COLLABORATIVE LEARNING:
SUSTAINING PENNSYLVANIA’S PRIVATE FORESTLAND

A Thesis in
Forest Resources

by

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ABSTRACT

The state of Pennsylvania has more than 744,500 private landowners making it the state with the largest number of private forest landowners (PFLs). These landowners own 12.5 million acres, nearly 70 percent of the state’s forestlands. Decisions made by PFLs can have long-reaching impacts on the ecological, social, and economic benefits forests provide available to all stakeholders. Stakeholders are PFLs and others who have a stake in private forestlands (loggers, wood products, natural resource professionals, commonwealth citizens). The Bureau of Forestry in Pennsylvania has made private forestlands an area of focused concern.

In attempts to improve outreach to private forestlands stakeholders, a learning community of 16 Department of Conservation and Natural Resource employees was brought together to take a introductory workshop series in Collaborative Learning. Collaborative Learning is an evolving and dynamic approach towards finding solutions and directions based in stakeholder experiences and knowledge. These 16 employees attended three workshops in State College during the 2006-2007 academic year. The program was evaluated through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and phenomenological interviews to discover the experience of the participants. The interviews explored attitudes, perceptions, and receptivity of the participants using Collaborative Learning in a natural resources context and addressed Collaborative Learning’s practicality in changing interactions with private forestland stakeholders and addressing other natural resource issues.

Interview analysis highlighted three categorical themes that describe participant experience with Collaborative Learning: direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops, the agency reflections, and facilitating in a Collaborative Learning way. Category one, the direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops, describes the changes and confirmations the participants experienced. Category two, the agency reflections, contains reflections on how their agency currently works and what they have identified as impediments to collaborative processes. Category three, facilitating in a Collaborative Learning way, contains the reflections of those who have facilitated and those who were members of a group facilitated in a Collaborative Learning way.

Leadership in the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources decided to use the Collaborative Learning framework in their regional approach and have started meeting with internal stakeholders, the Natural Resource Professionals (NRPs), in the summer of 2007. Further research is needed to understand the extent to which these changes will expand beyond the workshop setting and how this might continue to change interactions with private forestland stakeholders.
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Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

Pennsylvania has the largest number of Private Forest Landowners (PFLs) in the United States. Seventy percent of forested land in this state is controlled by roughly 744,500 PFLs (Metcalf, 2006). Beyond the ecological services it provides, private forestland holds diverse social and economic values for its owners and society as a whole. Decisions made by PFLs on the management of their land can have cascading effects on the ecological, social, and economic benefits available to all of the Commonwealth’s citizens.

Recognizing the important value of this private resource has caused a focused concern on how to effectively engage stakeholders with different backgrounds, experiences, values, and goals. Professional foresters are educated and trained to manage forest resources, but rarely are they prepared to use local knowledge and experience in creating better sustainable practices for all (Parker, 1992). Currently natural resource professionals (NRPs) in Pennsylvania and elsewhere draw upon their knowledge set to address management questions. This exchange, between NRP and PFL usually occurs on an expert-client basis. The PFLs are given directives about their land based on the natural resource professional’s science education and experience. Although the science may point to a certain solution, a forest landowner in this situation may feel that the answer does not fit their needs or their experience. Therefore, suggestions given by resource professionals could be ignored or poorly implemented by some stakeholders (Esseks and Moulton, 2000).
Because of the importance of private forestlands in Pennsylvania, an introductory course in Collaborative Learning was proposed for Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resource employees as a new way of engaging stakeholders and coming to solutions incorporating stakeholder knowledge and experience. This introductory course was a skills workshop, part of the statewide Private Forestland Initiative introduced in May 2005 to address the economic, demographic, and social realities related to private forests.

I evaluated this workshop from a social constructionist epistemological stance using qualitative methods. The main forms of data collected through qualitative means were participant observations, reflective journaling, semi-structured interviews, and phenomenological interviews. Action research was the framework through which I studied my practice as a facilitator. The objective of this study was to understand the experience of the participants in the Collaborative Learning workshop. Themes were developed from the data collected from the participants to discover their workshop experience. Results of studying this workshop were used to answer the following questions: What was the experience of the participants in the Collaborative Learning workshops? What are the attitudes, perceptions and receptivity of using Collaborative Learning for natural resources practitioners? And, is Collaborative Learning a viable tool for changing interactions with private forestland stakeholders and addressing natural resource issues?

The following chapter (chapter two) reviews related literature on the topic of private forestlands, the current role of NRPs and their interactions, theories on teaching
and learning, Collaborative Learning, and similar examples related to the workshop studied. Chapter three describes specific research methods, which include an overview of what was done in the workshops, the methodology used to study the experience and support for the choice of methodology. Chapter four is a synopsis of the collaborative learning workshop series. A thematic evaluation of the results formed from the interviews transcripts and participant observation notes is found in chapter five. The results section is followed by discussion and implications for NRPs (chapter six) and a conclusion (chapter 7).
Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pennsylvania’s Private Forestland

Pennsylvania, among all states, has the largest number of PFLs in the United States. Seventy percent of forested land in the state is controlled by approximately 744,500 PFLs (Metcalf, 2006). It is important to understand the owner of this important resource because decisions made by PFLs on the management of their land can have effects on the ecological, social, and economic benefits available to all of the Commonwealth’s citizens. What do we know about private forests and their owners?

Most previous private forestland studies have been conducted using quantitative research. Our understanding of PFLs has been derived from response surveys with multiple choice questions, with pre-set answers and choices developed from NRP’s understanding of forestland issues (Kluender and Walkingstick, 2000). Often the questions asked in these surveys are a reflection of NRP’s knowledge, and primarily address issues related to timber harvesting (Best and Wayburn, 2001). In forestry studies, terms such as “management” and “active,” are defined by accepted professional forestry standards, which are not easily understood by forestland owners (Bliss and Martin 1988, 1989). Because of this and the language professionals may use we fail to know “…who they [PFLs] are, what motivates them and how best to reach them.” (Best and Wayburn, 2001, p.113). In addition, quantitative studies show that PFLs are diverse in their management and reasons for owning. Their numbers are also increasing over time, and they typically own smaller and smaller parcels of land. Further, there are different behaviors and attitudes surrounding the ownership of land which are not easily studied.
with traditional quantitative studies and need to be approached with more participatory methods (Thompson et al., 2005).

PFLs in Pennsylvania own approximately 12.5 million acres of land, which is seventy percent of the forested land in the state (Lester, et al., 2003). The size of these landholdings is continually parcelized into smaller acreages and the tenure of ownership continues to decline. Recent studies of Pennsylvania’s private forestland show that only a small percentage of landowners use a resource professional when harvesting their land (Lester, et al., 2003). Only five percent of Pennsylvania’s PFLs have a written forest management plan (Lester, et al., 2003). This small percentage, though, comprises about twenty nine-percent of the privately owned forestland in the state. Many harvests conducted in Pennsylvania are unsustainable, meaning management practices used are unable to sustain native species (Jones, et al., 1995). In addition to the unsustainable harvesting on private forestlands, Pennsylvania faces a multitude of other ecological problems. Regeneration is hindered by high white-tailed deer populations, invasive species, insect pests, and competing vegetation (Lester, et al., 2003). Regardless of their poor treatment and myriad problems, the state’s private forestlands, along with public forests, and a shrinking industrial forest base, support an annual five billion dollar forest products industry; employing nearly a hundred thousand citizens (Butler and Leatherberry, 2004). In addition to the timber industry, these forests provide clean water, clean air, recreation and biological diversity (Lester, et al., 2003).
Interactions between Private Forest Landowners and Natural Resource Professionals

Interactions between PFLs and NRPs have typically been described as a one-on-one relationship. The NRP is normally the expert in this interaction, giving direction and advice to the PFL. According to Bransford, et al. (2000), when someone recognizes themself as an expert, they will draw upon their knowledge base and decide what is relevant. In this case, what is relevant in a NRP’s world is what they are educated and trained to do, which is to scientifically manage the resource according to science. Carr, et al. (1998), who studied the experiences of Forest Service employees using collaborative approaches, posit that foresters have typically viewed themselves as expert managers of forestland. When they use public participation in forest management, it has typically been treated as an educational opportunity, wherein the information sharing has been in one direction, from natural resource professional to the public (Carr, et al., 1998). This interaction is commonplace because NRP’s schooling rarely prepares them to use local knowledge and experience in collaboratively creating more sustainable and/or acceptable practices with stakeholders (Parker, 1992). Although the science may point to a certain solution, a stakeholder may believe this answer does not fit their needs, their objectives, or their experiences. Therefore suggestions given by resource professionals can often be ignored or poorly implemented (Esseks and Moulton, 2000).

Much has been written about the professional forester’s inability to incorporate society’s changing values into their management strategies. Given the large and varied values society holds for forests, Luckert (2006), drawing on Behan’s (1966) article, ascertains that the role of professional foresters is not to tell the public how to manage
their forests, but to manage according to society’s goals. Luckert (2006) contends that
the public sees professional foresters as public representatives of the forest resource and
that management should be performed according to the public’s needs. But public needs
are poorly understood or they are misunderstood by NRPs. Jones, et al. (1995) argue that
a forester’s inability to truly understand the private landowner is a major barrier to sound
management. They identified myths that foresters have held as truths in their interactions
with private landowners. These myths identify landowners as “…rural-dwelling and land
connected, anti-environmentalist, timber-oriented and intensely in favor of private
property rights” (Jones, et al., 1995, p. 41). They contend that when foresters hold onto
these historical myths reflecting their bias, it prevents them from truly helping the private
landowner in their current real-life situation. Furthermore, those working with forest
owners must not assume that those, who are not “active” by their standards, are
unknowledgeable or have no invested interest in their land (Steiner, 2003).

To work with society and not against it, a broader understanding of different
expertise concerning natural and social sciences is needed (Luckert, 2006). According to
Parker (1992), “…the ‘rationality’ of modern science as the primary guide…has blinded
professionals to the larger social purposes and daily realities of people” (p. 21). She
contends that although the public may not make the correct decision as far as the science
is concerned, “people are excellent risk managers within their own worlds” (Parker,
1992, p. 21). Professional foresters have missed the opportunity to recognize the social
importance of forests by sticking to long held models of management, predicted to have
the highest yield in the shortest amount of time, in lieu of managing for society’s vast and
varied goals. Unfortunately, this stance has caused a decline in the respect and trust the public has previously held for the forestry profession, making it harder for these professionals to make real differences in the forests in which they work (Luckert, 2006). Carr, et al., (1998) see a need for a shift in management philosophy held by the public, from a product-oriented to a more holistic approach. Landowners are also becoming more diverse and more numerous, making it necessary to approach private forestland issues in a more participatory method (Carr, et al., 1998; Paulson, 1998; Selin, et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 2005). Selin, et al., (2000) are convinced that “…all natural resource agencies and stakeholders need to initiate and sustain a more collaborative process to resolve disputes and advance a more shared vision of the future” (p.736).

Teaching and Learning

   Research on the interaction between NRPs and PFLs suggests a need for using a more collaborative approach, drawing on the experiences of all involved in the management of forestland (Selin, et al., 2000). Since this is the case, there is a need to understand adult learning and how collaboration occurs through the epistemology of social construction.

   Learning, according to Schunk (2000), “…is an enduring change in behavior or in the capacity to behave in a given fashion, which results from practice or other forms of experience” (p. 2). There are three criteria to this definition. First a change must be observed or the capacity for change must be recognized. It is recognizing a change in yourself or having the capacity for change, even if it does not occur simultaneously with the learning event. Second, change endures over time. Forgetting and relearning are
always possibilities. Third, learning happens through experience and practice (Schunk, 2000).

Moving from the definition and criteria for learning, there are three techniques identified as ways to teach. Type One teaching and learning occurs when the teacher is the primary source of information. This is typically identified as the lecture type of learning where the teacher transmits information he or she believes the student needs and the student will learn, if they so chose (Peters and Armstrong, 1998). This focus is on individual learning and the information only moves from teacher to student. This is based on “…a worldview that supports the teacher as authority, knowledge as a commodity, and the learner as an empty or nearly empty vessel” (Peters and Armstrong, 1998, p.79). In Type Two teaching and learning, the focus is still on individual learning. In this situation the teacher is still the primary source of information, but he or she allows sharing among the students. Learning occurs as students share information and make sense of new ideas. The lecture followed by discussion is an example of this teaching type. Type Three teaching and learning is represented by Collaborative Learning. The focus here is on the construction of new knowledge and the teacher becomes part of the group. Information therefore can be shared between all learners openly by using dialogue. Individual learning can still occur, but now new knowledge and understandings are also created by the group (Peters and Armstrong, 1998).

Collaborative Learning, an example of Type Three teaching and learning, demonstrates the importance of social construction. That is, “…human beings construct their perceptions of the world, and… no one perception is ‘right’ or more ‘real’ than
another” (Glesne, 2006, p.7). The focus is cognitive where emphasis is put on how people process information. It draws on the “…importance of social interactions in acquisition of skills and knowledge” (Schunk, 2000, p. 286). Vygotsky, as discussed in Schunk (2000), was the first to identify modern constructionism. He believed the environment could be altered for individual purposes and cognitive growth was possible through interactions and collaborations. The Zone of Proximal Development is a more specific theory that fits well with adult learning (Schunk, 2000). It recognizes that “…learners bring their own understanding to social interactions and construct meaning by integrating those understandings with their experiences in the context” (Schunk, 2000, p. 296).

Oftentimes when teaching adults, many approaches tend to fall into Types One and Two teaching and learning, wherein learning is handicapped because of the lack of sharing experiences. Adults come into a learning setting with a vast knowledge set and different backgrounds that must be taken into account when structuring a learning event. Furthermore in a workshop situation adults come with different skills, beliefs, and prior knowledge which will influence what they notice and how they interpret information presented (Bransford et al., 2000). This will ultimately affect the way they remember information, because they will construct knowledge based on prior experiences and these experiences are obviously different (Schunk, 2000).

A facilitator needs to capitalize on this knowledge, focus on what everyone brings to the process, and understand the social construction of knowledge. Peters and Armstrong (1998) have suggested several approaches for facilitating in a collaborative,
adult setting. It is best to engage your group in a collaborative event early on to effectively encourage sharing and trust among group members. Engagement may be sharing stories, talking around a news event, or anything that fits the setting, and having time just to reflect on interactions. A facilitator has a responsibility to acknowledge when the group is working collaboratively. But most importantly it is important to be open and allow others to follow the facilitator’s lead, to share, listen, and learn (Peters and Armstrong, 1998).

**Collaborative Learning**

Collaborative Learning is “…to labor together to produce knowledge and frequently to take action on the basis on new knowledge” (Peters, 1995, p. 269). It is an intentional group process where something new is created, something that was not present in the group or in the individuals before coming together (Muth, 2004). Collaborative Learning creates something new based on the lived experiences of those present; it is not an idea that one or a few create and everyone agrees to accept. It is an outcome, decision, or new understanding, made from all knowledge sets present, in which everyone has a stake and all are satisfied with because they created it together.

To ascertain that a Collaborative Learning event occurred, there are essential elements that must be present. These elements are dialogue, cycles of action and reflection, multiple ways of knowing, focusing on construction (Peters, 1995; Peters and Armstrong, 1998), and fellowship (Muth, 2004). I will discuss each in turn beginning with dialogue.
Dialogue

Isaacs (1999) defines dialogue as “...a way of thinking together and reflecting together. It is not something you do to people. It is something you do with people” (p. 9). From the Greek word dialogos, Logos meaning “the word” and dia meaning “through,” dialogue is something you do with others where meaning flows among those involved and something new emerges (Bohm, 1996). Dialogue draws on social construction theory wherein existing knowledge is used to build new knowledge (Bransford et al., 2000). Bohm (1996) sees dialogue as “…this shared meaning (that) is the ‘glue or ‘cement’ that holds people and societies together” (p. 1).

For dialogue to occur, Isaacs (1999) suggests that members of a group go through four stages. Stage one is politeness where the conversation among group members stays on neutral territory and individuals are cordial with one another. If a disagreement occurs or if individuals or subgroups realize there are differences among those involved, this defines stage two of dialogue: breakdown/conflict. As the name implies, this may be an uncomfortable condition. This stage can encompass recognition of differences and not necessarily dissolve to “conflict” as characterized by an exchange of harsh words. Moving past the breakdown/conflict stage, a group may achieve stage three; inquiry/reflection. In this stage, members of the dialogue inquire about differences among participants by asking questions and personally reflecting on assumptions that they may have that affect group interactions. At this stage, group members learn from their assumptions and further understand their beliefs and learn what others bring to the table (Muth et al, 2008). The final stage of dialogue is generative flow. The hallmark of
this stage is the creation of new knowledge by the group involved in the dialogue and from this a new outcome can occur (Isaacs, 1999). True dialogue is where “…each person is participating, is partaking of the whole meaning of the group and also taking part in it” (Bohm, 1996, p. 14).

Cycles of Action and Reflection

Cycles of action and reflection encourage participants to examine their assumptions and biases. This element is a repetitive cycle, wherein participants will act and reflect on their action, act and reflect repeatedly. Marshall (2001) defines a cycle of action and reflection as:

Planning to engage in some action or exploration, becoming immersed in the chosen territory in an appropriate way, noting as I go along, and then taking a step back and reflecting on what I have experienced and done, later moving on again to plan another cycle of engagement (p. 434)

Reflecting after each act can help participants redirect actions that might be guiding their group or individual direction. Parker (1992) extended this idea to NRPs by writing that, “…insight into how our beliefs have shaped our thinking and action in the past can help us identify the obstacles we face in changing the ideas that no longer work” (p. 22).

Marshall (2001) recognized two different ‘arcs’ of reflection. The inner arcs of reflection focus on noticing yourself in a situation. It is taking into account how you make meaning in your world. To do this, Marshall (2001) suggests paying attention to the assumptions used and listen for “…repetitions, patterns, themes, dilemmas, key phrases which are charged with energy or that seem to hold multiple meanings” (p. 433).

The second arc of reflection is the outer arc where one focuses outside of one’s self. This is similar to Isaac’s (1999) third stage of dialogue: inquiry and reflection. It involves
questioning of others’ ideas and discovery of any possible new knowledge occurs. Marshall (2001) observed that this questioning does not have to come to new knowledge or a conclusion; it could just be a way to “…monitor and critique my sense making without direct confirmation” (p. 434). Just like Isaacs (1999), Marshall (2001) realizes that inquiry and reflection do not necessarily lead to new knowledge, the process could always go back to earlier stages of politeness or conflict. Keeping track of reflections by journaling is a necessary part of the process and recognizing that “…any self-noticing is framed and conducted by selves beyond the screen of my conscious appreciation” (Marshall, 2001, p. 433). Any reflection is compiled by the social construct of one’s life world (Marshall, 2001).

Systematically, there are processes identified by Peters et al. (2002) to help groups or individuals reflect. DATA, one of those processes, is an acronym that stands for describe, analyze, theorize and act. Created by Peters et al., (2002) the first step of the reflection process is to completely describe the problem or task an individual or group wishes to address. The next step involves analyzing variables that contribute to what the individual or group wants to change. Important to this step is the need to examine assumptions that might surface as hidden beliefs about a situation. Participants should keep an open mind and should constantly question to clarify what they are hearing. Step three involves theorizing about different ways a problem could be solved and different solutions that could be possible. Finally, an individual or a group would act on the final theory developed and then further reflect on the outcome (Peters et al., 2002).
Multiple Ways of Knowing

The third element in Collaborative Learning involves recognizing and valuing knowledge of Collaborative Learning group members. This element requires appreciating participant experiences. It is valuing everyone’s array of life skills and learned knowledge. Husserl, discussed in Borda (2001), calls it “vivencia” or “erfahrung”, which means life experience and being empathetic towards those experiences of individuals. This involves recognizing and valuing people and the creations the group makes as contributors to their own understanding and as valid ways of making meaning. Here, recognizing the multitude of skills, beliefs, backgrounds, knowledge, and experience is acknowledging that people are socially constructed by these things. It affects what we notice and how we interpret our world (Bransford et al., 2000). These experiences and different views should be taken into account (Borda, 2001). As NRPs, Muth, et al. (2008), observe that we are not the only experts; to recognize multiple ways of knowing among stakeholders in private forestlands we must allow space for stakeholders to share their life experiences. This space could be as simple as time given to reflect on a meeting and to share experiences openly with others.

Focus on Construction

Focusing on construction is basically two ideas: focusing on new meanings and understandings within the group; and recognizing the social construction of the knowledge (McNamee and Gergen, 1999). Knowledge that is socially constructed recognizes the multitude of skills, beliefs, background, knowledge, and experience that influences what we notice and how we interpret things in our world (Bransford, et al.,
As individuals in a group talk to one another, they form meanings based on their world-view. “Content does not have meaning except in terms of the intentions of the people who are in communication with each other and the nature of the relationship they construct in the process of communicating” (Peters and Armstrong, 1998, p. 77). As NRPs, Muth, et al. (2008), suggest that we try to learn something every time we interact with someone or challenge an old idea we have previously held. More specifically, working with collaborative groups around natural resources there needs to be more emphasis on tangible benefits. Without focusing on construction “…collaborative efforts lose their effectiveness over time” (Carr, et al., 1998, p.770) and members will become tired of the process.

Fellowship

Finally, fellowship is increasing personal interactions with each other to form connections, build trust, and to foster community. This can be done through sharing stories, laughing, sharing a meal, and just catching up with each other (Muth, 2004). A more specific example of fellowship was witnessed among Oregon’s Applegate Partnership. They note “…the love of a place was shared as members walked forest trails, flew observation planes, held community potlucks, and drank beer” (Sturtevant and Lange, 1996, p.6). The creation of community through fellowship is an important element to “…help one another solve problems, build on other’s knowledge, ask questions to clarify and to suggest avenues towards goals” (Bransford, et al., 2000, p 25). This can be accomplished by connecting learning to aspects of participants’ lives. “People must be comfortable enough with each other to be open and willing to try new
ideas, and they must feel that others have their best interests at heart” (Muth, et al., 2008, p.7).

The Collaborative Facilitator

In addition to the elements of Collaborative Learning discussed above, there is a specific role a facilitator fills when leading a Collaborative Learning event. A facilitator in a Collaborative Learning setting is also responsible for helping the group dialogue, reflect, and generate new ideas. But unlike the traditional facilitator who is to withhold their opinion and remain neutral, the Collaborative Learning facilitator has a responsibility to share their viewpoint and is often an active member of the group, not an outside observer. The facilitator can comfortably step in and out of the leadership role (Bohm, 1996). The role of the facilitator is “…to get the group going …keep watch on it for a while… but his function is to work himself out of a job” (Bohm, 1996, p. 10). Most people are not accustomed to this type of interaction in a learning environment. Being able to step out of a leadership role requires an amount of humbleness and trust. Peters and Armstrong (1998) stress the importance of humbleness, because it is important for others to feel comfortable trusting the process to openly share their experiences and thoughts.

Research on Collaborative Group Processes

There are few examples of Collaborative Learning groups that use the same definition (Peters, 1995) as the one used in this study. But there are numerous similar studies of “collaborative” groups. Below I summarize similar collaborative studies and the methodologies they employed.
Collaborative planning, coordinated resource management, partnerships, and Collaborative Learning are just some examples of similar collaborative processes (Carr, et al., 1998; Paulson, 1998; Sturtevant and Lange, 1996; Muth, 2004). These examples used qualitative methods to collect data on group processes and experiences of group members. Both Paulson (1998) and Sturtevant and Lange (1996) studied collaborative groups using a case study framework. Carr et al. (1998) used telephone interviews and surveys to collect qualitative data on collaborative groups and, most similar to this research, Muth (2004) studied a Collaborative Learning group under the framework of action research using phenomenological data collection.

More specifically related to the experiences of a natural resource organization’s collaborative processes, Carr, et al. (1998), studied the experiences of U.S. Forest Service employees and their external partners from across the nation actively involved in collaborative planning to provide feedback on the effectiveness of collaboration. They defined collaborative planning as a “…collective process for resolving conflicts and advancing shared visions involving a set of diverse stakeholders” (Carr, et al., 1998, p. 768). The elements that set this type of collaborative process apart from others is the “…face-to-face dialogue, mutual learning, and voluntary participation” (Carr, et al., 1998, p. 768). To learn more about the collaborative experience and provide suggestions, an interview type questionnaire was distributed to 113 Forest Service employees and 15 external group partners, all of whom were identified as actively involved in the collaborative processes. Questions ranged from the benefits and barriers of working with
collaborative processes, to leadership support for the process, and future roles they saw for it as well (Carr, et al., 1998).

Results indicated that respondents valued collaborative processes in forest management from large scale strategic visioning to smaller scale trail projects, and respondents personally supported the efforts of the collaborative processes. However, Forest Service employees observed a reverse trend, seeing decreases in support as the level of agency position increased. For example, employees actively involved in collaborative processes showed strong support for what they were doing, but as the position within the agency increased from forest supervisor to regional office and Washington levels, perceived support for collaborative processes decreased (Carr, et al., 1998).

The most frequently reported benefits of the collaborative process were intangible ones, such as building networks and relationships amongst similar peoples. Benefits shared by both Forest Service employees and external partners were just having a place to share information, to work on improving communications, and learning to trust one another. On the flip side, barriers to the collaborative process included personal agendas, being too busy to commit the time needed, becoming sidetracked, and organizational culture. Forest Service employees specifically mentioned the organizational culture as a major barrier to collaboration. This finding stems from a gap “…between employee values and their perceptions of agency values [that] is evidence of the power of organizational culture and the difficulty in changing its orientation” (Carr, et al., 1998, p. 773). As for the future of collaborative processes, internal and external stakeholders
expressed concerns of a cure-all belief. Collaboration should not be considered a cure-all. Groups cautioned not to expect the process to fix all of the problems faced by an organization. Forest Service employees and their external partners saw the effectiveness of this process fading over time as people become more negative and tired of working together. The need for visible and tangible outcomes is necessary to feed the collaborative process (Carr, et al., 1998).

Coordinated Resource Management (CRM), another form of collaboration, was studied in Wyoming by Paulson (1998). This program was created in the early 1950s by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service and is now used by the Wyoming Department of Agriculture. Paulson (1998) examined how this collaborative program “…attempts to incorporate the values and interests of diverse stakeholders in the management of public rangelands” (p. 302). Her study more specifically discussed how different values and interests were included, what was needed for groups to work together, and limitations of this process and implications of these limitations. She collected data from interviews, meeting observations, and document analysis to create a case study of the collaborative groups.

Paulson (1998) found that participants in her study identified the greatest success in their CRM groups was improved communication and understanding, very much like the successes found in Carr, et al.’s (1998) Forest Service collaborative group study. CRM groups also reported a “greater understanding of the other side” (Paulson, 1998, pg. 307). In addition to these similar findings, there were many themes around working with different values and interests; most groups did not include diverse stakeholders.
adequately representing the issue. Group members were likely to not work out detailed objectives, resulting in misunderstanding and even decreased trust. There was a need to focus on win-win solutions because they did exist, but for groups to move forward there needed to be understanding about how people determine legitimacy for a topic or issue (Paulson, 1998).

Using the Collaborative Learning definition used in this study, Muth (2004) studied experiences of a Collaborative Learning community in Deer Lodge, Tennessee. She met monthly with the community members, NRPs, and stakeholders to discuss issues facing the community. Qualitative data in the form of phenomenological interviews, participant observation notes, and reflective journaling were used to understand the Collaborative Learning experiences of participants in the Deer Lodge community. From her data, Muth (2004) identified themes based on the experiences of community members and community stakeholders. Members of the Deer Lodge community experienced opportunity in Collaborative Learning. They mentioned getting reacquainted, getting to know each other, and recognizing the differences that each brought. They also believed they never focused on a direction or a goal for the group to specifically address (Muth, 2004).

**General Findings of Collaborative Processes**

The most commonly reported finding among collaborative groups is witnessing positive relationships (Carr, et al., 1998; Muth, 2004; Paulson, 1998; Sturtevant & Lange, 1996). Carr, et al. (1998), defined these outcomes as intangible (i.e. the network building among diverse groups, the building of trust, and just learning more about each other).
Paulson’s (1998) participants acknowledged improved communication and learning to understand each other as their biggest success. Muth’s (2004) community members defined opportunity as the central theme for their group: opportunity they found in getting reacquainted with members of their community and just learning more about each other, which they called “gaining a whole other view” (p. 70). Members of the Applegate Partnership spoke of empathy and understanding that laid the foundation for positive relations (Sturtevant & Lange, 1996). Findings from all groups identified a common purpose for meeting - building new and existing relationships.

All of the aforementioned examples addressed challenges facing groups. Specifically, what held them back from being collaborative? Time was a major issue mentioned with the Applegate partnership (Sturtevant and Lange, 1996) and Carr, et al.’s (1998) study of Forest Service collaborative groups. Some Applegate members argued that collaborative processes, such as addressing issues and coming to consensus, required entirely too much time and therefore increased the likelihood of failure (Sturtevant and Lange, 1996). The Forest Service study highlighted members’ outside commitments that consumed their time and prevented them from being collaborative (Carr, et al., 1998). The need for concrete direction was another common constraint. Muth’s (2004) participants believed they “never did zero in” (p. 72) and they needed direction from outside the group to tell them where to focus. Paulson’s (1998) participants needed direction in the form of detailed objectives. The lack of detailed objectives and direction, she observed, resulted in misunderstanding and even decreased trust (Paulson, 1998).
Three of the four groups examined in this section recognized the lack of diversity as a major pitfall for implementing collaborative processes (Muth, 2004; Paulson, 1998; Sturtevant and Lange, 1996). Muth’s (2004) study recognized the lack of age diversity in their group. They also noticed a lack of “movers and shakers” (p. 73), who they believed could really facilitate group success (Muth, 2004). Paulson (1998) found in her Forest Service study, that most groups do not include a diverse set of stakeholders adequately representing the issue. The groups she studied were dominated by NRPs. “With or without intent, most groups do not include representatives of the more divergent views that typify conflicts over Western rangelands” (Paulson, 1998, p. 309). To include a more diverse set of stakeholders, the Applegate Partnership made sure that the time commitments to the group were reasonable. Including diversity is part of their mission statement and they recognize the importance of local knowledge (Sturtevant and Lange, 1996).

From what I understand about collaborative groups, there remains a need to move in a collaborative direction. Selin et al., (2000) are convinced that “…all natural resource agencies and stakeholders need to initiate and sustain a more collaborative process to resolve dispute and advance a more shared vision of the future” (p.736). In order to study the Bureau of Forestry’s collaborative initiative, I used qualitative methods. The following paragraphs describe the methodological underpinnings used to learn more about the experience of the collaborative learning workshop participant.
Qualitative Research

My study explored the experiences of the members in a Collaborative Learning workshop. Through qualitative approaches, the intent was to learn more about the attitudes, perceptions, and receptivity for using Collaborative Learning in a natural resources setting and Collaborative Learning’s practicality in changing relationships and addressing other natural resource issues.

Qualitative research seeks to answer the question how or what, compared to quantitative studies that seek to answer why (Creswell, 1998). More specifically, Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as an “…inquiry process of understanding… that explore(s) a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complete, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p.15). Glesne (2006) expands on this idea by adding that the goal in qualitative research is to “…understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, (and) to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu” (p.4). Qualitative data seeks to describe in depth and detail the realities of a small number of people, resulting in a need to spend time in the natural setting of those the researcher is studying. In contrast, quantitative research uses large, generally random samples which are reduced to quantifiable bits of information in order to make generalizations about people and places (Glesne, 2006).

From definitions by Creswell (1998) and Glesne (2006), one can see that qualitative research is grounded in a social construction paradigm. Social construction purports that people construct their reality from their unique experiences. Those
experiences can have “…implications…for their lives and interactions with others” (Patton, 2002, p. 96). People have the ability to construct their own reality and it is important to recognize that “…the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently” (Patton, 2002, p.96), compared to quantitative studies wherein groundings are found mostly in logical positivism paradigms. Quantitative researchers believe that they can continue to add to a “…body of knowledge until we could come to know how the world worked” (Glesne, 2006, p.7).

Knowing that qualitative research is grounded in a social constructionist paradigm, one can understand the ontology of qualitative research as being subjective and socially constructed (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006). Reality is created by the participants in the situation. There is also a multitude of realities represented among any group, such as the researcher, the participants and the audience reading about the study (Creswell, 1998). The ontology of quantitative research, by comparison, is fixed, measurable reality that one can come to understand the world through quantitative measures (Glesne, 2006).

Quantitative and qualitative research methods also differ in the relational expectations of the researcher/researched interaction. The quantitative epistemological assumption ascertains that a distant, objective stance is necessary. But qualitative researchers try to minimize the distance by continuously reporting on their values, bias, and assumptions (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006). The researcher’s influence is seen throughout the study and they recognize the realities of their study participants by “…exploration with the participants about their perceptions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 6).
Traditionally, in any research study, decisions are made by the lead researcher. This power structure opens doors for a rethinking of research roles, design, and implementation, especially by action researchers who raise important questions about participant-oriented research.

**Phenomenological Research Methodology**

A phenomenological methodology was used in this study to further understand the experience of the NRP in the Collaborative Learning setting. Phenomenology is the study of lived experience (Creswell, 1998; Manen, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1989). Manen (1990) states that “…phenomenology is the study of the life world - the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it” (p. 9). Its methodology involves the collection of rich, dense descriptions of people’s experiences and concentrated analysis to discover the “essence” of the experience. The “essence” of an experience is the central meaning that is shared by all who have experienced the same phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Polkinhorne, 1989). Phenomenology began with the writings of Husserl, a twentieth century philosopher who rejected the “…positivist and empiricist conception of the world as an objective universe of facts” (Kvale, 1983, p. 184).

To understand the basics of phenomenology as a methodology, one must understand the three philosophical tenets brought forth by Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The first of these tenets is defined by the phrase “to the things themselves” (Merleau-Ponty, 2000, p.29). Husserl was the first to explain this tenet - it means to let little interpretation stand in the way of the first-person view. For a
researcher, the best representation of the experience will be the one presented by the person having the experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2000). This meshes well with the social construction view of qualitative research - that all reality is socially constructed. A closely related tenet is Heidegger’s “being in the world.” This means that people and the world are never separate from one another and they co-constitute each other (Merleau-Ponty, 2000). The final tenet is Merleau-Ponty’s idea of intentionality. Intentionality draws you to notice the direction in which an experience occurs. It is what and how we experience as an individual (Merleau-Ponty, 2000).

The phenomenological interview is the way one goes about discovering the essences of an experience. The interview begins with an opening question, which the researcher follows with subsequent questions based on what the interviewee says. With following questions, the researcher is mindful “… not to go beyond what we learn in our conversations” (Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p.25). To understand someone’s first person world, the question to answer is what, not why. The goal is to get the individual perspective of the experience. “Individual perspectives do not confuse understanding but provide it with depth and richness” (Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p. 25). During the interview, the researcher can take notes on the nonverbal communication that occurs and their own interactions as a result of the dialogic relationship (Kvale, 1983). The information collected will be a direct result of the interaction of interviewer and interviewee; it is an interpersonal situation (Kvale, 1983).

It is best for the researcher to transcribe the interview immediately following the interview. It is important to pay attention to what is said, but also to what is not said, by
making notes of pauses and voice changes (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). Once the
transcription is completed the next step is analysis; ultimately reducing the data until the
essences specific to the experience are identified. It is a continuous process, relating the
parts to the whole using the hermeneutic circle. Any passages that describe an
experience “…are always understood in terms of their relationship to the larger whole”
(Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p. 35). In some analysis situations, the researcher chooses to
employ the perspectives of an analysis group. An analysis group provides their own
unique perspectives and interpretation to the discussion. Its members also help provide
feedback on the interview techniques the researcher employs.

The analysis steps by the research group, according to guidelines set by the
University of Tennessee Phenomenological Research Group (Thomas and Pollio, 2002),
start with reading the transcribed interviews aloud. To recreate the tone of the interview,
the researcher reads the part of the interviewee. Another member of the analysis group
assumes the researcher’s part. The reading continues until an analysis group member is
struck by something read, whether it is a particular phrase or word. The reading then
stops and the analysis group will discuss the point, trying to find meaning in what struck
them. They try to understand what was significant about the particular phrase or word
and then compare it to what was heard in the complete set of interviews. This discussion
continues until it is exhausted; this exhausting tells the group that the essence of the
experience has been found. The group then returns to the transcript and the process of
reading and analyzing parts and the whole continues. Deciding what is thematic is not a
matter of simply identifying and counting instances of an element, rather “…the
researcher ponders not only specific words but the meaning of those words in the context in which they were uttered and their relationship to the participant’s narrative as a whole” (Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p. 37). Once themes are developed the goal is to seek commonalities across all the interviews. Quotes are compared, finding common ideas, and placed into quote tables. Quote tables are lists of quotes that support a shared meaning among all interviews - essentially the essences of the phenomenon.

**Action Research**

Because human knowledge is jointly created as a result of a collaborative learning event, it is important to understand all experiences including the researcher’s. Action research can be used by a researcher or practitioner to study, revise, and act on her practice. Defined basically, action research involves attempting to change something within a practice or to solve a problem that has been identified by the practitioner (Glesne, 2006). Reason and Bradbury (2001) add that “…action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview” (p.1).

Peters, et al.’s (2002) definition focuses more on the individual practitioner:

*Action Research is a systematic and critical study of their work by individual practitioners…the aim being to revise their practical theories in the light of these findings plus the context of their practice, and to act on subsequently revised theories in the interest of improving their practices* (p. 5).

In this framework, the role of the researcher is different from that found in most typical study settings. The researcher is not the sole source of information; rather, she is to act as a facilitator, using her abilities to help the participants’ efforts (Glesne, 2006). Furthermore, the researcher is the subject of the inquiry - studying, revising, and acting
on her practice (Peters, et al., 2002). Unlike conventional research where it is important to remain objective, researchers doing action research are “…legitimate subjects of their inquiries…there is no logical way to separate them from their own practices” (Peters, et al., 2002, p.3).

To equally present work in action research, there are three dimensions of inquiry. The researcher must understand her role in the research, integrate the work of the participant partners in the research, and finally decide how to present the finding in a wider context (Bradbury and Reason, 2001; Tolbert, 2001). Tolbert (2001) identifies these dimensions as first, second, and third person. In the first person role, the researcher inquires into her life. In the second person “…the researcher engages with others in some form of joint inquiry into their mutual interests” (Peters, et al., 2002, p.5). Finally, the third person dimension of inquiry looks at expanding the first or second person dimension into a wider context of communities and groups. The third person dimension inquiry is used to influence future communities into their mutual interests.

The following chapter covers the specific methods I used to understand the collaborative learning workshop experience. The workshop experience was researched through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and phenomenological interviews. To understand my role as facilitator of the process, action research was used as described below.
Chapter 3. Methodology

Introduction

The intent of this USDA Forest Service grant funded project was to evaluate the use of Collaborative Learning in natural resource settings as a way to address private land issues. This study looked specifically at the experience of a group of Pennsylvania NRPs in their Collaborative Learning group. I wanted to know if Collaborative Learning was a viable tool for changing interactions with private forestland stakeholders and addressing natural resource issues. The study used qualitative means to understand the experience of Collaborative Learning workshop participants and to investigate my role as a facilitator. Understanding my role is necessary because of my involvement in the planning, facilitating, and studying the workshop. Planning and facilitating the workshop series was a role I shared with the Penn State project team; James Finley, Professor of Forest Resources, and Allyson Muth, Forest Stewardship Program Assistant.

The study’s themes were developed from semi-structured interviews Dr. Muth and I conducted as an evaluation between the November and March 2007 workshops, and the phenomenological interviews I conducted following the workshops. To support these themes, I collected participant observation notes and I reflective journaled during the workshops, meetings following the workshops, and before and/or after each individual interview.

Study Site

The Collaborative Learning workshops were held in State College, Pennsylvania, at a local conference center during September and November 2006, and March 2007.
The semi-structured mid-cycle evaluation interviews occurred in the study participants’ office, and participant observations occurred in their respective regions as well as in the workshop setting. The phenomenological interviews were either conducted in person at the participant’s office or by telephone from my office.

Study Participants

To engage interest in the use of Collaborative Learning to build staff capacity, this project began with a presentation in January of 2005 at The Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) Bureau of Forestry staff meeting. This presentation informed prospective participants about Collaborative Learning, and how it could enhance their interactions with private forestland stakeholders.

In January 2006, another presentation on Collaborative Learning was given at a DCNR Bureau of Forestry staff meeting. A new regional approach was also introduced at this meeting. The intent of this approach is to change Bureau of Forestry DCNR employee interactions with private forestland stakeholders. Bureau of Forestry employees at this meeting were asked to form small groups to brainstorm on identifying skills they would need to work with the full range of stakeholders involved with private forestlands. From this brainstorming session, we merged Collaborative Learning with the regional approach and created a workshop curriculum around their self-identified needs.

In May 2006 the Penn State project team, (Kerlin, Muth, Finley), met in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania with Bureau leadership and presented a more detailed outline for proposed workshops. This was done to ensure we were meeting the agency’s needs. In June 2006, a presentation at a Bureau of Forestry staff meeting more specifically
addressed the proposed Collaborative Learning workshop content. Anyone interested in these workshops was asked to contact the Penn State project team. This was the beginning of participant recruitment. Some individuals expressed interest immediately following the presentation and they were asked to join us in September for the first workshop. Bureau leadership also helped identify additional participants based on their role within their organization. The first workshop had 16 participants, identified through these two processes, who represented a diverse set of employees (seven were field staff and eight were central office staff from Bureau of Forestry, and one was considered centralized staff from another DCNR Bureau). After the first session one field staff member left the group because of a position change. Following the second workshop another field staff member dropped out due to a job change, and a central office staff member left for military duty, leaving thirteen participants in the study.

I began the September workshop by addressing my proposed project to study the experience from the Collaborative Learning workshop. The participants were given informed consent forms (Appendix A) to read over and were encouraged to ask any further questions. These consent forms guaranteed research confidentiality and noted that all participants would be given a pseudonym. All agreed to participate in the study and signed consent forms.

Objectives

Workshops were created around the elements of Collaborative Learning to engage NRPs in different ways to work with private landowners. The specifics of the workshops can be found in the next chapter.
I wanted to answer the following questions: What was the experience of the participants? Is Collaborative Learning a viable tool for NRPs to use in changing interactions with PFLs and addressing other natural resource issues? What were the attitudes, perceptions, and receptivity of the participants using Collaborative Learning in a natural resources setting?

How I Studied This Experience

Previous research evaluating collaborative groups has mostly been conducted qualitatively (Carr, et al., 1998; Paulson, 1998; Sturtevant and Lange, 1996). All of the collaborative groups discussed in the literature review of this thesis explored the experience of the natural resource professional as well as other stakeholders through qualitative methods, but they did not include an exploration into their role as researchers (Carr, et al., 1998; Paulson, 1998; Sturtevant and Lange, 1996). Other research on Collaborative Learning groups, like the group in this study, has also been conducted qualitatively, but included some exploration into the researcher’s role in addition to the experiences of the study participants (Muth, 2004).

The following section explains the qualitative methodology employed to understand the experiences of the participants in the Collaborative Learning workshops described in this thesis.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured evaluation interviews were conducted with the participants to “…learn what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions, and how events shaped their thoughts and feelings” (Weiss, 1994, p.1). One semi-structured
interview was conducted following the November workshop as an evaluation at the midpoint in the workshop sequence. The focus was on challenges and excitement for Collaborative Learning. A second semi-structured interview occurred at the end of the workshops to investigate my practice in the Collaborative Learning work. The focus of the second set of interviews was on my role in the workshops and to inform my future work I might have facilitating Collaborative Learning in natural resources.

A semi-structured interview, “…is neither a free conversation nor a highly structured questionnaire” (Kvale, 1983, p. 174); instead an interview guide is used to focus on a theme. I used a guide to focus the interviewee on their experience with Collaborative Learning. A semi-structured interview is also described as a conversation between two people, talking about a shared theme (Kvale, 1983). The structure for the March workshop was tailored in response to the participants’ needs as they expressed them in the first semi-structured interview. Responses in the semi-structured interview focused on my role and my practice.

Phenomenological Interviews

Phenomenological interviews were conducted with each Collaborative Learning workshop participant. The focus was on their experience using Collaborative Learning methods they were taught and asked to practice. I conducted all the interviews over the summer of 2007. Eight interviews were conducted in the participants’ offices, and five were conducted by telephone. Interviews lasted from 40 minutes to 1 hour and 48 minutes. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. All identifying information (names of participants, job titles, locations) was kept confidential with the
use of pseudonyms. The Pennsylvania State University Office of Research Protection protocols were followed (Appendix B). Study participants were informed of study procedures during the first workshop in September 2006, and each signed a consent form (Appendix A).

The phenomenological question posed was, “Can you describe an experience you were struck by when you were a member of the Collaborative Learning workshops?” Later in the interview participants who had become active Collaborative Learning facilitators were asked, “Can you describe an experience you were struck by when you were facilitating a group in a Collaborative Learning way?” And those who became members of these facilitated groups were asked, “Can you describe an experience you were struck by when you were a member in a group that was being facilitated in a Collaborative Learning way?”

Bracketing Interview

Before engaging in phenomenological research, the researcher is advised to examine her assumptions through a bracketing interview. Husserl, first introduced the concept of bracketing or *epoche* (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). In phenomenological research, bracketing “…is an intellectual activity in which one tries to put aside theories, knowledge, and assumptions about a phenomenon” (Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p.33). Bracketing focuses on becoming aware of what you bring to the table. Through it you become aware of your influence in the research, the interviewing, and better understand where you are relative to the research project. I had a member of Penn State’s Phenomenological group conduct a phenomenological interview with me. This group
was made up of graduate students and faculty from various backgrounds and disciplines who met once a week to aid in the analysis of the phenomenological interviews. During the interview, I answered the same question I was going to ask of my participants “…to sensitiz[e]… [me] to any potential demands that [I] might impose on participants either during the interview or in its subsequent interpretation” (Thomas and Pollio, 2002, p. 33).

By doing this bracketing interview, I became aware of the influence I might have during the phenomenological interviews. This influence could be in the form of researcher bias, or any capacity causing an effect in an indirect or intangible way (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). This comes from the understanding that “…the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of the individual” (Creswell, 1998, p.53). This goes to say that a researcher can only interpret based on her individual lived experiences. Bracketing or *epoche* does not expunge one of their biases; rather, it suspends them, so one is aware of them and their influence. Kvale (1983) says this better by stating that bracketing “…does not involve an absence of presuppositions, but a consciousness of one’s own presuppositions” (p. 185).

**Participant Observation**

To support the themes from the phenomenological interviews, I collected data during the workshop as participant observation notes. The goal of participant observation is to observe, experience, and record in detail so that someone unfamiliar with the setting can better understand what is going on (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 2006). My role during the workshops moved on a continuum from a being an outsider to a complete insider. In my role, I collected descriptive and reflective notes on my experiences, reactions, and
learnings (Creswell, 1998) and as the participant observer I “…learn[ed] first hand how the actions of the research participants correspond to their words; [saw] patterns of behavior; experience[d] the unexpected…and develop[ed] a quality of trust, relationship, and obligation to others” (Glesne, 2006, p. 49).

According to Glesne (2006), participant observation notes should be descriptive, analytic, and autobiographical. The notes should be descriptive to the point where the recorder should be able to “…a year later, to visualize the moment, the person, the setting, the day” (Glesne, 2006, p. 56). It is also important to be analytical about the things that happen to you by writing down your ideas, feelings, and reflecting on what is going on. To be autobiographical in my notes, I kept track of my behavior and emotions. I personally kept a journal on how my actions and interactions shaped what I was seeing.

**Action Research**

Because human knowledge is jointly created as a result of a collaborative learning event, it is important to understand all participants’ experiences in this process, including my role as facilitator. To investigate my role as facilitator, I used action research to study, revise, and act on my practice. The way I used action research fit best with Peters et al.’s (2002) definition:

*Action Research is a systematic and critical study of their work by individual practitioners…the aim being to revise their practical theories in the light of these findings plus the context of their practice, and to act on subsequently revised theories in the interest of improving their practices* (p. 5).

This project followed steps outlined by Muth’s (2004) action research study relative to the researcher’s role, the participants’ role, and how they affect natural resources overall. According to Muth (2004), the study “…begins with a deep reflective
understanding of the context in which the practice or problems within the practice occur” (p. 47). Here, the researcher can reflect on her own personal understanding and perception of the problems. Ideas that might address the problems are identified by reflection into one’s practice. Outcomes are identified by a formal investigation and the researcher reflects on their meaning “…with the intent to change the practice in some way” (Muth, 2004, p.47). To actually create change as a result of the outcomes is the final step in an action research study.

To better understand my role in the Collaborative Learning workshops, following the phenomenological interviews I asked participants questions on what they saw as my purpose. These questions strove to examine my role as a facilitator and to inform any future roles that I might have in natural resources. I posed the following questions to better understand my role: “What did you see as my role in the Collaborative Learning workshops?” “What did I do well?” and “What can I improve upon?” The intent of questioning was to understand “…more about [my] practices and how they can be improved” (Peters, et al., 2002, p. 3).

Data Analysis

Analysis of the phenomenological interviews was carried out as described in the phenomenological methodology section in this thesis’s literature review chapter. The Penn State Phenomenological Research Group provided their perspectives and interpretation of these Collaborative Learning interviews. All members of the Penn State Phenomenological Research Group were certified by the Pennsylvania State University’s Office of Research Protections to conduct social science research. Group members
signed consent forms assuring participant confidentiality before analyzing interviews (Appendix A). The Research Group helped identify representative quotes from the transcripts that supported themes. Further, themes were supported by the semi-structured interviews and participant observation notes. I was the only analyst for questions that addressed my role.
Chapter 4. COLLABORATIVE LEARNING WORKSHOPS

Introduction

This project endeavored to discover the attitudes, perceptions and receptivity for using Collaborative Learning by natural resources practitioners and to further explore whether or not it is a realistic, useful approach for addressing natural resource issues. Our initial planning for this workshop series involved seven contact days to teach and develop Collaborative Learning skill sets, reflect on the practice of being a Collaborative Learning facilitator of community groups, and assess the merits of the workshops. Based upon group participant schedules and work commitments, as well as a lack of initiative to begin facilitating groups, we shortened the workshop series to four contact days. The following is a synopsis of the workshop series held in State College, Pennsylvania over the 2006-2007 academic year. All power point presentations and workshop notes supporting this synopsis can be found in Appendix C.

September 25 and 26, 2006

Our first workshop was held September 25 and 26 and consisted of discovering the elements of Collaborative Learning. Hands-on training involved exploring traditional educational approaches, understanding adult learning, discussing successes and failures, and learning how to collaborate. The objectives were to help the participants understand Collaborative Learning approaches and to charge them to identify partners for a self-initiated project in work-related communities.

The first activity of the workshop was administrating the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator personality assessment. The assessment and interpretation was done by an
outside professional. Conversations with participants since this experience found positive feedback for the Myers-Briggs assessment, as they have used it to understand others and themselves in group situations. It was very apparent the group contained diverse personalities. Extroverts and introverts benefited from interacting with each other in a safe collaborative environment created for the workshops.

Immediately following Myers-Briggs assessment, we moved on to The DNA of Leadership test (Glaser, 2006, Chapter 1). The short leadership test was scored and was followed by a short presentation on the most common leadership theories (Appendix C). This presentation focused on leadership and compared it to facilitation: where does facilitation fit with leadership? Notes taken during the discussion yielded a handout on good facilitator traits and skills; this was sent to participants after the workshop (Appendix C). The discussion of where facilitation fits into leadership skills seemed to cause confusion. This was noted and clarified in later workshops.

The remainder of the first day involved presentations and discussions around adult learning, Collaborative Learning, and dialogue. While planned as separate presentations, these three discussions ran together because they are interrelated. Adults are most comfortable learning in a collaborative setting wherein they test new knowledge against their own experience and that of their peers. Dialogue is an important ingredient in this Collaborative Learning process. There were numerous questions around teaching and learning where the “expert” acts as a member of the group and participates in the construction of new knowledge. Participants viewed themselves as the teacher in some situations and, as one participant put it, they didn’t know how to “take off the agency
hat,” meaning how do they allow others (i.e., non-professionals) to contribute significantly to natural resources decisions. This inability to “take off the hat” was attributed to society’s perspective, wherein professionals have to know all the answers. This led to a discussion on how, in typical interactions, they try to sway people to the right answer concerning the science of the situation; however, in Collaborative Learning participants try to dialogue to create mutually beneficial, new outcomes. For this to happen, the participants believed they had to be humble, take risks, know how to let some things go, and learn how to trust. One participant said about the dialogue process, “As resource professionals we need to open ourselves up to ask others, “what do you think about it?” Collaborative Learning made sense to them at an individual level. What they had the most trouble with was how to incorporate this idea into their daily job responsibilities and if it would be perceived by their supervisors as a valid way of working.

To conclude the first day, a few people shared stories about how they became natural resources professionals. Later, sharing stories was mentioned repeatedly as one of their favorite workshop events; they were able to learn another side of their colleagues and find commonalities in their experiences. Using these stories, the group practiced dialogue. Before concluding the day, we asked for feedback. They expressed concerns over “what does it mean to be a professional?” How does Collaborative Learning relate to natural resources and were there concrete examples to help them frame Collaborative Learning for their situations? Before they left for the day we asked them to think about
how they encourage conversation or break down conversation. This became a reflection point the following day.

The second workshop day started with participant reflection on the previous day. Once again, the “agency hat” became a conceptual stumbling block for operating in a Collaborative Learning way. The group talked about the importance of humanizing experiences with the public, by “leaving the agency hat at the door.” That it is easy to immediately put on the “agency hat” when interacting with the public was a commonly shared perspective. They believed this happened because of agency expectations; however, they acknowledged the importance of recognizing value in others’ opinions and experiences. Another significant question was how to get to solutions with Collaborative Learning and perceived frustrations with using Collaborative Learning because it can be very time consuming.

From the reflections on the previous day, we moved into creating ground rules for good dialogue. Some rules participants believed necessary for dialogue were:

- Park agency hat at the door
- Ask for clarity
- Encourage active participation
- Promote clarity of feelings
- Recognize participants as “co-learners”
- Recognize different “comforts” of others (Myers-Briggs experience)
- Allow disagreement - don’t demean perspectives
- Leave sarcasm at the door
- Keep a sense of humor
- Recognize that all “data” or knowledge is valid
- Keep a positive attitude

These activities led to a discussion about assumptions. We helped participants become more aware of assumptions they brought to conversations by again practicing
dialogue around one of their stories and reflecting on what they brought to the conversation.

The day ended with a short presentation and a discussion about identifying community partners. The intent was to help them begin building stakeholder groups around private lands. We asked them to think about working with partners, reaching out beyond their comfort zones, and considering ways to approach people. These ideas were recorded and returned to them later as a handout (Appendix C). Participants left the workshop with the charge to identify groups with whom they could work in a Collaborative Learning way and to begin the process of creating a learning community with their groups.

November 14, 2006

We gathered the workshop participants for one day in November. The day’s objectives were to reinforce previous training and to start identifying processes for initiating their learning community project. Presentations, discussions, and activities included blending skill sets, transparency, understanding bias, meeting logistics, and helping people find common ground.

Initially, this day was much less interactive than experienced in September. The possible disconnect was attributed to a two month time span between workshops. There was not much dialogue around the first couple of questions used to start the day. We asked about using Collaborative Learning: how they see themselves using it; and their experience if they have tried it. It was apparent no participants had tried using any of the
material. We reminded them of resources given in September and available in their notebooks.

To practice the facilitation style discussed in September, participants were divided into two groups. In each group, there was a facilitator and recorder and others served as active listeners contributing to the dialogue. Every eight minutes roles changed. To engage the groups, we asked them to facilitate a conversation around issues driving land parcelization. This was good facilitating practice, because the issue was pertinent to their work experience. By asking the right questions, it helped them draw out the experiences of the group.

Most of the day’s discussion centered on team learning and consensus building, which focused on perceived difficulties when working with others. The challenge of dealing with “jerks” came out numerous times. They wanted to learn how to deal with difficult people and how to get them to participate. Some of the approaches suggested by the group were to walk in their shoes, to take an empathetic approach towards the “jerks.” They mentioned that sometimes they put on their “agency hat,” when instead they should try to dialogue, which is more “human.” This thread remained throughout the day and was reiterated at day’s end.

After lunch, the focus was on blending skill sets. The introductory presentation was on people skills, an overview of the theoretical literature and tied into their Myers-Briggs assessment. To actively practice blending skill sets, they were challenged to build a chair with wooden dowels and rope. Participants were split into two teams and the teams were further divided into thirds. Each third was taught a different skill to
contribute to this project before reassembling teams. The challenge was timed and their chair had to support a teammate twelve inches off the ground for thirty seconds. After testing the chairs, we talked about this process and blending skill sets. We reinforced this project through discussions about their job experiences.

The final discussion focused on creating their learning community and making explicit their assumptions and biases; how they see themselves using Collaborative Learning and what they expect to happen when working with groups. We had anticipated a much more rapid investment into the Collaborative Learning skills than had actually occurred. This discussion gave us pause and changed the structure of subsequent project workshops. Some of the skills participants believed they still lacked, and needed before investing completely were:

1) How to rally “jerks” around a cause, ways to deal with difficult people, helping them participate, moving them out of the “jerk” role.
2) Building confidence
3) Critiquing real situations – peer reviews

As a result of apparent reluctance to move forward, we canceled the January and February workshops and decided to use those months to conduct evaluation interviews with all the participants. The evaluation focused on the challenges and excitement for using Collaborative Learning. The interviews were face-to-face in Bureau of Forestry offices and followed the outline shown below:

Questions for Collaborative Learning Workshop Participants

- What have you been “struck by” in the Collaborative Learning workshops? What about the experience stands out to you?
- What makes sense to you about Collaborative Learning?
- What is hard for you to wrap your head around?
• How do you see yourself using facilitation skills in general and Collaborative Learning skills in particular?
• What do you need to feel readily able to pull Collaborative Learning and facilitation skills out of your toolkit?
• What have you liked about the workshops?
• What can we do better?
• Do you feel that these workshops had merit? That others should attend?
• Was this workshop worth your time?

Semi-Structured Interview Results

Through these semi-structured interviews, we learned we had made Collaborative Learning more complex than needed. Most of the participants wanted the workshop more concrete and less theoretical. One participant said, “You have to be more concrete - what this is, why do it, how to do it, where it is used.” Most participants agreed with this statement and suggested less reading and more “quick and dirty” cheat sheets on topics such as facilitation. They also told us they frequently used cheat sheets they had received. They wanted information in a format that would easily fit in their pockets for referral as they facilitated groups.

They also acknowledged the need to find “the right circumstances” for Collaborative Learning. They asked for case study videos to help them critique “what is going on,” “practical exam,” “observations and critiques,” and “looking over agendas” before a meeting. We incorporated these suggestions into the March meeting agenda covered below. In addition to the March meeting, we agreed to attend, observe, and offer feedback to meetings facilitated in a Collaborative Learning way. We offered to help with agendas and encouraged them to find ways to incorporate Collaborative Learning facilitation into their practice.
The March workshop reflected input from the evaluation. Especially, a suggestion on a more compact workshop program was created. All participants acknowledged the usefulness and merit of the workshops. One participant said, “It’s necessary, fair, a really important part of the DCNR motto - Stewardship, Partnership, Service. If we are to put any weight to those terms then we have to collaborate.” But there were concerns about “preaching to the choir,” that there was a need to incorporate more thought into who would benefit from this workshop. The suggestions on who should attend ran the gamut of DCNR employees - from every employee to only field staff employees.

Throughout the interviews, it was clear we needed to focus more on how participants could use Collaborative Learning in their daily jobs. We set Collaborative Learning up as a bounded entity, wherein you have to follow exactly certain steps to achieve success. Realistically, individual elements of Collaborative Learning happen everyday in an individual’s life. We asked them to hold Collaborative Learning as an ideal to which to ascribe, knowing that it takes a large amount of hard work, invested time, and openness to those moments when the elements arise. We attempted to reinforce this idea in March as well as provide tools such as facilitation cards and case study examples to help clarify take home messages.

From lessons learned in the evaluation interviews, we decided to meet one last time in March. The following covers the specifics of the March 20 workshop, which was tailored to the participants’ expressed needs and was designed to solidify those skills and ideas introduced during the previous three contact days.
March 20, 2007

The first activity was a group check-in: we asked what was on their mind today, how were they doing? They mentioned moving forward with collaborative learning in their regions and starting fresh. They enjoyed the “cheat sheets” and used them in their interactions, but the long break made it hard to recall everything they had learned. To address this, we reviewed everything in chronological order, spending more time on salient points. A conversation grew around a slide about facilitator characteristics, facilitating dialogue, and dialogue. At this point we shared a cheat sheet (Appendix C) on facilitating in a Collaborative Learning way and a conversation occurred centered on being humble and participating as a group member – realizing that sometimes it is okay to say, “I don’t know the answer but maybe we can find the answer together.” They also mentioned that taking time at the end of a meeting just to ask “what did we do good today” could add reflection time and a sense of comfort to the group.

We asked a participant to share ground rules he had created to help his group work more collaboratively. He planned to work collaboratively with a group comprised of central office employees. His rules addressed equal power and recognized that everyone brings value to the conversation. The rules resonated with the group.

Following the conversation that emerged from this participant’s examples, we discussed Collaborative Learning actions others had taken. A few members shared their experiences. In response to the request for case study videos, we showed ACE Basin in South Carolina (Halbert and Taylor, 1995). The video purports to show the benefits of involving stakeholders, by describing experiences of NRPs concerned with preserving a
large ecologically important landscape. However, it is clear from interviews that area citizens were not involved in the process. They expressed frustration with the decisions professionals made without their involvement and how these decisions were affecting their businesses, jobs, and community. We used this video to create discussion of different outcomes from Collaborative Learning facilitation. Some wondered, “If you can get it done, do you just get it done?” Others saw that it was “not what everyone wanted” and to “broaden your impact, find commonality.”

Hoping to facilitate the application of lessons learned during the workshops, participants had been asked to bring agendas for meetings they had planned or hosted. We broke into smaller groups to review these agendas and to offer suggestions for incorporating Collaborative Learning elements into meetings. This exercise created awareness that agendas should include time for people to talk about a subject all could discuss. Following the small group discussion, we returned to the large group to discuss community. How can they support each other? How can we support others in DCNR? How can we support them? Observations included getting to know the members of your group by setting five minutes aside at the end of meetings, using this training with all new employees, and championing support by using and practicing Collaborative Learning. This community talk ended our last meeting in the workshop series.

**Moving Forward**

To support workshop participants as they work more collaboratively in their practice, we offered to consult with them on structuring meetings and to observe and provide feedback on their Collaborative Learning facilitation. We have done this at
numerous meetings and have assured participants that we are available for any future needs. Participants noted they had at this point received sufficient information and resources on Collaborative Learning. But unlike similar skills workshops of this type (Steven Covey’s 7 Habits), we attempted to create a community of resources among group members to aid their practice and offered ourselves as resources and sources of feedback as they use these skills.
Chapter 5. FINDINGS

Introduction

To study the experience following the collaborative learning workshops participants were asked to describe an experience that struck them. They were also asked to describe a striking experience as they facilitated in a Collaborative Learning way or as a group member with a Collaborative Learning facilitator. Interview analysis highlighted three categorical themes that describe participant experience with Collaborative Learning: direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops, the agency reflections, and facilitating in a Collaborative Learning way. Thematic category one, the direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops, describes the changes and confirmations the participants experienced. Thematic category two, the agency reflections, is reflections on how their agency currently works and what they have identified as impediments to collaborative processes. Thematic category three, facilitating in a Collaborative Learning way, the reflections of those who have facilitated and those who were members of a group that was facilitated in a Collaborative Learning way (See Table 1).
Table 1: Organization of Thematic Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme one</th>
<th>Better perspective of the other side</th>
<th>The disconnect</th>
<th>The central office staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme two</td>
<td>Workshops helped working relationships</td>
<td>The agency hat-The voice of “we”</td>
<td>The field staff; sort of collaborative effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor theme one</td>
<td>Confirmed - adult learning</td>
<td>Being there is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor theme two</td>
<td>Domination, taking opportunities away</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In thematic category one, two major themes emerged as participants described direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops that helped them 1) get a “better perspective of where people are coming from” (participant interview) and 2) how it helped them in their work relationships. To a lesser degree, a few participants indicated two minor themes; 1) the workshops confirmed what they already knew about adults and learning and 2) a small group reflected on how others dominated conversation. These two minor themes, although not expressed by all, were deeply reflected upon in several interviews by either field staff or central office employees, and further represented the differences between these groups, hence their inclusion.

Comprising the second thematic category are reflections on interactions as an agency and has two major themes: 1) many participants commented on feeling a “disconnect.” This was most apparent in the field and central office staff dichotomy. There was also a recognized split between the two Bureaus participating in the workshops. 2) Theme two related to feelings towards their agency, many “put on” what participants described as their “agency hat” (Field notes, September 2006) and changing
the pronoun from a reflective “I” to a removed “we.” This change from a personal reflection to a removed stance occurred most often when participants were describing their roles as an agency representative. These two themes, the “disconnect” and “agency hat” were the main findings of category two, the agency reflections. Only one minor theme emerged from mostly field staff employees, who mentioned the need for a leadership presence in their regional meetings. They weighed the importance of issues based on who was present in meetings they attended.

The third thematic category describes participants’ experience with the regional approach, where many first put their Collaborative Learning skills to use. The regional approach to private forests has been created to engage field staff employees in creating ideas for better reaching private forestland stakeholders. The two themes are then 1) the Bureau leadership has charged central-office employees, who were a part the collaborative learning workshop, with facilitating private forest discussions in the state’s six field regions. 2) Field staff employees comprise these regional groups facilitated by the central office staff. There is an acute difference between field staff and central-office staff perspectives of their experience with the regional approach.

Characteristics of Study Participants

The collaborative workshop experience themes were mined from a diverse group of DCNR employees’ interviews. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim. All interviews received a pseudonym and no identifying information was shared. Of the original workshop participants, seven were field staff and nine were considered central office staff from the Bureau of Forestry; one was considered central
office staff from an outside Bureau. After the first workshop we lost one field staff member because of a position change. Following the second workshop another field staff member dropped from the group due to a job change and a central office staff member left for military duty. The following table contains the pseudonyms and positions of the thirteen participants who attended all workshops and provided me with their Collaborative Learning experiences (See Table 2).

Table 2: Workshop Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central Office Employees</th>
<th>Field Staff Employees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Smith</td>
<td>Joseph Potter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Brook</td>
<td>Roger Nickles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky Williams</td>
<td>Steven Burkhart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Steward</td>
<td>Jacob Walker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rod Nilesworth</td>
<td>Tom Brunsman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Johnson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Merkel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandy Windford (Outside Bureau)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thematic Category One: Direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops

The following themes are direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops. Participants first reported gaining a “better perspective of the other side.” The sides they perceived were the two Bureaus and within the Bureau of Forestry between field and central office staff. By understanding their similarities and differences
and getting to know each other, participants were able to improve their working relationships. In addition to a better perspective of the other side and their improved working relationships, a few participants said the workshops confirmed what they already knew about adults and learning and several participants also reflected on the domination of others in conversation. These themes although not reflected upon by all, were reflected upon deeply in their interviews. These themes are further explained below with supporting quotes from the participants’ interviews.

**Theme one: Better perspective of the other side**

Throughout the workshops, we asked participants to share their story on becoming involved in natural resources. Participants described this sharing as “enlightening and eye opening…kind of a bonding time experience” (Brandy Windford interview). They described sharing of stories, as well as fellowship time, as important for getting to know others better. Many acknowledged similarities when they compared their stories to those of others. Jessica Smith described it as a “common language” that she and the others shared. She found comfort in this “common language,” “I thought it was good you know. Okay! Ha! I hear you, I understand!” Others saw differences among the stories, but still appreciated sharing, “…it helps you appreciate people’s differences, people’s backgrounds, and really how different we, we all are” (Vicky Williams interview).

More than just gaining a better perspective, many saw opportunity in their newfound understanding. David Johnson saw strengths in their differences. The “...strength is that ah, ah, good or bad or indifferent, it’s just different than ah, my eyes
were…it gives each of us a different set of things to bring to the table to have open
discussion, to resolve things or come to resolutions about things and, I thought that was
good.” Others saw strengths in the differences. Brandy Windford saw a need to bring
all the perspectives, histories and experiences to the forefront in order to collaborate.

Having fellowship gave many the opportunity to network and spend time
together. Getting to know others as people and not a position was important to Joseph
Potter. “You know, ah now there is a person, ha, that goes along with that and I
understand a lot more.”

**Theme two: Collaborative Learning workshops helped working relationships**

The Collaborative Learning participants saw improvement in their working
relationships. Many witnessed better communication as a result of these workshops.
Joseph Potter described the communication change as “…both sides got opened up. And
we were able to communicate, I think a lot better. Uh, actually I know a lot better.”
Joseph now feels more willing to contact the central office employees who were involved
in the workshops. This openness, he says, enables you to “…do your job a little more
effectively.” Brandy Windford and others also saw improvements in the working
relationship between the Bureau of Forestry and other DCNR Bureaus. She and others in
the Bureau of Forestry observed a “…need to communicate and compare notes so that we
are not tripping over each other” about important issues facing both Bureaus. This
example of improved relations shows group ownership for the improved communication.
“So it’s not necessarily my meeting, it’s not her meeting, it’s our meeting” (Brandy
Windford interview).
Examples of improved working relationships emerged during the workshops and at regional meetings. During the March workshop, one central-office participant shared an idea on how to engage her fellow field-staff employees in decisions. In preparation for a regional meeting she was about to organize, she called each field-staff employee and asked what would make the meeting worthwhile for them (Field notes, March 2007). These collaborative regional meetings occurred after the workshops and I took participant observation notes at each session. In one regional meeting, a participant from central office started the meeting by saying this meeting was important to him and the other Bureau leadership present and that the field staff should feel comfortable about contributing. These two examples demonstrate a change in typical interactions between central office and field staff (Field notes, July 2007).

Minor theme one: Confirmed what they already knew about adults and learning

A few participants, most of the central office employees, confirmed that Collaborative Learning was something that made sense, something they “…have learned at some point along the way” (Vicky Williams interview). Although they also mentioned the above themes, it was important for the central-office employees to reflect upon the acceptable nature of Collaborative Learning. “I think my understanding of the definition was the best news that when you ah, um, adults get together and talk and share experiences and that’s the way adults really learn…it was a relief to know that” (Patrick Merkel interview). Vicky Williams described the theories behind Collaborative Learning as no secret. “I mean it’s no secret that if you want to understand people you have to listen to them when they talk. Ha! You know, you have to ask for clarification if they
say things that you don’t quite understand. Um, and if you don’t ask them for the clarification, you may misunderstand, you may make assumptions that are inaccurate” (Vicky Williams interview).

**Minor theme two: Domination, taking opportunities away**

A few participants were acutely aware of domination by others. Although these participants mentioned the above themes, it was important to them to reflect upon dominance in conversation. A few participants also became aware of their dominant role in a group situation during the workshops. One specific activity used a yarn ball tossed to individuals as they contributed to a discussion. The interaction among participants became physically apparent and clearly, some participants were observers and took the lesson learned as something to watch. “Well I think there again having that ball of string in there, how someone can dominate and I think that, um, that was a good lesson…the ball was one thing that struck me as, as something to watch out for if you are going to be facilitating” (Roger Nickels interview). Others became aware of their presence in a conversation. Another participant was uncomfortable with the amount of string coming his way. “I dominated too much or I don’t know. Just, I was surprised that I was talking too much…because when I dominate I take away opportunities from other people” (Steven Burkhart interview).

**Thematic Category Two: The agency reflections**

Most of the discussion surrounding a better perspective of the other side and improved working relations led to a conversation about the current condition within the Bureaus. Many participants mentioned a “disconnect” between different sides.
Participants perceived sides as being between Bureaus and field and central office staff. Because participants were given an opportunity to gain a better perspective and were able to improve working relationships, they were able to kindle a connection. But before the Collaborative Learning workshops, participants described their relations as strained. This “disconnect” between the sides was a "historic misunderstanding" (Sarah Brook interview). Flexibility in a phenomenological interview allowed many interviewees to willingly share and expand on their feelings about the disconnect. It became clear their thoughts on particularly uncomfortable situations, like the disconnect, represented a cohort within the institution. Repeatedly, they removed themselves as “I” in their descriptions and replaced “I” with “we” statements; this is one way of communicating that the participants described as “putting on the agency hat” (Field notes, September 2006).

**Theme one: The disconnect**

Participants reported on a disconnect between Bureau of Forestry field and central office staff and between two Bureaus participating in the Collaborative Learning workshops. Central office staff was dubbed as “rule making regulators,” “who have never been in the woods;” they don’t understand field staff experiences. Field staff have been blamed for “carrying a torch and pitchfork” into every meeting with central office staff. The cause for “torch carrying” was attributed to everything from length of time the person has held their job to, jokingly, drinking water quality in the region.

A disconnect was evident during workshop interactions and post workshop regional meetings. For example, during the workshop in March 2007, during a
discussion about an upcoming meeting and possible ground rules for its conduct, one participant asked central office staff about agenda content since they were going to attend the meeting. A field staff employee spoke up first, mentioning that maybe central office staff should “…include the field staff and what they have to say and their experiences, since we are the ones who will be doing what you decide in those meetings” (participant quote from field notes, March 2007). This exchange showed central office staff had not included field employees in important decisions affecting them. This may explain the centralized office staff named the “rule making regulators.” Another example of disconnect occurred during a regional meeting following the workshops, when during a brainstorming session, field staff were asked to generate ideas for engaging private forestlands stakeholders. One gentleman, not a Collaborative Learning workshop participant, exclaimed, “Well every time we come up with ideas, someone in Harrisburg just shoots us down!” (Field notes, June 2007)

Joseph Potter links this “historic misunderstanding” to a lack of communication between the field and central office staff. Jessica Smith agrees “…it’s the situation where the right hand doesn’t know what the left hand is doing.” She continued by saying “…because there is a barrier, there is that disparity…it is very valuable to show the different experiences…this whole process is going to be very healthy for us in the long run.”

The disconnect between Bureau of Forestry and an outside bureau involved is more subtle. This disconnect is similarly attributable to the lack of communication, which led Brandy Windford to wonder about what was happening in other Bureaus. “I
often find myself looking in the windows of the other Bureaus and, you know, watching them and wondering why they do what they do.” She feels that other Bureaus watch her Bureau as well and wonder what they do; they never will engage in conversation. Questioning another Bureau has become inappropriate according to Brandy, “and, if someone says, you know, really questions what we do, they might not even give it a second thought because it has become so institutionalized. It is how we have always done it!”

**Theme two: The agency hat - The voice of “we”**

The discussion around the “agency hat” a Bureau employee wears as a professional was mentioned the first day we met. The “agency hat” is described by one participant as an “inescapable reality of results driven politics.” It requires one to “infer information on people,” “have the answers in their position,” and “decide what your output needs to be to satisfy who needs to be satisfied” (participant quotes from field notes, September 2006 and March 2007).

During the workshop, defining their current agency stance allowed participants time to reflect on their influence and acknowledge there was a problem with putting on their “game face” when conducting agency business. They mentioned “leaving the hat at the door, a need to humanize your experiences…and to validate other’s experiences” (participant quotes from field notes, September 2006). They expressed a need to include themselves as an individual rather than speaking for the group as a whole.

Participants identified issues related to wearing an agency hat in their interactions during the workshops; however, the voice of “we” is inescapable. Myriad times during
the interviews, participants would change pronouns from a reflective “I” to a removed “we” to describe potentially uncomfortable ideas and thoughts. The “agency hat,” the cohort representative of the institution, would often be applied to descriptions of finding results, inferring information on others, giving answers, and satisfying those who need to be satisfied. Talking specifically about experiences using Collaborative Learning with her group, Sarah Brook expressed frustration with coming to new understandings that do not always lead to action, “So, if we are coming to these new understandings like, new understandings are great, but what kind of actions do they lead to?” Others mentioned coming to results or conclusions, hoping to satisfy leadership within the Bureau.

“…mostly, you know, the executive directors for the state are looking for concrete information; they are looking for concrete results, um, you know, we haven’t been able to provide that for them in the past 50 years…we have no evidence that we have actually been successful and they want to find…something that we can kind of put our hat on” (Joseph Potter interview).

Another important “we” voice supplies information to people. One participant even mentioned changing the ethics of the Commonwealth citizens. Jessica Smith adds to this by saying “…we should let people know that we are the experts on forestry…it’s like we are trained to see those things that other people don’t.”

Participants also described the “agency hat” as having the answers. Vicky Williams describes it as turning people around to see the point she is bringing to the table, “I’ve got to turn them around. It’s part of my job, you know,” she said, as she was describing some of her frustrations in her regional meetings. Jessica Smith also had a hard time and she believes her region’s frustrations with the lack of movement and
decision-making stem from not having answers. The responsibility for the frustration lies within “we.”

“...We haven’t done a good job of telling them (field staff employees) how to do that and you know we are not giving them solid direction. And, that’s one of the things, when we have asked them how they were feeling and feeling like we don’t have the answers either, they’re looking to us for answers (pause) we don’t have them” (Jessica Smith interview).

**Minor theme one: Being there is important**

In addition to two themes mentioned above, field staff employees commented on the need for central office leaders to participate in meetings. Although they also mentioned the above themes, it was important to field staff employees to have leadership presence in their meetings. Having leadership present was important; it shows they are cared for. Reflecting on a recent meeting, Joseph Potter noted having central office leadership present, “…shows interest and you know, we are making a strong effort to make some changes.” He believes the biggest thing relating to their presence, is it shows field staff that “…you actually care about what they are doing” (Joseph Potter interview). Jacob Walker adds to this saying if you are engaged with what he does,

“...it’s motivating for me, um you know, I um, if you are working with people who aren’t motivated or don’t have any spirit in the work that they do, it, it brings you down and you don’t even want to work with them because you feel like, for me, I feel like it’s a waste of time.”

**Thematic Category three: Facilitating in a Collaborative Learning way**

At the conclusion of the workshops, Bureau of Forestry leadership chose to use Collaborative Learning techniques to engage the field staff employees in developing approaches to better reach private forestlands stakeholders. This approach is now identified as the regional approach. Bureau leadership charged central-office employees, who were a part of our workshop, to facilitate meetings in each of six-field regions across
the Commonwealth. Prior to their meetings, facilitators met with Penn State’s research team to discuss ways to use their Collaborative Learning skill sets to change typical interactions with fellow employees in their regions. Suggestions included having everyone share a story they of which are proud and allowing time at the end of a meeting for reflection. It was clear from this request that central office facilitators were attempting to relate differently to their field staff employees. A few of the field staff employees who attended these regional meetings were also members of the Collaborative Learning workshops and this provided an opportunity to reflect on their experience with the regional approach. The following discussion emerges from group perspectives.

*Theme one: The central office staff*

Asked about the regional approach, many central office staff commented on a disconnect between themselves and field staff. What struck them the most when facilitating in a Collaborative Learning way was how negative the interactions were. Patrick Merkel described it as dealing with the “wet blankets”, people that try to spoil others’ fun. David Johnson mentioned difficulties he was having getting people to share, “I was surprised when two of the (field staff employees) who have been there, for several decades had nothing to say when we asked them just to talk, just give a couple of minutes about something, you were proud of that you did in the past month or so.” Many attributed the difficulties to mistrust between the central office and the field staff, “…People that have been around for awhile are just, often times seem sort of jaded, like they don’t really trust us” (Vicky Williams interview). Jessica Smith was sympathetic to what they must be thinking when the central office staff comes to their district with new
ideas, “…They have their own bundle of things to deal with, and an edict comes forth and um, ah, it’s got to be hard to swallow. And I’m already working as hard as I can, you know, what more do you want me to do?”

Only one central office employee described his regional facilitating experience as positive. He links the positive experience to the average age of his group and the group’s small size. Newer staff, he believes, still have enthusiasm and they are not “…like from what I heard about the other groups, there are guys with issues out there” (Rod Nilesworth interview). He believed his central office peers had “…to deal with this and, you know, it was pretty negative um, the load that they were carrying.”

Theme two: The field staff: sort of a collaborative effort

Asked about the regional approach, field staff had expected a much more rapid Collaborative Learning investment in their meetings. Instead, many were either frustrated with the lack of movement or if any quick decision making occurred it was “…sort of a collaborative effort” (Tom Brunsman). Joseph Potter was frustrated with the lack of movement in his meeting; “And, when we actually came to make a decision on, okay this is the direction that we need to go, we, we were just spinning…we ran out of time!” Others thought their regions were “cutting to the chase” (Tom Brunsman interview). “I think it was just good to sort of cut to the chase. And, we all did, you know, had an opportunity to give our two cents of what we think, what project we should chase, but it was ah, it was rather quick…by twenty minutes in we were jumping on a decision and figuring about how we were going to accomplish the task” (Tom Brunsman interview). Jacob Walker expressed feeling similar to other field-staff employees - there
shouldn’t be a “silver bullet each time” in Collaborative Learning (Jacob Walker interview).

So in the regional group I didn’t see, well I guess I saw a little bit of collaborative things working, where people were feeding off of others, ideas and trying to evolve things, but you know the thing that I got out of the collaborative training was that you know there is not always going to be a result at the end of each meeting (Jacob Walker interview).

Reflections on my role in the workshops

In addition to the experience questions posed in the phenomenological interviews, I asked questions on my role in the workshops. I used these questions to investigate my role as process facilitator, and then to revise, and act on my practice. This study into my practice and how it can be improved is an action research investigation. I posed the following questions to collaborative learning participants to learn more about the part I played: What did you see as my role in the workshops? What did I do well? What can I improve upon?

The following is a summary of what I learned about my role. My reflections on how I can improve my practice are considered in the discussion section. What I have learned about my practice will help inform and improve my future work.

What did you see as my role?

All of the participants saw my role as a co-facilitator, supporter, or assistant to Muth, a member of the Penn State project team (Kerlin, Muth, Finley). Participants saw Muth as the “senior team member” and I was learning from her. They reflected on being aware of Muth’s experience, but don’t recall knowing right away what my experience was or why I was interested in collaborative work. They sensed that my lack of participation in the beginning was attributed to my role observing the processes. They
viewed this as the researcher role, collecting data for my thesis. When I did speak up they perceived this as me giving feedback or “…making visible what we just learned” (Rod Nilesworth interview). They also recognized me as an organizer and provider of information. They mentioned the process of setting up the workshops as something I did and the exercises as something I organized. I provided the information they needed to complete the task. Many mentioned the workbook I provided as an informational tool they could use in the future. For example, they thought the numerous handouts and articles we gave them in their workbooks was my way of providing them with “…answers to questions like the difference between dialogue and discussion” (Joseph Potter interview).

What did I do well?

As the co-facilitator, researcher, organizer, and provider of information, I asked participants what I did well pertaining to roles they identified me as fulfilling. Many came back to the researcher role of observing and then a co-facilitator role when I would speak-up during an activity. By observing the process I was able to come up with reflective questions that “…provide some insight on what (I was) seeing and what (I was) observing” (Brandy Windford interview). Jacob Walker saw my facilitator role as a way to “…reintroduce what people are saying…to get people to open up and dig a little deeper.”

In addition to the observing researcher role, they also commented on the interviews I conducted with them. Sarah Brook appreciated my leadership during the semi-structured interviews. She said by stopping the workshops in November “…and not
dragging it out…we re-grouped and fixed it.” Others mentioned the phenomenological interviews as way of showing that I cared about hearing their story.

*I feel like you are actually engaged in our work rather than just being an objective egg head perspective…I just felt heard and that felt really good! Even though you are not part of the Bureau, I felt a level of empathy which is always, always a welcomed human trait* (Eric Stewart interview).

**What can I improve upon?**

I asked participants what I could improve upon to inform my future role. Many mentioned being more practical and not as abstract with lessons we presented. They asked that we, with theories and methodologies, make things simpler. Roger Nickels wanted more hands on exercises to make teaching more applicable to their everyday situations. He described the hands on exercises as being “…hit in the head without hurting!” Tom Brunsman also mentioned making the learning environment more applicable to his everyday situations. He said I needed to explain “…how it plays into effect with our job.”

Providing insight on what I was seeing and hearing was mentioned as a positive characteristic, but many mentioned I should have talked more during the workshops, especially when they were having group discussions around topics they believed I had contributions or information to. Many did not know much about me because I so infrequently provided my insight. Others said I should not be intimidated by their group, and I should be confident as I have a level of understanding. Many mentioned that I should have shared my story on how I got involved in natural resources.

*Where you are coming from and also where you hope to go, you know your dreams and aspirations and why you are doing this project…would have been a very meaningful part of the workshop…and why it is attractive coming from someone who is looking forward,*
looking forward in life, why do they want this group of skills, why do they want this body of knowledge... would have helped to build a compelling case. (Eric Stewart interview)

Many recognized the experience Muth gained through her dissertation work at the University of Tennessee. That is why many of the participants saw me as a co-facilitator or as an assistant learning the ropes. Just gaining more experience is away to improve my practice. Many observed I should go out on my own and try to form a collaborative group. Or, if the Bureau of Forestry decided to put on this workshop again, I should feel comfortable enough to facilitate a group. Others mentioned just getting older will help me gain experience to draw upon. David Johnson told me to just to “Keep learning and make the most of it.”
Chapter 6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Thematic Analysis

This study addressed the following questions: What was the experience of the participants in the Collaborative Learning workshops? What are the attitudes, perceptions and receptivity of using Collaborative Learning for natural resources practitioners? And is Collaborative Learning a viable tool for changing interactions with private forestland stakeholders and addressing natural resource issues?

Experiences of workshop participants are further explored through themes discovered in the interviews. Attitudes, perceptions, and receptivity for using Collaborative Learning is derived from reflections on the regional approach, where their Collaborative Learning skills were first used by participants. Central office employees were receptive to using techniques they learned, but were presented with many difficult obstacles relating to the perceived disconnect. Field staff employees were receptive to working in a different way, but time constraints imposed by the format for the regional approach to make decisions were perceived as “sort of collaborative.”

Although there are no indications of immediate change in external private forestland stakeholder interactions, Collaborative Learning did change internal stakeholder interactions among Bureau employees. They acknowledged improved working relationships by gaining a better perspective on each person’s role. Improved relations are helping regional approach facilitators engage all Bureau employees making decisions about natural resource issues. Studying participant’s experience with Collaborative Learning immediately following the workshops left the long-term effects of
the experience and further changes in interactions undetermined. Further time and research are needed to understand if Collaborative Learning is a viable tool for changing interactions with private forestland stakeholders outside the agencies. Further research is also needed to explore the usefulness of Collaborative Learning in addressing natural resource issues with all private forestlands stakeholders.

**Direct outcomes of the Collaborative Learning workshops**

According to Loseke (2007), humans identify themselves through social life levels. Such identities begin at the most fundamental *personal identities* and escalate to a macro level of *cultural identities* (Loseke, 2007). Participants described in this thesis, with no exception, used identity levels to describe their experience with Collaborative Learning. Beginning with personal identities, participants described getting to know the other side. Polkinghorne (2001) describes personal identity as being able to link “… lived actions into meaningful wholes” (p. 96). Reflecting on their personal identity within the experience allowed them to create coherence between their role and the roles of others in their workplace (Gergen, et al. 2001). This coherent whole is observed in their reflections on the other side. Jessica Smith described it as a “common language;” she believed similarities between her and her co-workers created a “fraternity of people who cared.” Those who believed differently from the rest of the group were still able to create a “meaningful whole” they were a part of by perceiving strengths in their differences. The “…strength is that ah, ah, good or bad or indifferent, it’s just different than ah, my eyes were…it gives each of us a different set of things to bring to the table” (David Johnson interview).
Participants identified themselves personally through better working relationships. Getting together improved their communication skills and empathy. Joseph Potter described the communication change as “…both sides got opened up. And we were able to communicate, I think a lot better. Uh, actually I know a lot better.” Joseph now feels more open to contact central office employees involved in the workshops. Paulson (1998), who also studied a collaborative group, observed that “…the greatest success of their groups was…improved communication and understanding” (p. 307).

These findings are not unusual in collaborative settings. Other similar collaborative efforts have reported on gaining a better perspective of the other side (Carr, et al., 1998; Muth, 2004; Paulson, 1998; Poncelet, 2001; Sturtevant and Lange, 1996) and improved working relationships (Carr, et al., 1998; Poncelet, 2001). Both Carr, et al. (1998) and Poncelet (2001), identified these themes as “…intangible outcomes” (Carr, et al., 1998, p. 774) or as “…secondary or indirect consequences” (Poncelet, 2001, p. 273) to the expected collaborative outcome, new solutions. These secondary or indirect outcomes were noted throughout Poncelet’s (2001) ethnographic study on a collaborative group. Where the process “…helped them to learn more about the other stakeholders involved” (p. 284). These are moments of social learning “…where participants gained new knowledge and understandings by virtue of their contact and interactions with other social actors” (Poncelet, 2001, p. 284). Some of this social learning is single-loop learning where actors learn new information that assists them in achieving objectives. Other aspects of learning fall into the category of double-loop learning; learning includes
continuous self-reflection and a change on the part of the actor (Argyris and Schon, 1996).

There are examples of single-loop and double-loop learning among participants in the workshop experience. David Johnson experienced single-loop learning when he learned more about other participants. This new information, David says gives each of them “…a different set of things to bring to the table…and maybe some, strengths to draw from.” Patrick Merkel was relieved to learn that when teaching adults “…there was a better way of doing it.” The workshops provided him with validation on what he already knew about adults and learning. Joseph Potter experienced double-loop learning in his working relationship with central office staff.

*I came to the conclusion that, the realization that you know, we are all trying to accomplish the same thing...You know until I went to the Collaborative Learning training, how often did I call (Central office employees)? Not very often. And since then, I um, I feel a lot more open to call them and ask some questions.*

Steven Burkhart reported on a similar change in his interactions after personally reflecting on dominance in conversation. “I dominated too much or I don’t know. Just, I was surprised that I was talking too much. Because I tend to look at myself as pretty quiet…So, it’s just helped me learn that I don’t have to talk all the time!”

Although the participants’ interviews did not reveal the expected collaborative outcome of solution generation (Carr, et al., 1998; Poncelet, 2001), social learning is important for moving in this direction (Poncelet, 2001). Relationships and new understandings created in Collaborative Learning processes, “…all increase the probability that these partnerships will produce consensus decisions that better attend to the diversity of interests and perspectives involved in any particular environmental
problem solving effort” (Poncelet, 2001, p. 292). To encourage social learning in a Collaborative Learning setting, it is best to facilitate “…the generation of new ways of knowing things, doing things and being together” (Poncelet, 2001, p.296). In the workshop setting, sharing stories about how they became involved in natural resources supported social learning. These types of social learning are moments of fellowship; an essential element of a collaborative learning event. Many participants commented that sharing stories allowed them to understand the other side. They also enjoyed the mix of field and central office employees. Fellowship, sharing a meal for example, was useful for building relationships and networks. These identified elements needed to be present to encourage this type of learning, continue viability of changed interactions among Bureau employees, and increase the probability for addressing natural resource issues collaboratively.

The Agency Reflections

Not atypical of many organizations like the Bureaus involved this study, participants spoke of a disconnect between field and the central office staff and between Bureaus. Bohm (1996) has observed that people are constantly in the business of dividing and fragmenting things that are actually fundamentally connected. The Bureaus divided themselves even though they are connected under the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, and participants divided themselves based on job duties even though, as one participant put it, “…we are all trying to accomplish the same thing.” The root of the word “fragment” literally means to “smash.” This smashing between fundamentally connected wholes “…pervades the way human beings think and
talk…it is a reflection of divisive forces that we have inherited and usually take for
granted, and about which there often seems little we can do” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 53). What
can be done with the fragments participants identified and how does this attitude affect
their receptivity for using Collaborative Learning?

I was witness to many episodes where disconnections were made visible. These
disconnections “…have significant realities to them (and)…identities are invested in
them” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 53). Moving away from disconnections to a more unified whole
can seem impossible when facilitating. Participants reported on having to deal with
negative attitudes, the “wet blankets” and those “sabotaging our efforts” to move the
regional approach forward. The Bureau’s regional approach goal is to bring diverse
regional groups together to decide on actions to better reach private forestland
stakeholders. Regional facilitators were often stalled by the evident disconnect between
field and central office employees. To respond to these fragmenting forces, Isaacs (1999)
has identified three goals, that help us to respond differently in difficult situations, and
that lead to dialogue. The three goals are finding the underlying intent, being aware of
structural traps, and creating a conversational field.

The first goal is finding the underlying intent behind what people say and do. At
a regional meeting I witnessed an outburst by an angry field employee during a
conversation around regional ideas that “Whenever we come up with ideas, Harrisburg
just shoots us down!” (Field notes, July 2007) This disconnect was felt by all participants
at that meeting. Isaacs (1999) suggests in a situation like this to “…go beyond the
appearance and the baggage that might be attached to a particular action” (p. 201).
Workshop participants discovered what was beyond baggage by sharing stories and getting to know the other side. Extending these types of personal interactions into the regional approach can help diminish baggage, improve working relations, and increase receptivity for using Collaborative Learning.

Bureau of Forestry leadership showed they were aware of structure, Isaacs’ (1999) second goal. Structures in human interactions are “…the set of frameworks, habits and conditions that compel people to act as they do” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 204). Bureau of Forestry leadership are attempting to avoid structural traps by allowing regions to identify what is wrong and what needs to be corrected concerning private forestlands. They are not assuming regions are homogeneous. By involving their employees in decision-making, they are enhancing their identification with and commitment to the organization (Therkelsen and Fiebich, 2003).

The third of Isaacs’ (1999) goals is setting the scene or conversation field to enhance dialogue. The conversation field is”…made up of the atmosphere, energy, and memories of the people who are interacting” (Isaacs, 1999, p. 234). Regional approach facilitators will benefit by being sensitive to the memories, thoughts, and feelings many have about field/central office disconnect.

In addition to what Isaacs (1999) suggested, another way to address disconnects is by being aware in every situation of your influence (Thomas and Pollio, 2002). Many participants perceived that using Collaborative Learning in the regional approach was going to be difficult. I heard in many of the interviews that participants “…went out to their regional meetings thinking they are going to have to deal with this and you know it
was pretty negative. The load that they were carrying for some” (Rod Nilesworth interview). A bracketing interview is a way of becoming aware of the influence you bring into a situation. Influence can be expressed as a bias, or any capacity causing an effect in an indirect or intangible way. Discussing what you expect to happen with another colleague suspends your biases, so that you can become aware of them and their influence (Creswell, 1998).

Another “agency reflection” that participants identified with was wearing the “agency hat.” This cohort representative of the institution was a way of identifying themselves as the experts in charge of changing perspectives. The “agency hat” requires one to “infer information on people,” “have the answers in their position,” and “decide what your output needs to be to satisfy who needs to be satisfied” (participant quotes from field notes, September 2006 and March 2007). Using the “agency hat” as their guise, participants described their organizational identity; another level of social life people use to identify themselves (Loseke, 2007). This identity required participants to “infer information on people” they identified as “…the Commonwealth citizens, who needed to know we are the experts on forestry.” (Participant quotes from field notes, September 2006 and March 2007).

Luckert (2006) also noticed this guise in his article on the changing roles of foresters. He argues the role of foresters was “…not to tell the public how to manage their forests, but to manage according to society’s goals” (p. 299). One of the obstacles to change in this direction is relying on professional identity. Because there are diverse values attached to forests, we cannot depend solely on our professional judgment to come
to solutions. “Problems require careful consideration of social values, inclusive decision making processes, and professional and scientific judgments on alternative forest management approaches” (Luckert, 2006, p. 304). NRPs have a lot to offer, but they also have a lot to learn. They need to become aware of their limits in a changing society to adopt exclusively scientific solutions. NRPs should not be so quick to subscribe to an organizational identity and organize actions around it.

In addition to the disconnect and the “agency hat,” many field employees commented on the importance of having leadership present at their meetings. They measured importance of the new initiatives at these meetings by the leadership who attended. Being there “…shows interest and you know, we are making a strong effort to make some changes. [It also shows your employees that]…you actually care about what they are doing” (Joseph Potter, interview). Organizational literature supports this finding (Johlke and Duhan, 2000; Therkelsen and Fiebich, 2003). Therkelsen and Fiebich (2003) identify leadership of an organization as “the linchpin of employee relations” (p.120). Of all the publics that an organization works with, immediate employees are the most important. “Employees ascertain their value by evaluating the organization’s daily interactions with them” (Therkelsen and Fiebich, 2003, p. 122). Employees need to believe supervisors are interested and care about the work they are doing. Carr, et al. (1998), who studied the experience of United States Forest Service employees working collaboratively, noted the importance of leadership support. Forest Service employees believed that “…throughout the organizational hierarchy there needs to be clarification of support for collaborative efforts in both words and deeds” (Carr, et al. 1998, p.772).
Johlke and Duhan (2000) found the best way to show support and interest is to be present; a finding identified by Bureau field employees. Joseph Potter emphasized leadership presence as the first step to healing disconnects between field and central office staff. It greatly improves communications.

The Regional Approach

Participants described their experience in the Collaborative Learning workshops as a way to improve working relationships and to know the other side. Collaborative Learning changed internal stakeholder interactions between Bureau employees. There was no mention from participants of changed external private forestland stakeholder interactions. Studying their experience with Collaborative Learning immediately following the workshops left the long-term effects of experiences relatively unknown. Now that the Bureau of Forestry has decided to move forward using the regional approach to change interactions with private forestlands stakeholders, leadership needs to acknowledge new working relationships and exert energy to improve relations between field and central office staff and between Bureaus. Central office participants who were regional facilitators described their experience dealing with the difficult people or “wet blankets.” On the other hand, field staff participants described their experience as regional group members as a “sort of collaborative effort.” To improve relations with “wet blankets,” participants noted simple fellowship would allow them time to get to know the other side and build working networks. This might involve sharing a meal, sharing stories (like the story participants shared about becoming involved in natural resources), and anything that is atypical of normal meeting interactions and allows time
to get to know each other. Facilitators should be aware of the baggage each participant brings with them and not let it color their views and interactions. Therefore they have to go into each situation aware of influence. Field staff employees defined the regional approach as a “sort of collaborative effort.” This occurred because they felt forced to identify conclusions in a very short time. More time should be given to relationship building, because the type of trust required to contribute to problem solving takes time and decisions should not be forced. Change takes time and one must not assume that the work is done.

**Lessons On My Role**

In addition to the experiences of Collaborative Learning workshop participants, I also investigated my role as a facilitator using an action research investigation. Through this investigation, I learned about roles the participants’ saw me filling, and I was able to reflect on and revise what I learned about myself. My role was co-facilitator, researcher, organizer, and information provider for the workshops. In this role, many participants came back to the researcher’s role of observing and sometimes the co-facilitator role when I spoke-up during activities. By observing the process, I was able to develop reflective questions that would encourage people to dig a little deeper. Participants also noted my empathy during the interview process. They said it was a way that I showed I cared about hearing their story.

In these roles, I learned that participants would have liked to hear from me more often. They believed I could have contributed more. They also said I need to explain more completely about how Collaborative Learning contributes to their job. Many
mentioned that I should be more practical and less abstract. Many did not know my background or why I was interested in this project.

If I were to facilitate a Collaborative Learning workshop again, I would share my story. I would be more up front about my purpose, my background, and how I became involved in natural resources. I would be more wary of projecting my role as an objective outside researcher, which was not the case. I was involved and I was learning from them. I would give more attention to their reception of the lessons I present on Collaborative Learning and related topics. I need to be more practical in my approach and relate the lessons to their job. Most importantly in any future endeavors, I believe I need to continue to reflect and learn from my experiences.

**Moving Forward**

Is Collaborative Learning a viable tool for NRPs to use in changing interactions with private forestland stakeholders and addressing other natural resource issues? Interactions have changed between central office and field staff employees and between Bureaus involved in the workshops. One of the major goals for this project was to improve relationships with private forestland stakeholders and with each other. Relationships were improved among the participants as they got to know the other side and improved their working relationships. This contrasted with the disconnect they described as normal working relations and the collective recognition of the “agency hat.” The workshops confirmed what they knew about adults and learning, gave them an opportunity to reflect on dominating conversations, on the importance of leadership presence, and on their feelings about the regional approach.
One question remains about how long newfound understandings will last. Studying experiences immediately after interactions means we cannot measure if changes will persist beyond the workshop setting or if the workshops will affect or continue to affect interactions with private forestland stakeholders. The social learning that did occur in the Collaborative Learning workshop setting has the potential to affect participants in unforeseen and undetermined ways. This study only captures immediate understandings gained by the experience. Further research is needed on future or retained understandings from the Collaborative Learning workshop participant, on the usefulness of Collaborative Learning in changing interactions with external private forestland stakeholders, and in addressing natural resource issues outside the agencies in which they are employed. One would hope participants’ experiences would continue to influence relationships internally and externally with private forestlands stakeholders.

This research illuminated the importance of internal stakeholder relationships. The obstacle in this Collaborative Learning effort was the disconnect between field staff and central office employees, and between Bureaus. Participants identified the relationship building efforts as a way to alleviate disconnects. Future Collaborative Learning work should pay special attention to the internal relations; effective dialogue and trust among the group is vital to its work and longevity. Before even addressing relationships with outside stakeholders or issues of group interest, essential attention is due to the internal relations. Simply meeting more and having fellowship time has been proven by our participants to amend these relations.
Chapter 7. CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

Concluding my two years of qualitative research has left me pondering my experiences and my decisions. How have I personally grown as a researcher? What advice would I give to others going into qualitative research? What can and does need to happen next? Many things come to mind. I know the full ramifications of this experience will continue to have a presence in my life. I also know what I have learned will continue to affect what I will learn. I am not finished with learning from this experience. In an attempt to have some closure now, I offer the following perspectives.

Personal Growth

When I accepted Penn State’s offer to conduct research on the collaborative learning workshop, I was intrigued first and foremost by the possibilities of working with people. I came from a hard science background where I was used to crunching numbers and making bar graphs. But there was always a part of me that wanted to involve people in the decision making. Decisions made solely on the basis of statistics frightened me. I knew the categories we would organize our lives around did not tell the whole story. My experiences in the woods told a different story. Forests are more than board feet and economic viability, or habitat for various creatures. Forests provided the story settings in books my father used read me, they were the building blocks of my imagination, and the safe place my brothers and sister could explore. My insatiable feelings for the many values forests held lead me to believe that I could do better in my research pursuits by including the human story.
The biggest personal change I have noticed is my confidence level. Getting a masters degree was something I believed at one time was beyond my abilities. I have also grown in my research abilities; a role that fits my beliefs and complements my experience with human understandings. I always knew there was more than quantitative research that described my world. This was first apparent in my qualitative methodology class. Learning about a methodology that does not rely on statistics opened my eyes. I questioned what was real and factual. I was challenged and stretched to understand qualitative methods. I know this sound naïve, but I did not know anything other than quantitative existed! I have depended on numbers to tell many of the stories I would automatically accept. I have grown to challenge what I depend on as factual.

I think my introduction to qualitative research has set me on the human dimensions path. Now embarking on the job search phase, I continue to look for positions related to people and natural resources. Qualitative research sticks with you; it becomes a part of your soul, your nature, your understanding. Because it is a part of me, I am more confident in my abilities. I am more confident now that I might possibly be offered a job doing something I love. Pondering on my personal growth, led me to thoughts I would like to share with those looking to do phenomenological research; what new researchers should be aware of.

My Advice to Others Conducting Phenomenological Research

Over the past two years, I have grown into a phenomenological researcher, but it was not easy. There were many lessons I learned by doing. There were surprises I never found cited in methodology books. And there are friends I met along the way. Among
my experiences there are three prominent themes I would like to share with a future phenomenological researcher. They are: Be prepared for surprises during the interview, bracketing your assumptions and biases will not make you perfect, and expect to be grateful towards participants and responsible for sharing their story in the correct light.

Be Prepared for Surprises

One of the driving goals of this project was to change private forestland stakeholder relationships. The focus was on stakeholders external to natural resource agencies. So intense was this focus that we even prepared participants to think about identifying stakeholders and to begin forming private forestland stakeholder groups. When this did not happen, I was really frustrated in their lack of enthusiasm to move in this direction.

Why did we not move in this direction? During the first two days of the workshop, I was surprised to witness that relationships among participants were strained. Participants later told me in interviews that they perceived a disconnect between field and central office staff and between Bureaus involved in the workshop. They blamed this disconnect mainly on their inability to communicate with each other. I had noticed the inability to communicate between Bureaus during a September workshop discussion.

_I left the workshop feeling extremely frustrated. I saw a lot of things that were skimmed over in the Bureau of Forestry and outside Bureau conversation. Namely a comment about how to engage people who are not conservation/ecosystem/nature people... Brandy mentioned technical jargon as being an issue. “I don’t know what you are talking about” was mentioned several times, but people kept talking and ignored what I believed to be a serious issue to Brandy, from an outside Bureau, who was trying to relate._ (Field notes, September, 2006)
I was not expecting to learn more about this relationship. Because of the space participants were given in the workshop to openly talk about their relationships, they eventually improved. I was not expecting this important finding. Initially, I believed everyone was on the same page, understanding the usefulness of the workshops skills for working with stakeholders external to the Bureau; I quickly learned they were most useful in kindling internal relations.

When you ask the important phenomenological question, do not be surprised at what you hear. The answers will likely be different than your expectations. A bracketing interview can prepare you for some surprises, but do not expect it address all your assumptions.

**Bracketing Will Not Make You Perfect**

As I think back to my bracketing interview, I consider how much conscious thought I invested to “guarantee” addressing bias. I thought it was a perfect method and would not let me down. I thought about bracketing constantly. I expressed my thoughts about bracketing during my bracketing interview.

*Me-Unfortunately I think I thought about this bracketing interview too much. Interviewer-Oh, did you? Ha!*  
*Me-Yeah, I was up all night thinking about it and then thinking oh, I shouldn’t be thinking about it because the participants aren’t really going to think about it because they aren’t going to know what I’m asking until that moment. So...  
Interviewer-Right, right  
Me-I’m going to try and be very genuine.*

I had mentally prepared myself, or so I thought, for any situation I would encounter - that was not the case. In one case, the interview process moved at a slower pace and I found myself filling uncomfortable silences with lines mentioned in other
interviews. I was caught up in the moment and shared my feelings and thoughts with the participant, adding my assumptions about foresters. Lines in parentheses were my thoughts as I transcribed the interview.

Participant-But I think I would have been useful if somebody else from parks would have been there with someone else from our office.
Interviewer-uhuh, yeah, I agree now too, I think that would have been helpful for them to see, I think they get stuck on their language so much that they don’t realize that maybe others don’t understand. (Crap, did I influence again?!) Participant-Well, it’s group think.
Interviewer-uhuh
Participant-So many of them think alike.
Interviewer-yeah

Clearly, I offered my assumption by agreeing with her and added to what she was saying by offering my opinion.

How did I amend this? I was unable to go back, but I was able to omit my utterances in the analysis, as they were an obvious result of my interference. The example above was not considered in the thematic analysis. Although I was angry and annoyed by my error, I learned a great deal about my conduct and was able to make subsequent interviews even better.

Expect to be Grateful and Responsible

The space created by a phenomenological interview allowed great trust to develop between myself and each participant. I am grateful for the opportunity to know each participant personally. I fully believe many participants had never had an opportunity to openly express their opinions as they did in the phenomenological interview. Several participants embraced this opportunity and expressed their gratitude for providing the space to share their thoughts.
I feel like you are actually engaged in our work rather than just being an objective egg head perspective...I just felt heard and that felt really good! Even though you are not part of the Bureau, I felt a level of empathy which is always, always a welcomed human trait (Eric Stewart interview)

I am most grateful that they entrusted me to tell their story.

How can I ever pay them back for the stories they have entrusted to me? I can only attempt. Their stories put a tremendous weight on my shoulders. I was responsible to tell their stories in a way that they would be confident in their choice to share. I only hope with this thesis and resulting journal publications I will fulfill my responsibility. I offer the following observation; phenomenological research puts tremendous responsibility on you. You are the keeper of the stories; represent your characters well.

What Needs to Happen?

From the collaborative learning workshops, what I learned about the regional approach, and participant feelings about their agency and the changed relationships they experienced leads me to conclusions about what should occur. In previous chapters, I talked about respect, moving forward, and patience with the process; however, participant reflections on agency are most perplexing. The biggest hindrance to working collaboratively is the known disconnect between field and central office staff and between Bureaus in the Department. Healing the disconnect can create a cohesive, respectful, work environment. I am providing ideas to aid in healing the disconnect. Also, wearing the “agency hat” can make one appear removed and inconsiderate; considerations are provided to help remove the “agency” from the “hat.”
Heal the Disconnect – Creating a Cohesive, Respectful Work Environment

This thesis documents the disconnect between the “Bureaus” in the workshops and between field and central office employees. Participants attribute the disconnect to poor communication. Reflecting on my findings and opinions, I offer the following suggestions:

Change meeting interactions: Most meetings involve central office expressing ideas to the field staff. Because central office employees do most of the talking, field staff are frustrated as they perceive they do not fit the “perfect field employee mold” projected by central office employees. This feeling was clearly evident during a regional meeting when the floor was given to the field staff employees (I believe for the first time) to share their thoughts on private lands and specifically what could be done in their region. The following are my reflections on the thoughts a field employee shared.

Another problem he sees besides the slow movement of government is that when he goes to meetings “they make you feel like everything you are doing is a waste of time”, “you haven’t been doing what you should have been doing.” Meetings seem to be very negative. I feel a consensus around the room by the way others attention is drawn to this conversation. They are nodding their heads and they perked up as they are listening to him talk. He also mentions something about “you don’t want to hear what I have to say” before he begins talking about the negativity around the meetings. I feel like this is telling of the Bureau. They are not afraid to talk, but the way they ask, “you are not going to like what I have to say”, makes me think that they have mentioned things like this before and that it hasn’t resulted positively, whatever positive is for them. (Field notes, July, 2007)

It was clear he saw these meetings were an opportunity for central office employees to tell him that he was not doing his job. He also felt that he can not openly share with them, because they will never like what he has to say.
The Bureau has started to address this problem by allowing field staff employees more opportunity to share during meetings; however, I believe it has to be more than mining field staff employee audiences for their opinions. The regional approach is in part about giving field staff employees the capacity to work with a broad range of private forestlands stakeholders. Having field staff employees who are confident enough in their role to lead these groups to dialogue is critical to this process. If field staff are to become leaders, they need opportunities to lead. Give them time at large meetings to create the agenda and lead the process on a topic of interest to them. Trust them enough to share and provide something that is significant to them; be unconditionally open to their ideas. They have plenty of experience to share and all Bureau employees learn from their experience. Instead of having central office employees exclusively lead a discussion, have a field employee facilitate. Alternatively, when central office facilitates, trust that the audience will identify a conclusion that satisfies them; do not provide solutions. Rely on them and trust them unconditionally and provide them space to openly share their feelings.

The new direction identified by the Bureau suggests that leadership should work to identify and seek employees who fulfill the new and evolving roles. Clearly if the goal is to move from providing technical assistance to leading collaborative processes, the Bureau needs to hire a different type of employee. Start by describing the new role of private forestlands facilitator in job announcements – acknowledge the expectation that field staff will work with groups of people. Require experience working with diverse
groups of people. If the employee is to be a private forestlands facilitator, advertise for a facilitator. That way there is no question about their role.

In addition to providing leadership opportunities for field staff employees and changing job requirements for new hires, there is a need for fellowship. Fellowship was the defining element that changed interactions and kindled relationships among collaborative learning participants. Are there opportunities every year for the different employees from all levels to get to know each other? Provide a retreat for employees to learn more about each other. A meeting to discuss current issues facing the Bureau is not a retreat. Rather, a retreat can be a fishing trip, a visit to a historically significant conservation area, a canoe trip on the Allegheny, a teambuilding workshop, whatever needs to happen to have people share more than the burdens of being natural resource professionals. Importantly, on these trips, make sure field staff, central office, or employee from a different Bureau personally make the effort to meet someone outside their work circle. If necessary, a facilitator can help make this happen.

Removing the “Agency” from our “Hat”

Is part of the disconnect attributable to the “hats” agency professionals wear? I believe there is little question as to where the “agency hat” originates; it comes from the education natural resource professionals receive. Very little is done to prepare professionals about the many values people hold surrounding natural resource issues.

For example, personally, I was only prepared to consider the ecological ramifications of decisions. When I was released into the world, I was surprised that others were not hanging on every utterance from my educated mouth. I was taught that
ecological answers were “right” and was never prepared or even knew there was another side of the story. At the beginning, I fought blindly for the “right” answer and still do in some situations (I don’t think I could ever accept any reasoning for owning a Hummer). But when I ignore important social and economic values in my fight, I can alienate a significant proportion of stakeholders; the same stakeholders who would have a significant impact on the ecological values that I hold so dear. In my pursuits to protect a value that was extremely important to me, I became an expert at sharing my beliefs with those who would listen, essentially those who already felt as strongly as I did.

“We are preaching to the choir,” is a phrase I heard many times during the regional meetings. I noted what I called negative talk during a regional meeting.

_I heard a lot of negative things in this talk. It was like preaching to the choir about all the problems we already know exist and putting blame elsewhere. I heard “if only people were educated”, “if only state parks managed differently”, “if only consulting foresters were good people.” Maybe a better question to ask when they put the responsibility elsewhere is what can we do better. How can we heal relationships and strained connections?_ (Field notes, June, 2007)

These meeting participants seemed to be experts at sharing their beliefs; just as I once was with a homogenous crowd. I would also hear “if they [the public] only knew what we know, they would agree with us”, “it’s just a lack of education.” Logical enough I suppose, but there is an unseen danger in thinking this way. “If only” statements like these are based on the presumption that natural resource professionals are fully informed and “right.” Another apparent assumption is that the public is the only group needing to learn. This haughty, over-confident stance leads to trouble. Many times in situations there is a perceived need to impart knowledge, with a presumption that “…interests are
largely fixed and that the best one can hope for is a grudging compromise that perhaps satisfies no one” (Daniels and Walker, 1996, p. 74). A failure to allow social learning among stakeholders assumes there are no shared values in the first place.

But there are shared values. Participants proved this when they were able to create better working relationships because they realized “we are all trying to do the same thing” (Joseph Potter interview). This simple realization can be expanded to all natural resource issues. Removing “agency” from “hat” doesn’t mean remaining quiet; it is about understanding others values and knowing when and where to include ecological values. It is listening carefully and empathetically to what others believe is important. It is going into a situation not expecting the “right” solution to always be completely accepted. Getting excited upon discovery that a shared value is also an ecological value, like clean water, clean air, and/or the need to recreate. Showing care about what someone has to share and recognizing that something can be learned from every situation removes the need to wear an “agency hat.” Rather, it is replaced with a person who has values and beliefs.

Conclusion

Can we examine and change our relationships and interactions? Can we be comfortable removing the “agency hat” and interacting with others in a humble way? Are we prepared to be a collaborator rather than an educator and/or objective scientist? Participants in the collaborative learning workshops challenged themselves by exploring these questions. I suggest reflecting on these questions. Consider and examine the learning’s of this small group of Pennsylvanian natural resource professionals. I hope by
reading their experiences we are encouraged by their progressive movement; that we are

inspired to continue changing our approaches for the betterment of all.

I believe everyone in that room felt value in working together. Not only the
process of it, but the sense of community felt. We moved beyond the shy and
awkward stage somewhat to become more comfortable with each other. I can’t
say we were a unified voice because we were not, but a group of people who
respected each other’s experience. A long way...still a long way to go...
(Field notes, September, 2006)
References


Appendix A.

Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research

Confidentiality Agreement for Members of the Applied Phenomenology Group
Informed Consent Form for Social Science Research
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Discovering Collaborative Learning Workshop Series

Principal Investigators:
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Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to give you, as Bureau of Forestry employees, the skills and practice to use Collaborative Learning to change your interactions with private forest stakeholders and with each other; and to create stewardship groups to serve you in an advisory and educational role. The research question that will be answered from your participation in the workshops is, “What was your experience with Collaborative Learning?”

Procedures to be followed: As a participant in this study, you will be asked to attend all seven separate days of the workshops and to be actively engaged in discussions and assignments. You can also aid in the creation of a Collaborative Learning workbook to help you in your future facilitating roles. Following the conclusion of the workshops during the summer of 2007, Betsy will visit you for a follow-up interview to gain information on your experiences within the Collaborative Learning group so as to inform processes and outcomes of this facilitation experience. These interviews will be tape recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The tapes will then be destroyed. The transcriptions will receive a numerical identification (and/or pseudonym). Only the principal investigators will be able to link you to your identification number or pseudonym. In all reports and publications of the process and evaluations, no individual identifying information will be shared. The data collected will be stored in a locked file cabinet in room 320 of the Forest Resources Building, Penn State, University Park. After three years, these data will be destroyed by shredding.

Statement of Confidentiality: Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the principal investigators will know your identity. Any and all information you provide will be confidential. Neither your name nor any identifying information will be used in any reports, although your words may be used to support the interpretation and analysis. At no time will your words be linked or traceable to you. The data collected will be stored and secured in 320 Forest Resources Building in a locked file cabinet. In the event of a publication or presentation resulting from the research, no personally identifiable information will be shared.
Right to Ask Questions: You can ask questions about this research. Contact Elizabeth-Sterwerf at 814-865-4431 or Allyson Muth 814-865-3208 if you have questions about this research.

Voluntary Participation: Your decision to be in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. Refusal to take part in or withdrawing from this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits you would receive otherwise.

You must be 18 years of age or older. If you agree to participate, please sign and date below.

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signatures on file
Participant Signature Date

Signatures on file
Person Obtaining Consent Date
As a member of the Applied Phenomenology Group in the School of Forest Resources at The Pennsylvania State University, I agree to guarantee confidentiality to participants who are a part of this study. I will not publicly divulge information that I learn about the participants.

Date

Signatures:

Signatures on file
Appendix B.

Office of Research Protection Protocols

IRB# 23813-Discovering Collaborative Learning
The Office for Research Protections (ORP) has reviewed the above-referenced study and determined it to be exempt from IRB review. You may begin your research. This study qualifies under the following category (ies):

Category 1: Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices, such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods. [45 CFR 46.101(b)(1)]

Category 2: Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observations of public behavior unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human participants can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the participants; and (ii) any disclosure of the human participants' responses outside the research could reasonably place the participants at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the participants' financial standing, employability, or reputation. [45 CFR 46.101(b)(2)]

PLEASE NOTE THE FOLLOWING:

· Include your IRB number in any correspondence to the ORP.

· The principal investigator is responsible for determining and adhering to additional requirements established by any outside sponsors/funding sources.

· Record Keeping
The principal investigator is expected to maintain the original signed informed consent forms, if applicable, along with the research records for at least three (3) years after termination of the study.

This will be the only correspondence you will receive from our office regarding this modification determination.

MAINTAIN A COPY OF THIS FOR YOUR RECORDS.

· Consent Document(s)
The exempt consent form(s) will no longer be stamped with the approval/expiration dates.

The most recent consent form(s) that you sent in for review is the one that you are expected to use.

Follow-Up
The Office for Research Protections will contact you in three (3) years to inquire if this study will be on-going.

If the study is completed within the three year period, the principal investigator may complete and submit a Project Close-Out Report. (http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/areas/humans/applications/closeout.rtf)

Revisions/Modifications

Any changes or modifications to the study must be submitted to the Office for Research Protections on the Exempt Modification Request Form available on our website:

http://www.research.psu.edu/orp/areas/humans/applications/exemptmod.rtf

Modification WILL NOT be accepted unless submitted on the Modification Request Form.
Appendix C.

Collaborative Learning Workshop Agendas and Workshop Material
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September 11, 2006

Greetings workshop attendees,

This letter is to give you more detailed information on the upcoming collaborative learning workshops. As previous emails have mentioned, we’ve scheduled the first workshop for Monday and Tuesday, September 25 and 26, in State College. The meetings for both of these days will be held at Tofrees Resort and Conference Center starting at 8 a.m. on September 25th. Included in this packet you will find directions to the conference center.

Also included in this packet you will find the self-scoreable Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. This test will set the stage for this workshop series. The estimated time to complete this test is twenty minutes. Please complete this worksheet before you arrive in State College. The other assignment is to write a one-page story of how you got involved in natural resources management and/or conservation. We will use this story as a starting point for some of the dialogues in the workshop. We ask that you please prepare the story in advance so that you’re able to listen more fully without worrying about what you’re going to say when it’s your turn.

We have included the agenda to prepare you for the flow of the workshop. It might also be helpful to bring something on which to take notes to help you along on this journey.

In addition to providing you with collaborative learning and facilitation skills, there is also an evaluative component in which you will be asked to participate after the end of the workshop series. Participation in the evaluative component, which will include observations by the facilitators during the workshops, feedback solicited during the workshops, and post-workshop interviews, is entirely voluntary. We'll share more information about this part of the workshop at the first meeting.

If there is anything we can do to make your attendance easier please let us know. We look forward to our workshop with you and thank you for participating.

Sincerely,

Allyson Muth
Forest Stewardship Program Associate

Betsy Kerlin
Graduate Research Assistant
September 25-26th, 2006
Collaborative Learning Workshop

Learning objective: Participants will understand collaborative learning approaches and have charge to identify partners in their community.

Monday, September 25th

8-8:30 Breakfasts

8:30-9 Overview and welcome, ground rules, expectations

9-10 Myers-Briggs personality assessment

10-10:45 Leadership test

10:45-11 Break

11-12 Leadership talk….facilitation talk
What is leadership? (group talk)
Leadership presentation (15 min. what experts have said)
Continue the talk on leadership…
Where does facilitation fit in leadership?
List of good facilitator traits/skills

12-1 Lunch break

1-2:30 Educational approaches
How have you learned? (group talk)
Adult Learning presentation (15 min. what experts have said)
How do you learn?
Intro to collaborative learning-overview presentation

2:30-3 Collaborative learning elements
Examples of collaborative learning-role playing

3-3:30 Break

3:30-5 Use stories to practice dialogue.
What makes a conversation of dialogue?

Final Question: How do you encourage conversation/break down conversation?
Tuesday, September 26th

8-8:30 Breakfast

8:30-10:30 What was dialogue like?
Being in the conversation verses not being in the conversation?
Did you note how others reacted?

Ground Rules: What’s good for dialogue? (group creates rules based on their knowledge and experience)

Try a dialogue again. Ask someone else to share their story.
Go through…reflect…

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12 Assumption discussion
Reflection card given to put in their pocket
Imel article: “Reflective practice in adult education”

Try dialogue again…reflect…

12-1 Lunch

1-3 Identify partners discussion
What experts have said (15 min. presentation)
How to approach people
Collaborative Learning Workshop  
September 25 and 26, 2006  
Workshop 1: Leadership, Adult Learning, Collaborative Learning and Dialogue

Resources Provided to the Participants


Notes from opening leadership talk.

Leadership is…

• Willing to accept accountability
• Encouragement
• Helps group members achieve goals
• Empowers others – “We did it ourselves”
• Willing to take risks
• Mission-oriented / Vision
• Helps define / find group identity
• Integrity
• Charismatic (good or bad?)
• Ability to herd cats
• Well-informed – omniscient
• Knows where to go, how to get there
• Leads by example
• Helps group make better decision as group over individual decisions
• Creates beneficial group synergy
• Helps focus groups / directs conversation
• For the good of the group
• Manager
• Coach
• Leads by example
• “Walks the walk”
• Successful?
  - positive outcome
  - having respect of the group
• Varies depending on where leadership needed

Notes from facilitation discussion following the leadership talk.
Facilitation is…

- Facilitator = leader (form of)
- Get the group to lead
- Organizing the groups’ thoughts and ideas into action
- Consensus-building
- Help group go where it wants to go
- Form of leadership
- Understands context, people involved, process knowledge, perception, vision
- Intuition
- Good listening
- Empowers / engages group members
- Teacher = facilitator
- Reflection – give back to the group; helps group listen, understand
- Capture group member’s interests, etc.
- Ensure participation
- Process – hold to appropriate process
  - depends on goals of group, outcomes
- Create environment to get information / learn to get to decision-making, action
- Process-oriented
Leadership is...

Components of leadership

- Leadership is a process
- Leadership involves influence
- Leadership occurs within a group context
- Leadership involves goal attainment
Leadership is...

A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

Two types of leadership

- **Assigned** Leader—title position (manager, president, CEO)

- **Emergent** leader—regardless of title, when an individual is perceived by others as the most influential member of a group or organization
Influencing Power

Positional

- Administers
- Copy
- Maintains
- Systems & structure
- Control
- Short-range view
- Imitates
- Status quo
- Does things right

Personal

- Innovates
- Original
- Develops
- People
- Inspires trust
- Long-range view
- Originates
- Challenges
- Does the right thing

Major leadership traits

1. **Intelligence** - strong verbal ability, perpetual ability, and reasoning
2. **Self-confidence** - the ability to be certain about one’s competencies and skills
3. **Determination** - strong initiative, persistence, dominance and drive
4. **Integrity** - individuals who adhere to a strong set of principles and take responsibility for their actions
5. **Sociability** - friendly, outgoing, courteous, tactful and diplomatic
Leadership skills

1. **Technical** skill—having knowledge about being proficient in a specific type of work or activity.
2. **Human** skill—having knowledge about and being able to work with people.
3. **Conceptual** skills—abilities to work with ideas and concepts.

Team Leadership:  
*Characteristics of team excellence*

1. Clear, elevating goal
2. Results-driven structure
3. Competent team members
4. Unified commitment
5. Collaborative climate
6. Standards of excellence
7. Principled leadership
8. External support
Speaking of Team Leadership ...

- Where does facilitation fit in leadership?
- What makes a good facilitator?
List of facilitator traits and characteristics participants developed following the leadership talk and presentation.

**Facilitator Characteristics**

- Humility / Humble
- Self-confidence to step back -> to be open
- Taking Risks -> openness, again (target)
- Participating / open / risk
- Use group to formulate
- Open to process
- Trust (to deal with other views)
- Let some things go
- Tease out information
What Is Learning?

• Learning can be defined as a way in which individuals or groups “acquire, interpret, reorganize, change, or assimilate a related cluster of information, skills, and feelings. It is also primary to the way in which people construct meaning in their personal and shared organizational lives.” (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

How Do You Learn?

• Do you learn the same way now as when you were in school?
• How important are your life experiences?
• Do you listen and learn more from peers or from “experts?”

• Most Adults are Retroactive Meaning Makers
  – Make sense in terms of experiences had.
  – Incorporate elements of reflection
More About Learning …

• Learning occurs when people engage in complicated undertakings and find a way to reflect on how they’re doing it.
  
  – Peter Senge

What’s Different in Adult Learning?

• Initiative (Diagnosing own needs)
• Formulating Goals
• Identifying Resources
• Choosing Appropriate Learning Strategies
• Evaluating Learning Outcomes
Type I Teaching and Learning

• Definition
  – Teaching by transmission, learning by reception.
  – Teacher has information that the students need.
  – Focus is on individual learning.

• Example
  – Lecture

Type II Teaching and Learning

• Definition
  – Teaching by transmission, learning by sharing.
  – The role of the teacher is to transmit info and to enable students to share info with one another.
  – Teacher is primary source of information.
  – Focus is on individual learning.

• Examples
  – Guided class discussion
  – Lecture followed by discussion
Formal Learning Vs. Informal Learning

• Formal Learning
  – Economically infeasible for programs to meet all individuals’ needs.
  – Outcomes are delayed in applicability to real-life situations.

• Informal Learning
  – Needs-specific, and, therefore, more relevant to the learner.
  – Used immediately.

The Notion of Informal Education

• Friendly, informal climate
• Flexibility in the learning process
• The importance of experience
• Participant enthusiasm to topics
Informal and Incidental Learning

- Individual and group learning activities that occur outside formally structured, institutionally -authorized, classroom -based events.
- Informal learning involves a degree of conscious awareness that learning is taking place.
- Incidental learning is a byproduct of some other activity.
Informal and Incidental Learning

- According to Watkins & Marsick (1992), informal and incidental learning has the following characteristics. It is:
  - Based on learning from experience;
  - Embedded in context;
  - Oriented to a focus on action;
  - Governed by non-routine conditions;
  - Concerned with tacit dimensions that must be made explicit;
  - Delimited by the nature of the task;
  - Enhanced by proactivity, critical reflectivity, & creativity.

The Necessity of a Learning Organization

- A learning organization is an organization, “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (Senge, 1990, p.3).
Type III Teaching and Learning

- **Definition**
  - Joint construction of new knowledge.
  - Teacher becomes a member of the group.
  - Information transfer occurs between learners, between learners and the group, and between the group and learners.
  - Dialogue is the means by which this occurs.
  - Focus is on individual and group learning.

- **Example**
  - Team Learning

Letting Learning Into Our Practice

- **Recognizing what informal and incidental learning is.**
- **Planning for learning outside of formal situations and providing space for that.**
- **Helping stakeholders become critically reflective.**
- **Helping stakeholders and peers understand the social construction of knowledge and the influence of past experiences.**
Purpose

“Our task as informal educators is to work alongside people so that they may learn and organize things for themselves.”
Collaborative Learning

Collaboration and Collaborative Learning

- **Collaborate** – verb. 1) To work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort. 2) To cooperate treasonably, as with an enemy occupying one’s country (American Heritage Dictionary, 1985).

- **Collaborative Learning** – noun. People labor together in order to construct something that did not exist before, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborators; the result is something other than the parts (Peters & Armstrong, 1998).

- **Collaborative Learning** is to labor together to produce knowledge, and frequently, to take action on the basis of new knowledge (Peters, 1995).
Collaborative Learning

Definition

✓ To labor together to produce knowledge, and frequently, to take action on the basis of new knowledge (Peters, 1995).
✓ Collaborative learning is a group process, an intentional, conscious, reflective moment out of which something new is created — something that was not already present in the individuals themselves or the group.

Collaboration Vs. Collaborative Learning

Collaborative Learning ...

• Draws strongly on knowledge gained from all participants' experience.
• Participants have strong intentions to be a part of the process.
• Uses Dialogue as the route by which to get to new understanding.

Collaboration ...

• Can involve people who are unwilling participants.
• Participants simply come to consensus — no new understanding.
Elements of Collaborative Learning

- Dialogue
- Cycles of Action and Reflection
- Multiple Ways of Knowing
- Focus on Construction
- Fellowship

Dialogue

(According to Isaacs, 1999)

Dialogue is about shared inquiry, a way of thinking together. It is something you do with others (Isaacs, 1999).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage I</th>
<th>Stage II</th>
<th>Stage III</th>
<th>Stage IV</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politeness</td>
<td>Breakdown/Conflict</td>
<td>Inquiry/Reflection</td>
<td>Generative Flow – New Something</td>
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Cycles of Action and Reflection

- Participants act, reflect on their actions, act upon their reflections, et cetera …
- Reflection serves to redirect actions as well as provide a means to examine and challenge the assumptions guiding action.

Multiple Ways of Knowing

- Recognize and value
  - Experience
  - Skills
  - Learned knowledge
  - What is created within the group
- … as valid ways of making meaning.
- If all ways of knowing are valid, then all are experts in their own lives and experience.
Focus on Construction

Encapsulates two ideas:

- The creation of new meanings and understandings in the collaborative learning event.
- The recognition of the social construction of knowledge (group members co-construct these new meanings).

In essence, new meanings are socially constructed within the group.

Fellowship

Arises through personal interaction

- Sharing stories
- Laughing
- Sharing a meal
- Catching up

Establishes a personal connection between participants through identification and resonance with others’ experiences.
Key Assumptions

❖ Everyone has experience to draw on.
❖ Everyone is an expert if they have experienced the situation under inquiry.
❖ Dialogue and Collaborative Learning have been experienced by most people, without giving name to what they were doing.

Practical Application

❖ In your work with stakeholders and peers
  ❖ Allow time for questions
  ❖ Acknowledge things you’ve learned from your audience.
  ❖ Engage in dialogue – with a focus on new understanding – versus discussion.
  ❖ Provide time to interact personally so you can interact professionally.
Why Are We Headed This Way?

- Gets people talking within the community.
- Promotes better stewardship through peers.
- Empowers stakeholders.
- Better able to make sustainable management decisions because all stakeholders will be understood.
List of dialogue rules developed by participants following the collaborative learning presentation.

**Rules of Dialogue**

- Leave “sarcasm” at the door
- Keep a sense of humor
- All “data” (i.e., input) is valid – all knowledge is valid
- Keep a positive attitude
- Engage as a “I” and “Thou” – People have “worth”
- Be aware of assumptions and biases
- VALUE the time invested in dialogue
- Disagreement / breakdown is important; it creates a place for dialogue and moves the conversation to inquiry / reflection
  
  - Be comfortable with this
  - Expect it
- Accept that dialogue may not happen
- Park “Agency” hat at the door
- Ask for clarity
- Separate dialogue from discussion – differentiate
- Encourage active participation
- Explain Dialogue and Discussion to participants
- Understand experience of others and validate life experience
  
  - Delve into what people say
- Allow “half-baked” points to emerge
- Develop new “understanding”
- Movement toward -> Direction
- Clarity of feelings
- Participants are “co-learners”
- Recognize different “comfort levels” of others
- Allow disagreement – Don’t demean perspectives
Card presented to them on how to reflect in conversation; an important dialogue tool.

**Techniques for Reflecting in Conversation**

- Ask back
- Speak from personal experiences; share your stories
- Inquire into words/phrases that “strike” you
- Keep an open mind
- Invite others to share their viewpoints and ideas
- Bring your perspective, but don’t hold to it as an “absolute” truth
- Acknowledge things others say that affect you
- Focus on new understanding
### Identifying Partners

Stakeholders in the regions

### Stakeholder Checklist

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<td>Territory</td>
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<td>Vanity</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMPACT</td>
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**Capacity**

- The capacity required varies with the scope of the effort
- Up to fifteen people is ideal
- The maximum number that doesn’t interfere with scheduling meetings and giving everyone a chance to speak

**Difficulty**

- Why would you want a difficult person in your group?
- Brings a different perspective and skills that may be beneficial and necessary
- Makes you aware of issues that you may be blind to
**Dynamics**

- Be aware of special relationships outside of the collaboration and how this may affect the group
- Spouses, friends, relatives ....

**Familiarity**

- Similarities in purpose, expertise, community, clients ....will help the collaboration jell
- History of positive working relationships
Impact

- Include members who are dedicated to the purpose of meeting
- Dedication promises long-term ownership of the results

Power

- Connections, expertise, resources, position, persuasion, charisma, visibility and integrity
- Those who have the power to impact others, whether it be using natural charisma or positional power.
**Stimulus**

- “Queen Bees”
- People who attract workers given their positions (superintendents, famous personalities...)
- Role is to attract

**Territory**

- We tend to invite people from similar disciplines...
- Instead, include people from as many different sectors as appropriate.
Variety

Having a variety of people from many varied skills and “lived experiences” to guarantee the heterogeneity of your group.

Avoid homogeneity!

How are we going to identify and approach these stakeholders?
Participants developed this list on how they can identify stakeholders in their regions.

**How to ID Stakeholders**

- Personal relationships
- Purpose
- Location
- People willing to invest time without clear outcome needed
- Past work and real-life experiences with:
  - subject matter
  - process
  - being a part of a group
- Willingness to give of themselves (and bring snacks - preferably good))
  - they show up and contribute
- Use existing networks to help identify
- Demonstrated diversity of thought; ability to see other perspectives
- Knowledgeable…
- People who will listen
- People who will participate
- Snowballing

Card presented to participants on how to approach and engage stakeholders in a collaborative learning event.
How to approach stakeholders to engage them in a collaborative learning event…

- Tell them about what you’ve enjoyed working with them in the past and talk about how they can contribute
- Establish a relationship (break bread – drink coffee) first
- Talk to them about what this is about, what you are interested in
- Give context
- Talk about how this is different
- Identify who the other group members are / will be
- Set it up so they will understand it’s a reciprocal relationship
Learning objective: Participants will gain reinforcement of their previous training and identify processes for beginning their learning community creation project.

8:00  Breakfast

8:30  Overview of day

8:45  Dialogue around using collaborative learning

9:30  Facilitation
   - Summary of resources
   - Practice in small groups

11:00  Team learning and consensus building

Noon  Lunch

12:45  Blending skill sets
   - People skills
   - Build a chair activity

2:15  Your Assignment – create a learning community of your own. What are you going to do with this?

2:30  Making explicit assumptions and biases – Bracketing activity

3:30  End – Drive safely

Collaborative Learning Workshop
November 14, 2006
Workshop 2: Dialogue, Facilitation, Consensus Building, Blending Skill Sets, and Addressing Biases

Resources provided to participants


Kansas State University, Cooperative Extension Service (1998). *Building and maintaining a group* and *The role of a meeting facilitator.*


Facilitating Dialogue

Facilitation Is...

- Organizing the groups’ thoughts and ideas into action
- Empowering and engaging group members
- Creating environment to get information and learn to get to decision-making and action
- Helping the group go where it wants to go
- Consensus-building
- Process-oriented
- Good listening; ensuring participation
Facilitator Characteristics

- Humble
- Self-confidence to step back and let the group lead
- Takes risks by being open
- Participating / open
- Open to process
- Trust (to deal with other views)
- Can let some things go
- Teases out information

National Park Service’s Community Toolbox

- Facilitation
  - Active Listening
  - Brain Storming
  - Dialogue
  - Ice Breakers
Facilitating a Collaborative Learning Dialogue

- Ask back and help others to ask back
- Inquire into words/phrases that are “striking”
- Keep an open mind
- Invite others to share their viewpoints and ideas
- Bring your own perspective but don’t hold to it as an absolute truth
- Acknowledge things others say that affect you.
- Watch body language
- Help moderate those who dominate
- Focus on new understanding
Remember

- Your role as the Facilitator is to help the group hold to process of dialogue – reflect on conflict; generate new ideas.
- You are a participant in the group.
- You can allow others to move in and out of the facilitator role – little “f”s”
- You have a responsibility to share your viewpoint
  - This is counter to most traditional facilitator styles
- Be transparent about your own assumptions
  - This helps others to investigate their own

Facilitating a Dialogue

- Two Groups – based on color of your card
- Black Dots take turns being facilitators
- Red Dots actively listen and record the group’s ideas.
- Everyone participates in the dialogue
- Roles shift every 8 minutes.
What are the issues driving parcelization in Pennsylvania?
Further points added to previous lists on facilitating a collaborative learning event.

What do we need to facilitate?

- See *Facilitation* pages…
- Listening
- Ensure participation
- Understand goal of discussion
- Help group stay on task
- Direction from above – support of vision of higher-ups to be effective
- Clarity of goal, desired outcomes
- Legitimate processes
Team Learning

Team Learning Definition

Transforming conversational and collective thinking skills, so that groups of people can reliably develop intelligence and skills greater than the sum of individuals. (Kerr, M. S., et al. The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies for Work in a Civic Economy, p. 134)
Team Learning Builds On …
- Developing shared vision
- Personal mastery

Team Learning Is Important
- Teams are becoming the key learning unit in organizations.
- Almost all important decisions are made in teams.
- Teams can be a microcosm for learning throughout the organization.
Outcomes of Team Learning

- Team learning creates an atmosphere of joint responsibility, mutual respect, and a sense of personal and group identity.
- Teams are able to think insightfully about complex issues.
- Inculcates practices and skills more broadly in the organization.

Dialogue and Discussion

- Dialogue – sustained collective inquiry into everyday experience.
- Discussion – conversation in which the subject of common interest is analyzed and dissected from many points of view; the aim is to win.
Dialogue Is Characterized By:

- Free and creative exploration of complex and subtle issues;
- Deep ‘listening’ to one another;
- ‘Suspending’ one’s views
  - Make explicit one’s views such that assumptions may be questioned.

Discussion Is Characterized By:

- Different views that are presented and defended;
- The search for the best view to support decisions that must be made.
Dialogue Versus Discussion

In discussion different views are presented; in dialogue, different views are presented as a means toward discovering a new view.
In discussion decisions are made; in dialogue complex issues are explored.
Productive discussions converge on a conclusion; dialogues diverge seeking a richer grasp of issues.
Action are the focus of discussion; new actions emerge as a by-product of dialogue.

Advantages for Teams Who Dialogue

- Develop a deep trust that carries over to other parts of their work.
- Create a richer understanding of each person's unique point of view.
- Experience how larger understandings emerge.
- Defend points of view more gracefully and with less rigidity.
- Improve the skills of inquiry and reflection.
Conflict

- Continually learning teams experience visible conflict of ideas.
- Conflict is productive in great teams.
- Mediocre teams either give the appearance of no conflict or are rigidly polarized.
- Conflict helps teams reflect on their assumptions in order to go on together.

Team Learning in Practice

- Participants believe that they’re doing something that matters.
- Every individual within the team is somehow growing.
- Participants are more intelligent together.
- Emerging visions from all levels are shared.
- Participants are invited to learn, ask questions, and take risks.
- Participants treat each other as colleagues.
Practical Difficulties

- Team learning takes a great deal of time.
- Existing systems limit the team’s capacity to learn.
- Traditional focus on team ‘success’ or ‘failure’ rather than the process.
- Teams must reflect and make changes based in reflection in order to create new knowledge.

Questions?
Consensus Building

Consensus

Collective opinion arrived at by a group of individuals working together under conditions that permit communications to be sufficiently open and for the group climate to be supportive for everyone to feel that they had a fair chance to influence the decision.
Why groups?

- Learn faster
- Make fewer errors
- Recall better
- Better decisions
- More productive
- Process gain

Process Gain

- The interaction among group members results in ideas, insights, and strategies that no one member had previously thought of.
5 major characteristics of an effective group decision

1. Resources fully utilized
2. Time well used
3. Decision is of high quality
4. Implemented fully by all
5. Problem-solving ability of the group is enhanced

Consensus

Collective opinion arrived at by a group of individuals working together under conditions that permit communications to be sufficiently open and for the group climate to be supportive for everyone to feel that they had a fair chance to influence the decision.
Communication

All members …
1. Understand and support
2. Rephrase and understand
3. Tell the group how they feel
4. Those who disagree can publicly agree to try it

View differences of opinion as:

- Gathering additional information
- Clarifying issues
- Forcing the group to seek better alternatives
Consensus guidelines

1. Avoid arguing blindly
2. Avoid changing your mind
3. Avoid conflict reducing procedures
4. Seek out differences of opinion
5. No winners and losers
6. Discuss assumptions
**Chair Challenge**

This class is rather “challenge-intensive”, meaning a large part of the class will be taken up by the process of building a pedestal or support structure that will support a group member off the ground. However, do not lose sight of the goal. We want to discuss the characteristics of leadership, and hopefully build better leaders in your group. So begin with some discussion and brainstorming, maybe an idea web, about characteristics that make an individual a great leader.

Have the students tell you about, or even re-enact, specific moments or actions that occurred in their group throughout the day where someone had shown leadership. Frontload the challenge a little bit by talking about the different forms of leadership that might be needed in a corporation or business.

**Necessary Props:** (for each group)
20 dowel rods or metal poles - approx. 30 inches long, 3/4 to 1 inch diameter.
Parachute cord or similar string - 20 pieces @ 6-8 foot lengths

**The Challenge:**
Each group will choose a “leader” or “boss” and a moniker of some sort. You may want this to be done BEFORE the challenge is given. The challenge for that group, then, is to make themselves look good, and make their boss look good, by building a pedestal or support structure that will keep that “leader” or “boss” off the ground at least 12 inches (depending on facilitator’s comfort level), for at least 12 seconds. The structure MUST BE SELF-SUPPORTING.

Before any planning or building occurs, parts of each group will go to “training sessions” where important skills will be taught. One third of each group will be taught the “clove hitch and square knot”, while another third will be taught “parallel lashing”, while the last third will be taught “cross lashing”.

Once the divided groups come back together, bearing their new-found skills, there is a period of “planning”, during which no building may occur (length of planning time is up to discretion of facilitator). Be strict about this rule!

Once the planning time is complete, turn them loose on the building process. Give them a time limit (25 - 30 minutes?) to keep them on task. Announce that no strength tests may be done on the structure during this building period. (They don’t drive trucks across bridges during the construction process to find out if the bridge is strong enough; they build the bridge stronger than it needs to be!!) Also provide incentives to induce the most creative, neatest, simplest, tallest, most extravagant architectural designs.
When the time is up, have each group present their structure to the other groups. What do they call it, what are its unique qualities, and of course, demonstrate that it will indeed hold up your “leader” or “boss”.

**Facilitator’s Role During the Planning & Building Processes:**
Facilitators will be watching to see specific interactions, specific leadership styles and specific group dynamics as the planning & building occurs in the group.

**Processing:**
Here are a few processing ideas that could easily be applicable to almost any group that would be doing this challenge.

1. What was the role of the chosen “leader” or “boss”?
2. Did the “leader” or “boss” know all three skills at the beginning?
3. Did any one person know all of the skills?
4. In real life situations does the leader, or any one person, often have ALL the skills and ALL the knowledge of what to do?
5. How did you find out what skills the other group members had learned?
6. What did you notice about leadership styles in your group?
7. In this challenge, what sort of leadership was most effective?
8. How is this challenge similar to “real life” situations?
9. Can the same conclusions be made about leadership styles and their effectiveness?
10. In this challenge, a third of each group knew very specific, important goals. Are there skills that each person comes into every day, “real life” roles with? If so, are each persons skills welcomed and put to good use?
11. How can we be sure to be open to ALL the available skills? Where else do we have to be able to share skills with and acquire knowledge from other people?
12. How can we improve this process?
Dear Collaborative Learning Workshop Participant:

Thank you for your continued participation in the Collaborative Learning workshop series. We are most pleased that all the participants are finding this information useful in their work and personal lives and hope that it continues to remain relevant. However, the conversation at the end of the November 14 workshop gave us pause. We had anticipated a much more rapid investment and use of collaborative learning in participants’ work world. This does not reflect badly on the participants, but rather has suggested modifications to the agenda to which we were holding ourselves.

In efforts to help you find new outlets to use collaborative learning and to enhance your skills and confidence levels in using collaborative learning, we would like to deviate from the schedule a bit more. Therefore, we are canceling the January and February workshops and, instead, we would like to engage with you in conversation about your particular challenges and excitement for using collaborative learning.

Early in the New Year, we (and Jim if he’s available) will be traveling the state to come visit with you. We’d like to ask for about an hour of your time to talk with us about where you are in using collaborative learning. We felt that the group wasn’t quite as ready as we’d hoped to go out and use the new skills in their toolkit to begin or work with a collaborative learning group, and we’d like to visit with you about what we need to do to address this.

So to sum up, the entire group will not be meeting again until March 13, 2007. In January and February, we will be coming to you to engage you in a conversation and provide us with feedback regarding the overall process. We will be contacting you to set up these conversations.

Again, we are so pleased that you continue to work with the process of using collaborative learning. We hope these planned conversations will refine our shared learning and make your skills more readily available.

Sincerely,

Allyson Muth
Forest Stewardship Program Associate

Betsy Kerlin
Graduate Research Assistant
Dear Harrisburg Collaborative Learning Participants,

This email is referring to the letter we sent to you over a month ago about setting up meetings to talk about where you are in using collaborative learning and assisting you to begin work in a collaborative learning group. This meeting should last no longer than an hour and will just ask some questions about your thoughts.

In efforts to limit the number of times Allyson and I will have to travel to Harrisburg, we are attempting to have all the individual meetings in one day. What we need from you is your availability for the next couple of weeks. Please let us know what days and hours work best for you and we will attempt to coordinate a one day trip. As of today Allyson and I will be unable to travel to Harrisburg on Monday, February 12th and Wednesday, February 14th.

Thank you for your assistance!
Sincerely,

Betsy Kerlin
March 20, 2007
Collaborative Learning Workshop

Learning objective: To strengthen the learning community and to understand deviations and modifications inherent to different situations.

9:00 Group participant check-in
   What’s on your mind today?
   What did you give up to be here?
   How’re you doing?

9:30 Review of Collaborative Learning and the Workshop
   What we’ve covered
   Salient points from each section

10:00 Clarify Take Home Message
   Discussion on how we’ve set CL up and what we’re really trying to cover

11:00 Examples and case studies
   Discussion on what you’ve seen and heard

Noon Lunch

1:00 BS Session
   What have you tried? What are you thinking about?

2:00 Small group feedback on agendas

3:00 Create community
   How can participants support each other?
   How can we support them?
   What can we do for you?
   How is Betsy going to study the process?
   Closing ideas

4:00 End – Drive safely

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Workshop Review

Myers Briggs

- Extraversion (E) or Introversion (I)
- Sensing (S) or Intuition (N)
- Thinking (T) or Feeling (F)
- Judging (J) or Perceiving (P)
Leadership is…

A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

Type I Teaching and Learning

Definition
- Teaching by transmission, learning by reception.
- Teacher has information that the students need.
- Focus is on individual learning.

Example
- Lecture
Type II Teaching and Learning

- Definition
  - Teaching by transmission, learning by sharing.
  - The role of the teacher is to transmit info and to enable students to share info with one another.
  - Teacher is primary source of information.
  - Focus is on individual learning.

- Examples
  - Guided class discussion
  - Lecture followed by discussion

Type III Teaching and Learning

- Definition
  - Joint construction of new knowledge.
  - Teacher becomes a member of the group.
  - Information transfer occurs between learners, between learners and the group, and between the group and learners.
  - Dialogue is the means by which this occurs.
  - Focus is on individual and group learning.

- Example
  - Team Learning and Collaborative Learning
Collaborative Learning

Definition
- To labor together to produce knowledge, and frequently, to take action on the basis of new knowledge (Peters, 1995).
- Collaborative learning is a group process, an intentional, conscious, reflective moment out of which something new is created – something that was not already present in the individuals themselves or the group.
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Stage IV
Generative Flow
- New Something

Stage III
Inquiry/Reflection

Stage I
Politeness

Stage II
Breakdown/Conflict
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- Participants act, reflect on their actions, act upon their reflections, et cetera ...
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  - Sharing stories
  - Laughing
  - Sharing a meal
  - Catching up

- Establishes a personal connection between participants through identification and resonance with others' experiences.
Identifying Stakeholders

- Capacity
- Difficulty
- Dynamics
- Familiarity
- IMPACT

Power
- Stimulus
- Territory
- Variety

Facilitating in a Collaborative Learning Way
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- Humble
- Self-confidence to step back and let the group lead
- Takes risks by being open
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- **Be transparent about your own assumptions.**
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**Team Learning**

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*(Senge, et al., *The Fifth Discipline*)*
Consensus

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Bracketing

A way to make explicit assumptions and biases
What do you expect to happen when you are working with groups of people and working with collaborative learning?
Card given to participants - workshop take home message.

Facilitating in a Collaborative Learning Way

• Encourage people to share their experiences and make contributions to the group; make connections for yourself and help others make connections.

• Help draw out those who aren’t talking – make space for them even if it means you have to, politely, get someone else to stop talking.

• Be willing to step out of your facilitating role – you don’t always have to be the one presenting or directing the group.

• Pay attention to your physical position within the group and within the room.

• Be open to new ideas; explore new ideas or ideas that challenge the group (as time permits).

• Make time at the end of meetings for the GROUP to reflect on what they heard – help participants make sense of what was learned and accomplished.

• Foster ownership of the group.

• CREATE COMMUNITY