied that, while she did fit the eligibility criteria under EAP's definition, her parents both had Associate degrees.

One theme in particular that emerged from previous research interviews was *family*. Under this theme was a sub-theme not found in previous research on first-generation college students: a perception by the student of disparity of attitude between the father and the mother. Parents as distinct individuals was a concept not addressed in the literature. When I presented this discovery to a group dialogue of college educators, one participant asked the question, "What do you plan to do with this information?". The question seemed irrelevant. The intentionality (in the phenomenological sense) was not to *use* anything but to illuminate—to bring the background of our experience into the light for our interpretation and learning toward new ways of acting. It is the illumination and the experience of transformation within this being-in-the-world that is the interest and the focus of this dissertation. Results reflect not only the knowledge created during the interview but also the experience of

the relationship of counselor to student. As Goethe expressed through Faust, salvation comes from the seeking of the knowledge, not the ultimate attainment of knowledge.

In the analysis proposed by Steinar Kvale (1996), the natural extension of the learning that takes place is action, “where the researcher and the subjects together act on the basis of the knowledge produced in the interviews” (p. 190). For the dissertation, I was interested in what acts stand out within the larger scheme of coming to the agency and what meaning these acts have for me and the student. I was especially interested in the actions I can control, hence, the action research part of the discovery. The action in this case is the interview itself. I have instituted the phenomenological interview as a part of my intake process. Instead of interviewing with an intentional stance of learning about the other—striking a Faustian bargain—I intended to interview as a medium for establishing the I-You relationship with the co-participant and co-constructing knowledge.

The results of this study address questions of the relationship I have with the student and how this was played out in the form of the conversation. I was looking for those times when the student and I were engaged in unthinking dialogue in which we were living for the moment in each other’s space. The results are reflected in the way we ask each other questions or invite responses, the points of view we take when examining certain topics, and the non-verbal elements of discourse that appeared in the course of conversation.

Formal and Practical Theories

The theories that underscore my approach to the practice illustrate a shift from the intrapsychological realm (inside the head) to the interpsychological (the *between*). This shift is similar to the change in orientation to the world when Galileo proposed that the earth moved around the sun rather than the whole of the universe revolving the fixed point that is our world. At this period of history, it is very difficult to imagine the entire universe spinning and interweaving in relation to the earth as a fixed point, but when causality is set aside, the earth as the center of the universe is just as valid as any other point in the universe. Our formal theories of the counselor/student relationship assume a self that interprets the other. In practice, however, the counselor and student are linked in a relationship where boundaries are far less clear. It is neither the student revolving around the counselor nor the counselor revolving around the student, but rather the two in an ongoing dance determined by the histories and cultures of both dancers.

The counselor's role in mediated learning

The formal role of the counselor presumes a relationship defined by a subordination of less experienced or knowledgeable student to the more culturally savvy counselor. This role is similar to that of the parent to the child or the teacher to the student. The level of intervention of the counselor, teacher, or parent --the "bearer of knowledge" --with the learner varies from the principle of Lev Vygotsky to those of his contemporary, Jean Piaget.

Piaget suggests that the bearer of knowledge functions to facilitate an environment conducive to the learner's natural, relatively invariant process of learning. Learning to Piaget is a seeking of cognitive equilibrium through the mechanisms of assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is defined as the absorption of a new experience into an existing schema, or mental structure. Accommodation is the alteration of this mental structure when the new experience does not fit. In early childhood, the process of accommodation and assimilation serves as the medium for a progression through what Piaget sees as major periods of cognitive development:

- Sensorimotor – from birth to approximately two years of age, the child uses the senses and motor skills to explore the environment. Within this period the child progresses in stages ranging from innate reflexes through the more goal-directed recombination of learned schemas.
- Preoperational – from around two years of age to age seven, the child develops a use of symbolic, inner representations and manipulations of reality.
- Concrete operations – from roughly seven years to eleven years, the child “fine tunes” the assimilation-accommodation mechanism into an organized and structured system.
- Formal operations – from eleven years to adulthood, the emerging adolescent is more able to combine these organized systems or propositions to conceive not only of what exists but also of what could exist (Flavell, 1963)

In this framework, the adult learner acts as a hypothetico-deductive agent. The learner interacts with the knower as a possessor of knowledge to be processed toward formation of a formal theory.

Vygotsky (1962) approaches the relationship between the bearer of knowledge and learner from a somewhat different point of view. Vygotsky introduces the concept of a continual interaction between the social world and the inner world of the learner. Central to this concept is the *meaning* of the individual act. In the first stages

of the sensorimotor period, the child may make a reaching gesture that is not meaningful in itself but takes on meaning through the reciprocal act of the adult. Vygotsky also states, "A word without meaning is an empty sound, no longer part of human speech." (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 5). Words take on meaning when they are both generalizing thought and social interchange. The adult acts in the early period of a child's development to insert the child into activities that move the child past his or her current level of functioning into what Vygotsky terms *the zone of proximal development*. The adult then "scaffolds" the experience (by modeling or providing hints) to allow the child to move to a higher level of functioning (Miller, 1983).

Vygotsky's views also differed from Piaget in conceptualizing the preoperational stage. Where Piaget saw the egocentric speech of the child growing increasingly more overt and social, Vygotsky saw two different processes at work that meet and fuse into a uniquely human form of behavior, "In the phylogeny of thought and speech, a prelinguistic phase in the development of thought and a preintellectual phase in the development of speech are clearly discernible." (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 41). What Vygotsky proposes is that two separate behaviors can exist and develop independently until they converge at the beginning of the preoperational period to form what Vygotsky terms, *inner speech*. We can look at prelinguistic thought as being the type of thought common to skilled athletes who talk about being "in the zone"--that is to say, not thinking about the activity. We can also view preintellectual speech as speaking without reflection, a notion that will take on greater import when we examine the interaction between counselor and student later in this discussion.

The change in thinking from Piaget to Vygotsky represents a further encompassing of culture as affecting the mental life of the individual. It also suggests a more formal role for the college counselor in aiding a student's transition to the new culture of higher learning. The mechanics of mediation have been illuminated in the work of Feuerstein (Feuerstein, Klein, & Tannenbaum, 1991) and brought to rational discourse through the practices and writings of Paulo Freire and Myles Horton. Feuerstein takes the raw experience of what he terms the mediated learning experience (MLE), and defines MLE as a quality of interaction where another person intentionally interposes himself between the organism and the stimuli to give meaning to the stimuli. This, of course, is dependent on a symbolic language system as Vygotsky stated earlier. Feuerstein argues that human beings can be exposed to stimuli for years without a change in cognitive schemata, and this is evidence that a single modality model for human development is inadequate to explain differences among human beings. MLE is then purported to account for phenomena that are unique to humans: *modifiability and diversity*.

Feuerstein came to his theory of MLE through his work with "culturally deprived" individuals who, "either not having been exposed or not having been able to benefit from his exposure to mediated learning experience, is devoid of learning tools, habits, dispositions, and propensities to learn" (Feuerstein, Klein, & Tannenbaum, 1991, p. 5). As a formal model for the counselor/student relationship, MLE makes a lot of sense. The assumption is that of a deficit or a disability that has come about through lack of exposure to culture or adequate mediators. By creating a formal

process of mediation Feuerstein seeks to make up for this deficit and give practitioners a standard for helping individuals “learn to learn” (Feuerstein’s quotes) through formal mediation. The goals of cognitive modifiability are to make the individual more adaptable and flexible--a generator of information rather than a passive recipient. The 12 culturally determined conditions for MLE that can be found in interactions that qualify as MLE are:

- Intentionality and reciprocity;
- Transcendence;
- Mediation of meaning;
- Mediation of feeling of competence;
- Mediation of regulation and control of behavior;
- Mediation of sharing behavior;
- Mediation of individuation and psychological differentiation;
- Mediation of goal seeking, goal setting, and goal achieving behavior;
- Mediation of challenge: the search for novelty and complexity;
- Mediation of awareness of the human being as a changing entity;
- Mediation of the search for an optimistic alternative; and
- Mediation of the feeling of belonging. (Feuerstein, Klein, & Tannenbaum; 1991)

According to Feuerstein, the three most important and universal conditions for MLE are intentionality and reciprocity, mediation of transcendence, and mediation of meaning. Intentionality (as Feuerstein and his associates use the term) and reciprocity involve an explicit invitation to concentrate on and join into an interaction. The intent of the mediator is to “transform the mental, emotional, and motivational state of the mediatee” (p. 18). In practice, this can mean getting the attention of the mediatee to focus on the stimuli and to stimulate asking of questions, or (in Vygotsky’s terminology) to create the zone of proximal development. The mediation of transcendence acts to establish ways of solving problems that go beyond the

immediate context. In this sense, the mediator uses the process as a metaphor for how things can be done in other circumstances. The mediation of meaning provides the “energetic dimension of the interaction; it answers the questions of why, what for” (p. 24). It not only gives import to the act of mediation but serves to more broadly initiate the search for the meanings for existence. It is evident in this third quality of MLE, that Feuerstein has an agenda of a higher order of human existence, one that can be reflected in formal education. It also assumes that one of the parties—the more disadvantaged one—must change his or her way of thinking.

Up to this point, we see learning paradigms that assume inner processes as affected by external forces. With other paradigms we begin to see emphasis on a shift in power between the mediatee and mediator where the roles can be reversed. Paulo Freire (1970) recognizes and illuminates the political role of the teacher as mediator, and, along with Myles Horton, calls for social responsibility in the act of teaching. Those who are employed in the formal role of the mediator in society have the power to impart the paradigms of the dominant culture to those to whom they mediate. Freire and Horton differ from Feuerstein in how they feel that power should be used. Where Feuerstein seeks to bring the individual in line with the culture, Freire and Horton sought to bring culture more in line with the individual.

Like Feuerstein, Freire and Horton focused their attention on oppressed cultures. Paulo Freire worked with the impoverished people of Brazil, and Myles Horton was an organizer with the poor and exploited of Appalachia. Unlike Feuerstein, however, Freire and Horton emphasized the cultural richness of these

populations rather than their cultural deprivation (though it can be argued that Feuerstein was also invested in having individuals make the most of their own cultures). Through his experience with oppressed cultures, Freire recognized that education has the power either to domesticate or liberate the individual. He and Horton were advocates of popular schools and proponents of the emancipatory goals of education. They asserted that the educator should establish a dialogical relationship that places a high value on jointly derived rules for knowing (Peters & Armstrong, 1998; Freire, 1970). By doing so, the educator is emancipated by critically reflecting on his or her practice, and the learner gains control over the learning process (their primary aim). Freire and Horton emphasize the continual cycle of reflection and action necessary to maintain this idealized, democratic educational process.

At all stages of their liberation, the oppressed must see themselves as people engaged in the vocation of becoming more fully human. Reflection and action become essential. True reflection leads to action but that action will only be a genuine praxis if there is critical reflection on its consequences. (Freire, 1970, p. 41)

This ideal is central to higher education that has traditionally served as the site for both the transformation in the thinking of individuals and the empowerment of the individual to take on the role of the mediator of culture.

The role of counselor as an agent of transformative learning

Students enter college with certain expectations about their roles as learners (sometimes problematically as passive learners) and with strong convictions about the way the world should work. As a source of cultural change, institutions of higher

learning face students who are often highly resistive to looking at the world in new ways. Mezirow (1990) defines learning as a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of an experience. This presumes that learning takes place from a vantage point—a frame of reference that is constituted by our *habits of expectations*. The meaning of an experience comes about in two forms; meaning schemes and meaning perspectives. Both are similar to the schemata mentioned by Piaget in the progression toward the formal operations of the mature individual. Meaning schemes are logical and hierarchical rules for interpreting our world. They take the form of basic if-then, cause-effect, or categorization rules (Mezirow, 1990). Meaning perspectives are propositional in form. They are networks of arguments, the higher order schemata through which we incorporate and transform new experiences. Meaning perspectives are uncritically acquired habits of expectations born out of emotionally charged events in the individual's life. These habits can take the form of defense mechanisms or blocking out of the experience. Since these habits are uncritically acquired, Mezirow suggests that they may be amenable to change through critical reflection.

Reflection to Mezirow is a higher order mental process that attends to our own behaviors and thought processes and ultimately yields reflective action. The first step, critical reflection, examines the presuppositions that underlie our perceptions and interpretations of phenomena. Two factors that influence critical reflection are *instrumental learning* and *communicative learning* (Mezirow, 1990). Instrumental learning is likened to metacognition, or learning about the hypothetico-deductive skills of decision-making. Communicative learning examines the way we make meaning or

coherence of an experience through cultural devices of art and metaphor. Mezirow, like Victor Frankl (1959), stresses the importance of communicative learning: "No need is more fundamentally human than our need to understand the meaning of our experience" (1990, p. 11). Through these two types of learning, we can move to reassessing the way we have solved problems, look to the best ways to act, and finally, to put reflective action into a practice and an orientation to life. A practice of reflective action is in itself a transformation of perspective. We can see a perspective transformation most often arising--as Frankl (1959) notes--by encountering a significant or remarkable person or experiencing something significant and remarkable (a work of art, a piece of literature, or a social movement), by personal suffering (as in the Holocaust) , or by creating a work or doing a deed. In each of these instances, we learn not just fact but multiple perspectives on the meanings of these facts. Similarly, as reflective practitioners, we develop not just formal theory, but practical theory -- a state of remaining open to the world as it is. The counselor especially should be open not only to the life space of each new student but also to change with new experiences.

Methods of intervention are designed with a client in mind--someone who has need of a change. Action research, which focuses on the self as client, should none-the-less have those same methodologies at his or her disposal. The psychiatrist Robert Gould (1990) has proposed a method of using transformational learning to help adults change meaning perspectives that underlie outdated or maladaptive patterns of behavior. He has proposed seven steps of therapeutic work that reflect both the transformational theory and (roughly) the approach to the study at hand:

- Identifying and framing the function to be recovered;
- Clarifying the action intention;
- Distinguishing realistic dangers from exaggerated fears;
- Isolating and exposing the fears as predictions confused with memories;
- Explaining the origins of catastrophic predictions;
- Demonstrating and diminishing self-fulfilling prophecies; and
- Consolidating new views of reality (Gould, 1990, pp. 140-144).

Gould's approach involves the therapist helping a patient in crisis through these changes; however, the underlying premise is one that the reflective practitioner may apply to himself or herself as a routine way of remaining open to the constantly changing world.

Relational responses

Thus far, the guiding theories have concerned themselves mainly with intrapsychological changes, following the philosophical tradition of individualism. The theories that follow represent an examination of the interpsychological, where what we consider the self relies on the dialogical relationship between persons (self and others) and where what we consider thought is not so much inner speech but dialogical relationships with imaginary others (*othernesses*). The practical theory of the counselor/student relationship that moves to philosophical discourse stresses the dialogical relationship between self and others while holding in abeyance the inner conversation between self and othernesses.

The first philosophical problem to be addressed is the access we have to the "other". In some respects this means that we have to change our way of looking at ourselves as a corporeal being separate from the rest of the world. Wittgenstein (1970) concerned himself with the validity of the inner experience and questioned

whether the color green he experienced is the same green that you experience or whether his toothache is the same as your toothache. There is a shortcoming in language in relating inner experience. As Wittgenstein states, "What cannot be talked about must be shown." Another philosophical problem then is one of identifying the criteria for language at which subjective experience becomes solipsism. "The criteria for ascribing pain are given by the language game of which pain ascriptions are a part, and it is the practice of experiencing, recognizing, and talking about pain that we learn when we learn to use the word 'pain'." (Wittgenstein, 1970). Again, the problem lies in the use of language. To Wittgenstein, there is no such thing as private language. Language originated in the relational response to an other. To participate in the *language game* is to share, what Wittgenstein terms *forms of life*. Language is more than the grammatically correct string of words—the same sentence uttered by different people in different circumstances has entirely different meaning. The meaning of language lies in the resonance and reverberations between those in dialogue (Shotter and Katz, 1996). The counselor who is not in tune with the student may dismiss the words of the student and impose a meaning of his or own creation to suit the assumptions held about the general disposition of students. The message given is, "What you say is this, but what you mean is...". A reaction of that type is more a reflection of the nature of the counselor than that of the student. On the other hand, a student who may not feel in tune with the counselor may be left to think, "I know that's what I said, but that's not what I meant." The assumption of the student is that

the counselor could not possibly understand what he or she is experiencing. Sadly, that probably is the case most of the time.

The question, then, is how does a counselor become more in tune with the student? The answer may lie in a change in orientation. Martin Buber (1970) describes the primal emergence of the *I* through the infant's drive for contact with a *you*. Until the infant can relate to another, it has no concept of itself as a self. As Buber states, "Man becomes an I through a you" (1970, p.80). Buber describes two main types of relations, the I-You and the I-It. These are the basic attitudes toward the world. One difference between them is, "The basic word I-You can only be spoken with one's whole being. The basic word I-It can never be spoken with one's whole being." (Buber, 1970, p. 54). When the words *it* or *you* are spoken, the *I* is present. In the case of the counselor and the student, either may view the other as an it or a you with the *it* representing the person as an object of study and the *you* as a fellow person. The you, however, is destined to become a thing at one time or another--it is unavoidable and not necessarily objectionable. Buber does identify a more desirable state of the I-You that comes about through a state of grace. The I-You cannot be attained by seeking but only by being open to the other. Buber believes that we can find truth and meaning in solidarity with the other. Again, like Wittgenstein, Buber sees language as meaningful in its pre-grammatical forms, a relational process where "what counts is not these products of analysis and reflection but the genuine original unity, the lived relationship" (Buber, 1970, p.70).

Mikhail Bakhtin (1986; Holquist, 1990) incorporates much of the preceding thought of Wittgenstein and Buber when he speaks of the “responsive, relational and dialogical nature of human communicational process” (Katz & Shotter, 1996, p.927). Like Wittgenstein, Bakhtin sees the real power of speech not as an isolated and independent unit of set meaning but as a response to the momentary circumstances that calls out or invites a response from another. Just as the *you* and *it* of necessity imply the *I*, each utterance reflects a position to which the other may assume a responsive position. More current authors such as Berne (1964) and Laing (1967) have focused on the types of positioning in human relationships--although in a more static or ritualistic manner (Davies and Harre, 1999). Bakhtin asserts that our voice is not that of the individual alone but of those who, by their mediation, have given meaning to our utterances. These utterances are something new and unique to that circumstance and moment. It is within each dialogue that two people operate “as if against a background of the responsive understanding of an invisibly present third party” (Bakhtin, p. 126; Katz & Shotter, 1996). The interaction with another, especially as I see my practice, is a dialogical one that can assume various forms. The first of those forms, the magistral dialogue, is a relationship defined by the presence of the magistral, or authoritative, voice who serves as the mediator of knowledge for the novitiate. The magistral voice calls upon a third voice, that of the real authority--the cultural and historical rule-bearer--that speaks through him to the novitiate (Cheyne and Tarulli, 1999).

To see how this might work in the real world, we need to establish a pragmatic link between the philosophies of language and relationships to the everyday practice of institutions and organizations. John Shotter (1993, 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1999a, 1999b, 1999c) relates his early interest in the field to his experience working on the shop floor, when he noticed the type of knowledge held by the steel workers and the disparate forms of life between management and these workers. Steel work provides a metaphor for the ways of knowing. Shotter describes a "knowing of the third kind" (1993, p.3). It is not the *knowing that* of the management or the *knowing how* of the workers but a peculiar kind of *knowing within*--of feeling into the steel with the cut of the torch or blows of the hammer. Another metaphor is that of the blind man's stick. The blind man feeling his way through the world cannot describe what he knows of the world as vibrations picked up by his hand on the handle--his knowing into the world cannot be articulated at the handle or even at the end of the stick. Shotter cites Vygotsky's (1962) claim of language serving as an acquired psychological instrument or tool with which to explore the *in between* in human interaction. As earlier developmental psychologists have posited, language enables the adolescent and the adult to engage in propositional or theoretical thinking. As the child gains control over language, perception becomes more volitional, and the child is able to think about and act on imagined phenomena. Language is, however, more than a computational code--it is a *reaction*. Its meaning comes from how it is interwoven into the taken-for-granted fabric of our lives. It is a symbolic structure, which allows a reality--a getting in touch with a world not in the immediate presence.

Shotter is interested in what it means to act within a given position in a dialogue and how it is that we articulate the usually ignored background of our lives (1993). The social act is a skilled performance, a process of managing who does what in constructing meaning. In the momentary, shared *dialogical spaces* each person calls out a response in the other and points toward a real or theoretical construct within the space (1998b). The other's response either enables or constrains further response. The dialogue opens up possibilities. Shotter argues that our inner lives are neither as private and inner nor as logical and systematic as has been assumed (1999c). Our human nature is of our own making and comes about through our *knowing into* each other in the "relational-responsive kind of understanding" (1998b, p. 2). As we engage the other in the I-You (as Buber might describe it) each of us puts forward our ways of life and different ways of knowing emerge. We construct different forms of person-world relations and "interact with different worlds of only theoretically-defined entities" (1993, p. 12).

Social construction of knowledge

From what we have discussed so far, we can now say that reality--or knowledge--is more than an accumulation of facts stored in the brain. Knowledge involves relating to the world and especially to others in the world. Kenneth Gergen describes the social construction of reality as the transformation of experience into a linguistic ontology. This calls into play Vygotsky's assertion that the syntax of speech precedes the syntax of thought. That is to say the linguistic patterns inherent in our culture establish the circuitry of our thought. In our (western) culture, we practice a

pattern of speech that follows the line, subject-verb-predicate. This is a linear type of thinking in which the world is understood in terms of causality. The phenomenological perspective, in contrast, takes a view of experiencing the world "thoughtlessly"--without the culturally determined sorting out of raw experience. As Heidegger states, "the world as it is." (Gergen, 1982, p. 202). Negotiating within this phenomenological being-in- the world means that we must have a way of making sense of it.

Gergen (1982, 1997) cites Vygotsky for our increased interest in learning as a social process.

Thus the emphasis of pedagogical practices shifts toward forms of dialogue ('interanimation') and group problem solving, patterns of teacher student interdependency, the role of the teacher in carrying social norms, and the potential of students as teachers. (Gergen, 1997, p. 199)

Gergen (April, 1999) "For the constructivist therapist, however, the same words are neither descriptors of the real world nor manifestations of repressed desires, but indicators of the world from the client's perspective." Gergen makes a distinction between the constructivist and the constructionist. The constructivist is concerned with the individual psychological workings, but the constructionist is concerned about the workings that occur between persons. Vygotsky would fall into the category of constructivist--his emphasis is on the constructs or intrapsychological changes that occur as the result of a mediator giving meaning of an act to an individual (a parent teaching a child rules).

The problem for me as researcher is to direct myself away from the student as subject to the perception of the student as a co-constructor of knowledge. Gergen

notes three parts to this problem. The first is the realistic assumption. I had been examining the words of the student as an expression of his or her reality when words in the day-to-day function are merely evocative of different worlds of experience or, as Gergen states, different "forms of relationships." A second part is the subjectivist assumption that we can gain access to another's subjectivity. This assumption runs afoul as the researcher (and the reader of the research) interprets the words (and the narratives) from what Gadamer (1976) calls our own "horizons of understanding." Most of what we learn is connected in some way to something we already know or have experienced and, therefore, takes on a meaning partially unique to each of us. A third assumption is that of our use of language as a strategic implement. It is purposeful and, generally, carefully chosen by the researcher to keep the flow of information going from the participant to the researcher. I, however, wish to look at the nature of what is happening during construction of knowledge.

The field of discursive psychology can be seen as the culmination of works by Vygotsky, Wittgenstein, Bakhtin, and their successors not just as the way language is used but also as an analogue for the study of other phenomena (Harre and Stearns, 1995). In the 1972 article, Harre and Secord talk about this as the ethogenic alternative in science (Gergen, 1982). Ethogenic is a composite of ordinary language philosophy and structured anthropology--it relies on an agent's ability to evaluate his or her performance according to rules and plans. Ethogenic is an alternative to the debate between exogenic (environmental determinants) vs. endogenic (mental world) views and methodologies. Ethogenic methods examine the structured actions of

people in everyday life. Harre argues that the very discussion, lines of argumentation, and the identification with (or refutation of) writings about psychology are evidence of the discursive nature of psychology itself. Language is the way we have to look into nature and the workings of private experiences, and the management of these experiences. The ability of counselors and others in helping-professions to radically affect forms of behavior through verbal interventions bears witness to the power of language.

Discursive psychology looks at the ways people are positioned on the basis of linguistic practices. Conversation involves a negotiation of positions for both the participants. The place of positioning in discursive psychology is to locate the selves as “observably and coherent participants in jointly produced story lines.” (Davies and Harre, 1999, p. 3). Although one’s speech can position the other or the self, positioning is not necessarily intentional. Neither are positions necessarily fixed--any position can be constituted and reconstituted in the run of the discourse. The conversation has a topic as the seed of the act with each participant taking a vantage point of the world they inhabit (that can be called out by the discourse). The topic is followed through the logic and the autobiographies of the participants. These speech acts are embedded in larger structures from which they derive their meaning. How we pick things out from the “hurly burly” is determined in part by our language--to what we attend that tells us something about ourselves.

Positions are identified in part by extracting the autobiographical aspects of a conversation in which it becomes possible to find out how each conversant conceives of themselves and of the other participants by seeing what position

they take up and in what story, and how they are then positioned (Davies and Harre, 1999, p. 3).

For those who use dialogue in professional practice, it becomes imperative to be attentive to the positioning in conversation (that we know to be in our control) and to find ways to make this knowledge applicable to our goals.

Dialogue

Several researchers into the act of dialogue (Brown, 1995; Isaacs, 1993; Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1999; Senge, 1990) have sought to operationalize what they see as largely a natural act to maximize its benefits to serve a social order. The ideals for dialogue fit the purpose of a more democratic and open sharing of meaning. These theorists describe dialogue as basically “good conversation” among those of equal status (Brown, 1995; Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1999). Judy Brown calls dialogue, “that which we have forgotten to remember” (Brown, 1995, p. 154). The methods they propose serve as a way to rediscover the art of dialogue by articulating factors that they see are conducive to dialogue.

To know what dialogue is, it is important to point out first of all what dialogue is not. Dialogue is not discussion, debate, or a “salon” (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1999). In discussion, there is generally a preset goal, either explicit or implied, to which participants must adhere. The word debate gains its meaning from the Latin root that means to beat down--in a debate, the participants maintain certain ideas and opinions independent of the other participants and resist any change in them. In the salon, participants gossip, entertain, or exchange friendship. Though these types of

interactions have a place, they do not create the forum for a sophisticated production of knowledge.

Dialogue is “a discipline of collective thinking and inquiry, a process for transforming the quality of conversation and, in particular, the thinking that lies beneath it” (Isaacs, 1993, p. 25). Isaacs (1993) and Bohm (1999) both point out that “dialogue” is derived from the Greek *dia* and *logos* suggesting meaning flowing through. This metaphor of a stream of dialogue “flowing around and through the participants” (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1999, p. 2) suggests a field of “genuine meeting and inquiry” (Isaacs, 1993) where the participants seek coherency rather than consensus. Isaacs describes this as a *container*, a safe space in which dialogue takes place. Once blocks are overcome, dialogue achieves a state where the participants “relax and bask in the ‘high’ that accompanies the experience” (Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1999, p. 3) and where conversations “have a life of their own” (Senge, 1990, p. 239). Dialogue is a refinement of the language tool (as Vygotsky might describe it) used to uncover the ways in which we perceive reality. To physicist, David Bohm, dialogue is a metacognitive (“collective proprioception”) technique, a medium for bringing to the surface and altering the tacit infrastructure of thought. Through this medium, our perceptions and thoughts can be joined with others to construct our worlds (Isaacs, 1993).

The practitioners of dialogue mentioned above have set out parameters for dialogue that tend to hold the conversation in a state where knowledge is created.

Though not unanimous in particulars, they find that members are in good dialogue if they:

- suspend thoughts, impulses, and judgements (Bohm, Isaacs, Senge, Brown);
- have a facilitator (not a leader) to hold the context (Senge, Bohm);
- suspend notions of authority (Bohm, Senge);
- observe and mediate each other (Brown, Isaacs);
- call for moments of reflective silence (Brown, Isaacs);
- listen for understanding (Brown);
- ask questions from a place of genuine not knowing (Brown);
- grant others the respect of being an authority over their own thoughts and feelings (Brown);
- and befriend polarization (Isaacs).

Dialogue is human activity, and as such it can never be predictable or fully exclude the intransigent thoughts and opinions of the members. The key to productive dialogue, though, is to look beyond our past interpretations of events for new understandings.

An openness to the experiences of others and a reflection on meanings of these experiences produce knowledge that may alter our course of actions.

An open and trusting stance toward another requires an environment conducive to such a relationship. A competitive marketplace does not necessarily dictate a continual threat to the security and well-being of individuals willing to share power and prestige. Chris Argyris developed the strategy of *Action Science* to assist individuals to move beyond unilateral control and defensiveness toward working together to create a more democratic and open organization (Argyris, 1993). The types of problems addressed are the complex, real-life problems of interpersonal relations and group learning. Argyris describes *Model I* and *Model II* theories of action. In Model I the individual would:

- design, manage, and plan unilaterally;

- own and control the task;
- unilaterally protect self and others; and
- evaluate others in ways that do not encourage testing the validity of the evaluation.

While this model may be more typical of most organizations that value and reward individual effort (such as universities offering tenure), some consequences are predictable and often run contrary to the overall mission of the organization. The pressure to compete for resources, prestige, and advancement drives insecure members to use mechanisms that tend to disrupt the activity of the organization. It would be risky to unilaterally open up to another who may be entertaining an opportunity to gain advantage. Argyris describes the learning of Model I as single-loop learning or anti-learning because it fails to embrace the issues and conflicts.

Model II action theory, in contrast, involves double-loop learning that recognizes the gap between formal theories and practical theories. Model II theories of action emphasize joint activity and evaluation that is open and reflective. The result of Model II actions are maximized and valid information, free and informed choices for those affected, and high commitment to choices and monitoring of implementation. Those of us who have experienced the subtle jockeying for position and modes of attack in organizational meetings know the risk of insufficient commitment on the part of all members of the organization. Argyris' model of action research involves the search for actionable knowledge that is more complete through cooperation with others. This involves open and public reflection on the reasons and assumptions behind positions or conclusions. With the trust of the support from others in the organization, this model can extend to relationships to the consumers of services.

Model II actions would seem to be especially appropriate to the nature of the counselor/student relationship. Here, the counselor serves as a representative of the culture to which the student aspires. The college experience is one of questioning the reasons and assumptions of society, and it would be disingenuous and unproductive for a counselor to assume a role that does not encourage openness at all levels.

A Choice to Act

In the fourth step of the model I make a more informed and less impetuous choice. It appears, given what others have said about the nature of relationships and the nature of dialogue, that the phenomenological interview would be an appropriate medium for what I want to accomplish in my practice. The interview itself, however, would not have the impact I desire without an approach that would shift the focus from an analysis of another to a construction of knowledge between us. The phenomenological interview, then, would be most beneficial under conditions conducive to sharing of power, feelings of safety, and a continual state of genuine curiosity. The action to be taken includes the interview looking into the life of another and dialogue about the experience.

As I take this action I am mindful of what informed my decision, and I give scrutiny to the *process* of what I am doing as I do it. I act with attention to the positioning of myself and the participants, to the qualities of the dialogue, to what is happening as we transition to different forms of dialogue, and to whether this action is improving my practice in the ways I had intended.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The chapters that follow are the inquiry into the practice as outlined in DATA II of the DATA-DATA model (Peters, 1997). This inquiry seeks to answer the following questions:

- What stands out for participants in the phenomenological interviews?
- What is the nature of “conversation in the zone”?
- What knowledge about my practice comes from conversation?
- How does this knowledge inform actions within my practice?

Action Research

Action research is best understood in the spirit of the inquiry rather than in a definition. The word *define* is derived from the Latin *definire* meaning to set boundaries to. A definition, therefore, would serve to limit the ability of the researcher to answer questions. Action research addresses a form of knowledge that is not usually the domain of science--that is, it is a method of exploring the relational rather than the finite. Articulation of results is then best achieved by *reading through* the description for shared experience rather than for empirical proofs amenable to replication. As in phenomenological research, action research is best understood by doing rather than speaking of it. Action research is what an action researcher does: “An action researcher is a person with a scientific attitude, an understanding of qualitative research principles, an understanding of the dynamics of change, and a commitment to studying problems that are relevant in real settings” (Cunningham,

1993, p. 4). Quantitative methodologies are not excluded (and can be imperative in a decision to act when allocation of resources are at stake), but the action researcher is free to go beyond the *true score* to search for meaning.

The philosophical origins of action research can be traced back to Aristotelian praxis (found in *Nicomachean Ethics*) and educational principles (in *Politics*) and to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. In his ideas on education, Aristotle set out the principle of learning by doing, the use of rational thought and a goal of doing that which is right, and the use of contemplation to guide action. Immanuel Kant established the philosophy of a person as being the end product of his or her interpretation of the world as it is experienced. These ideas manifested themselves in the later work of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The notion of the world as being somehow separate from a disembodied mind or soul gave way to a unity with possibilities grounded in our positioning (or intentionality) toward the world. What we are, then, is that which is made up of a direct experience combined with a transcendent strategy for interpretation of that experience. Our concern is not to analyze, explain, or breakdown the fabric of the world but to describe the world in ways that others may experience as well.

Kurt Lewin is most often credited with bringing these principles into the activity of action research (Reason, 2000; McTaggart, 1991; Quigly and Kuhne, 1997). Lewin developed *Field Theory* to describe his neo-Gestaltist orientation toward homeostasis within the individual in the field. He saw behavior as goal-directed and purposeful, not entirely dependent on the physical and social

environment, but also on forces experienced by the person within the life-space of that individual. Lewin used empirical research, active experimentation, and evaluation to help solve problems of dynamics within business organizations as well as in other institutional settings.

The Action Imperative

The nature of the counselor/student relationship suggests that the student with the problem is the one who must change the way he she or she goes about the business of learning. Few people would doubt, however, that the counselor also learns something new with each new student. Through pride or confidence in our own abilities, counselors tend to resist the urge to let students “manipulate” us--to make us change the way we operate. After all, the student is the one with the problem, not me. The actions I am proposing might be construed as heresy to the profession. Dominant practices mandate that we should not “allow the lunatics to run the asylum.” That is not what I propose. What I am proposing is an action research project based on critical reflection on the usually taken-for-granted approach to the practice; a suggestion for alternative approaches and an examination of the actions taken in response to this new knowledge. Taken together these actions should lead to the formation of new practical theories.

To illustrate the way this philosophy of embracing change can work in our everyday practices I turn to the work of Peter Reason (Reason and Heron, 1995; Reason and Bradbury, 2001). Reason speaks of knowledge generating practice into action. He espouses a participatory worldview, where the emphasis is placed on

people making sense for themselves. Trusting people to make sense is perhaps a risk for counselors--a client in crisis may be viewing the world the "wrong" way. Jointly creating knowledge would mean, in this view, that we might be creating "wrong" knowledge. The goal, however, is not just in developing knowledge, but also in developing a capacity to make knowledge. Much like Harre (2000; Harre and Stearns, 1995), Reason pays respect to reasonable knowledge in addition to rational knowledge. This type of knowledge is created through face-to-face encounters in what we can term *communities of inquiry*. (As an aside: I especially take note that Reason sees these communities as evidenced when at least one of the parties in this encounter is "misoriented" in a culture not of one's own--this situation fits what a non-traditional student in college would likely be facing.) Reasonable knowledge (or realistic knowledge) is best described as relational as well as presentational, practical, theoretical, and experiential. Experiential knowledge is the in-depth knowing that comes from a genuine and unprejudiced encounter with the world and others. This is the type of knowledge we might consider the "raw experience"--unreflected, in-the-moment responses to the world. To retain the fullest depth of knowledge from this encounter, we form presentational knowing that is expressed through art, narratives and other aesthetic forms of expression. Theoretical knowing refers to the propositional knowing through abstract, logical constructs and ideas. The ultimate type of knowing is the practical knowing of acting out the other forms in the everyday practice of our lives. Reason acknowledges the power enjoyed by persons such as himself but finds urgency in "developing the kind of self-reflexive critical awareness-

in-action” (Reason, 1995, p. 325) that divests this power towards a more democratic society.

Bradbury and Reason (2001) have offered five criteria by which to judge the quality of action research. The first question concerns quality as a relational practice. Does each participant have a stake in the research, and is each fully involved? Next, the researcher must judge the *reflexive-practical outcome*. Will the participants value the learning toward new ways of acting? The researcher also should examine the quality of the *plurality of knowing* that relates to whether the research addresses the multiple ways of knowing--ways that are reasonable, aesthetic, and appropriate. The fourth quality concerns whether the research is worthy of study. Does this research meet not only the goals of addressing a problem at hand but also unearths deeper issues of the human condition? The final question asks whether the study will have an enduring consequence. Will the research establish a sustainable impetus of institutional change?

Qualitative Research

I chose to use a methodology that examines the co-construction of knowledge, focusing neither on the participant nor on myself but on the “between.” In dialogue, and in dialogical research, meaning is derived from the supplementary action. An utterance has no deep meaning unto itself but only within the context of the anticipation of response. Bakhtin, in fact, views language as a joining with the other. What we are, then, is what he terms *polyphony*, or a multiplicity of the voices from our culture and history. What we are, however, can not be pinned down to be examined as

if under a microscope. Bakhtin borrows from quantum physics to describe the chronotype, a knowledge that changes upon examination much like a particle under study. To look at it means that it is no longer what it once was. When we join with the other, we first take on an invitational stance that invites the other in to being but simultaneously creates and constrains the possibilities of the interaction. Gergen asks, "What dances am I invited into when you use these phrases as opposed to others?" He also states, "It's not clear that a fixed view of oneself or one's conditions can remain functional across a wide range of ever-emergent relationships." The choice of methodology, then, should reflect a way of being with others.

The relation to others would suggest a methodology that generates multiplicity. Gergen and Gergen (1999) speak of methodologies that go beyond the phenomenological or narrative analysis methods. They give the term, multivoiced research, to a type of research where the researcher injects his or her own experiences, along with voices from disparate vantage points, into the narrative to construct a richer account. Beyond the multivoiced methodology is collaborative research--more specifically, a kind of participatory action research--where the researcher enters into the culture of another group to help them research into their own problems to affect some sort of change. A combination of these two types of methods would seem to be what would best answer the question of what goes on within my own practice. I seek both to illuminate the culture of this unique form of helping-profession and to take action to improve upon it.

The choice of any methodology is driven by the questions to be answered. In this project, there were several questions. I wanted to know first of all what is going on in the phenomenological interview that makes it so appealing to me. In qualitative research, a key element is the phenomenological notion of meaning perspectives. Meaning perspectives are the “structure of the assumptions within which new experience is assimilated and transformed by one’s past experience during the process of interpretation” (Mezirow, 1990, p. 2). Part of the research, then was to look for these meaning perspectives within the dialogical exchanges with the first-generation college students in the EAP. I also wanted to know what is going on when we engage in these dialogical exchanges--these *conversations in the zone*. To find an answer to this question I reflected on the conversations by listening to the tapes and by scrutinizing the transcripts, in effect by standing back and looking at what we had done as an athlete might review his or her performance on tape after the contest.

Participants

Participants in this study were undergraduate students who were applying to the Student Support Services (SSS) program. I chose to ask the first three, first-generation college students who came during the spring semester of 1999 and the first eight from the summer semester to participate in the study. All eleven participants agreed without reservation, although two students could not make the second meeting due to work and illness and were not included in the study. First-generation status for federal eligibility is determined by the student’s indication on the application that neither parent had graduated from a four-year college or university: however, for this

study, in the intake interview I verified that neither parent had completed a two-year college. I chose these additional criteria because I felt that the effect of first-generation status was more apparent in those students whose parents had no college or had not completed any college program (York-Anderson & Bateman, 1991; Cotter, 1999).

The students who participate in the SSS generally are seeking academic assistance such as academic advising, tutors, special sections of math and science, or academic counseling. The SSS advertises and conducts workshops during summer orientation, and we receive referrals through advising centers, the Black Cultural Center, and the Office of Disability Services; however, like the majority of students in our program, participants heard about the program through friends or classmates who were already involved in the program

Procedure

The process for entering the SSS program follows a certain routine. Students come to the office, which is located on the second floor of a converted coeducational dormitory. The office is difficult to find for most students, and participants usually noted the run-down condition of the building (narrow stairwells, poor lighting, dinghy walls, etc.). Students enter the main office and inquire at the front desk, which is usually manned by a student worker who gives the prospective applicant a brochure describing program eligibility requirements together with services and a five-page application. The applicant is directed to the hallway to complete the materials and

then to bring them back to the desk where an appointment is made with me. The appointment is normally set within two days.

The application generally takes ten to fifteen minutes to complete. The first page requests information on the student's name, address, Social Security number, plus a number of demographic and eligibility items (parents' college attainment, any disabilities the student might have, and whether the student has applied for and received financial aid). The second page is a questionnaire where the student ranks himself or herself on a Likert type scale on possible academic risk factors. The third and fourth pages are releases for financial aid information and academic transcripts, and the final page is an informal contract to participate. The last page also spells out the nature of the SSS program as "a holistic vehicle" that works best when the participant uses a combination of the services that are then listed. The participants contract to take part in three of the ten services (see Appendix C1-5).

I first know of an appointment when I find the completed application in my mailbox (a metal divided shelf sitting atop file cabinets in the front office). When I see the application, I check the appointment time in the ring binder at the desk then take the application back to my office and write the name and time of the appointment on my desk calendar. I review the application to see if it is complete and note the students' eligibility, the services they desire, and some of the demographic information (to give an idea of who to look for when they come in). I take apart the application and place the financial aid form in an envelope to send to the Financial Aid office along with forms of other students at the end of the week. I also add the

students' names and Social Security numbers to memos that I send at the end of the week to the transcripts office (requesting the students' academic histories) and to the Disability Services office (requesting evidence of a disability) if they have indicated a disability on the application. I then place the application in a stacking file holder beside my desk.

When students return to the office for the intake interview, they come to the front desk and usually state to the worker there that they have an appointment at that time with "Mr. Cotter." The worker at the desk will check the appointment book and call me--the front desk worker usually states something like, "Your ten o'clock appointment is here." I tend to ask the student's name and say that I will be up there momentarily. Before I go to the front desk, I pull the student's application and check it to remind myself of any issues I might need to address--in the instance of this study, to check if the student might be a first-generation college student and eligible to participate in the study. My office is located on the opposite side of the building from the front office, so I must pass through the office with our graduate assistants' desks and filing cabinets, through the resource room where there is a table and four chairs and three computer stations, and through a hallway to get to the student. The student normally is waiting by the front reception counter but occasionally will be sitting in a chair in the hallway. I greet the student and introduce myself by my first and last name and then lead the student back through what most students describe as "the maze" to my office. I invite the student to sit anywhere--there is a choice of a swivel chair on the other side of my desk from my seat, a loveseat, or an office chair at a right

angle to the loveseat. Almost without exception, the students choose the seat opposite mine. I prefer to allow the student to sit before I take a seat behind my desk.

As part of the routine of the intake interview, I begin by going over some of the information on the application which stands out for me. I look for things such as the student's hometown, choice of major, or previous schools to find something of interest and to start a conversation to help establish rapport. I ask students what they know about the program and how they heard of the program. Most applicants--similar to participants in the study--report knowing only a little about the program. I give the background of TRIO programs in general, lay out the services we offer, and discuss the commitment to participate that we request of students in the program. I also ask about the applicants' experiences in college and what it is that brings them to the program. We then discuss what the student needs from the program and make arrangements for those services. If the student requires a tutor, I give a tutor request form and schedule an appointment with the tutor coordinator.

The overall plan for the study was to have three sets of interviews and conversations during the summer semester of 2000, analyze the transcripts, form a practical theory, and make revisions for the fall semester--in essence to repeat the DATA II. After the summer semester I decided to change the nature of the questions and, consequently, the form of the follow-up conversation. The reasons for this change will be discussed in the results section. In the fall semester six more students participated. The initial phenomenological interview remained as it was in the summer.

Three students participated in the summer semester of 2000. For participants in this study, the routine diverged in the formality of the interview. I explained the nature of the study (the questions to be addressed in the first interview, the audio taping and transcribing, and the follow-up conversation) to the students who were to participate, asked if they would be willing to help, and went over the consent document (see Appendix C1). I explained that I would be taping the first interview but that I anticipated that I would be concentrating on tapes of the follow-up conversation for the study. When the student agreed and signed the consent form, I gave him or her a copy and placed the signed form in the file drawer.

Once the participant agreed to a taped interview, I brought out two battery-operated portable cassette recorders and placed them on the desk between us. I placed one of the recorders close to me and one close to the participant, and I explained that if one recorder stops working or doesn't pick up the conversation, the other should make up for it. I pressed the record button on both recorders and checked to see if they are running. I then began the interview.

The initial interview focuses on questions about the participant's experiences of college (see Appendix C2) and follows the format described earlier for eliciting further exploration of the experience. Interviews lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and 15 minutes in length. After the interview, I went with the participant to the front desk and made an appointment with the participant to return to the office to have a conversation about what the experience was like for both of us. The appointments were set two days later for one participant, seven days later for another, and two weeks

later for another--all dates were set to accommodate the participants' work and class schedules and other commitments. I labeled the cassette tapes with the first name of the participant and the type of the interview (initial or follow-up) and placed them in a locking file cabinet.

Participants returned at their appointed times by coming to the front desk and notifying the worker there. The worker then called my office, and I went to the front desk to meet the student and return to my office. Again, I asked the student to sit wherever they felt comfortable. I reminded the participant that this would be a conversation rather than an interview.

In the summer session, I suggested that we would be interviewing each other--I would ask some questions of the participant, and I expected the participant to ask me about what I thought or question why I wanted to know certain things. In the fall sessions, I had said at the end of the first interview that we would both have an assignment of thinking of three things that stood out for us from our experience. At the beginning of our conversations I asked whether the participant would like to go first. I explained in both summer and fall sessions that the conversation would be tape recorded in the same manner as the interview with the same parameters spelled out in the consent form (free to stop at any time and to participate as much or as little as they desired). Participants all chose to sit across the desk from me as they had earlier. As before, I placed the two cassette recorders with fresh tapes on the desk, pressed the record buttons, and checked to be sure they were running. I then began the conversation by asking the participants what stood out for them. In contrast to the

phenomenological interview, I responded with my own impressions and invited questions from the participant. The conversations lasted from 30 minutes to an hour and a half. When interviews were completed, I thanked the participant and invited him or her to return if there were any afterthoughts. I placed cassette tapes in the locking file cabinet in my office until I transcribed the tapes using either the portable cassette player or a transcriber. Analyses began with my listening to the tapes of the conversations and transcribing the tapes into a typed protocol.

The results of this study were evidenced by several factors. The phenomenological interview process was gauged by illumination of elements of the experience and the way these elements make sense within the whole of the experience. In this sense, the application of a phenomenological interview was judged to be useful to my practice if the second interview illuminated elements of the counselor /student relationship that made sense to both of us and revealed an enlightening experience. It was important, then, to look at what areas stood out for both of us.

I am mindful that good conversation--in what I call the *zone*--supports a topic, concept, or experience held between people and outside of their individual thoughts and opinions. I looked for evidence of this in the ways we play with creative thoughts with others--in particular, I looked for:

- narratives set out as analogues--metaphors for the way things are,
- descriptors of experiences--re-creation of an experience,
- invitations into dialogue--words or tones which call out for a response,
- expansion or magnification of concepts--building on what the other has said, or
- *hitchhiking* off of concepts--latching on to something reminding the other of some similar experience.

I also made note of what stood out for me in the overall tone and rhythm of the conversation and the flow of the stream of thought. The *zone* is the term I employ for the kind of dialogue that is carried along by the momentum of the topics. It is spontaneous and unreflected conversation--what Reason and Heron (1995) describe as experiential knowing.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The chapter that follows begins with results from the summer semester. Since I tried a different approach in the follow-up conversations between summer and fall semesters, I chose to present the results of the dialogues as separate sections--beginning with summer and followed by fall semester--to make the effect of the change more evident. After the presentation of results by semester, I give a sample of the meaning perspectives, the use of which transcended the styles of dialogue and was common to both semesters.

In the individual semester sections I first present the structure of the dialogue itself and then the things that stood out for me from the dialogues--the things that will guide future action within my practice. Since the semester results were different, the organization of the results will also be different. In the summer semester things that stood out emerged from the phenomenological style, which was more prevalent during this session. I begin with a look at the style of the personal narratives, and then I look at the evidence of conversation in the zone--to show how it is identified. Still in the summer semester, I give the results that emerged from the phenomenological interviewing style that dominated dialogue within this session.

The fall semester results differ in that participants engaged more fully in the conversations in the zone. I therefore present what it was that made the conversations noticeably different and show the things that stood out for me along with excerpts

from that dialogue. As the purpose of action research is to improve one's practice, I focused my attention on those aspects of dialogue that addressed my own practice.

Summer Semester

Personal narratives

Follow-up interviews began with my asking participants what stood out for them from their contact so far with the program. Before the conversations, I told participants they were free to ask me questions. In reviewing the transcripts, however, I noted that I responded more from what I considered to be invitations from participants for me to give my viewpoint rather than to direct questions. Participants' responses took the form of several contiguous statements with occasional use of narrative examples within the exchanges. For example, in introducing the research project to participants, I informed them that my viewpoint is that of a second-generation college student. When I asked one participant if she had thought what it was like for me as a second-generation college student, she replied:

L: No, I hadn't. I had stereotypes. I had stereotypical thoughts like, oh you know, it probably, you know, people helping him, it was never that hard work, second generation, their parents helped them through this, and second generation your parents went to college, then, you know, they have money. I've always thought that about people. One of my, my coworkers...I...the first time I met him summed him up as something totally different than what he was. Before I actually went on a trip with him, um, because I got out on these trips to various plants, some of them, back at the first trip of engineers. And the first time I met him I thought he was just this rich then or uppity or stuck up or snobby or anything. I just thought he was just this rich guy, he was just coming to college, and he, he's almost in his thirties. I thought, you know, he just didn't have anything else to do, so he thought he'd come back to college. But actually, his mother and father were very poor, and they, you know, they could barely afford paying him through college, and he's scrimping and saving through college, and things like that and I just totally, a totally different, you

know, um, not really an understanding, a totally different view of what he was just by, you know, stereotyping him and, you know how is it?

Another participant responded with this short history when I asked what it was like to come from what she described as a very small Christian school to the university:

S: I was like, "Okay" (laughs) Overwhelming, I suppose, because it's hard enough. Like when like I first came to college I thought I'm going to have like Math 119 the whole year. I didn't know I was going to have to change and change every semester. So that was like because, like I said, in my high school, I never had a guidance counselor, and I didn't know what college was all about. And I came here and it was like "I have to change classes again?" It's very annoying. You have to call on the phone and classes are closed, and what are you going to do if you can't get your classes, so...It's not very fun. And, you know, doing your schedule...

These narratives, while enlightening, were of a singular viewpoint and were not interspersed with invitations for me to contribute what I experienced. In contrast, conversation was more likely to contain tones, inflections, or utterances that indicated a request for me to respond.

Conversations in the zone

One goal of the conversations was to stimulate dialogue that was free-flowing and spontaneous--in the zone. The following excerpt is an example of what I considered to be such an exchange. The transition from one speaker to the other was punctuated by a series of narrative illustrations, expansion of concepts, addition of details, reflection of comments, and invitations to respond (these transitions are noted in italics between responses--passages preceded by "M" represent my voice, whereas passages preceded by other initials represent the other participants). I took the participant's comment on her own ability to talk freely and noted:

M: Yeah... Oh... Uh-huh, well you know southerners are pretty good about that anyway.

Reflection

L: (laughs) yes they are.

Narrative example

M: That's a, yeah, and... I lived up north for a little while, and a, you know, they're very matter of fact, you know, if you go into a store, you don't strike up a conversation. They just want you to move on through there, and it's not really being rude. It's just not the way they do things. It takes a while...

Expand to narrative

L: Yes!... Yeah... I was born I Ohio, Oh, I mean, you didn't just stop in line and talk to people. You just did your business and came down here for the first time and went to the bathroom with my, my niece and "oh, is that your little girl?" and "No, that's my niece" and "oh she's so pretty, oh look at her" and she just started telling me her life history. About her grandchildren and her son and daughter, and like "wow!"

Add to narrative

M: Yeah, I took, I took some kids to Wisconsin from here. They'd never been out of Tennessee before, and I'd kind of, ah... briefed them on what it would be like and that was one of the things they said, you know, you go to fast food place they really don't want to hear about your grandmother (laughs)

Reflect and add

L: No they don't (laughs) no, it's like "may I take your order please"

Interpret experience

M: Yeah... It's... Yeah, and they may look at you funny, but, you know, just bear with it. It's different people and different ways of doing things; it's just different it's not better or worse, or, uh... Just be patient, and, you know, keep your eye open. It's always a learning experience. That sort of thing. Unless you get real offensive about it. Well, you know, coming in here though...see, when I first came here it was kind of an odd feeling for me, the kind, the way the office was set up and stuff like that, and uh but after a while you get so accustomed to it, uh... it's almost like you need company to clean your house.

Cause you never notice stuff, that's laying around until someone else is going to come in and you're kind of thinking "oh if they," You put yourself in their shoes.

Transition to thinking

L. Yeah (laughs)...yeah....yeah...(laughs)...Yeah, what will they see?

There were several *sets* of these transactions--a *set* being comprised of continual responses connected by transitions--covering topics of cultural differences in communication, stereotyping, dialogue, college finances, and perceptions of different colleges. The change from topic to topic occurred from a break in the concentration -- usually when one member stopped (as in the above *transition to thinking*) to interpret the experience or from one participant hitchhiking off a comment to his or her own experience. This was the case in the following example stemming from a short exchange concerning getting someone to talk:

L: And it was the funniest thing. It's like, you know, when he, when you want him to do it, when you tell him to do it, he doesn't. When you really don't pay attention to it, he does. And I, I feel the same way about, the dialogue class, um... (*interpret the experience*) That probably would have been a much better class if the professor would have come in and said "ok, um, I'm going to split you into two groups, I'm going to leave you there, I want you to talk, I will come, um, within five minutes, and if your group's still talking I'm going to sit there and listen to what you have to say, I'm just" or not even tell them that, and just walk around, stand there, and listen to their conversations, what they're talking about and things like that and, I mean, I'm not sure how you would grade that, but it would probably make a much more interesting course...

The dialogue was animated and obviously interesting, but participants seemed to be in their own worlds. Participants were not attentive to conversation as a co-production.

The focus was also on topic areas other than the actual experience of the previous

interview, not on our shared experience. The direction of the conversation, with some exceptions, seemed to be toward the life space of the student.

Phenomenological results

Subsequent conversations seemed to follow the style of a phenomenological interview rather than of a conversation. In my exchange with the first participant, there were seven identifiable sets of free-flowing dialogue. In my exchange with the second participant, there were only two short sets, and with the third participant, there were three. I felt that the onus was on me to ask questions of the student. This became explicit in a few instances, such as the following:

J: No, not really. I'm just wondering what you are going to ask (laughs) and what I'm going to say.

M: Oh! Well so am I. I'm making this up as I go along, so feel free to jump in any time (laughs).

Evidence of the participant not attending to the flow of conversation was illustrated in this comment:

J: I...I don't remember. (laughs) I don't know what I was going to say. I was listening to what you were saying (laughs). I was trying to remember and it was just like...it must not have been important.

Although our concentration and interest in each other's words appeared to be broken by an occasional distraction of inner conversation (as I took the preceding comment to be), the modified phenomenological interview did produce some noteworthy information. I was able to get an image of what it was like for the student, on several planes, to come to our Student Support Services program. The building housing the program and the passageways in the building stood out in contrast to my own office in the following statements:

(in this and subsequent selections of dialogue, non-contiguous passages or speech of different participants are separated by lines)

J: I think it's more...it's a little more comfortable because it is cluttered. I don't...I mean I don't...I wouldn't say it was cluttered, but I'm not saying it's cluttered. It's an older building and walking down this straight hall with all these doors closed, you know...I wasn't picturing that.

S: I was like, "What is this place?" It was haunted house looking. I came in here, and I walked up the stairs was looking for EAP. And I thought it would be this whole big building to itself and...I'm like..."Okay (laughs) I hope I'm getting advised right."

M: Yeah those stairways are dim and kind of dingy-looking...

S: A dungeon, kind of. Yeah, I like it. I recommend it to people.

J: It's kind of relaxing. I mean, it's small and...uh.

M: Okay, you're talking about this office? Right here?

J: Yeah. Your office is pretty relaxing, I guess (laughs). I mean it's kind of...it's pretty quiet and...

M: Yeah? Well my office is all cozy for me, but I don't know what you think about it.

S: This is fine (laughs). Bigger than the other offices. I don't know...I like it. I don't know what to say. I...I just...I'm comfortable. I'll...I don't know how other people feel about it, but I personally think that sitting down one-on-one talking about, you know, just like what you were doing before high school and previous experience...I like that.

I took from this that the office environment stood out to the participants. One feature of my office that I had not noticed as standing out to the students was the placement of the speakers to my radio behind me on the wall. It provoked the following comment that I took to heart:

L: Yeah... well, the first time I did walk in I, it was so funny, cause, your speakers there... and then your, your chair, that, cause you were sitting directly in the middle when I first walked in and you, you, stood up (laughs), and I was thinking it's kind of like a throne there, and you were sitting in this chair and....

M: yeah...(laughs) maybe I should get a microphone, and talk through it...

L: that's the first thing that went through my head, when I first walked in. I'm like, "wow!"

I moved the speakers to a less obtrusive spot shortly after this discussion.

Participants also talked about their experience with the interview process, when I prompted the discussion. In the following passages, they gave their impressions of me as an advisor:

L: Yeah, and then when, you know, you asked me "well and how's everything going?" and you acted so interested And I felt good. It was more a, if I was stressed about classes thing. It was just talking about made me feel better. I had a conversation with a girlfriend today, about, you know, being stressed out, made me feel much better

M: Well you know, I'm never really sure if I can get people to do that.

L: Really?

M: I don't consider myself a real touchy-feely kind of person. Uh, I always feel I'm much more analytical than, I've always been kind of jealous of people who can just make other people just feel so comfortable and, you know, I never felt like that was me, and...

L: (laughs) Well, when I'm with you I was pretty comfortable, I mean. But then, you know, I had no reason to be uncomfortable, really. I mean, but I guess I can just talk and talk and I'd be just some lady in the store and I like something and I just walk up to her and "I really like that" and just start a conversation. I've just always been a people person.

J: (laughs)...okay...um... I didn't know what to expect (laughs) I was a little nervous, oh my god.

M: Lets say more about that. I mean, what did you expect?

J: Um, I really, I don't... I don't know. I just, ah, I wanted to come in and come in and, get a, you know, someone to help me figure out what I'm going to do (laughs), than, like, few years here, I will need it.

M: Yeah, what sorts of impression did you get?

J: I think good impressions... everyone cared. When I came in and everyone was really nice, um, you know... I thought you were really nice too, and understanding (laughs).

M: Oh, okay, as far as, I mean, as far as, speaking and being open, or?

J: Mm hmm, yeah, I think so, you know...when you're walking down the street people here you just talk to...you can bring up a conversation and just talk, and at home we never did that, (laughs) you know. It was just, you know, look at somebody and you don't even say "hi." I just got that impression from you, you know.

- *****
- J: Yeah, because we just talked and considered like, you know, when you go for a job interview. I think you feel more tense. I didn't feel as tense. I could... I really didn't know what to expect, so I was a little bit nervous, but...
- M: Mm hmm.
- J: It ended up being more comfortable, I thought. So...
- M: I'm thinking about getting one of these directional lamps to shine in your face, "Tell me about your study skills." (laughs) It can work that way.
- J: Yeah...
- M: I mean... I've been guilty of that, I guess. In saying, you know, "well, tell me exactly what it is that you do when you study." I never really thought about how it affected people, I guess.
- J: (laughs)
- M: What about the interview itself? How did you feel about talking about...maybe you didn't expect to talk about some of those things? About your background and going to college?
- J: It...it didn't really bother me. Some things did bother me a little more. I mean not really bother me but...that's not what I was going to say (laughs).
- M: It is my job to bother you.
- J: (laughs) No, not bother me. No. I was just...I was just thinking...at home and it was just a lot different. As far as my parents and the kind of things that they did. I don't know...maybe how they acted. I always...it always bothered me that they acted like I was...that I couldn't take care of myself or think on my own (laughs) and it really bothered me. And I just...like I wasn't grown up or something.
- *****
- S: (laughs) Exactly. I mean they have no humor at Arts and Sciences. They're dry and, frankly, I don't like how they advise people.
- M: Oh, and see, I've been told that I'm pretty dry.
- S: Oh, really? (laughs) I mean, I just think its comfortable to talk here, you know instead of in a small, little office and, I mean, these people are waiting for next person to come in and... and like, since I'm on academic review, they are just so cold, "You know that you have to pass. You have to have a two-point-O." And I'm just like, "Okay, are there any tips that you can help me figure out?" They don't really care. You're just another person. What are you? I mean, among five thousand people, you know. That's how I feel about the college advising.

The above excerpts suggest that students prefer the phenomenological interview to other types of interaction because they viewed the interviews as more

personal and more comfortable. Within these exchanges, however, I could identify very few instances when students overtly questioned me.

The results of the summer session addressed only the first two research questions. Students gave favorable accounts of the phenomenological interview intake process. Although they did engage in conversation in the zone (enough so that I could identify the salient features), I did not find enough of the conversation in the zone to gain any results that could adequately inform my practice. However, the conversation did give me confidence that knowledge emerging from “the zone” would be more spontaneous than information from interviews and therefore what I would judge to be more genuine.

As the preceding passages indicate, expectations of what was to happen in an interview stood out for both the participant and for me. After reviewing the summer’s conversations with a committee advisor, I decided to change the way in which participants and I transitioned from the first interview to the conversation that was to follow and, by doing so, possibly change the expectations for the conversations. At the end of the initial phenomenological intake interview, I suggested to the participant that we both come back to the next meeting with an assignment: We each would think of three things that stood out for us in our first contact and report back to each other when we met again.

Fall Semester

Six students participated in the follow-up conversations during the fall semester. When we met, I gave each participant the option of opening the conversation

with the three things that stood out for him or her, or the option of letting me go first. Four of the six participants chose to go first. The presentation of results from the fall semester differ from the summer semester in that I concentrate on the conversations in the zone and the results from the conversations that inform my practice.

Conversations in the zone

There was a noticeable change in the rhythm and pace of the conversations and in the topics that were addressed from the conversations in the summer semester. The exchanges were more rapid-fire. Often we would be finishing each other's thoughts or talk over each other with the same thought as in these passages:

M: One of the things that stood out for me was the relationship with your mother in that she seemed to be amenable to listening...

D: Yeah.

M: At least helping you through the process if not the actual content of what was going on in college.

D: Right.

M: Was it in my situation...I don't know...if I had griped about it my parents would have been, "So?" (laughs)

D: Like 'So?'

M: "We told you."

D: Yeah. Yeah that's true. I don't know. That just came to mind. You know it probably would have been easier. If I had that information there that I had to go and find out for myself, stuff that I thought was such an accomplishment when I learned about it. It's stuff that people already knew when I went in, you know? (Laughs) It's like, "Ohhh, that's where you knew that."

M: I've never heard the name before. So, I don't know.

D: Great (laughs). I'd rather take her. He said she was real good.

M: But you're looking at the...

D: the fall.

M: Well, the evening classes...

D: are kind of small.

M: Yeah, and a lot of times you've got older students in it who are more serious and are more willing to talk about the material.

D: Yeah

- M: (laughs) Now that stands out for me, how you could imitate your grandmother. (laughs).
- A: That's what I'm going to major in, imitating my grandmother.
- M: Uh huh. You could make a career out of it. (laughs) We can pray on that anyway.
- A: "We can pray on it."
- M: (laughs)
- *****
- M: No. (laughs) I think we're here until they tear the building down. But hopefully they'll give us notice before they start tearing it down.
- A: That'd be nice.
- M: That wrecking ball coming through the wall is not what...
- A: I just had the clearest image of a ball just smashing through the window.

What these passages suggest to me is that we were synchronized in our thinking and were speaking "into" a topic rather than about a topic.

The conversations had much more momentum with these participants than the dialogues in the summer. The "playing with concepts"--or sets, as I have called them-- had a longer duration with fewer prompts on my part. I noted more invitations to respond and more questions coming from the participants, and the questions I asked came more from my own curiosity than from a desire to keep the conversation going. Topics that were suspended between us in this conversational *zone* ventured into areas that addressed the initial questions of the study.

Results from conversation in the zone

In several instances, participants made reference to a new awareness they gained from the intake interview. The awareness was not of new information but of a way of looking at things. As in Wittgenstein's (1970) model, we were not hunting out new facts but were trying to describe something that was in plain view. The following passages illustrate how participants expressed this:

D: The last interview was really good for me because it opened my mind to things I had never even considered before.

M: Mm hmm.

D: You know I never had a reason to ponder about it, so I didn't.

D: Yeah, it's like, "He's right", you know. And like when I was talking to my mom, talking about the relationship there again, and I was like, "He was so helpful, and you know what? Thanks for not going to college." (laughs)

M: (Laughs)

D: She was like, "What are you talking about?" and then I told her, I said, "You know, if you don't make it, you just try it again." because I said that it's really hard, and she said, "That's right. That's right." And that's good. I really needed to hear that.

M: She probably told you that somewhere along the line.

D: Probably, but you know, I probably didn't listen because she didn't know what she's talking about. She never went, you know?

F: Um, to be honest, it was almost like I was supposed to find out something negative about being a first-generation college.

M: Oh?

F: I mean, almost, not totally.

M: Yeah, well it is what you call a deficit model...

F: I didn't think about it. I really didn't think about it.

F: I don't know. I really didn't think...I really didn't know anything about it except a few basic...here's what you need to qualify. And I thought I'd just check it out and see what it was about. So...I really didn't think much about until after we talked the first time.

These statements indicated that students discovered something that they had not thought about prior to the interviews. Students during the fall sessions had more responses specifically about the intake process and their interpretations of the process:

D: Really, I love positive things like that. That's probably one reason I decided on college, you know. Because you don't hear anybody mention at home that when you are around people like you, and they inspire you and stuff. It really helps, you know. And then maybe you think, "Well, maybe you're right.", you know. (laughs)

D: Yeah, I have a real good feeling inside about the...I feel, like, protected, you know? (laughs)

M: Oh! Okay. (unintelligible)

D: Well, not really. Not other than what we've discussed. You know, I'm just very thankful that you guys have done this, opened this window of opportunity. You know.

M: I like doing it.

D: Really? It gives you a good feeling that you've helped.

M: I like to come to work every day.

D: And it shows. Do you know what I mean? Because you're not negative about stuff. You're like "boosting." I get energy off of people like that.

A: I guess it's like comes and goes with the job. You know, like just the people you meet. Some people need you to bear down on them and be like, "You need to do this.", and push them or whatever. Some people... Oh my, they have enough on them to do, and it's nice to meet someone who's, "You need to do these things." and leave it at that.

M: The first time I meet you, how can I know what kind of person you are?

A: You just talk... and that's another thing. You're... you actually have conversation. A lot of people come in and are just like, when you come in, "All right, tell me what you've done. Tell me what you think you need to do. I'll tell you what I think you need to do, and you go do it."

M: Mm hmm

A: And you actually have adult conversation, so you know, I'm trying to do some stuff. You asked me some questions, which wasn't routine, like "question, question, question".

G: That's why I sort of want to meet with an advisor I can stick with or somebody that can help me that I can stick with. That's what I've been thinking. My whole mind-set is just getting to know people. Usually, like I've just been asking for people's bosses really. I want to get the people, "Who's in charge? Who can make it happen? Who can sign off and I don't have to go to five offices?" And that's pretty much what I've been asking for.

What stands out for me in these passages are the feelings that the students shared about what they are getting from me as an advisor. When I mentioned to a student that one of the things that stood out for me was the relationship he had with his father, he replied:

B: Yeah, I noticed that, too. It seemed like you had a real interest in that. Aptly so. I guess that really defines my character.

This process of conversation as a way of interacting with students stood out in contrast to their experiences with other advisors, along the lines of personal versus impersonal, small versus big, humor versus dry, and comfortable versus cold. In the following passages, the perception of the program in general as more personal and intimate was paired with a belief that the participant was likely to return:

G: I expected the just the typical run-around, come here, fill out a bunch of paperwork, give a blood sample. You know, wait for the results in six months, and a year and a half later they would tell me that I wasn't accepted. You know what I mean?

M: Yeah.

G: But it was actually a lot easier than I thought.

M: Okay.

G: Everybody was pretty friendly. I expected to wait in a long line of a thousand other people...a thousand other people waiting for a handout. That was my mentality. You know, like a food stamp line.

G: It's an emotional attachment, I think.

M: Yeah?

G: When you speak to somebody directly. I think even when you find somebody's weaknesses or imperfections, it draws the person closer. Because, you know, I think that's what makes people strong is their imperfections, really.

M: I mean the emotional attachment as far as the people in this office. I mean, now we have an investment in you, too.

G: Sure, absolutely. Yeah, I definitely think this will be a long-term thing for the rest of my college. I can see me bugging you a lot for advice.

These statements stand out for me as they suggest a connection to the program and the staff--one of the concerns expressed by Tinto (1986) as a factor in college retention.

The utility of the phenomenological interview stood out for the participants as well. One student described the intake interview as a therapeutic encounter:

M: Yeah. People have said, "What good are these interviews for your students?"

J: Well, catharsis. It's like, "Wow!", you know. And then when I say it out loud, I mean it's my feelings, but I think it's like therapy, too. It's like when people

go to therapy. You get something out of talking. It's...it's...catharsis...for me...to say it. I didn't know I needed to say or I didn't know that I wanted to tell somebody about that. Or I need to, but then after I did it, it was like, "Oh!" Or that somebody was interested. To say it out loud makes me realize...hmmm...makes me look at it totally different. It's just...you know what I mean, to say it out loud?

M: For me it's like...

J: It never even occurred to me that you would understand what I was talking about.

M: Yeah?

J: Or that you could say, "Other people have said that" or it never really occurred to me...not that I'm the only person in the world who's ever felt this or done this...but it wouldn't have occurred to me maybe...or never did occur to me that other people have gone through that. You know?

A professional goal that emerged for me in critical reflection was to transcend the analytical stance to what I considered to be a more genuine relationship with the students. The following passages refer to my relationship to them:

A: Um, what stood out...I don't know if this is useful or not, but you're like a really nice person. And like I haven't run into a lot of people that, like, look at my situation like it is so grave that I will never make it out. Like, "oh gosh, you've got to do this, this, and that and the other. You've got to get on the ball, or life is over." You know, and that's like the impression I get from a lot of people.

D: I really don't take that for granted whenever I'm offered extra help and stuff. I mean, I just really, really, really look up to people who try to help me. I don't try to take advantage of it. You know what I mean?

G: I would want to label you somehow. You might enjoy smaller settings, just a few personal friends, just quiet things around the house as opposed to going out to the movies and hanging out with some friends and playing cards.

M: Yeah, that's right. That's me. (laughs)

G: Uh, I mean...I don't know. It's just...you look very disciplined, you know. In a sense like you have a job to do and you do it.

M: Yeah.

G: Like writing this book or doing this project you have to do. I'm sure you have a boss, but you're...it seems like this is your baby, and you have a goal, and you're going to attain it, and you're disciplined about it.

G: Getting to know you, I would feel more comfortable. Because I feel like you take a personal interest in your job, not only that you're interested, but probably one thing that would attract me to you was that you take a personal interest in what you do...in this.

M: And it's kind of fun.

My office arrangement and decor seemed to have an effect on perceptions the students had of my relationship with them, as well. It is an effect that I have tried to establish, and it contrasts to the descriptions of the office building--as shown in earlier examples in which students described the building as a dungeon. It was interesting to me that a student noted:

A: It's like where I could get advised and help and counseling and guidance from a nice person.

M: What makes it like that?

A: Hum...because you don't have a lot of expensive plaques hanging up on the wall, you don't seem to be like one of those arrogant people. Well it's...it's like people who decorate their office too much, it's like they're showing off.

M: Oh. Okay.

A: But it seems like a friendly environment.

M: I think the problem is, I don't have that much to show off, so it's...

A: Don't tell anybody that.

M: (laughs)

A: But it feels like a friendly place. It seems like...it seems like, it reminds me of a guidance counselor's office.

This statement suggests that the office environment exudes personality.

The general climate of the office serves as a background that is perceived to be supportive of the student. This hearkens back to the open environment conducive to dialogue--the container Isaacs (1993) mentions. Student workers (the "friendly group of people") especially stood out as a positive part of the experience in this passage:

B: Well, it seemed like, uh, when I came in here, it was a very friendly, uh, friendly group of people.

M: Okay.

B: It was not, you know, I didn't get the feeling, "Oh, we really don't have time for you." And then too, I had missed a couple of appointments. I was...I was feeling bad about that, but still yeah, in spite of all that, I felt very, very welcome. And you had a genuine interest in what I had to say and what I was asking for.

In this, I found that students perceived a climate in the program that was conducive to what I value in my practice--genuine interest.

Participants indicated expectations of returning to the Student Support Services program because of our interaction. The words of one participant serve as a fitting summary of these conversations:

B: No, I just think, uh, I hope to do well here. I hope to get that tutor that I'm supposed to get on Monday, and if I have any questions, I hope that I can just come back here and talk to you.

M: That's what we want.

B: I'm looking forward to it. I believe in the interaction.

M: Mm hmm.

B: As opposed to, "Well, you may get one." and "I don't know what I'm going to get." So I'm just trying to say I'm here, and hopefully, I expect you to be here, too.

This student made explicit what other participants said in different words--human interaction has value in continuing a relationship with a program.

Results from the fall semester differed from those of the summer in the quality and the content of the conversations, but the way participants interpreted experiences was common to both sessions and can be discussed as such in the next section.

Meaning Perspectives

As discussed in chapter two of this work, Mezirow (1990) defines meaning perspectives as the structure of assumptions through which new experiences are interpreted. I considered meaning perspectives for both semester sessions. They took

the form of brief descriptors that captured the flavor of the way each person interpreted the topics being discussed. The dialectical dimensions that supported these perspectives were in the exact words of the participants in most instances, and were only changed to reduce longer iterations when it was necessary. After listening to the tapes and transcribing the dialogues I assigned each participant a short descriptor of respective assumptions or guiding philosophies and the dichotomous qualities that appeared within these. I identified the perspectives by how they stood out either by repetition over the course of several different topic areas or by being specifically addressed as the way a participant saw him or herself. An example is the following:

F: (laughs) That's me. A doctor in a pick-up truck.

This student's descriptor became "A doctor in a pick-up truck." It relates to her way of viewing herself as outside the mainstream of the local culture, in which she was willing to try new things (versus being complacent), she was physically active (versus sedentary), and she was interested in things she thought were useful (such as Biology) as opposed to useless (such as Chemistry).

I chose the above student's meaning perspectives because they were close to my own. My meaning perspectives--those that emerged through critical reflection in the bracketing interview--appeared throughout the conversations. In chapter five I discuss the interplay of my meaning perspectives with those of the participants.

Summary

The difference in the summer and fall sessions were highlighted by the style of dialogue. Participants in the summer tended to adhere to the phenomenological

interview format with longer narratives that seemed to be addressed not to me as a participant but to an interviewer (who just happened to be me). There was value in this type of response, however, as students gave opinions and ideas that I found useful. Although the conversational style was short-lived and less frequent in the summer than in the fall semester, I did find evidence of the ways that concepts were shaped between us. In the fall, when these conversations in the zone became more prevalent, the imagery was more recognizable and I got a greater sense of experiential knowledge. The words used, while not necessarily more elaborate, were evocative of more details within my imagination. For example, I got what I felt was a genuine experience of growing up on a farm in Ohio and of coming from New York to find a religious experience in the South.

The results of the conversations, like numerical data in quantitative studies, make little sense in and of themselves. In action research, the action taken depends on the sense that the practitioner makes of the experience. This sense-making was guided in this instance by critically reflecting on the words and the presence of others against the backdrop of the practical day-to-day workings of my practice. In the next chapter I will revisit the experience and discuss how the experience fit in with the practical and formal theories set out earlier. I will also discuss some findings that were not anticipated in the design.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

In terms of the decision to use phenomenological interviews as part of my practice, I liked what I saw in the results. What stood out for participants was a more personal interaction than the student and I were accustomed to finding in an advising session and a dialogue in which the student felt that his or her voice was heard. There is more in this process, though, than a way of asking questions--there is an intentional stance taken toward the other. Vygotsky, Piaget, and Feuerstein contributed heavily to my practice in making me aware of the ways we all can learn through mediation by another. A counselor in my position is the mediator between a student and the culture in which the student finds herself or himself. I have the power by virtue of my role (as defined by my profession and recognized by the student) to lend meaning to the student's experience. As my critical reflection indicated, however, I am not entirely comfortable with that role. I am somewhat like "the doctor in a pick-up truck." Part of this discomfort lies in what I see as the nature of the culture of the university.

While the university is a source of transformative and uplifting experiences (as might appeal to Feuerstein), it is also a source of oppression and conformity. On the one hand, I want to bring students into a culture I value. On the other hand, I feel my social responsibility is to see that education is a liberating force. The intentional stance I have taken, then, is to remain open to the life of the student--not just with the intention to learn about the students but also with a willingness to change myself. As Freire and Horton point out, this frees me to new options for action and allows the

student to gain control over his or her learning. This way of looking at the way thing ought to be--tempered by my life experiences--is a source of my meaning perspectives.

The meaning perspectives of the participants were as varied as their histories and cultures. Regardless of the qualities of the conversation we had in summer versus fall semester, there was evidence of unique perspectives that framed experiences--this much was a constant within the method. Each participant consistently had a perspective under which the topics of conversation seemed to be subsumed. If I were to describe how a participant (including myself) indicated assumptions, I might paraphrase as, "I look at it this way." I found participants' recognition of my viewpoints in their reflection of my comments, especially in the fall semester conversations. Despite acknowledging each other's assumptions, however, our own descriptions of experiences maintained a consistency based on the philosophies or ways of life we brought to these dialogues. This is how Shotter and others have viewed the act of collaborative learning.

Collaborative learning involves the construction of knowledge in which participants in dialogue contribute their experience as seen through their eyes. Each participant is free to take from this constructed knowledge an interpretation based on his or her own meaning perspective. Mezirow points out that these meaning perspectives are transformed through experiences--usually remarkable experiences or encounters. While insights from the intake interviews may not have been of earth-shaking proportions, the student participants and I noted increments of

transformations. When we were able to say that we “had never thought of that before” (in the participants’ words), we were acknowledging additional nuances to our meaning perspectives, thus shedding new light on experiences. This prepares us to examine is the effect of the phenomenological interview itself. It is not just the information we gained about another but also the change in both participants that comes from access to the life space of another.

The impression from the summer conversations provided some mixed results. I was pleased with the overall tone of the exchange, which was highlighted by laughter (which I will say more on later) and insight. There was also some evidence of the defining features of conversation in the *zone* throughout the dialogues. Though enlightening in many respects, these first conversations were not of the quality of a sustained dialogue that I had hoped for, and they were not as focused on those areas of my practice in which I had questions. I did not believe that the plan of using a two-way phenomenological interview was effective in leading to this kind of interaction. The student did not ask questions of me that would have given them more control over the direction of the conversation. What stood out was what I perceived to be a maintenance of the power difference between us and a reluctance by students to move beyond the professional interviewing mode (as Kvale described it) to more philosophical conversation.

The change in the way I guided the transition between the initial intake interview and the follow-up conversation after the summer seems to have made a difference in the quality of that conversation. By placing emphasis on coming up with

“three things” that stood out and by taking on equal responsibility for that task, the relative positions of counselor and student changed. It was no longer me interviewing the participant, but two people working together to construct knowledge. This difference in posture toward each other opened up avenues and topics that previously were blocked by social convention--a student does not normally give observations of a counselor's practice (at least not with the counselor). We were now free to express experiences as we saw them. I was also better able to make use of the elements of good dialogue: we suspended thoughts and notions of authority, embraced polarization as a tool for seeing the concept, mediated each other, asked questions from a position of genuine not knowing, and granted each other the authority over our thoughts and feelings. The direction of our concentration went from an attention to what we were doing to the objective of our doing. It was a bit like riding a bicycle--once you stop thinking about riding the bicycle and start concentrating on where you are going, you and the bicycle become a single unit. As with riding a bicycle, it is easier to not think about dialogue when it is done in a safe space. Although Isaacs describes the container as a safe place metaphorically, the actual container--the physical space in which the conversations took place--contributed to the discourse.

One part of the discourse--a device I assumed would contribute to the safe space--was laughter. In examining the transcripts and in listening to the recordings, these moments of laughter took on significance. There was very little that could be said to be funny except in context. A simple reading of the transcripts might lead the reader to conclude that these persons were very easily amused. What stood out for me

was the *direction* of the laughter--directed toward self, directed at the other, directed at us, or directed at a third party. Initially, laughter was directed at the self and moved to a third party or to ourselves. I interpreted the laughter at the self--a self-deprecating humor--to be an invitation of sorts to engage at a less formal level. In effect, I was asking the student to come out and play. As the person with the most power, I was more likely to laugh at myself; however, the student's laughter at self seemed to perpetuate the power difference--the students' laughter at self was most frequent in the exchanges typical of the professional interviewing style. It was when we were able to direct our laughter at ourselves or at others that we entered into the zone.

Actions such as laughter, arrangement of our physical space, and gestures factor into our positions toward one another, but these are all elements in the here and now. As we explore each other's life we also need some way to connect to the past histories and to the other voices that contributed to our world as we live it. This study highlighted the nature of a kind of conversation where this connection can be established. It happens through a basic nature of conversation itself. In our formative years we transcended the corporeal realm to explore notions, values, and fanciful creations far beyond the reach of our senses. We do all this with language. Through language we can gain knowledge of exotic lands, understand the workings of subatomic particles, and relive events long past. As Vygotsky pointed out, language acts as more than words connected to a corresponding item or act. Language is a tool that connects us to the meaning of things, like a string around the finger reminds us to pick up a loaf of bread on the way home from work. Just the mention of that word,

“bread”, connects to a whole range of stimuli and experiences--fresh-baked bread in a grandmother’s kitchen, school lunches packed in brown paper bags and eaten in crowded grade school cafeterias with a kid with braces who talked with his mouth full, a communion host delivering us from eternal damnation. There is knowledge conveyed in the sharing of words. There is language in looks and gestures and tones that make the words into more productive tools. Language in all its manifestations is the tool of the counselor.

Several aspects of this experience with language warrant mentioning in light of the practical and formal theories set out earlier in this work. The nature of the conversations gave us access to types of knowledge that a problem-solving or expert analysis relationship could not have produced. The participants and I both learned from our engagement with each other and gained new understanding of what it means to be first-generation or second-generation college students. This was a kind of presentational knowledge--as Reason and Heron would assert--that came about through metaphor and images. The experience of creating these images and playing with them outside of our preconceived notions and judgements gave the knowledge depth and breadth that went beyond the descriptive or naming capacity of the words we used. It worked something like this: one of us planted the seed of a concept, offering it up to the other with an invitation to make something of it. As Shotter and Katz might describe the exchange, this verbal offering connected to some experience in the other and called out for a response. The response took the form of recognition of the concept. If the concept had an unclear form, the response might be a request to

fill in more detail. If the concept “clicked” with the other, the response might be to add more detail. The concept floated back and forth between the participants like an airy sculpture taking on new shape and meaning as each participant contributed something from his or her vantage point. This is what I define as collaborative learning--the construction of knowledge in the “in between.” It is an experience that must be lived to be understood fully, and it would be more clearly expressed (outside of living it) through the medium of art, another presentational way of knowing.

Collaborative learning of this sort occurs naturally between people but all too often is relegated to areas outside of the formal learning or business environment. Our professional roles are perceived as barriers to this more relaxed and playful type of relationship. The experience of using collaborative learning with first generation college students would tend to show otherwise. Students persistently deferred to me as the helping agent--the expert to whom they will come for advice and guidance. Within this role as expert, however, my position and the corresponding position of the student continually shifted along with the power held by each of us. Rom Harre suggests that this occurs through the use of the images and metaphors set out in the conversations. Each of us approaches the situation from positions based on past encounters. As the summer semester conversations demonstrated, this positioning was one of me as inquisitor. With a change in responsibilities--each of us having the same assignment--this positioning changed. The way of speaking within this new set of rules was altered for the occasion. Each of us was able to speak from fragments of our

life experiences and to create narratives that--though possibly not historically accurate--served as metaphors for the way we each negotiate the world.

The proposition of this dissertation is that there is more to the role of the counselor than an individual dispensing the expertise of the system and changing the thinking of another. The approach to the student I wish to maintain assumes the relational responsibility I have to the student as a fellow human being. I do not propose responsibility in this sense as a taking of blame or credit for actions but rather as McNamee and Gergen describe responsibility--an acknowledgement that human contact has an effect. These conversations were intended to engender the human contact--to relate to another as more than a set of problems or a manipulable object of study. I structured the dialogues within the parameters set out by Isaacs to create a container wherein we could construct knowledge together. In doing so, we saw each other as sharing struggles in the educational system, viewing the ways in which we felt apart from the dominant culture, caring about the same issues, having some of the same lived experiences, and having a depth of character not previously noticed. The experience is one that was transformative to a greater or lesser extent in each of us. Encounters with any other person have some affect on an individual, but the profound differences are in how open the individual is to the experience and in the stance each takes towards transforming with it. It was apparent through these conversations that there is much more to every student than the single dimension of presenting problems. The discussion of a failed calculus test may be interwoven with culture, values,

family, and history and with me as an active participant in the reconstruction of the experience.

Review of the Study

The quality of the action research dimension of this work can be judged by answering the five questions set out earlier by Bradbury and Reason:

- Does each participant have a stake in the research; is each fully involved?

The answer to this goes back to the perception of participants concerning their roles and positions within the relationship. At times, this perception was a block to the type of conversation that was free-flowing and spontaneous. That does not mean, however, that all participants did not have a stake even at those moments when the student was counting on my guiding questions. Participants in the dialogue (myself included) were free to choose the direction of the conversation, and, as the participant with the most perceived power, I took pains to follow the lead of the student and to invite input from him or her.

- Do participants value the learning towards new ways of acting?

I look to the words of the participants to answer that question. "I definitely think this will be a long-term thing for the rest of my college" seemed to be a clear and consensual indication of a value placed on this way of relating.

- Did the research address multiple ways of knowing?

The nature of the responses from all of the participants indicates that this criterion was met. While it is apparent from the transcripts that we were drawing on narratives of our lives and metaphors to convey experiences, there was also a less

empirically demonstrable connectedness--a shared life space. The knowledge from this was unique to the persons and the moment. This was a knowing- in-action emanating from this crossing of our culture and histories and intended to be applied to our unique situations.

- Is the research worthy of study--does it address deeper issues of the human condition?

This question can be addressed on several planes. The greater part of the conversations concerned values and philosophies of the cultures. We explored the meaning of feeling like an outsider, of race and socioeconomic status, and of families. A good deal of dialogue centered on the institution and the values espoused by the institution concerning the place of the student and equity within the learning community. We also addressed issues of our relationship--what it was like for the student to come to me for help and what it was like for me to receive them.

Conversations in the zone seems most appropriate to disadvantaged students such as those served by TRIO programs. While knowledge *about* students has value in allocation of resources and program planning, knowledge created *with* students enables the student to gain control over his or her own learning.

- Will the research establish a sustainable impetus of institutional change?

This is a question that remains to be answered. As Argyris points out, an institutional climate can either promote the spirit of open communication and respect or that of competition and mistrust. The grammars of a competitive environment would be slow to change. The grammars--or rules--exist to help us make sense of

experiences--to use a different set of rules within the context of more dominant rules would tend to cause alienation. This is similar to what Brookfield (1994) terms cultural suicide. It is a gamble to enter into a system built on mistrust and competition with notions of openness and honest communication. Grammars are malleable but none-the-less slow to change. A transformational experience, as Brookfield points out, may have consequences that leave one alienated. This is often the experience of the first-generation college student who finds that new knowledge and ways of viewing the world make him or her a stranger in their own home. I can only learn what they learned--new horizons are worth the cost.

Answers to the questions of my relationship to students as a counselor and the utility of phenomenological interviews became apparent in the conversational realities in this study. The present project was beneficial in adding this approach to the repertoire of professional behaviors I employ. I emphasize that it is an addition, not a substitution. There are times when I must address a student from my position as expert to provide information, to explain, or to give advice. In fact, well-presented information can provide similar constructed images and knowledge that was co-constructed in our conversations. The reality of the culture of higher learning is a knowledge that may need to be transmitted in this way to someone who is alien to it. The university will not readily adapt to suit the life of every student since it was designed to change others, not to be changed. The mediational role of the counselor is an integral part of the counselor/student relationship. It is, however, one role among many played by the counselor.

The essential ingredient to the type of relationship I wish to foster is a desire to learn and change. If the questioner approaches the interview with the intent to learn, the phenomenological interview is more than a set of questions put to the participant. If the interviewee can be engaged with the interviewer, they both can co-construct and live the knowledge. Past experience has taught that the openness to the world that makes a relationship a source of constructed knowledge cannot be sustained without vigilance. The fact that I found this experience so personally gratifying would indicate that it will continue, but nothing lasts forever, and I will need to renew my commitment to this way of life if I want my sense of awe and wonder to be like it was in the beginning.

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Appendices

Appendix A
Participation Consent Form

I understand that the purpose of the research is to learn about the experiences and perceptions of first-generation college students. I understand that participation involves answering questions in writing and in an oral interview which is audio-taped and that I will be made aware of the taping process. These tapes will be transcribed verbatim and pooled with other participants' responses for analysis by the researcher and a research group made up of doctoral students and a faculty advisor. I understand that my responses will be held in confidence by the researcher, with pseudonyms used to conceal identity. Audio-tapes and transcripts will be maintained in the office of the researcher at 205C Aconda Court.

I understand that I may review the written transcript for accuracy and completeness, but that interpretation of the responses is ultimately at the discretion of the researcher.

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and that I may withdraw from participation at any time and/or refuse to answer specific questions without incurring any penalty. There are minimal risks involved. This project ends on December 31, 2000.

I understand that I may contact the researcher at any point if I have further questions about the project or about my participation in it.

Researcher name: Mark Cotter Telephone number: 974-7901

The above project has been explained to my satisfaction, and I agree to participate truthfully.

Participant signature:

Date: _____

Appendix B

Interview questions

Initial interview:

Tell me what it was like for you when you first started thinking about going to college?

What did you think college would be like?

What was college like when you got there?

Follow-up interview (summer semester):

What stands out from the interview?

What was the interaction like for us?

What are our impressions of the program?

Amended (fall semester):

(At the end of the first interview): Think of three things that stand out for you, and I will think of three things that stand out for me. We will bring them back with us and talk about them when we meet again.

(At the follow-up interview): Would you like to start, or would you like me to start?

Appendix C1

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

EDUATIONAL
ADVANCEMENT
PROGRAM

APPLICATION 2000-2001

****For Office Use Only****			
ACT: E	M	C	HSGPA
_____	_____	_____	_____
SAT V: _____	M: _____	GED: _____	
G= _____	H= _____		
F= _____	VR= _____		
Transcript Req. _____	Rec. _____		
FA Form Req _____	Rec. _____		

Name _____ SS# _____ - _____ - _____ Date _____

E-mail Address _____ @ _____ Local Phone _____ - _____

Local/Campus Address _____ Zip _____

Major _____ Birth Date ____/____/____ Race _____ Sex _____

Classification: 1st Semester _____ Freshman _____ Sophomore _____ Junior _____ Senior _____
(0-29 hours) (30-59 hours) (60-89 hours) (90+)

Place of Employment _____ Hours per Week _____

Country of Citizenship _____

Parents/Spouse _____ Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Phone () _____ - _____

Person to Contact in an Emergency _____ Phone () _____ - _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Have either of your parents graduated from a four-year degree program or university? _____

Where _____

Have you applied for financial aid? _____ On what date did you submit your forms? _____

Have you been granted financial aid? _____

Are you a veteran? _____ What type of assistance are you receiving? _____

Please describe any learning disabilities you have _____

Please describe any physical disabilities you have _____

Do you receive aid from Vocational Rehabilitation? _____ Explain _____

Name of VR Counselor _____ Phone () _____ - _____

****FOR OFFICE USE ONLY****			
Academic Need Verification - Counselor Intake Statement			
Current GPA =	H S GPA =	ACT (SAT) =	Academic Review =
_____	_____	_____	_____
			Academic Index = _____
Date _____	Signed _____		

Appendix C2

Describe your previous college experience:

School: _____ Dates attended: from _____ to _____

School: _____ Dates attended: from _____ to _____

School: _____ Dates attended: from _____ to _____

What stands out for you in your decision to attend college? _____

Please circle the number which most closely reflects your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. My effort alone will determine my grades	1	2	3	4	5
2. I will graduate alongside my entering class	1	2	3	4	5
3. I study with a classmate or study group	1	2	3	4	5
4. Tests are good measures of my knowledge	1	2	3	4	5
5. My family knows what my college life is like	1	2	3	4	5
6. My mother is supportive of my academics	1	2	3	4	5
7. My father is supportive of my academics	1	2	3	4	5
8. Most of my childhood friends are in college	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am in control of my time	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am good at taking tests	1	2	3	4	5
11. I am open to help from others	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am well-organized	1	2	3	4	5
13. I fit in with other college students	1	2	3	4	5
14. I am an intellectual	1	2	3	4	5
15. I always meet my instructors	1	2	3	4	5
16. I attend class faithfully	1	2	3	4	5
17. I take very thorough notes	1	2	3	4	5
18. The transition to college was easy for me	1	2	3	4	5
19. I am active in clubs or campus organizations	1	2	3	4	5
20. I enjoy my courses	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix C3

Financial Needs Assessment Income Eligibility Criterion

Financial Aid Office Verification of Family Income

I authorize the student financial office at _____
(University/College)

to release income tax information, need analysis, and various financial aid information to the Educational Advancement Program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

Student's Signature	Date
Print Name	Social Security Number

(Information below to be provided by your Office of Financial Aid)

	Amount Offered	Amount Accepted
<u>AWARD</u>	_____	_____
PELL . . .	_____	_____
SEOG . . .	_____	_____
CWS . . .	_____	_____
TSAP . . .	_____	_____
PERKINS LOAN	_____	_____
STAFFORD LOAN	_____	_____
SCHOLARSHIP	_____	_____
(SPECIFY)	_____	_____
SCHOLARSHIP	_____	_____
(SPECIFY)	_____	_____
OTHER (SPECIFY)	_____	_____
TOTAL AWARD	_____	_____

The total established need for this student is _____.

The official confidential statement housed in the Financial Aid Office shows the family taxable (Line 33, 1040) annual income and family size for the above named student to be:

\$ _____ and _____, respectively.
(income) (family size)

Return to: Educational Advancement Program
201 Aconda Court
Knoxville, TN 37996

****For Office Use Only****	
<input type="checkbox"/> yes (F)	
<input type="checkbox"/> no (NF)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient Information	
Signature	Date

Office of Financial Aid

Appendix C4

The University of Tennessee
Educational Advancement Program (Student Support Services)
Ronald McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program

Program Commitment Contract
and
Waiver of Confidentiality

Name _____

Social Security Number _____

Date _____

This is to certify that I agree to actively participate in the Educational Advancement Program/Ronald McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program. As an integral part of my participation, I agree to complete all assessment, evaluation, and interest inventories and other data gathering devices as may be needed for research and programmatic evaluation. I understand that it is a program that provides holistic services over the length of my undergraduate/graduate educational experience, and that I should be willing to take advantage of a multiplicity of services including, but not limited to, academic advising, counseling, workshops, special instruction, tutoring, mentoring cultural events, and information exchange.

This is to certify that I agree to waive my rights under the Family Privacy Act (Buckley Amendment), and agree to permit the Educational Advancement Program/Ronald McNair Post Baccalaureate Achievement Program/Tennessee Pre Health Fellowship Program and Tennessee Pre Law Fellowship Program to have access to my term grades and academic history. I recognize that my grades will be held in strict confidentiality and only utilized in periodic performance reporting.

Signed _____

Date _____

Witnessed _____

Appendix C5

The University of Tennessee
Educational Advancement Program
 (Student Support Services)

Program Participation Contract
Spring Semester 2001

The Educational Advancement Program is a U.S. Department of Education TRIO-funded program designed to provide the support services proven to promote retention and graduation of first generation, low income, and physically challenged Students.

The program was created as a holistic vehicle -- it offers a combination of services to students who identify with the program's philosophy. It is the blend of several services which has demonstrated the greatest impact on the success of our students.

This is to certify that I, _____, am committed to being an active participant in the Educational Advancement Program during the 2000-2001 academic year.

I agree to take advantage of *three or more* of the following services:

- ___ Academic Advising
- ___ Career Counseling
- ___ Financial Aid Counseling
- ___ Personal Counseling
- ___ Graduate School Counseling Advice
- ___ Letter of Recommendation for Graduate School
- ___ Letter of Recommendation for Employment
- ___ Workshop
 - ___ Strategies for Academic Success (noon)
 - ___ Test Taking Techniques (noon)
 - ___ Financial Aid
- ___ Cultural Mentoring Event
 - ___ January 20 - "Nicholas Payton" Tennessee Theatre
 - ___ February 13 - "Inherit the Wind" Clarence Brown Theatre
 - ___ February 24 - "Ailey II" Clarence Brown Theatre
 - ___ March 5 - "Jose Limon Dance Company" Clarence Brown Theatre
 - ___ March 10 - "Moscow Festival Ballet - Don Quixote" Clarence Brown Theatre
 - ___ March 13 - "The Brecht File" Ula Love Doughty Carousel Theatre
 - ___ April 17 - "The Glass Menagerie" Clarence Brown Theatre
- ___ Tutoring
 Subject _____ Subject _____

This is to certify that I have been informed of all of the above EAP services and contract to participate in the above checked services:

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Mailing Address: _____

Phone #: _____ E-mail: _____

VITA

Mark Cotter is presently a counselor in the Educational Advancement Program, a federal TRIO program, at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. He has a Master's degree in Educational Psychology from that institution where he received the award for Outstanding Achievement in Educational Psychology. Previous to this, Mark had worked for several years with abused children and adolescents in foster care as director of an independent living group home, creator and director of a cooperative for teaching life skills, and as a caseworker and abuse investigator. As a volunteer advocate for children in foster care, he coached three teams of "emotionally disturbed" foster children to international competition in the Future Problem Solvers Program -- one team won the Directors' Choice Award and State Championship in their division, and another team was awarded Tennessee's Outstanding Achievement Award. Mark has taught creative drama techniques and sexual abuse curriculum for school teachers and has given workshops in creative problem solving.

Mark's chief interests have been in facilitating group change in young adults and disadvantaged students. His current research is focused on first-generation college students in exploring their perceptions and expectations of higher learning. Mark believes the Collaborative Learning program to be the natural culmination of his past work and experiences and looks forward to more international perspectives in learning.