

DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTITIONER
RESEARCHERS: HISTORY AND ANALYSIS
OF THE HUMAN AND WORK DIMENSIONS
OF AN ADULT EDUCATION DOCTORAL
STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP

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C O P Y R I G H T

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The past few decades have brought new challenges to the field of higher education. Greater numbers of students, students from non-traditional age groups, and students representing a variety of cultures have affected the profile of higher education. As a result of these changes, faculty find themselves faced with pressure from their institutions to be more innovative, to provide more individual guidance for students, to implement new technology into their courses, and to offer courses at distance utilizing technologies they are unfamiliar with or are completely foreign to (Cranton, 1998, p. 37).

Institutions of higher learning are beginning to address the issue of increasing numbers of individuals who have spent years in the workforce and are returning to colleges and universities. Statistics for the 1995-96 academic year show that:

Graduate study at the master's level is primarily a part-time activity. Most students enrolled less than full time for the full year and worked while enrolled (many full time). Among MBA and education master's students who worked, most considered themselves primarily employees rather than students (85 and 75 percent, respectively).... About half of the Ph.D. students enrolled full time for the full year....Relatively few Ed.D.

students enrolled full time, full year (16 percent), and most of those who worked considered themselves primarily employees (82 percent). (<http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/2001/section1/indicators06.html>)

These learners are seeking credentials offered by institutions in specific areas. Faculty interact with learners that seek to acquire tools to cope with a constantly changing environment (Cranton, 1998, p. 32). "In our fast-changing world, people are also changing careers in a way that they have never done before. As part of preparing students for the workforce, we are also responsible for fostering lifelong learning" (p. 33).

In the College of Education of Oklahoma State University a group of people came together in an Ed.D. program which is a practitioner oriented program. The goal of this group was to become better practitioners. They were very good practitioners due to their experience and background where they had functioned. However, they had a task to overcome. That task was to learn how to become researchers. This group of people came together and formed a support group. Participation in this group allowed them to demystify and overcome the research process. This group has overcome by applying adult learning principles they learned about in their classes. They implemented these principles in

both a Human dimension and a Work dimension. A community already existed that had formed as the students shared classes together. The community expanded as the support group evolved in the pursuit to overcome the daunting barrier of learning how to conduct research.

Higher Education

The public eye has focused on improving accountability in colleges and universities. "Publicly funded colleges and universities are now under pressure to serve public policy objectives" (Cranton, 1998, p. 36). The public demands more direct and appropriate training of students for the workplace, enhancement of the quality of teaching and what it achieves, faculty is encouraged to emphasize teaching over research and there is the expectation that our institutions serve more students from non-traditional backgrounds (p. 37). As the workplace desires well-prepared employees, many students seek to acquire more practical experiences that will help them in their future job-hunting efforts. The phenomenal growth of community colleges (Vaughan, 1995, pp. 1-2) and their commitment to meet the diverse needs of students are good examples of this change (Willyard, 2000, p. 5). As a result of new economic trends and fundamental changes in society's view of higher

education, there is growing pressure that conflicts with the traditional higher education system that has been independent of outside control. This increasing pressure challenges the view many have had of higher education as an ivory tower. "Ivory towers they are no longer; they are, more than ever, embedded in the society that surrounds them and reflective of its membership" (Rhodes, 1998, p. 7).

The higher education community has acknowledged these economic and societal trends. In spite of an increase in enrollment, institutions in the United States report between 40% to 60% of all doctoral candidates failing to complete their degrees (Bair & Haworth, 1999). The growing numbers of non-traditional students with familial and vocational obligations contribute to these figures. These completion statistics mirror the challenges that institutions face. Increased and diverse efforts are required to remedy this troublesome forecast.

Formal development of graduate study in the United States found its beginnings and current structure during the 1880's-1890's. "American scholars who traveled to Germany to earn advanced degrees implemented this philosophy when they assumed leadership roles in the new educational institutions being formed" (Krogh, 1997, p. 33). Harvard, Yale, and

Columbia promoted graduate study as early as 1880 with a call for a graduate faculty of arts and sciences to pursue new knowledge, which was preferably scientific and certainly systematic (Schön, 2001, p. 7).

With the development of graduate schools in the United States, study beyond the bachelor degree was established and the organization of individual graduate departments on campuses across the United States began. Higher education in U.S. institutions shifted from the English style of colleges, which emphasized the study of the classics, to the German model which stressed research and teaching (Pavel, 1999, p. 2). Institutions of higher learning became the credential gatekeepers, and they confer degrees to individuals that complete the requirements established by the institution.

In the United States, the associates degree is a 2-year program designed to either provide the first 2 years of a 4-year college degree or to prepare a student for the workforce in a particular field (Willyard, 2000, p. 32). The bachelors degree provides what is viewed as a core base of knowledge befitting an individual; this degree usually takes 4 years to complete with cumulative credit hours adding up to between 120 to 126 depending on the institution (Rhodes,

1998, p. 11). A master's degree is bestowed upon those whom the institution views to have completed a more in-depth study of a given field of knowledge; it usually requires accumulating at least 30 credit hours beyond the bachelor degree to demonstrate "mastering" an area of knowledge. The doctoral degree is the highest academic degree and is granted by the institution of higher education to the individual who generally accumulates at least 60 credit hours beyond a master's degree and adds new theory and knowledge to a field of study through research. In the United States, there are two types of doctoral degrees: the Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree and the professional degrees. The Ph.D. is a traditional degree that tends to be theory and research oriented. The professional degrees such as the Doctor of Education (Ed.D.), Doctor of Medicine (M.D.), and Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.), apply theory into practice.

Like the Doctor of Philosophy, the Doctor of Education requires the graduate student to conduct original research. Original research is research that has not been carried out previously or that creates new knowledge (Council of Graduate Schools, 1997, p. 5). Original research is reported by the student through a dissertation.

The dissertation should reveal the student's ability to analyze, interpret and synthesize information; demonstrate the student's knowledge of the literature relating to the project or at least acknowledge prior scholarship on which the dissertation is built; describe the methods and procedures used; present results in a sequential and logical manner; and display the student's ability to discuss fully and coherently the meaning of the results. (Council of Graduate Schools, 1997, pp. 4-5)

The dissertation is prepared with the approval and under the direction of members of a faculty advisory committee (Oklahoma State University Catalog, 2001, p. 171). At Oklahoma State University, the committee is appointed at the request of the student by the Dean of the Graduate College (p. 171). Generally, when course work is satisfactorily completed, a dissertation outline is prepared and submitted to the graduate college (p. 170). After completing the research, a final draft copy of the proposed dissertation is presented to the committee for defense. The student must demonstrate self-direction in the research and dissertation preparation to receive the doctoral degree (p. 170).

HRAE Program

In 1997, the Dean of the College of Education of Oklahoma State University re-organized the college and created the School of Educational Studies. Adult Education for the last 20 years had been offered as service courses as

part of the Occupational and Adult Education doctoral degree. Under the re-organization, Human Resource Development and Adult Education joined into one program area and offered the doctoral degree. The Adult Education portion of the program was designed for the application of adult learning principles to the students' field of expertise in their life experience. It was also during this time span that Oklahoma State University recruited and subsequently hired a full professor to strengthen the program, Dr. Gary J. Conti from Montana State University.

Students began to enroll in the program envisioning it as an opportunity to apply their life and professional experiences in a collaborative learning environment. In this program, they could contribute their experience in the facilitation of the learning of their peers, benefit from the experience of others, and add adult learning principles to their base knowledge. This in turn would prepare these students in the application of adult learning principles within their established fields of expertise, validating their prior experience and preparing them to become leaders and facilitators in their given area. This program attracted a diverse population of mature adults in their thirties, forties, and fifties. These women and men had made great

advances in their careers, raised their families with their spouses or alone, and continued to live very busy lives. African-Americans, Native American, White Anglo-Saxons, and Hispanics were enrolling in the program thus representing the diverse population found in the state of Oklahoma.

The Human Resources and Adult Education (HRAE) program was delivered in Tulsa as well as on the main campus in Stillwater. In Tulsa, it was a satellite program at the OU/OSU Research and Graduate Education Center on the consortium campus of Oklahoma State University with Oklahoma University, Langston University, and Rogers State College. In an administrative push to build programs on this campus, one of the lead programs was the Adult Education graduate program. This program began to grow exponentially in numbers as word got out within the Tulsa community of a great opportunity to apply life and professional experiences within a degree program of quality. With the support of the administration, Dr. Conti was to be assigned to the Tulsa campus to help build this program. Although the administrative details of this assignment were never finalized, Dr. Conti moved his residence to the Tulsa area, was assigned an office on the Tulsa campus, and conducted regular and continuous advising on the Tulsa campus.

Core courses offered in this program carried titles and covered areas of learning such as Characteristics of Adult Learners, Foundations of Adult and Continuing Education, and Instructional Strategies for Adults. The learners were introduced to the work of Lindeman, Knowles, Kidd, Houle, Smith, Horton, and Freire. Students were introduced not only to their published works in the field of the education of adults but also to their life work and to many of those who were impacted and benefitted by it. The learners that gathered in these courses not only learned the theory behind how and why adults learn but also were able to see its practical application in real-life situations. They came to realize that adult learning is going on everywhere and all of the time and that work is being done in this field by everyday people throughout the entire world.

Adult Learning

A Council of Graduate Schools report indicated that in 1997 over 55% of graduate students were women, the majority of students work full time, and 20% of all graduate students were representative of some ethnic minority (Council of Graduate Schools, 1999, pp. 3, 11). The typical graduate student was 33-years old with a spouse and children (Syverson, 1997, pp. 2-3). "These students, many of whom are

already engaged in successful careers, are likely to have different expectations for program availability, as well as content, than their younger counterparts" (p. 3). They are adults who are undertaking educational activities as well as carrying out their various additional roles. These learners are engaging in adult education since "adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing about changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills" (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9).

Over the past four decades the field of adult education has emerged. This field of study has developed a conceptual and theoretical base of knowledge. The concepts of andragogy, self-directed learning, learning how to learn, transformational learning, and empowerment are foundation concepts for the field.

Andragogy

Modern adult education is based on the assumptions of "andragogy". Andragogy is "the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1970, p. 38). It refers "to the discipline which studies the adult education process or the science of adult education" (Nottingham Andragogy Group,

1983, p. 5).

Andragogy as proposed by Malcolm Knowles (1970) is premised on six assumptions of the characteristics of adult learners "to be checked out in terms of their rightness for particular learners in particular situations" (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 1998, p. 96). These assumptions are that: (a) adults have a need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it, (b) adults are increasingly self-directing, (c) the learner's experience is a rich resource for learning, (d) the adult's readiness to learn develops from life tasks and problems, (e) an adult's orientation to learning is task or problem centered, and (f) an adults motivation to learn is driven by internal factors (Knowles, 1993, p. 97; Knowles et al., 1998, pp. 64-68).

The concept of andragogy has been foundational to the field of adult education.

The growing numbers of non-traditional learners turning to institutions of higher learning possess much more life experience than younger students. The expectations of these non-traditional adult learners are higher than those of younger traditional students (Syverson, 1997, p.3). The demands they experience from daily life place added pressure on the amounts of time and the focus of their learning

transactions. "The most critical actions that educators of adults can take is to recognize the equal importance of the various types of adult learning and advocate that people use them in whatever situation or setting they find themselves" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 43).

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning "is any process where the learner is the decision-maker and in control of the learning process" (Ghost Bear, 2001, p. 8). This process takes place when:

Individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning need, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes. (Knowles, 1975, p. 18)

Additionally, self-directed learning "usually takes place in association with various kinds of helpers, such as teachers, tutors, mentors, resource people, and peers" (p. 18).

Self-directed learning is a process that consists of six major steps: (a) setting the climate, (b) diagnosing learning needs, (c) formulating learning goals, (d) identifying human and material resources for learning, (e) choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and (f) evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

Adult educators have become increasingly interested in self-directed learning during the last 20 years (Long, 1992). Studies have revealed that 70% of adult learning is self-directed in nature (Tough, 1978). Learning in adulthood is synonymous with becoming more self-directed and autonomous (Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Knowles 1970). Because of their life experiences, non-traditional learners can be expected to be self-directed in their approach to learning.

Learning How to Learn

Learning how to learn is the process of:

Possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters. If you possess the necessary knowledge and skill, you've learned how to learn; and when you help yourself or others to acquire that kind of knowledge or skill, the concept is also at work. (Smith, 1976, p. 19)

There are three interrelated components or subconcepts to the learning how to learn concept. These components are the learner's needs, learning style, and training (Smith, 1976).

Learner needs are what a learner is required to know and be able to do to be successful in reaching their learning goal. Learning style is a person's individualized preferences and tendencies that influence their learning. Training is an organized activity or instruction to increase

competence in learning (Smith, 1976, p. 17).

Adults that have learned how to learn know how to take control of their own learning, overcome personal barriers to learning, learn from life and everyday experiences, and know the conditions under which they learn best. The learning process can be observed when adult learners lead and participate in discussion and problem-solving groups, negotiate the educational bureaucracy, learn from a mentor, and know how to help others learn more effectively (Smith, 1982, p. 16). The components contained in the process of learning how to learn are vital to completing a doctoral program.

Transformative Learning

The theory of transformative learning is "a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construct, validate and reformulate the meaning of their experience" (Cranton, 1994, p. 22). This type of learning is anchored in life experience. All humans have a need to make sense of their life experiences. During the process of making sense of their experiences, individuals first try the usual ways of thinking that have worked for them in the past. When this does not work, they either deny or postpone acknowledging the problem, or they can confront it (Mezirow,

1981). The process of reflecting on new experiences and trying to make meaning out of them provides an opportunity to make a change in perspective. Critical self-examination of assumptions, beliefs, and experiences are interpreted and are necessary elements for transformative learning to occur. During the process, learners' assumptions are reviewed and thus may be transformed.

Four phases are imperative for significant transformational learning: "critical reflection of assumptions, validating contested beliefs through discourse, taking action on one's reflective insight, and critically assessing it" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 11). In critical reflection, the learner examines assumptions and the basis upon which these assumptions have been accepted. In validating contested beliefs through discourse, the learner talks with others reviewing the evidence and arguments to arrive at a consensus. Action on the new perspective is imperative, both in thinking about it and in living it. Finally, critically assessing the new knowledge to determine its validity closes the cycle. The responsibility of the educator is to promote this critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997).

Non-traditional students aspire to bring about change

in their lives through various learning programs. Doctoral programs are an academic process adults engage in to make changes in their life situations. The process of completing a doctoral program can have a major impact on people. Their meaning schemes can be challenged as they learn their perspectives, and their lives may be transformed.

Empowerment

While transformative learning concentrates on personal change, the theory of empowerment is set within the larger framework of fundamental social change (Adams, 1975; Freire, 1970/1999). "Empowerment involves using learning from the social environment to understand and deal with the political realities of one's social and economic situation" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 21). Teachers and adult learners cooperate in a dialogue that seeks to humanize and to raise awareness about their life situations. The ultimate goal of this form of education is liberation. This comes about through praxis.

Praxis is "the action and reflection of men upon their world in order to transform it" (Freire, 1970/1999, p. 60). The transformation of one's consciousness is the process in which people achieve an awareness of the reality that shapes their lives and their capacity to transform that reality. This process is called conscientization (p. 49). Emphasis is

placed on mental constructs and inner meaning in descriptions of how adults learn (Freire, 1970/1999, p. 60; Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Change is a common element in the emphases. Biases, assumptions, and values are all impacted if meaningful learning occurs.

Consciousness raising and empowerment are fostered by the dialogic process. The dialogic process is a raising of awareness carried out by talking about problems and working out the answers in group dialogues as the means by which people learn. Through this learning process, people are empowered (Freire, 1970/1999, p. 105; Mezirow, 1997, p. 10). In 1927, Myles Horton discovered the effectiveness of dialogue as a means of learning in his practice at Highlander Folk School in the mountains of Ozone, Tennessee. As a result of his community meetings:

He had learned that the people knew the answers to their own problems. He had learned that the teacher's job was to get them talking about those problems, to raise and sharpen questions, and to trust people to come up with the answers. (Adams, 1975, p. 4)

Rather than originating from the experts, the process of peer group learning and solutions advanced from the people. This became the central focus of the group process at Highlander because "the group stretches the imagination of every individual in it and becomes the vehicle for

introducing the concept of collective learning power. When this happens, the 'seeds of fire' are unearthed" (p. 214).

The traditional approach in doctoral programs differs from the format of the Citizenship Schools fostered by the Highlander Folk School in the South during the Civil Rights Movement. "A Citizenship School would start off full of individuals who quickly became a group, helping one another learn to hold pencils, to say words, to make the tongue work" (Adams, 1975, p. 119). The Citizenship Schools capitalized on the adult learning principle of cooperation. Citizenship School facilitators realized that "individualism is enhanced by being part of a group" (Moyers, 1990, p. 4). In contrast to this group approach supported by adult learning principles, the structure of traditional doctoral programs foster individualism and competition. The research process to complete the dissertation is often done in isolation.

The Reflective Practitioner

The goal of graduate programs in the professional fields is to develop reflective practitioners. Reflective practitioners are individuals who find new knowledge, test it through application, reflect on the results, and use the outcome in self-directed learning endeavors to obtain

additional information they need (Schön, 1987). One example to explain the process used by reflective practitioners is good conversation (Schön, 2001).

And so is good conversation which must be neither wholly predictable nor wholly unpredictable. If it's wholly predictable, it's boring and not good, if it's wholly unpredictable....Good conversation...involves a moving between those extremes in a kind of on-line observation and action which is so natural and spontaneous to us that we don't even think about the capacity we have to do it. (p. 6)

Doctoral programs in the professional fields strive to produce reflective practitioners who are capable of composing new, field-based knowledge. In the research stage of their doctoral programs, students are expected to take the classroom-based knowledge that they have learned and apply it in real-life settings in a way to create new knowledge. This application of knowledge results in further action, a cycle that creates a vibrant program.

Group Dynamics

A small group is "any number of persons engaged in interaction with each other...in which each member receives some impression...of each other member distinct enough so that he can...give some reaction to each of the others as an individual person" (Bales, 1950, p. 33; Hare, Blumberg, Davies, & Kent, 1994). The interaction aspect or activity

that occurs between the people involved and the motive forces or changes that occur in that activity are the central focus in the study of group dynamics (p. 120). Research in group dynamics has provided some characteristics that are visible in all types of groups: (a) individuals affect groups, (b) groups develop structure and notions on how business should be conducted, (c) groups develop standards such as standards of productivity, acceptable communication patterns, and approved methods and procedures; (d) groups establish group goals and groups form because they are instrumental in satisfying member needs; and (e) groups vary in cohesiveness. Cohesiveness is defined as the tenacity with which a group sticks together, the extent to which members would resist giving up membership. (Frey, Gouran, & Poole, 1999; Gulley, 1960, pp.69-77).

Two dimensions of operation exist in small groups. Each dimension varies in degree of dominance. The first dimension is sociability. The sociability or social-emotional designation is concerned with friendliness, warmth, and member well-being. Groups can be expected to exhibit varying degrees of sociability according to the supremacy of task or social-emotionality and can change from moment to moment. The second dimension is the determination to achieve

productivity. The determination to achieve productivity or task designation has to do with activities directed toward goal-achievement characterized by sober and orderly conduct (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999; Keyton, 1999; Stock & Thelen, 1958).

Problem Statement

Competent professionals are returning to institutions of higher education to seek doctoral degrees. Despite the rigorous entry requirements for doctoral programs, large numbers of these adult learners are not completing program requirements. One reason for this may be that doctoral students do not have a support system within higher education based on adult learning principles that provides on-going opportunities for interaction with other learners and faculty to aid the students in completing their goals (Bair & Haworth, 1999, p. 16).

Individuals encounter many barriers in their pursuit of graduate degrees such as the daunting task of completing the dissertation process. This stage of the doctoral process is different from the teacher-oriented classroom portion because it requires the student to be self-directed. Unfortunately, self-direction can be misunderstood to signify the solitary effort of an individual to learn. In

many cases, during the doctoral research process, learners lack a facilitator functioning "to challenge learners with alternative ways of interpreting their experience and to present to them ideas and behaviors that cause them to examine critically their values, ways of acting, and the assumptions by which they live" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 23). More specifically, instructors do not provide the learners the direction they need to begin to understand the research process to initiate their learning. Students find themselves isolated and not knowing where to begin or how to successfully complete the process. This dynamic has created a group of learners that the literature and higher education community have labeled "All But Dissertation" or ABD (Hanson, 1992, p. 3). A recent analysis of studies carried out during the last 30 years found that between 40% to 60% of students that begin doctoral programs do not graduate (Bair & Haworth, 1999).

However, there is one group that has overcome these obstacles. This group is known as the Make It So (MIS) support group. MIS is a grassroots support group of Oklahoma State University graduate students in the Adult Education program. These learners organized and began to meet in participants' homes in June, 2000, to collaborate in finding

ways to cope with and overcome the tasks involved in the research and dissertation processes of earning a doctoral degree. The group met on a regular basis organized around the schedules of the participants. The initial purpose of the meetings was to demystify the dissertation process. This demystification included both that of the research process and the administrative processes involved with completing their dissertations. Topics discussed within the group included how to select a dissertation topic, proposal writing, research question formulation, methodology and research design, diverse ways to present research findings, data compilation, data entry and analysis, conclusion and recommendation writing, dissertation final draft preparation, rules and procedures of the process established by the university, and Graduate College requirements. These activities relate both to the cognitive processes required to complete the research and to the factors in the affective domain that influence students and their families. The accomplishments of each member of MIS were celebrated as students moved through the process. Moreover, each of these milestones were critically analyzed by the group through a group sharing of the experiences and a discussion of the meanings of these experiences.

Make It So (MIS) gatherings were well attended by the learners. Two different branches existed; one was in the Tulsa area, and one was in the Oklahoma City area. In Tulsa, meeting places were ordinarily in the learners' homes and were hosted by one of the participants. The average meeting attendance consisted of 25 to 30 people in Tulsa. In Oklahoma City the group met at a community college where several of the participants worked and the group had 10 regular attendees. Meeting agendas were always generated by the participants, and the sharing of food and celebrations were typical activities. Quite frequently participants' family members also attended MIS meetings.

Within the time frame of Fall of 2000 to Spring of 2002, 16 MIS members have successfully completed the Doctor of Education degree. All of the original members of both the Tulsa and Oklahoma City groups have either graduated or are in the final stages of their research. New members have joined the group and have made considerable progress toward completing their dissertation process. Six of the original members of the MIS group have had their dissertations nominated for the Oklahoma State University's Research Excellence Award, and two of those nominees have won this award.

This group not only studied adult learning as a content area but also undertook to implement adult learning principles in its Make It So (MIS) activities. The support provided within the group and the sharing of learning experiences has had a positive effect on the participants. However, no systematic analysis has been conducted regarding the learning that has taken place. The manner by which adult learning principles have been applied by the MIS group has the potential to provide insights into how the application of adult learning principles in higher education can be used to address the chronically high non-completion rates in doctoral programs. This can be accomplished because "research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied offers the greatest promise of making significant contributions to the knowledge base and practice of education" (Merriam, 1998, p. 1).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe the activities implemented by the Make It So (MIS) support group of the Adult Education graduate program at Oklahoma State University. These activities were classified as being in either the Work or Human dimensions. These dimensions were

viewed as two-fold within a 2 x 2 matrix. The Work dimension consisted of the Task and Social-emotional domain. The Human dimension consisted of the Individual and Group domain. The classification of the activities was accomplished by (a) an analysis of the activities performed at their meetings, (b) a review and classification of their actions as being in either the Task domain or Social-Emotional domain, and (c) a review and classification of their actions under either an Individual domain or a Group domain of the support group.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. What activities were performed by the Make It So participants at their meetings?
2. What adult learning principles were exercised during these activities?
3. Which of these activities can be categorized in each of the following domains:
 - a. Task
 - b. Social-emotional
 - c. Individual
 - d. Group

In order to answer these questions related to the activities performed by the participants, the activities were categorized within the Work or Human dimensions. Each of these dimension were viewed as two-poled. The Work

dimension consisted of the Task domain and the Social-Emotional domain. The Human dimension consisted of the Individual domain, and the Group domain. The existing video and audio library of meetings were reviewed. Events and activities were analyzed, and selected quotes from these activities were compiled and categorized within these domains.

Definitions

Adult Education: Adult education is a process whereby persons whose major social roles are characteristic of adult status undertake systematic and sustained learning activities for the purpose of bringing changes in knowledge, attitudes, values, or skills (Darkenwald & Merriam, 1982, p. 9).

Adult Learning: The interpreting and giving meaning to experiences. (Moyers, 1990, p. 2).

Andragogy: The art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980, p. 43).

Doctoral Program: the highest academic degree and is granted by the institution of higher education to the individual who generally accumulates at least 60 credit hours beyond a master's degree and adds new theory and knowledge to a field of study through research.

Empowerment: "Involves using learning from the social environment to understand and deal with the political realities of one's social and economic situation" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 21).

Learning how to learn: "Possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters" (Smith, 1982, p. 19).

MIS: Student support group of the Adult Education doctoral program of Oklahoma State University. Two groups met, one in Tulsa, the other in Oklahoma City. MIS is the acronym for Make It So, name adopted by the group.

Self-directed Learning: A learning activity that is self-planned, self-initiated, and frequently carried out alone (Knowles, 1975, p. 18).

Support Group: A small group that gathers to provide help and encouragement to one another.

Transformative learning: "a comprehensive and complex description of how learners construct, validate and reformulate the meaning of their experience" (Cranton, 1994, p. 22).

CHAPTER 2

Higher Education

Higher education in the United States has its roots in the foundation of Harvard College 16 years after the Puritans landed in Massachusetts in 1636. Harvard was founded as a school for the training of ministers at what would now be considered the secondary school level (Knowles, 1962, p. 5). The college was the beginning of an institutional form that has grown to the distinguished position it holds today within society.

At the close of the colonial period, there were nine colleges serving the higher educational needs of the new nation. By 1800 there were approximately two dozen private colleges based upon the English university model which focused on the classics. These colleges had been founded primarily to educate and prepare people for the ministry, medicine, and law. They tended to serve the male-dominated classes. However, technological progress was creating a demand for a more skilled worker. The rapid growth of cities produced the need for a concentration of skilled workers and resources. Thus, large cities began to champion public education. With westward expansion, egalitarianism, which is characterized by the belief that all people should have

equal political, social, and economic rights, reached its highest peak. As they were admitted to the Union, new states, made provisions in their constitutions for state systems of public instruction (Knowles, 1962, p. 25).

Change was on the horizon and the new nation began to experience growing pains.

With the development of nationalism, egalitarianism, and concern for the wide diffusion of knowledge that characterized the first half of the nineteenth century, there emerged an increasing dissatisfaction with these institutions of higher learning. Specifically, they were seen as being too aristocratic in nature and representing the interests of special sects and factions rather than the interest of the state as a whole. (Knowles, 1962, p. 30)

To procure change, many states began to establish new state universities. This development was stimulated even more with a movement for federal legislation in support of agricultural and mechanical colleges (p. 31). Economically and socially, the United States of America was agriculturally based. In 1862 more than 80% of the U.S. population lived in rural surroundings. Agriculture was the nation's primary occupation, but rural areas were lagging far behind the cities. Although rural conditions were far better than those of most other nations at the time, illiteracy was widespread, and farming techniques were not keeping pace with the mechanical revolution. Each farm on

average produced enough food to feed five people. There were very few opportunities for rural people and farmers to obtain instruction in agriculture and other related areas (Place, 2000, pp. 1-4).

To address this deficiency a land-grant bill was introduced in 1862 by Vermont Representative Justin Morrill in support of the creation of agricultural and mechanical colleges. The design of the bill was:

To donate federal land (30,000 acres) to each state and territory as an endowment. The intent of the bill was to provide a broad segment of the population with a practical education that had direct relevance to their daily lives. (Place, 2000, p. 5).

At least one college in each state was to be established, and these institutions of higher learning would be created and dedicated to teaching such fields of learning as "agriculture, military tactics, and mechanical arts as well as classical studies so that members of the working classes could obtain a liberal, practical education" (p. 1). The bill was passed and consequently began the establishment of the land-grant college system in the United States.

In 1890 Senator Morrill introduced and obtained passage of a second bill that specified that states that maintained separate colleges for different races had to provide a just and equitable division of the funds they had received under

the first Morrill Act. As a consequence of the passage of this second bill, any state that had used their 1862 funds entirely for the education of white students found that they had to either open their facilities to black students or provide separate facilities for them. Thus, the Second Morrill Act led to the establishment of 16 black land-grant colleges throughout the South.

Land-grant colleges provided for the teaching of some of the arts and all of the sciences, and they paved the way for the development of university systems that focused beyond agriculture and the mechanical arts (Place, 2000, p. 6). Since their outset, land-grant institutions have expanded to contain programs of on-campus instruction, research, and off-campus extension work to provide scientific knowledge and expertise to the public through non-resident educational programs beyond the initial educational needs of agriculture and industrial classes. Land-grant universities have a mandate to openness, accessibility, and service to people, and all share the same tripartite mission of Teaching, Research, and Extension (p. 6).

The creation of land-grant colleges was not the only effort to improve higher education. There were several other

changes (Levenburg, 2002). Other efforts made prior to the Civil War include a down-grade in entry-level competencies. The college experience also began to include extra-curriculum gatherings such as literary clubs. Classrooms experienced a change in the mode of learning from recitation to lecture styles. Institutions introduced programs in applied science and a bachelor of science degree in which the study of the classics were excluded. These programs had the support of industrial philanthropists and became a standard during the 1870's. New courses were offered in psychology, the social sciences, economics, political science, and the fine arts. Assessment methods changed from oral examinations in favor of written examinations which were graded by instructors who used numerical scales. Finally, the establishment of over 175 geography-based colleges between 1860 and 1870 extended educational access to those throughout the nation (pp. 3-4).

At the end of the 1800's higher education continued to evolve. One major development was the beginning of the community college movement. This began when President William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago reorganized that college into two units with the freshman and sophomore years becoming a junior college (Knowles,

1962, p. 60). Joliet Junior College began in 1901 as an experimental postgraduate high school program with an initial enrollment of six students. It is the oldest public community college in the United States (Knowles, 1962, p. 60; Joliet Junior College, 2002, p. 1). The community college was "designed to accommodate students who desired to remain within the community and still pursue a college education" (Joliet Junior College, 2002, p. 1). During the subsequent decades of the 20th century, the community college has responded to the pressures of two world wars, depression, and rapid social change. The curriculum has expanded to include programs in business, industrial training, two-year occupational programs, and off-campus instructional sites offering credit and non-credit classes (pp. 2-3). Originally, community colleges "were established strictly for the education of youth, they provided a trunk unto which adult educational branches could be grafted" (Knowles, 1962, p. 60).

As the 20th century progressed, some colleges and universities in the United States began to explore meshing vocational and liberal education. Others felt that this intermingling would tarnish the integrity of institutional research (Levenburg, 2002, p. 5). Professionally trained

academicians entered the classrooms, and with them came the establishment of academic freedom and tenure (p. 5).

Regional associations were formed to deal with the question of standards, and in 1913 the Association of American Universities assumed the responsibility for accrediting colleges and universities within the United States.

Standards were established which extended beyond what defined curriculum, including minimum library size, maximum class size, and maximum faculty course loads. Colleges became organized by academic department with specialists defining courses of study, and the emphasis on scholarship was affirmed (p. 6).

During the balance of the 20th century, students were given greater flexibility in designing their majors thanks to elective courses. This customization ushered in the necessity of some type of student "advisors"; student personnel administrators became part of many college bureaucratic structures (Levenburg, 2002, pp. 6-7). Despite these changes, students rebelled against the authority of the institutions during the 1960's, charging that their classes were too large in size and that they did not receive enough attention from faculty (p. 7). Top administrators listened, and new courses and new forms of content delivery

were introduced. Colleges in the United States began to address how learning could also be made enjoyable (p. 7). During the 1970's, the assessment movement began with a desire to bring institutions to greater levels of accountability through focusing on students' abilities rather than qualities. Courses were designed to assist the student in becoming competent, defining sets of evaluative criteria, and proficiency level requirements for successful attainment (p. 7).

With rapid advances in technology and the widespread access to the World Wide Web, institutions of higher learning are confronting the need for the utilization of new modes of delivery, such as learning at distance and other information technologies. The "virtual university" has emerged offering online college courses and degree programs via the Internet. Alternatives are being provided with the establishment of the University of Phoenix (UOP) which was founded in 1976 and which is one of the nation's largest private accredited universities with enrollment exceeding 116,300 degree seeking student (University of Phoenix, 2002, p. 1). UOP implements a teaching-learning model that "Recognizes the difference between younger students without experience and working professionals with practical

knowledge. UOP emphasizes active participation over passive lecture, enabling students to leverage their experiences" (p. 1). At the UOP classes are kept small to encourage interaction among participants. The emphasis of the courses offered is real-world relevance and the application of learning on the job. Efforts are made to replicate the way work is performed on the job. An intensive course session of 4 or 5 weeks per class is the format used. With the implementation of this model, traditional universities are faced with the challenge of competing with a customer-oriented educational institution based on supply and demand. And furthermore, a customer that is focused with a view to satisfy a perceived need, and to do so on their own terms.

Throughout this long history and despite the current changes, higher education institutions have commanded a firm grasp on being the conferees of the credentials that certify an individual as qualified and capable in most fields of knowledge within society. These institutions set the standards of what is judged to be a complete and satisfactory preparedness in both knowledge and skills within a given field. They also set minimum requirements and standards for those who wish to participate in the acquisition of this knowledge. All of the adult learners

that were participants of the Make It So support group were operating within the structure of higher education. As adults, they had returned to formal education submitting themselves to the norms established by higher education. They were seeking the credentials that are accepted within society and granted by these institutions of higher learning.

Adult Learning

Adult Education as a field of study had its birth in the 20th century. There have been many important contributors to the field. This study makes reference to those adult educators whose contributions provide a support for the discussion of the activities of the Make It So support group.

Eduard Lindeman "articulated and implemented a vision of adult education which still constitutes the conceptual underpinnings of the field of theory and practice in the United States" (Brookfield, 2001, p. 94). In his seminal contribution to the field, The Meaning of Adult Education, Lindeman (1926/1989) describes adult education as "a continuing process of evaluating experiences, a method of awareness through which we learn to become alert in the discovery of meanings" (p. 85). Brookfield supports this and

expands this description:

It is evident that passing through experiences which become increasingly varied in their breadth, form and intensity, affects fundamentally how we perceive the world and how we interpret new happenings and stimuli. As we develop intimate relationships and experience their dissolution, as we leave the confines of the formal school system and enter the world of work or face the reality of unemployment, and as we become involved in developing political involvements within our communities and societies, we realise the contextuality of the world. We become sceptical of those who proclaim that they have the final answer or ultimate truth regarding the dilemmas and crises of adult life. (Brookfield, 1988, p. 320).

For Lindeman experience is central to learning, and the experience that matters is that of the learner. Experience is described as "first of all, doing something; second, doing something that makes a difference; third, knowing what difference it makes" (Lindeman, 1926/1989, p. 87). Other elements Lindeman's conception of education include are the need for educators of adults to build curriculum around the learners needs and interests (p. 6), to be aware that learners have different ways of learning (p. 18), and to understand that motivation in the learner comes from within the learner (p. 66). Learners need to be aware of how they learn best and take an active role in participatory learning in small groups (p. 89). During this process they may experience pain or conflict but adjustment to that situation

can produce learning (p. 94). For Lindeman learning does not occur in isolation, but rather "adult education is an agitating instrumentality for changing life" (p. 104).

Lindeman (1926/1989) warned adult educators that "if learning is to be revived, quickened so as to become once more an adventure, we shall have need of new concepts, new motives, new method; we shall need to experiment with the qualitative aspects of education" (p. 4). The call to increase the body of knowledge continues to be answered by future generations of adult educators. Lindeman advised adult educators that "we shall discover our meanings when we are engaged in the process of adult education, not in advance" (p. xlii). This study of the adult learners of the Make It So support group documents the discovery of that meaning.

Andragogy

Malcolm Knowles provided the field of adult education with a learner-centered and learner-directed model of instruction with the introduction of the concept of andragogy. "Andragogy is, therefore, the art and science of helping adults learn" (Knowles, 1970, p. 38). Premised initially on four assumptions about the characteristics of adult learners, andragogy assumes that:

As a person matures, 1.) his self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directing human being; 2.) he accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning; 3.) his readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his social roles; and 4.) his time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly his orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of problem-centeredness. (p. 39)

Two more assumptions were added later. The first assumption became "the need to know" because "adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it" (Knowles, Holton III, and Swanson, 1998, p. 64). The final assumption dealt with motivation and defined it as internal pressures (p. 68).

In the andragogical model, the function and responsibility of the facilitator or teacher "is to create a rich environment from which students can extract learning and then to guide their interaction with it so as to maximize their learning from it" (Knowles, 1970, p. 51). The concept of andragogy "is the single most popular idea in the education and training of adults, in part because and for the way in which it grants to educators of adults a sense of their distinct professional identity" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 91). In andragogy "the learner is viewed as a mutual partner

or, when learning in natural settings, as the primary designer of learning activities" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 37).

The application of andragogical assumptions to the teacher-learning process was manifest in a seven-step program planning model (Knowles, 1970, p. 54). The first step in this model is the establishment of a climate conducive to adult learning. Physical conditions such as seating and lighting should be comfortable and conducive to interaction. An atmosphere of mutual respect and trust is encouraged as well as acceptance of differences and freedom of expression (p. 41).

The second step is the creation of an organizational structure for participative planning. The teacher and learner share in the planning and carrying out of their learning activities. "Every individual tends to feel committed to a decision (or activity) to the extent that he has participated in making it (or planning it)" (Knowles, 1970, p. 42).

The third step is the diagnosis of needs for learning. This process has three phases the first being that of constructing a model of competencies. Once that model is established, there is a diagnosing of competencies based on

that model. The last phase is helping the learner measure the gaps between present competencies and the model (Knowles, 1970, p.42).

The fourth step is the formulation of directions of learning or objectives. Adults will engage in learning activities if there is practical application incorporating the new knowledge to their past experience (Knowles, 1970, p. 53).

The fifth step is the development of a design of activities. The learner must have a voice in determining the learning activities. Group discussions, role plays and field projects are just a few of the methods that can be used to achieve this (Knowles, 1970, p. 45).

The sixth step is the operation of the activities. The instructor is an important resource as a facilitator and guide. The past experiences of the learners play an important role as resources for learning using discussion, role playing, and case method as techniques (Knowles, 1970, p. 53).

The seventh and final step is the rediagnosis of the needs for learning. "Andragogical theory prescribes a process of self-evaluation, in which the teacher devotes his energy to helping the adults get evidence for themselves

about the progress they are making toward their educational goals" (Knowles, 1970, p. 43).

The primary strength of andragogy is that it is learner-centered and the final decision of a learning experience resides with the learner (Knowles, 1970, pp. 50-52). "There are certain conditions of learning that are more conducive to growth and development than others" (p. 52). "These superior conditions seem to be produced by practices in the learning-teaching transaction that adhere to certain superior principles of teaching" (p. 52) as follows:

- The learners feel a need to learn;
- The learning environment is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences;
- The learners perceive the goals of a learning experience to be their goals;
- The learners accept a share of the responsibility for planning and operating a learning experience, and therefore have a feeling of commitment toward it;
- The learners participate actively in the learning process;
- The learning process is related to and makes use of the experience of the learners;
- The learners have a sense of progress toward their goals. (pp. 52-53)

As the participants of the Make It So (MIS) support group completed course requirements for the doctoral degree in Adult Education, they were constantly indulging in the assumptions of andragogy and its seven principles of

effective practice. These encounters involved theoretical discussions and exercises the application of these assumptions. The mind set of the participants was centered on the application of these concepts throughout learning transactions related to their learning in the graduate process.

Self-Directed Learning

Allen Tough proposed one of the first descriptions of self-directed learning which he termed self-planned learning or self-teaching. Self-teaching is the act by the learner of taking on the responsibility for the planning and direction of the learning process (Tough, 1968, p. 47). Conducting a study of the learning projects of 66 people in Ontario, Canada, he found that 70% of the projects were planned by the learners. He defined a learning project as "a highly deliberate effort to gain and retain certain definite knowledge and skill, or to change in some other way" (Tough, 1978, p. 250). This research also demonstrated "the most common and most important reason for adult learning is the desire to use or apply the knowledge and skill" (Tough, 1968, p. 52). At the same time, three reasons seem to influence adults' decision to learn: (a) what they are trying to do, accomplish or get; (b) a major question,

something that puzzles them, a research or philosophical question; and (c) their perception of what behavior is appropriate, normal, or desirable in the given situation (p. 54). Although there still exists disagreement on the amount and type of self-directed learning that occurs within the general population, the work of Tough has established the existence of the independent pursuit of learning in natural settings (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 195).

Another important contribution to the field of knowledge and practice of adult education is the description of self-directed learning posed by Malcolm Knowles. Self-directed learning describes the process in which individuals take the initiative in diagnosing needs, formulating learning goals, identifying resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating learning outcomes (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Self-directed learning is grounded in the humanistic philosophical assumptions of personal autonomy and free will to make individual choices. "When people have the opportunity to learn by taking some initiative and perceiving the learning in the context of their own life situations, they will internalize more quickly, retain more permanently, and apply more confidently" (p. 11). Knowles

furnished many resources for both learners and practitioners such as the use of learning contracts and evaluation methods. These resources have successfully been employed in the practice of adult education.

Stephen Brookfield has made many contributions to the field of adult education. One area has been his orientation of the concept of self-directed learning. Brookfield advocates that self-directed learning is more than a technical process of steps and procedures (Brookfield, 1986, p. 57). An adult's autonomy is guiding the concept. He delineates autonomy as the "possession of an understanding and awareness of a range of alternative possibilities" (p. 58). This understanding of alternative possibilities is enhanced by a transactional dialogue. It is an encounter of alternative ways of viewing the world, experiences, and attitudinal sets and of alternative ways of looking at personal, professional, political, and recreational worlds with a multitude of differing purposes, orientations, and expectations. Co-learners challenge each other with "alternative ways of interpreting their experience and ...present to them ideas and behaviors that cause them to examine critically their values, ways of acting, and the assumptions by which they live" (p. 23). When adults view

their personal and social worlds as contingent, therefore accessible to interventions, then the internal disposition for self-directed action exists.

The most complete form of self-directed learning occurs when process and reflection are married in the adult's pursuit of meaning....In which critical reflection on the contingent aspects of reality, the exploration of alternative perspectives and meanings systems, and the alteration of personal and social circumstances are all present....When they act on the basis of that appreciation to reinterpret and recreate their personal and social worlds. (pp. 58-59)

Central to Brookfield's understanding of self-directed learning is this interplay of thought and action.

The participants of the Make It So (MIS) support group perceived themselves as self-directed learners. All of the MIS meetings were based on the understanding that self-direction was enhanced thanks to the interaction with others. This principle was a driving undercurrent guiding the activities of MIS as they were planned and engaged by the participants.

Learning How to Learn

Robert Smith advances the idea that it is necessary that adults learn how to learn, which is intimately allied with self-directed learning. "Learning how to learn involves possessing, or acquiring, the knowledge and skill to learn

effectively in whatever learning situation one encounters" (Smith, 1982, p. 19). Smith views learning how to learn as a process that requires an acquisition and a development of attitudes, understandings, and skills that are associated with carrying out self-directed learning projects (Smith, 1990). The learner who has gained insight into this process can be viewed as a truly educated person. "The man who has learned how to learn...has learned how to adapt and change...has realized that no knowledge is secure; that only the process of seeking knowledge gives a basis for security" (Rogers, 1983, p. 120).

There are three interrelated components or subconcepts to the learning how to learn idea. These components are learners needs, learning style, and training (Smith, 1976). Learner needs are what a learner is required to know and be able to do to be successful. Learning style is a person's individualized preferences and tendencies that influence learning. Training is an organized activity or instruction to increase competence in learning (p. 17). Those who have learned how to learn has some level of mastery of these three components within their context of self even if cognitively they do not have a clear understanding of these processes themselves. However, "a central task of learning

how to learn is developing awareness of oneself as learner....Self-understanding links directly to learning how to learn when learners become sensitive to, and in control of, the learning processes" (p. 57). The person who has learned how to learn "expects cycles in motivation and plateaus in achievement. They monitor their learning behavior....They develop strategies for rekindling interest and commitment....They may decide to seek diagnostic help...join a group, form a group" (Smith, 1976, p. 103). This strategy is just one way that those who have learned how to learn cope with their own learning style.

Directly linked to the learner's self-awareness as a learner and the learners being sensitive to and taking control of their learning process are the research contributions of Gary Conti in the area of learning strategies. "Learning strategies are techniques or skills that an individual elects to use in order to accomplish a learning task" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 7). These strategies are a matter of individual preference and develop throughout life varying by task. "While effectiveness of a particular style relates to the individual, the success of strategies depends more on situation" (Fellenz & Conti, 1993, p. 4).

With the creation of the instrument entitled Assessing The Learning Strategies of Adults (ATLAS), facilitators and learners can easily and rapidly identify "the pattern of learning strategy usage of the learners" (Conti & Kolody, 1998, p. 109). The ATLAS instrument is available in printed form and in an on-line version in both English and Spanish (available on-line: <http://hometown.aol.com/atlasgroups/atlas.htm>). The instrument utilizes a user friendly, flow-chart format to identify learning strategy preferences in 1 to 3 minutes. The respondents are quickly identified in one of three groups: Navigators, Engagers, or Problem Solvers.

Navigators are focused learners who prefer a well-planned, structured learning environment complete with feedback that allows them to monitor their progress and remain on course. Problem Solvers are learners who rely heavily on the critical thinking strategies of generating alternatives, testing assumptions, and practicing conditional acceptance. Problem Solvers prefer a learning environment that promotes creativity, trial and error, and hands-on experimentation. Engagers are passionate learners who operate from the affective domain with a love for learning and who learn best when actively engaged in the learning in a meaningful manner. Personal growth, increase in self-esteem, helping others, and working as part of a team for a worthwhile project are emotionally rewarding to Engagers and will motivate them to embark upon and to sustain a learning experience. (Conti & Kolody, 1999, p. 87-88)

ATLAS has been used in over 12 research dissertations and is currently utilized by many adult education practitioners to

facilitate their instructional practice. ATLAS aids the learner to a better comprehension of how they learn how to learn.

The participants of the Make It So (MIS) support group were not strangers to the concept of learning how to learn. They all were aware of the three sub-components of this concept. The MIS participants had clearly identified their needs. They had the need to know how to do original research, how to present that research in an accepted scholarly format, and how to maneuver through the many institutional requirements to obtain a doctoral degree.

The MIS participants were unambiguous about their individual learning preferences. MIS participants were familiar with the research of Conti and Kolody. The terminology from the ATLAS instrument was utilized extensively. All were familiar with their preferred learning strategy. Not only that, they had realized that other strategies existed, and that as resourceful learners, they could utilize other strategies according to the learning circumstances.

The need for training was one of the principal motivators for creating the MIS support group. The members understood their need to familiarize themselves with the

individual components of the dissertation, the proposal, the literature review, the different methodologies of research, the many ways of analyzing findings data and presenting it in written form, and the importance of clearly presenting conclusions and making recommendations to the field of adult education. It was clear to the participants that they could benefit by taking the time to share in the experiences of the different members as they progressed through each stage of the process. There was also the added benefit of the encouragement offered by the group to keep their individual motivation level high; this contributed to understanding that there are cycles in the learning process. A low in enthusiasm could be counteracted with this time together, which emphasized hearing of others progress and the milestones achieved.

Transformative Learning

When encountering new learning situations, adults can have a difficult time adapting to change. They may lack the ability to see new alternatives because of their past experiences, assumptions, or prejudices. Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning provides the framework by which adult learners can respond constructively to changes in their lives. Transformative learning is "the process of

learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the reformulation of a meaning perspective to allow a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience. Learning includes acting on these insights" (Mezirow, 1990, p. xvi). Meaning perspectives are understood to be the assumptions that make up the frame of reference used by individuals to interpret the meaning of experiences. Critical self-reflection should be understood as an assessment of the validity of the way one has posed problems and one's meaning perspectives.

Therefore, the most meaningful learning experiences for adults are those when they engage in critical self-reflection; when they re-evaluate how they pose problems and their notions on what they know, believe, feel, perceive and how they act. "Thinking critically in the context of adult life involves our scrutinizing the stock of comfortable and familiar assumptions, values and norms we have developed in childhood" (Brookfield, 1988, p. 322). Perspective transformations may then take place triggered by a growing accumulation of transformed meaning schemes. Perspective transformation may also occur in response to a disorienting dilemma which becomes a catalyst that precipitates critical reflection and transformation. Changing social norms may

also make it easier to entertain and sustain changes in alternative perspectives (Mezirow, 1990, p. 14).

The adult learners of the Make It So (MIS) support group understood that learning could sometimes be difficult as a consequence of the wealth of experience of which they were participants. Life experiences are an asset in learning situations since they provide links to new learning experiences. At the same time this wealth of experience can carry with it faulty assumptions and prejudices. One of the purposes of meeting in a support group was to provide the opportunity to have a sounding board for how the individual was posing problems encountered in the dissertation research process.

As dissertation writing was a new experience for all, this learning opportunity for many was disorienting. Learning to write in the style required for this type of document was challenging. This was especially so for those that had considered themselves as good at writing until that point. To have to submit their writing to the constant scrutiny of their advisors review was a humbling experience. In many instances, it could have left a student with feelings of inadequacy. However, the support group provided a forum where ideas could be presented, challenged, and

enhanced in a supportive environment of peers. This facilitated critical reflection on the entire experience.

Empowerment

The transformation of peoples perspectives has been the ambition of many educators of adults. However, "there has been from the beginning a consistent effort on the part of some adult educators, both in theory and practice, to link adult education with social change, transforming conditions through reflection and action" (Heaney, 1996, p. 4). Two adult educators who have been an example of and who in many instances inspired this practice are Myles Horton and Paulo Freire.

"My goal was to work for world democracy" (Horton, 1990, p. 9). The approach Horton used to accomplish his objective was the education of adults. The practice of adult education by Horton was as radical as his goal for world democracy. He worked outside of the formal education system becoming involved in the union labor movement, civil rights, and ecological grassroots movements from the 1950's to the 1970's. His work was accomplished at the Highlander Research and Education Center in Tennessee.

Horton carried out his educational practice with the belief that when people get together as a circle of

learners, problems and experiences can be discussed amongst the group and answers can be found (Peters & Bell, 2001, p. 251). "I always thought my role was to pose questions and help people examine what they already knew. By questions, you help people to know what they already know but don't know they know" (Horton, 1990, p. 10). Another aspect of Horton's approach was a great regard for the experiences of the learners. His design was for the learners to develop meaning from their experiences and from those of others within the learning group (Peters & Bell, 2001, p. 254). Dialogue was an essential element to the learning experience; it is used to uncover the answers to the learners problems. Last of all, at the end of every Highlander meeting, learners were encouraged to talk about what actions they were going to take with the knowledge that had been uncovered when they left the meeting and returned to their daily lives. For Horton, real learning took place when people did something with the knowledge and insights they acquired.

As a contemporary of Myles Horton but in a different part of the world, Paulo Freire began his practice of adult education in his native country Brazil in the late 1950's and the early 1960's with a revolutionary offensive against

illiteracy. His methodology was widely implemented by Catholics and others in literacy campaigns throughout the North East of Brazil. Freire and his methods were conceived as such a threat to the status quo in Brazil that Freire was jailed and later exiled after the military coup of 1964 (Freire, 1970/1999, p. 13).

Freire viewed an absolute division of the world into oppressed and oppressors (Freire, 1970/1999, pp. 25-30). Education is seen as a non-neutral process because education does not occur void of a context (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 104). As a result of this perspective, Freire conceptualized two kinds of education, one that enslaved and one that was emancipatory. The enslaving form of education was used by the power elite to sustain the status quo. Freire called this form of education a banking education. In banking education, "the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (Freire, 1970/1999, p. 53). This form of education has a teacher-centered approach where "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (p. 53). This enslaving form

of education begets a culture of silence, which is a state where if the oppressed are like receptacles allowing themselves to be filled, they are better students in adapting to the world as it is and to the fragmented view of reality deposited in them (pp. 53-54).

In opposition to this, emancipatory education is one that "involves a constant unveiling of reality" (Freire, 1970/1999, p. 62). It transpires through dialogue where the "teacher-of-the-students and the student-of-the-teacher cease to exist" (p. 61). The teacher becomes a student, and the student becomes a teacher. Together "they become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow" (p. 61).

In emancipatory education, problems are posed and reflected on through dialogue. They confront the reality of the existence within which all of the learners find themselves. It is conceived as a "reality in process, in transformation" (p. 64). Problems and solutions are posed in this manner, thus establishing an authentic form of thought and action or praxis (p. 64). This form of education

Affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming-as unfinished, uncompleted beings....It affirms women and men as being who transcend themselves....who move forward and look ahead, for whom immobility represents a fatal threat, for whom looking in the past must only be a means of understanding more clearly what and who they are

so that they can more wisely build the future. (p. 65)

The methodology Freire developed for his literacy efforts was one of raising the consciousness of the illiterate from their current status. The methodology involved having the learners "name" their world, reflecting on the meaning of these words and an exchange of viewpoints between students and teacher through dialogue. Freire postulated that when the oppressed reflect on their situation, this leads to action on their part (p. 48). A deepened consciousness of their situation suggests people to comprehend that their reality is susceptible to transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for change, and people feel in control, thus empowering them to change their reality (p. 66).

In graduate education, "graduate students are obviously a less powerful group whose best interests are often sacrificed to the interests of the dominant faculty/institution group" (Hinchey, & Kimmel, 2000, p. 20). Graduate students are dependent of the institutions in many ways such as for financial support or in obtaining the desired degree. Graduate students are also dependent of faculty for advisement of their dissertations, many times

"having to shape it according to the prevailing theory in a department rather than their own beliefs" (p. 22). Graduate students submit themselves to such a relationship because it is viewed as the way things are. Thus, an unequal power relationship exists. The institution and faculty are in a position of power. The student learns "very quickly what it is dangerous to say and how necessary it is to echo the voices and values of their supervisors" (p. 22). "The dependent society is by definition a silent society. Its voice is not an authentic voice, but merely an echo of the voice of the [more powerful]" (Freire, 1985, p. 73).

One of the expectations of the participants of the Make It So (MIS) support group was to achieve empowerment through their meetings. MIS participants believed that in learning as a group they would see "learners becoming aware of the forces which have brought them to their current situations and taking action to change some aspects of these situation" (Brookfield, 1988, p. 324). The practice of consciously naming their circumstances was performed with the anticipation that through dialogue with fellow participants inactivity would give way to activity and that acceptance of their current circumstances would give way to empowerment.

The Reflective Practitioner

Donald Schön became a major influence in the field of adult and continuing education during the 1980's and 1990's with his two publications on the concept of the reflective practitioner (Cervero, 2001, p. 206). Seven concepts are foundational to an understanding of what a reflective practitioner is.

The first is technical rationality which considers that practitioners are "instrumental problem solvers who select technical means best suited to particular purposes. Rigorous professional practitioners solve well-formed instrumental problems by applying theory and technique derived from systematic, preferably scientific knowledge" (Schön, 1987, pp. 3-4). However, problems in day-to-day practice do not present themselves in neat little packages; they tend to appear as messy and indeterminate situations. Situations of this nature fall outside categories of existing theory and technique. To deal with these competently, practitioners must work by some kind of improvisation, inventing and testing their strategies as they move along. Practitioners that are superior with their strategies are often said to have more wisdom, talent, intuition, or artistry.

Artistry is understood as "the competence by which practitioners actually handle indeterminate zones of

practice....It is an exercise of intelligence, a kind of knowing, though different in crucial respects from our standard model of professional knowledge" (Schön, 1987, p. 13). Schön evokes painters, sculptors, musicians, dancers, and designers as examples to exemplify practitioners that are "unusually adept at handling situations of uncertainty, uniqueness, and conflict" (p. 16). Learners in these areas cannot be taught what they need to know. They can be coached providing an environment of freedom to learn. They can be allowed to perform in a setting that is low in risk. This can be accomplished with access to coaches who initiate learners into the "traditions of the calling" and by "the right kind of telling" help them "see" what they need to understand the most (p. 17). One of Schön's recommendations for learners and instructors is that "we ought, then, to study the experience of learning by doing and the artistry of good coaching" (p. 17).

The concept of knowing-in-action is the knowledge people reveal in their physical performances in which awareness, appreciation, and adjustment play a part. When people have learned to do something, they perform smooth sequences of activity "by heart". Characteristically they are unable to verbally explain how they know. Yet, by

observing and reflecting on their actions, people can make a description of the tacit knowing implicit in them (Schön, 1987, p. 25).

Knowing-in-action generally provides for an uneventful day, yet on occasion, familiar routines produce unexpected results. These unexpected results or surprises are dealt with by either brushing them aside or reflecting on them. Reflecting can take two forms. One is to think back on the event to evaluate actions taken and to determine what contributed to the unexpected outcome; this also called reflecting-on-action. The second can be performed in midst of the action, serving to reshape what is being done while it is being done; this is called reflection-in-action (Schön, 1987, p. 26). Reflection-in-action is a process that can be delivered without being able to say what is being done. Reflection on reflection-in-action can produce a good verbal description of the action, reshape future action, and enable becoming more skillful in the future. The individual who performs in this manner is a Reflective Practitioner.

The participants of the Make It So (MIS) support group were all experts in their areas of practice. Their areas of expertise included child welfare services, early childhood development, higher education administrators, customer

service call centers, language pathologists, higher education student affairs counselors, and import/export representatives. They were all seeking doctoral degrees in Adult Education with the objective of obtaining the credentials necessary to further advance in their diverse areas of expertise. They all had the understanding that in their fields of practice, there was much more that was not taught in the traditional instruction that prepared and credentialed future practitioners. In the effort to prepare themselves in the area of instruction of adults, they also found the same contradiction that they dealt with in practice.

Students read the literature regarding the collaborative nature of adult education, the need to develop self-direction in learning, or the importance of critical reflection in adult education, and then they find themselves unable to renegotiate central features of the curriculum, prevented from challenging institutional evaluative norms, or penalised for criticising lecturers and professors' ideas. (Brookfield, 1988, pp. 334-335).

The gatherings of MIS were viewed as neutral ground where the participants could exchange ideas, thoughts, adult educational practice, and their attempts at completion of the dissertation process. It was a place where they could reflect on the participants' successes and difficulties.

Through this reflective process, they sought to achieve a closeness to the art form of adult educational practice.

Adult Education and Group Dynamics

In the early 1960's an effort was made by existing educators of adults to develop a description of the field and the body of knowledge that should be required for graduate training programs. To this end, 1962 brought the publication of Adult Education: Outlines of an Emerging Field of University Study (Jensen, Liveright, & Hallenbeck, 1964, foreword). Since the founding of the American Association of Adult Education in 1926, the field of adult education had borrowed and adapted knowledge and theory from many other disciplines. From the field of social psychology, it borrowed basic knowledge about the processes of groups and communities (p. viii). The adult educator "thinks of a system of ideas in terms of its usefulness for dealing with problems of practice" (Jensen, 1964a, p. 106). Thus, the adult educator will "sift out whatever theory and research may relate to questions similar to those he encounters in his practice" (p. 108). Since the instructional group is the main tool utilized by the educator of adults, significant ideas and action implications are borrowed from the theory and research findings of social psychology about human

groups and adapted to practice (Jensen, 1964b, p. 139).

Group dynamics describes a field of study that is a branch of the social sciences that uses scientific methods to determine why groups behave the way they do (Knowles & Knowles, 1964, p. 12). The study of group dynamics comes under the umbrella of the discipline of social psychology. Social psychology "investigates such phenomena as human groups, formal organizations, the social organization of human communities, and the sociopsychological aspects of human learning and personality formation" (Jensen, 1964b, p. 138). When the adult educator better understands the connections between group variables and the operational indices utilized to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of their work, this forms a content distinct to the field of adult education (pp. 140-141). This body of knowledge enables the adult educator to manage the socio-psychological phenomena "in a way that will enhance the learning process" (p. 141). This implies that the facilitator and the learner, as co-learners, should have some understanding of group dynamics since this will enhance the learning of both throughout the interaction process.

Bales (1950) provided one of the earliest definitions of a small group when he advocated that it was a session in

which members could remember some contribution of each of the other members (p. 33). However, a small group is more than just people that have shared the same physical space. Group members share values that maintain a pattern of activity. They also acquire or develop resources or skills that they use in their activity. They conform to norms that define roles to be played and have a level of morale that provides cohesiveness. Above all, a small group has a specific goal in its purpose to coordinate the combination of resources and roles (Hare, 1996, p. x).

It is important to understand that individuals affect the group and that groups develop a structure, standards, goals, and a cohesiveness. Optimizing these group characteristics to achieve learning objectives in both formal and informal learning situations can provide for more effective learning transactions. A collection of people exists as a group when (a) it possesses a definable membership; (b) a group consciousness; (c) a sense of shared purpose; (d) an interdependence in satisfaction of needs; (e) an interaction that encourages members to communicate, influence, and react to one another; and (f) the ability to act in a unitary manner, behaving as a single organism (Knowles & Knowles, 1959, pp. 39-40). Groups are dynamic

organisms that are constantly in motion, and that moves as a unit with the various elements constantly interacting (pp. 58-59).

Small group behavior can best be understood when certain principles are utilized as a guideline in the practice of the education of adults. A small group attracts members and receives their loyalty to the extent that it satisfies their needs, helps them achieve goals important to them, provides them with a feeling of acceptance and security, and offers members that are congenial to them (Knowles & Knowles, 1959, pp. 59-60).

Each member of a group tends to feel committed to a decision or goal to the extent in which they have participated in its determination (Knowles & Knowles, 1959, p. 60).

Small groups can be effective instruments of change and growth for individuals to the extent that those who are to be changed and those who exert influence for change have a strong sense of belonging to the group; the attraction of the group is greater than the discomfort for change; the members share the perception that change is needed; information related to the need, plans, and consequences of change are shared by all relevant people; the group provides

individuals the opportunity to practice changed behavior without threat or punishment; and the individual is provided a means for measuring progress toward the change goals (Knowles & Knowles, 1959, p. 60).

Every small group improves its ability to operate as a cluster to the extent that they examine and reflect on their processes to make necessary adjustments (Knowles & Knowles, 1959, pp. 60-61). Also, the better an individual understands the forces influencing their own and the groups behavior, the better they can contribute constructively to the group (p. 61).

The elements that determine the effectiveness of a small group are varied (Knowles & Knowles, 1959). The small group must have a clear goal. Another element is the degree to which the group goal mobilizes energies behind group activities. Also of importance is the degree to which there is agreement or conflict among members concerning means to reach group goals; the availability to the group of needed resources; the degree to which the group is organized appropriately for its task; and the degree to which the processes the group uses are appropriate to its task and stage of development (pp. 61-62).

Reviews of small group literature (Frey, Gouran, &

Poole, 1999; Hare, Blumberg, Davies, & Kent, 1994) have shown that research suggests that group behavior takes place within two major dimensions (Armstrong & Priola, 2001; Bales, 1950; Bales, 1970; Salazar, 1996). The first is social-emotional activities related to group solidarity and attraction between members; the second is task-oriented activities related to goal accomplishment (Armstrong & Priola, 2001, p. 290).

Group interaction is effected by three major variables: group climate, group norms, and roles (Bales, 1970; Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999; Salazar, 1996; Scribner, 2001). Group climate is determined by the ability of members to resolve primary and secondary tensions (Bales, 1970).

Most groups experience and resolve primary tensions associated with getting to know each other and developing patterns of work. However, the manner in which groups deal with secondary tensions associated with conflicts in personality, values, and beliefs tends to portend group performance and learning. (Scribner, 2001, p.607).

Norms are a form of social control with effects on interpersonal interactions, communication, and organize a groups approach to decision making and problem solving (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999). Norms can develop in ways such as statements from group leaders, precedence-setting events, repetitive behavior patterns, and group members' experiences

that are imported into the group. Norms can be enforced through humor, needling, and banishment from the group (Scribner, 2001, p. 608).

Role formation and development within a group is contextual and dynamic in nature. It is played out by individuals in response to interactions with the group and to particular factors such as group tasks, developing norms, and previous interactions with the group. The enactment of roles is based on characteristics and preferences of the person performing the role and tends to focus on either task or social-emotional dimensions (Salazar, 1996; Scribner, 2001). These variables interact, and so "group dynamics can impede or facilitate learning within a group" (Scribner, 2001, p. 607).

The formation of a group has been an effective means to foster learning. The field of adult education has utilized this collaborative method throughout its history. "Support for this mode in adult education can be traced through the writings of such prominent adult education leaders as Eduard Lindeman, Paul Bergevin, J. Roby Kidd, Cyril Houle, Malcolm Knowles, Alan Knox, and Paulo Freire" (Conti, 1978, p. 4).

Research on the completion of the dissertation process shows that three types of internal barriers are commonly

experienced by those that participate in the process: lethargy, depression, and perfectionism (Germeroth, 1991, p. 76). Support groups satisfy various needs for their participants. "Dissertation support groups seem to help members stay focused, finish their doctorates and feel better about themselves in the process" (Stalker, 1991, p. 56). These groups can be organized by the institution or by the students (p. 57).

One example of program innovations provided by the institution to support doctoral students are the efforts of the Adult and Vocational Education Doctor of Philosophy program at the University of Connecticut. One of three initiatives implemented was that of providing necessary support to participating students. This included the creation of research teams that allowed students to work through each phase of the program as a member of a team; the creation of task teams that were formed around completing tasks toward degree completion such as a proposal team; conducting a monthly program meeting where shared learning was encouraged; a "listserv" discussion that included students in the program, faculty, and program graduates providing a communication system for the sharing of ideas and problem posing and resolution; and finally an annual

gathering which included recognition of those who reached program milestones (Kehrhahn, Sheckley, and Travers, 1999).

An example of a support system organized by the participants that has been implemented to cope with the stresses generated in the dissertation process is the use of a dissertation partner. Monsour and Corman (1991) describe their experience as such partners interpreting that episode through the lense of the task and social functions. They posit that a dissertation partner furnishes "the type of support that advisors are not capable of providing" (p. 181). The primary goal of a graduate student advisor is the successful completion of the dissertation with task support being the main focus (p. 181). Yet, in the dissertation process, "one of the major reasons some people never finish the dissertation is the tremendous task and social stress involved in its completion" (p. 185). There are extraordinary task demands, and even the most dedicated advisor is unable to provide the time for the task support to the degree required by the typical graduate student (p. 182). Although some advisors provide social support to the candidates, the need exceeds the advisors role. Furthermore, there is reason to believe "that social support is most effective when it comes from peers" (p. 182). Since the

advisor is a supervisor and not a peer, the advisor does not share the same reality as the student, and thus the advisor is unable to provide a critical point of comparison in view needed by the graduate student to really be effective (p. 182). Due to time and other responsibility constraints, the advisor and other committee members cannot invest the time and energy that a graduate student would perceive as necessary to provide social support.

Monsour and Corman (1991) suggest that one task function of the dissertation partner is to "closely facilitate the performance of the many and varied chores associated with the execution of a dissertation" (p. 183). This can happen by making sure the goals are performed in a timely and accurate manner, by making suggestions for better or different ways to approach things, and by providing guidance if possible (p. 183). A second task function suggested involves "a weekly setting and analysis of goals" (p. 183). This meeting has four objectives: (a) goal setting of time to be spent during the week on the task, (b) goal discussions set the previous week, (c) new goal setting for the following week, and (d) a discussion of ideas and issues associated with both partners' dissertations (pp. 183-184).

Social functions that can be performed by the

dissertation partner are to give companionship and emotional support, to attend dissertation workshops together, to celebrate little victories along the way, to provide one another with empathy, and to provide motivation (Monsour & Corman, 1991, pp. 184-185). To stay motivated is one of the most difficult battles faced by dissertation writers. An important function of the partner is to remind one another that down times are natural and to work together to keep a productive level of emotional intensity (p. 185).

A support group such as that formed by the participants of the Make It So (MIS) student support group provide opportunities for both the task and social functions to be fulfilled. The meetings held at regular intervals provided the formation of different units of close support. A review of their activities and interaction furnishes insights and strategies that can be implemented by both institutions and individuals in their quest for completion of the dissertation writing process.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study was a qualitative case study. Data were collected to examine the relationships between two distinct dimensions of action. These dimensions are the Human dimension and the Work dimension of the activities of the participants of the Make It So (MIS) support group.

A qualitative case study "is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit" (Merriam, 1988, p. 21). Qualitative research, also called interpretive or naturalistic inquiry, has five characteristics: (a) the researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed with the focus on understanding the participants' perspective of what's important rather than concentrating on the views of the researcher; (b) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, and the data is reconciled through this human instrument; (c) it usually involves fieldwork in which the researcher must physically go to the people or setting to observe behavior in its natural setting; (d) it primarily employs an inductive research strategy where the researcher builds toward theory from

observations and intuitive understandings gained in the field; and (e) the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive in which the focus is on process, meaning, and understanding and where words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned (Merriam, 1998, pp. 6-8).

With the usage of the term naturalistic inquiry, naturalistic expresses a view of the nature of reality. This view is that the world is a dynamic system and that all of the parts are so interrelated that one part inevitably influences the other parts. Naturalistic inquiry seeks to "illuminate social realities, human perceptions, and organizational realities [and] regard[s] gestures, language, and behavioral patterns of the subjects as significant descriptive data" (Owens, 1982, p. 7). Qualitative or naturalistic inquiry seeks to provide a holistic view; however, the inquirer "must derive a set of units or categories within which he will classify and interpret observed outputs" (Guba, 1978, p. 50). This facilitates the difficult task of converting field notes and observations into systematic categories. The differences between categories ought to be bold and clear, seeking recurring regularities (p. 53). Thus, this researcher utilized a

framework derived from the existing literature on the study of group dynamics. The data were examined and the activities grouped into either the Human or Work dimension. Each dimension consisted of two poles and the data were then scrutinized and placed into one of four domains of action. The data were evaluated in either Task or Social-Emotional domains as two poles of the Work dimension, or evaluated in the Individual and Group perspectives as two poles of the Human dimension. This allowed for a simple categorization and presentation of the interrelation of the activities of the Make It So support group.

"Qualitative case studies can be characterized as being particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic" (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Particularistic means that it refers to a specific phenomenon. Descriptive means that the end product of the study is a vivid description of the matter under scrutiny. Heuristic means that the study will assist the reader in a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. This study is particularistic in that it focuses on the Make It So support group members, their actions and interactions, and the way this particular group of people confronted their challenge of learning how to conduct research and reach the completion of their dissertations.

This case study is descriptive since it applies "collecting data to test hypothesis or to answer questions concerning the current status of the subject of the study. A descriptive study determines and reports the way things are" (Gay, 1996, p. 249). The end product:

Describes and interprets what is. It is concerned with conditions or relationships that exist; practices that prevail; beliefs, points of view, or attitudes that are held; processes that are going on; effects that are being felt; or trends that are developing. (Best, 1970, p. 116)

It is a "rich description or narrative of the essential aspects of the topic as viewed of the participants....The main focus...is to use language to paint a rich picture of the setting and its participants" (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 20). The use of thick description:

Provides meaning of human behavior in the real world in such terms as cultural norms...and community values....Conveys very much the sense of the web of interrelated contextual factors....A literal description that figuratively transports the readers into the situation with a sense of insight, understanding, illumination not only of the facts or the events in the case, but also of the texture, the quality, and the power of the context as the participants in the situation experienced it. (Owens, 1982, pp. 7-8)

"Innovative programs and practices are often the focus of descriptive case studies in education" (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). The findings of this study are presented in narrative

form. Extensive quotes from the library of recordings of the meetings were used in order to provide an accurate depiction of the events and provide a voice for the participants.

This case study is heuristic in that it provides the background of the activities of the MIS support group. It discusses, explains, and evaluates the different alternatives chosen by the participants of MIS, those that worked, and those that failed. It summarizes and presents conclusions with the intent to illuminate an understanding of this phenomenon, thus increasing its potential applicability within other frameworks.

Context

This study utilized participant observation to gather data. "The participant observer sees things firsthand and uses his or her own knowledge and expertise in interpreting what is observed rather than relying solely upon once-removed accounts from interviews. Observation makes it possible to record behavior as it is happening" (Merriam, 1998, p. 96). In qualitative research, the ideal "is to get inside the perspective of the participants" (p. 102), and the best resource for data collection in this investigation was a participant as observer. At the time the meetings of the MIS support group began, I was a masters-level student.

I became interested in participating in the gatherings because I personally was evaluating whether to continue graduate work towards a doctoral degree. I contemplated that participating in MIS activities would allow me to become better informed in all aspects of what the pursuit of a doctoral degree entailed, and this was vital to making an informed decision. The participants of MIS were informed of my interest and accepted and encouraged my participation in the meetings. After participation in various meetings and as a result of such participation, I concluded that the pursuit of a doctoral degree was an achievable objective.

As student successes and the benefits of participating in MIS became noticeable to faculty members serving on advisory committees for MIS members, the suggestion was made that the MIS group should consider studying itself as an exemplary application of adult learning principles in higher education. The suggestion was first made by Dr. James Gregson at a committee meeting for one of the MIS members. Because this suggestion was strongly supported by another committee member, Dr. Martin Burlingame, who also served on the committees of several MIS members, the idea was brought back to the MIS group by Dr. Gary Conti. Whereas the MIS group had a strong interest in research and because of the

group's keen interest in exploring ideas related to adult learning, the group strongly endorsed the idea of a research project.

Thus, the idea of documenting MIS activities originated as a decision of the MIS group. Since I had participated in the meetings from their onset and would be doing a dissertation, the MIS group encouraged me to take on this research. The MIS group used this idea of a research project in a meeting as an exercise on how to generate a research design and research questions. The group decided that the study should be qualitative in nature and the data would best be collected by participant observation. "In qualitative research where the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, subjectivity and interaction are assumed" (Merriam, 1998, p. 103).

As the researcher gains familiarity with the phenomenon being studied, the mix of participation and observation is likely to change....An investigator might decide to join a group to see what it is actually like to be a participant and then gradually withdraw, eventually assuming the role of interested observer. (p. 102)

The MIS group agreed that all future sessions should be video taped in order to document what was happening. I began as a participant in the support group. I evolved into a participant observer at the time the data collection phase

of this research project ended. With the extensive audio and video library of meetings generated by the MIS group, I offered a unique insight into the meaning of many the activities carried out by the group that anyone else observing the historical data could not supply. I am also a non-traditional student who is a male Hispanic in my forties, is married, has a preteen son, and was employed full-time in the private sector. I completed graduate course work taking night and weekend classes in the pursuit of a career change.

Population

The population is the group of interest to the researcher that has a similar set of characteristics (Gay, 1996, p. 112). The population for this study was a diverse group of nontraditional doctoral students of Oklahoma State University that attended the Make It So support group in Tulsa from June 2000 to March 2002. These doctoral students were enrolled in the Adult Education program of the College of Education at Oklahoma State University. The group has had a total of approximately 65 participants and continues to meet on a bi-monthly to monthly basis.

This study focused on the activities of the founding participants and the first year and a half of activities.

The participants were a group of nontraditional students of diverse backgrounds. There were no formal rules for membership, and participation in the group varied to fit the needs of each student. Nevertheless, during the first year and a half of the group's existence, a core group of approximately 15 attended regularly.

The participants of the MIS doctoral support group were a diverse group of non-traditional graduate students. Of the founding group of participants, more than two-thirds were females. More than half of the participants were in their 40's, and a third were in their 50's. Over three-fourths of the participants had a family. All of the participants were employed full-time and completed the course work and the dissertation process requirements of the adult education program taking evening and weekend offerings. Almost half of the group participants were African-American, and a third were white. Native Americans and Hispanics were also represented among the group members.

For example, one of the founding participants was an African-American female who was in her forties, married, and had a preteen son and an elementary grade school daughter. She was employed with the Department of Human Services as a Child Welfare Supervisor in the Tulsa area with an extremely

large case load. She completed undergraduate work in a historically Black university in Alabama and obtained a masters degree in social work in Oklahoma after more than 10 years in her profession. She was the first person in her family to pursue a doctoral degree.

Another of the founding participants was a white female in her early forties. She was in her second marriage with two adult daughters. Self-employed as an Early Childhood Development Consultant in the Tulsa area, she had completed undergraduate work in the late 1970's. She returned to higher education 20 years later completing a masters degree in Adult Education and continued to pursue a doctorate in this same field.

Procedures

The collection of data by multiple methods and from multiple sources is known as triangulation. This method is used to obtain a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under study with the purpose of obtaining similar information from different independent sources (Gay, 2000, p. 252). The data for this study was collected from a video tape and audio tape library of previous meetings, interviews collected by participants, reference aids created and utilized by participants as they completed different stages

of their dissertation, and direct participant observation.

The first 6 months of meetings of the MIS support group meetings were recorded on audio tape. Many of the participants would bring tape recorders to the meetings. The discussions were always interactive and lively. Many individuals found that bringing their recorder and taping the sessions helped them with easy access to the useful information that was presented. During the spring semester of 2001, MIS meetings were video taped by Linda Conti. Also during this period, one participant was completing a course where as a class presentation, she interviewed three dissertation completers. The audio tapes and transcripts of these interviews were added to the historical documentation of the development of MIS. During the time that the MIS group met, some participants would create and distribute among the participants different handouts as a review of a stage that they had completed. These serve as a source of information and a record of experiences.

An understanding of the research of how groups operate provides a framework from which to categorize and analyze the perceptions and activities of the adult learning principles utilized and implemented by the MIS support group. This understanding is derived from the perspective of

the individuals as well as that of the group. Participation in a group and identification with its goals, standards, and structure has an effect on the individual. These factors must be considered in any analysis of group activities and accomplishments (Bales, 1950; Frey, Gouran, & Poole, 1999; Gulley, 1960).

Social-psychology (Bales, 1950; Gulley, 1960; Stock & Thelen, 1958) in its study of group dynamics affords a structure through which the activities of the MIS support group can be categorized. This study utilized two dimension under which to analyze the various sources of data. These are the Human dimension and the Work dimension. These dimensions were viewed as two-fold within a 2 x 2 matrix. On one axis, the Human dimension, the activities of the MIS support group were viewed from the perspectives of the Individual domain and the Group domain. These domains are viewed as opposite poles along the continuum of activities of the MIS support group. The Individual domain consists of actions taken on behalf and for the benefit of the individual. The Group domain consisted of actions taken on behalf and for the benefit of the group.

On the axis of the Work dimension the activities of the MIS support group were viewed on one end as the Task

domain and on the other the Social-Emotional domain. These domains are also viewed as opposite poles along the continuum of activities of the MIS support group. The Task domain consisted of activities and perceptions through which the application of mental and physical efforts toward a purpose are undertaken within the support group. The Social-Emotional domain consisted of activities and perceptions where expressions of relationships between people and feelings among them occurred within the support group. It is possible for the level of dominance of the Task domain and the Social-emotional domain to undulate throughout meetings and discussions of groups (Hirokawa & Salazar, 1999; Keyton, 1999; Stock & Thelen, 1958). This is what occurred with the MIS support group.

Dimension		Human	
		Individual	Group
Work	Task		
	Social- Emotional		

Data analysis is a process of making sense out of the data and can be limited to determining how best to arrange the material into a narrative account of the findings (Merriam, 1998, p. 192). The method of analysis of the data

obtained in this study was the constant comparative method.

The constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences....Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. This dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory. (p. 18)

In this study, the data were first categorized in either Human or Work dimensions, then classified into the Individual, Group, Task or Social-emotional domains allowing for simple categorization and presentation of the interrelation of the activities of the Make It So support group.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The Perspective of a Participant Observer

I was a participant observer at the MIS support group meetings. At the time of the formation of the support group, I was half finished with my course requirements for a master's degree in Adult Education. Prior to this, I had never contemplated pursuing a doctorate. In the time I had spent with my classmates listening to the research they were conducting, it all sounded very interesting and exciting. Still, I had a lot of self-doubt concerning my abilities to take on such a venture. When the initial invitation was sent out to gather together as a support group, the premise was that the group was for those that were in the final stages of the program to get together although no one was being excluded. I expressed my interest in observing to make a more informed decision on my own future and was warmly welcomed to attend. Many of the attendees conversed with me during our social moments both at the meetings and before and after classes. As a result of these conversations, I have a perspective of both public and private statements of the participants. These are some of my observations.

The Participants

The participants came from all different walks in life, but they had a common dream that they wanted to fulfil. Everyone wanted to earn a doctoral degree. Some had been working in the field of education either as administrators or as educators. For others, it was a desire to change careers and do what they had always wanted: teach. For even others, it was a lifelong plan to reach this degree. For most, this was the ultimate effort to reach where never thought possible before. Oklahoma State University would make it possible in offering the degree of Doctor of Adult Education.

The Program

The program was flexible and focused on the needs of the working adult. The courses were offered mostly at night and on weekends, and there were even inter-session courses packed into a series of weekends. Course work readings, presentations, and papers could be completed within the schedules of working adults if they organized their lives effectively.

The Learners

Students found themselves with peers in the same circumstances. Some had not taken courses in years. For many, returning to the classroom was intimidating. The

underlying question in most minds was, "Can I do this?" However, the classes were conducted in a relaxed environment. Many of the instructors had themselves completed their degrees as adults and that was encouraging.

The Coordinator

The program coordinator, Dr. Gary Conti, always had a positive attitude and projected it in the many anecdotes he would tell of others that had reached the goal. For him, there was no obstacle that could not be overcome. Students just had to go at it one step at a time. Students had to take action, and before they would know it they would be writing their dissertation, defending it, and walking at commencement ceremony with a big smile. We were not really aware of all of the effort it took to write a scholarly dissertation and of how everything had to follow all sorts of rules and guidelines to be completed correctly. We did not really know what original research was all about. Yes, we were in for a surprise.

The Environment

Classes were great. There was camaraderie. We would work in teams and help one another along the way. Group-work was common, discussions, and application of principles that were discussed. This kept it real and in touch with our

daily lives. I remember the first class I attended. It had been more than a decade since I had taken a higher education course. I knew one person in the class. What first caught my attention was how everyone was so friendly. When someone was new in a class, that person was welcomed warmly because all understood what that person wanted to do. While being introduced to different new classmates, I received constant words of encouragement on the venture I was about to begin.

The People

Classes were becoming large. Many of the Tulsa classmates heard about the program offering by friends who were enrolled or who were already in the writing stages. In the majority of the cases, students ended up spending more time with classmates than with their own family. Although family supported the quest, they could not really understand all of the challenges faced in learning and trying to assimilate these new concepts. Thus, it was natural that when it was time to begin the dissertation writing process, students turned to one another for help, for resources, for support. But, I'm getting too far ahead....

The Role of the Advisor

In the 2002 general catalog of Oklahoma State University it states that "academic advising is designed to

assist students in developing their intellectual potential through effective use of all resources available at the University--academic, cultural and social" (OSU Catalog, 2002, p. 31). Academic advising is viewed as a mentoring function. Mentors "seem to do three fairly distinct types of things. They support, they challenge, and they provide vision" (Daloz, 1986, p. 212). Support refers to "those acts through which the mentor affirms the validity of the student's present experience" (p. 212). The function of challenge is "to open a gap between student and environment, a gap that creates tension in the student, calling out for closure" (p. 213). The function of providing support is manifest in that "mentors provide proof that the journey can be made, the leap taken....Helping their charges look ahead, to form a dream, to sketch their own maps" (p. 213).

Most of the participants of the MIS support group had the same advisor, Dr. Gary Conti. He had nearly 20 years of experience in higher education and knew how it worked. He came from Montana, leaving a program that had helped many Native Americans complete their degree.

There have always been a few non-Indian scholars who understood how to work with Native communities effectively....A modern example is Dr. Gary Conti, formerly of the Montana State University College of Education, who nurtured many of the best Native

scholars in Montana. In 1997 alone, five American Indians earned Ph.D.s through his program, compared with less than 100 Ph.D.s normally awarded to Natives nationwide in a year. Such allies demonstrated not only humility and respect, they were committed. They didn't make a short foray into the Native community for gems of knowledge and then disappear. (Ambler, 1997, p. 4)

Did he have stories to tell! It seemed that for any and every learning opportunity, he had an anecdote or story he could tell of others that had been there before and achieved success. He talked about a format that he had developed for writing a dissertation. After advising so many students over the years, he had observed a pattern in how the research should be presented.

During his years in Montana he began applying this format. The Montana graduate students began to hold yearly meetings that were retreats, and they called them Essex after the place where they met. During these meetings they would work together in groups which were often based on the different stages they were in of the dissertation writing process. They would isolate and reflect on the task they had in front of them, work on sections individually, and then gather again presenting what they had accomplished and reflecting on the process. They had given these meetings the name Essex in a Freirian effort of "naming" their process.

The number of people that completed their dissertations grew exponentially. During the Montana years, Dr. Conti advised 28 doctoral graduates, 14 of which completed in the last year of his stay.

Now in the Oklahoma State program, Dr. Conti had held a weekend seminar on how to write the dissertation. There was also a course on how to manage research data; all of this was seasoned with stories of the successes and with copies of the completed dissertations of those that had come before. This process of breaking the research into different manageable stages and reflecting on progress was encouraging to the students of the Adult Education program in Oklahoma.

Catalysts for Action

One of the many students enrolled in the program was a Department of Human Services Child Welfare Supervisor who in taking a course in critical issues in adult education envisioned opportunities for adults to learn in everyday circumstances. In the course of reading current adult learning literature, she became aware of the work of Dr. Phyliss Cunningham of the University of Northern Illinois in the Chicago area. This self-directed learner wanted to know more and was challenged by her facilitators, Dr. Robert Nolan and Dr. Gary Conti, to contact Dr. Cunningham

personally to become better informed of the efforts of this tireless woman. Being of a somewhat outgoing personality and having received the challenge, the student promptly made a phone call to Dr. Cunningham's University of Northern Illinois office. In the course of their conversation the question was posed to Dr. Cunningham if she would consider traveling to Oklahoma to speak to this and other students in the adult education program. The details were worked out and on February 24, 2000, as the student drove Dr. Cunningham to various points of interest in the Tulsa metro area, a conversation ensued where the student expressed the isolation and frustration she felt as she embarked on the writing of her dissertation proposal. Dr. Cunningham suggested that the student speak with her peers since more than likely she would come to realize that she was not alone in her sentiments and would find support from others in her situation. Dr. Cunningham thus functioned as an outside expert that reinforced the adult learning principles and ideas already existent in the program. Her great contribution to the group of adult learners in the Tulsa program was validation and stimulation for these learners to take action.

As this learner spoke with others in the program, she

realized that all she spoke with lead busy lives like herself and that they had similar feelings of isolation. As expressed in the original email invitation, the idea of getting together in spite of busy schedules to "share literature we've found if it would help some one else, give feedback, brainstorm, offer suggestions, advise, mentor" was the motivator for a first meeting scheduled in the home volunteered by one of an initial group of 23 people. The initial communication between potential participants was made via email, and the subject line contained the heading of "Destined to Succeed Dissertation Group".

The expressed objective for the group was to unite those in the adult education program who were at different stages of the dissertation process. Whether they were just at the point of selecting a research topic, proposal writing, proposal defense, data collection, comprehensive examination, or writing of findings and conclusions, they were committed to get together to offer support to one another and share their experiences. Seeking to follow the adult learning principles about which they had learned, this group wanted to provide an environment conducive to learning. All of the participants were doctoral students. The exception was this researcher, who at that time was a

masters level student and had just begun my graduate studies. I was encouraged to attend because I had expressed my desire to know more about the doctoral process to better decide if I wanted to pursue this degree.

In the spirit of sharing, the attendees agreed on bringing food to the gathering. This was modeled after a common practice of many of the Adult Education classes. All prospective attendees were working adults and would be either leaving a class, their workplace, or their children at some activity to participate in the meeting. They all had limited time and wanted to encourage an atmosphere of learning. They understood that this was something that could not occur if they were hungry or had to stop in transit to deal with food matters. Moreover, they all realized that "the establishment of a climate conducive to adult learning" (Knowles, 1970, p. 54) through a proper physical and psychological climate (p. 41) is a necessity for adults. Again, all of the details for food were agreed upon via email communications. The opinion of the group prior to the first meeting was that by getting together they could foster communication between different people, and all would benefit from the sharing of experience, knowledge, and resources by applying the adult learning principles that

they had all been learning. The sentiment as expressed in one of the e-mail exchanges was that "once we have this first meeting, we may even develop sub-groups to deal with particular issues or subjects that can meet on their own, but we need to get started."

The night of the first meeting was June 14, 2000. All of the prospective participants were scheduled to arrive after 7:00 p.m. or as soon as they could because of their personal commitments. It was agreed upon that punctuality would not be allowed to become an issue. All were free to arrive as they could and leave the gathering when they needed to. At 7:15 p.m. there was a small group of three sitting in the living room of their hostess. Shortly after a few more people arrived, food was shared, and a group of eight sat down to begin a discussion of their purposes in meeting. They wanted to devise a plan on how they could help one another to demystify the dissertation process and not work in isolation. About a half an hour into the discussion as different ideas were being shared, to the surprise of all present, their advisor, Gary Conti, arrived and offered any help to the group that they felt they may need in carrying out their purposes. The offer was joyfully received and accepted.

From the very first meeting, it was agreed upon by the group members that meetings should be documented to provide a reference of the information discussed. The attendees all jokingly referred to the remark of one attendee who said, "We are all 'mature people' here, and I for one won't be able to remember all of the details going on in this lively discussion. I don't want to miss out on any of this useful information." Tape recordings were agreed upon, and if anyone wanted a copy of the tape, it could be distributed within the group. Tape recordings seemed the logical choice since one of the attendees was carrying a tape recorder among his "research stuff". He explained that he used it to record meetings with his advisor since he was unable to take notes thoroughly enough and remember all of the items discussed. He used this technique to be able to review all of the details. All of the group members immediately supported the use of this technique, and it was heralded as the first tangible outcome of the efforts of their meeting. They could all benefit from sharing a practice that could effectively help them to reach their goal of completing their dissertations. Indeed, since this time, it has been routine for MIS members to tape record all of their meetings including their meetings with their advisor, their oral

comprehensive examinations, and their dissertation defense.

A discussion followed to determine a name for the group. Initially in the email communications, "Destined to Succeed" was in the subject line and this was proposed as a group name. However, Conti argued that this title carried some negative connotations and suggested a different name from the Star Trek television show. Many of the attendees were Star Trek Next Generation fans, and the line by the captain Jean Luc Picard to his helmsman or first officer of "Make It So" was mentioned and chosen by all. When something needed to be done, Picard simply gave the order to "Make It So", and the deeds were accomplished. The group was of the united opinion that through their joint efforts they would complete their objective of reaching the degree of doctors in education and the name seemed fitting and was so adopted.

As the evening continued, the group agreed that they would continue their discussions at the next gathering focusing on the topic of the dissertation proposal writing. One attendee offered to distribute copies of her current first draft so that all could read it prior to the next meeting. She invited the participants' input in order to aid in strengthening the document and in a spirit of sharing.

It was agreed that the topic of discussion of the

following meeting would be the selection of a research topic and then follow with the mechanics of the writing of a proposal. From the start the meeting atmosphere was one of camaraderie and excitement at the prospect of making progress. In a later remark, the person that volunteered her first draft proposal commented that if distributing her draft would be of help to others, she did not feel intimidated to offer her draft for group scrutiny. A date for this next meeting was agreed upon for within two weeks, the proposal draft would be provided via email, snacks and food supplied by the attendees, and a host volunteered a home for that next meeting.

Embodiment of Adult Learning Principles

The MIS support group wanted to model the adult learning principles they had learned, and andragogy was their guiding principle. The need to know, the first assumption, was being met in the communications that went out via email inviting all to attend a gathering were they could benefit from one another. These learners' self-concept was moving from a personality dependent on the theoretical courses being offered in an educational program to being self-directed in learning the intricacies of the dissertation process. All of the attendees kept in mind that

the experience of each one of them was a resource that could be tapped into by gathering together. These experiences would furnish a resource for learning in their common goal of completing the dissertation process. The readiness to learn was present considering their common role of reaching the point of beginning or completing their dissertation process. Each participant's time perspective had changed from a postponement of application of knowledge to the need of an immediacy of application of knowledge. Also present was a shift in their learning orientation from one of a subject-centered orientation such as the learning of principles and theory to one of a problem-centered orientation with the issue of devising a plan to unravel the intricacies of the dissertation process, breaking it into manageable components. Their motivation was an internal pressure to complete the process and achieve the goal to MAKE IT SO.

The Influence of Highlander

The importance of sharing experience was the tool of choice for the group. Most of the attendees had read Unearthing Seeds of Fire which is the story of the Highlander Research and Education Center. They were inspired by the educational efforts during the Twentieth Century of

Myles Horton and Highlander in Tennessee through their work with the Labor Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and other groups. A common phrase expressed by many of the MIS participants was that of labeling themselves as a "circle of learners". Horton utilized the method of:

Getting someone to start the meetings with a singing game or a retelling of one of the beloved mountain stories passed orally from generation to generation. Eventually, warmed by story and song, the people would talk long into the night, sharing with and explaining to each other. Then they'd walk back home, back to the hollows, to try out what they'd learned. (Adams, 1975, pp. 3-4)

The ultimate expressed objective of the MIS meetings was the empowerment all participants. The specific objective was to provide all attendees with the tools they needed to complete their dissertation process. The design was to provide an environment where the different needs of the attendees could be voiced through conversation. As at Highlander, they believed that from within the group would flow the answers to their expressed needs. This would occur in the form of references, leads, or proven solutions of what had worked for others. These answers could then be taken back by the participant and tried out with the expectation of advances made by each individual towards the goal of dissertation completion.

The Group

The participants of the MIS support group operated on different levels. Tasks existed that they wanted to accomplish with their meetings. The need for task attainment existed for both individuals and the group. Also, social-emotional needs could be met in getting together. Support and encouragement could be given to one another. The following diagram helps illustrate the areas of needs of the participants positioning them within the different group domains of activity:

Dimensions		Human	
		Individual	Group
Work	Task	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining Research Topic • Scheduling Committee Meetings • Attending Committee Meetings • Critically reflecting on milestones • Working on Comprehensive Exams • Defending Dissertation • Preparing for Final Defense 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning process for determining research topic • Learning about milestones in the process • Mentoring • Learning elements and procedures of Final Defense

	Social- Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging • Reflecting on milestones • E-mail support and encouragement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encouraging • Sharing the milestones • Maintaining e-mail support and encouragement • Seeking support for Final Defense
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The needs in the Individual domain involved the MIS members in a variety of activities that ranged from simple awareness items to highly reflective activities. One of the first tasks of the Individual dimension was that of determining the topic of research for dissertation. Many individuals would attend MIS meetings with the plan that they could present their prospective topic of research to the group for feedback on either the viability of the study or on the concepts that person had envisioned would be involved. The group would then serve as a sounding board for feedback. Another task the individual would intend on accomplishing in attending MIS meetings would be that of learning how to prepare for committee meetings both in the aspect of scheduling and preparing for the actual meeting. This entailed such aspects as who to call to schedule a conference room, what materials to bring, and how to present proposed dates to committee members. As MIS meetings

evolved, attendees were asked to reflect on events and milestones of other participants. The individual would be encouraged to reflect on what he or she would do in similar circumstances and by this better prepare him or herself for similar events. The individual would also attend meetings with the expectation of being better prepared for the comprehensive examination and the final dissertation defense.

Individual activities in the Social-Emotional domain enhanced the participant's self-efficacy. The participants would attend MIS meetings in search of receiving social-emotional support in areas such as finding encouragement to continue their task, or consolation during difficult transitions where their writing had become stagnant. On occasion attending a meeting would provide a link to an e-mail partner with whom a closer support could be shared. Preparation for major milestones such as a proposal, comprehensive examination, and final dissertation defense was also obtained. This was not just in the area of tasks that should be accomplished but in emotional support that the individual would need from a group of peers who understood their plight. Throughout this process, the MIS members built their confidence as researchers and became

empowered in the research process.

The activities that the participants of the MIS support group engaged in that can be categorized under the Group domain ranged from awareness activities to external activities. Group domain awareness activities could be activities that would provide information to the participants such as learning how to determine a research topic, learning how to recognize milestones in the writing process, becoming familiar with the elements and the procedures of the Final Defense. Yet one task that took place when the group met and was part of the tasks set forth to be accomplished was that of seeking to mentor others that were not as far along in the process.

Group activities categorized under the Social-Emotional domain were external in nature. The MIS group would meet with the purpose to seek and provide support and to share with others, to console and support one another in lull moments of the writing process, to share milestones with the purpose of encouraging one another, and to actually seek support for final defense. All of these were external relationship building activities.

All of the activities in the gatherings of the MIS support group fell within the two primary dimensions of

group behavior. However, the group did not set out to accomplish either Human or Work activities. As task activities would become very intense, someone in the group would either make a joke about the intensity or digress with a related anecdote to thus relieve some of the intensity. In moments of social activity such as the customary food sharing at the beginning of meetings during the time when participants would visit with one another to catch up on individual progress or family, as these moments became extremely social, a participant would call the others to begin a task that had been agreed upon as part of that day's agenda. Thus, an undulation occurred between Task and Social-Emotional activities, providing a balance between one or the other domain as the activities would lean heavily into either. This can be observed in the activities of the MIS support group that will be described below such as: (a) getting the research started; (b) the anatomy of writing a dissertation; (c) research findings meetings; (d) celebrations; (e) It's not over until the paperwork is done; (f) the circle of learning; and (g) group dimensions.

The Proposal: Getting the Research Started

The priority of the majority of the initial participants of the MIS support group was to begin writing

the research proposal of their dissertations. Many of the participants were finishing their required course work or had already done so. Most had an idea regarding what their research topics would be. All had met with their advisor to consult about the merit of the study they wanted to pursue. Many had narrowed down the major concepts that were pertinent to their studies. Some had even made attempts at writing a first draft of their research proposal. Yet, all of these participants had expressed a feeling of disorientation or dissatisfaction with their preparedness to deal with the task which they had begun. As one white female participant put it, "You don't know what your doing!" Others in the program who had already overcome this hurdle understood that there were some general guidelines in writing a dissertation that needed to be followed. The group gathered to share their anxieties, rudimentary first efforts, and ideas. They then sought to utilize one another as sounding boards for their ideas and possibly to obtain help to get started.

"What is your study about"? At the second meeting of the MIS group, that question was asked of many of the participants. To verbalize a research idea before this group of peers became one of the primary activities from the

earliest meetings. "What are your major concepts?" To answer that question and accept challenges posed by other participants was an exercise that would repeat itself through the course of future gatherings. "Why is your research necessary and what contribution will your study provide to the field of adult learning"? These and similar questions emerged during the discussions at MIS. Once the questions were posed, the people being asked discovered many times that they could not always clearly articulate the answers. Yet this process of the questions being posed and all participants having to answer promoted learning. Participants became familiar with what they were expected to know about their own studies. Furthermore, through these exercises, MIS members gained a firm understanding of their particular research process. Finally, they learned how to articulate their topics in a scholarly manner.

One participant, a white female who we will call "Pooh", had distributed a first draft of her proposal five days prior to the second meeting in order for the participants to review it and supply her with their feedback. The aforementioned questions were posed, and she supplied the responses. During the course of that second meeting, a discussion in regards to the need for linear

thinking and writing ensued. As a result of this discussion, it was agreed that in the proposal the writer should guide the reader step-by-step through the proposal building a case that justified the need for the study. MIS participants grasped the need for leading the reader from one concept after another until it became clear that a problem existed where a need for new knowledge was necessary.

As a result of that second gathering of the MIS group, "Pooh" received input from the group of 12 that gathered. She produced a second draft within two weeks. This second draft was submitted to "Pooh's" advisor. Only one more round of corrections were required before she was given approval to submit her proposal to her entire committee for defense. "Pooh" assembled a list of points to be aware of when preparing a proposal and distributed them within the MIS group to help future MIS participants in writing their proposals (see Appendix A). This success story spread rapidly among the students. The third MIS meeting had a record attendance of over 20 people, but the growth in numbers was just one sign of growth.

A close look at the handouts generated by the participants gives an insight the community that developed into existence. The MIS group had their own terminology and

language that outsiders would be unable to comprehend without an interpreter. References to Christopher Robin and characters of the Winnie the Pooh stories are an example of this. These documents are cultural documents by which the group demonstrates their cohesiveness and their internal communication

The fourth MIS meeting also had a large number of participants. One attendee was an individual who had completed all course work over a year ago yet had not been able to put a dissertation proposal together. Asked by his peers what his study was about, he struggled trying to state the purpose of his study. When asked what his major concepts were, this soft spoken man proceeded to hesitantly express them. All of the participants agreed with him on the merit of his study and encouraged him to continue his efforts in writing his first draft. This participant expressed how helpful it was to have to answer those questions and how the feedback received from the group was appreciated and useful to him. "Having to tell all of you was like sweating bullets. I didn't think it would be so hard, but it has helped me to have to do it. Your input has been invaluable to me." He had brought his own tape recorder with him to record the session.

As had become customary in the MIS meetings, he was asked at the next meeting he attended to update everyone in the group regarding his progress. Since the meetings were attended by a fluctuating group, once again he was asked to tell all that had not been there during the previous session what his research was about. This man proceeded to eloquently present his research problem, the purpose of his study, and its design. He articulated the major concepts and how they were related and presented a problem which required the need for new knowledge that would be delivered by his research. For those that had attended the first meeting where he had talked about his study, an obvious transformation had occurred in this individual. This was not the same soft-spoken person who had tentatively struggled to answer some questions during a previous gathering. On this occasion, there was someone who could clearly present his study, a researcher expressing to his peers where he was headed. He continued to explain to all present that his attendance to a prior MIS meeting had been a turning point for him. Having to articulate his ideas and to obtain the feedback of his peers had been invaluable to him both in helping him clarify his focus and in receiving so many expressions of support. After that first meeting, he had

gone home, and within a little more than a week he had completed a solid draft of his proposal and submitted it for review to his advisor. This person expressed to all present the positive effect that MIS meetings gave to him: "It's like coming to charge my batteries. It pumps me up. The atmosphere is so positive and encouraging that it keeps me going. I couldn't wait to get here!" The group commented on the obvious transformation and how he now seemed visibly empowered. Additional words of encouragement were expressed to him by all. Within less than one year this individual completed his dissertation and had it nominated for a research award by his advisory committee. He is considered by many of the MIS participants as one of the greatest beneficiaries of their group efforts. Other participants benefitted from discussions on the process of working through the proposal stage, but none was more dramatic nor was such a visible transformation ever seen as in this case.

One adult learning principle implemented in the activity of the discussions of the MIS support group on getting the proposal and research started is the concept of learning how to learn. A theme that was always emphasized to all participants throughout the discussions during MIS meetings was that of each participant's preferred learning

strategy. The descriptors of ATLAS were continually referenced as a reminder of each participant's preferred strategy. On many occasions participants presenting their ideas for a research project or receiving input from the group would remind the other participants of their preferences in learning strategy. This would be done to remind those that were providing input to try to facilitate the best possible conditions conducive to their assimilating any new information being supplied. These events took place in a light-hearted manner, many times providing a release of the intensity that took place during some of the discussions of the MIS group.

Self-directed learning operated as a basic premise for each of the participants of the MIS support group. The participants were in control of their individual learning process. Meeting attendance and participation were strictly on a voluntary basis. Participants would attend regularly, and if their life circumstances necessitated greater attention, perhaps three or four meetings would go by without their attendance. Still, the group supported each and every participant with understanding and encouragement.

Throughout the activity of the MIS support group of discussing the writing the research proposal the

participants maintained Brookfield's principles of effective practice that facilitated learning. All of the discussions were conducted with respect among the participants for the self-worth of the individuals in a safe environment. The participants cooperatively engaged in a diagnosis of needs of individuals fostering a spirit of critical reflection. The nurturing by the group encouraged the development of self-directed individuals, thus empowering the individuals. The individuals could thus perceive themselves as proactive in the research process.

The Anatomy of Writing a Dissertation

Among the topics of discussions at the MIS support group meetings were the various elements that make up the dissertation. From early on in the meetings, the preferred analogy used to describe the total process was that of the anatomy of a dissertation. Dr. Conti had developed an overview of the structure of a dissertation and supplied it to many of the students as a handout titled Anatomy of a Dissertation (see Appendix B). Utilizing a flow chart design, this handout outlines key elements that should be included in the structure of a dissertation. The strategy of this approach was to break down the parts that make up the dissertation into more manageable tasks. Dissecting the

sundry elements that are necessary to make up the total effort were central to the discussions that resulted in a demystification of the total process.

Following the initial deliberations on the preparation of a research proposal, subsequent meeting discussions focused on the various parts outlined in the anatomy. One area of concern was the preparation of a solid problem statement. MIS participants concluded that the problem statement should be a logical conclusion that would assert that a void in the knowledge base existed. This would become apparent in a well-written proposal based on the major concepts as presented in the proposal. The problem statement should logically lead the reader into the purpose statement of the research. This purpose statement should subsequently lead directly to the research questions or hypothesis.

Another element of the dissertation discussed at different gatherings of the MIS support group meetings was the review of the existing literature which is an element required in all dissertations. The purpose of this element is to demonstrate that the researcher has a familiarity with or mastery of the existing literature on the research topic. Discussions focused on the importance of what should and should not be included in this chapter, how long this

chapter should be, and at what point does the researcher know when to stop the writing process. Discussions on this topic revolved around the need to evaluate and synthesize the literature and not just to report it. At the same time, the quality and content of the writing should demonstrate to the reader the level of expertise on the subject matter possessed by the author. One aspect of this chapter that became evident to all MIS participants was the fact that the responses to the comprehensive examination questions were useful in completing this chapter. One message became obvious during these discussions. No writing and research would go to waste, but its placement in the document was of prime importance.

As one MIS meeting developed that began with the purpose of celebrating the final dissertation defense of two participants, a discussion ensued on different elements of the overall process. A good amount of time was spent on the importance and use of the comprehensive examination questions in the overall document. One participant explained:

My comprehensive examination questions developed during my proposal meeting. My research had to do with changes in the business world and why people seek advanced degrees. As my proposal defense developed, my committee had some questions about

changes in higher education and how these changes have effected higher education. How do small liberal arts colleges compete. This in turn was a mirror of what has been happening in the general population. My committee decided that I needed to go back to the literature base and find out what the research showed in this matter. I found how smaller colleges have adapted and the message that they send out in the media appeals to all sectors of society. This comp question ultimately helped me because it really made my research study stronger, and it provided me with a link to tie my conclusions back to the existing literature. With this I was able to make a link that demonstrated my contribution to the existing adult learning literature base. The questions gave me a common thread from the very beginning of my study that helped me organize everything all the way down to the very end of my study. My perception was that my committee was working with me contributing their knowledge with my own research to help me produce a better and stronger study. I felt like I was working with peers instead of being supervised. It was a great experience.

Another participant that had completed her final defense recently told the group of how at her proposal meeting she had presented to her committee a project where she would be doing some interviews via an online form to obtain her data. One of her committee members brought up the topic of the digital divide. Her words express this episode best:

My committee member Dr. Jim Gregson mentioned the digital divide and from the discussion of the topic that followed a comp question was written. I knew very little about the topic and had to research the existing literature. I wrote up my response to this question, and this portion became

a large part of my Chapter 2. It became very meaningful to the study in that in this portion both Myles Horton and Paulo Freire were tied in instead of in the adult learning portion of my writing. This provided me with an avenue to talk about communication, cultural differences, and languages. Overall, the question helped me develop a much stronger section of my dissertation.

This participant a year later was asked to contribute to a book with a chapter on the subject of the digital divide. In a different MIS meeting she later expressed the gratitude she felt towards her committee for having presented this question to her. She told the group that in retrospect, although she felt at the time that her study was taking an incomprehensible and unnecessary direction, it ended up being something that led her later to become a contributor to the overall knowledge base in the field of adult education.

Eduard Lindeman describes adult education as "a continuing process of evaluating experiences, a method of awareness through which we learn to become alert in the discovery of meanings" (p. 85). For Myles Horton his educational design was for the adult learners to develop meaning from their experiences and from those of others within the learning group (Peters & Bell, 2001, p. 254). For the participants of the MIS support group theses were

fundamental tenets of learning. In gathering and sharing experiences and reflecting on these experiences the participants of MIS had the purpose of sharing their experiences and by this means learning more about the dissertation process. The participants gathered with the intent to give and receive what they needed to complete the process.

Research Findings Meeting

Another activity that became common practice at MIS support group meetings was to gather and give participants the opportunity to present the findings of their research and conclusions. Subsequent to that a discussion would take place regarding the conclusions drawn from the research. In its first manifestation, the request came during the third month of meetings on the part of a participant that had completed data collection and already written her findings. The challenge now lay in writing up her conclusions and recommendations. At the prompting of her advisor, this person requested some time during the meeting to present research findings to the group. She wanted the group to feel free to offer their input of any conclusions. This participant used MIS as a resource in this way because she found that sometimes after looking at something for so long

she "could no longer see the forest from the trees."

This student had a very strong task orientation in most endeavors she undertook. She was eager to begin the meeting and get down to serious business. After the customary sharing of food and conversation, the group sat down to get started at the request of this person. She had prepared packets as handouts containing her findings. She had put a great deal of effort as evidenced by the detailed nature of each packet and the use of color schemes. She promptly passed out the sheets instructing everyone to look at page one to begin the discussion. At that moment her advisor Dr. Conti requested that she verbalize her findings in place of reading handouts. She reluctantly began to describe the steps she went through in data collection and the analysis of the data. As she began to present her findings, she became more and more animated in her presentation. The student supplied a verbal depiction of the conclusions at which she had arrived. Other MIS participants began to point out their observations and conclusions based upon the information presented. The outcome of this meeting is best grasped in this student's own words:

Probably the best part for me was when I took in the findings and they helped with the conclusions and things. It was also good in that I got to do a

mini-presentation and talk about the findings and things like that. So in a way, it was incredibly helpful. I'll tell you, [name of one participant]...she is awesome! She said some things in mine that made a total difference. She said some things in [student name] that made a total difference. Unfortunately she wasn't there for [another student], but [she] has a different way of looking at things....It was the entire group, but that woman, I mean if it were me, I'd want her at every one of them. I'd be paying her way to get here. She captured something that I wouldn't have ever thought of. It multiplies the power of your findings. So, definitely you'd want that. It's a pretty amazing process, and the sharing in the group is amazing. By the time we get to the doctorate, we've had a lot of education, and we've been in a lot of situations where you have some interplay with your colleagues. I'll tell you it was the first time in my life where I felt someone was doing something for me that I didn't have to do. I mean, in other words, they went above and beyond. I actually got more than I put in. It makes me want to stay, and it makes me want to keep helping people and giving them articles, and doing things like that. You just can't imagine the supportive environment, and I guess it's different than any other environment that I've seen in education.

The success of this exercise was not only expressed by the completer but also through word of mouth among the participants as an example of the encouragement offered by the participants of the MIS support group. The participants were willing to not only be present at meetings to receive the benefits of the group discussions but also to contribute whatever they could in observations or any possible insights they could provide throughout the discussions that would

develop. This aspect is described by the second beneficiary of a findings meeting.

I think the highlight for me was the night that I came and presented my findings and everybody was trying to help me find ideas. It's neat that other people would help you finish. You know, it's really neat. You're sitting there like, "Okay, I know I've to do this", but you have all these people going, "Okay, let's help you, let's help you." They're willing to do it, and they're happy to do it. I mean everybody in that room said something to me. When I got my tape and went home, I was just scribbling, and I'd stop and pause. I had Chapter 5 written when I left! All I had to do was fill in the information and back it up with literature--you know, back it up with numbers and findings and everything. But just, think you have that many people in a room that want to help you so few times in life. You know what I'm saying? At work you have antagonism, people, you know, especially if you're the boss, they don't want to do what you say. In your family there's always one crazy one, and your family isn't 20 people anyway. You're in this room with 20 to 25 people, and they're just as invested in that, in you getting that degree, as you are. That just really doesn't happen. I went to Ivy League undergrad, and it is competitive and cutthroat. If you make it out of there you're like, "Whew! Thank the Lord that that's over!" because it is a fight! But this wasn't a fight. I was just amazed. I was thinking, they--the people in the room--of course they came because they had questions too, but not all of them. [Another student] was finished, but it didn't matter. She was going to help me get mine. I thought that was really neat that that many people would say, "Okay, we're going to do this, we're going to help you do it." It's not often in life, and I'm sure there will be very few times when I'll find it again, that people would be willing to do that. They were there for me, and they helped me. It was just really what I needed to make it work. I had ideas, but they were able

to help me group them. I will never forget that. I'll be 80 years old and telling my grandkids about Chapter 5. Oh, grandma on her Chapter 5 story again. It was just so amazing, and my dad-- he was so happy, because I'm the first doctorate ever in the family. He was so proud, but even though he was proud and he wanted me to make it, he couldn't offer me the same support that the MIS group could. It was something only the MIS group could do and they came through!

As the group of people attending the MIS support group meetings continued to grow, meetings held specifically to discuss findings and generate conclusions became more difficult to hold. One reason for this was that the participants were at so many different stages in their dissertation process. Another reason was because the gatherings became so large that the duration of meetings would surpass 4 hours. It was decided by the group that to remedy the situation a findings meeting would be called by the researcher. It was also decided that findings meetings would be held at a different time and place than the routine MIS support group meetings. Another decision the group made was that the findings meetings would be attended by invitation of the completer. This would prevent the over-scheduling of some MIS members and allow the findings group to remain small enough to be constructive. MIS findings meetings then became a small gathering of five to seven

people, generally attended by those MIS'ers that had already completed their doctorate or were in the final stages.

Utilizing the experiences of those who had already completed or nearly completed, this part of the process lent itself to focused discussions as opposed to a more free-floating brainstorming session that occurred when the entire group was involved. This became a successful solution enabling the researcher to obtain valuable feedback and suggestions in the generation of conclusions.

In the Research Finding Meetings of the MIS support group the guiding adult learning principle was the concept of the reflective practitioner. As the participant presented the research findings to peers, each participant would reflect on the problem, the methodology, the research questions and the findings of the research and in so doing would attempt to test the strength of the conclusions posited or would draw conclusions from the findings.

Also, emancipatory learning was exercised by the participants of MIS in the Research Findings meetings. Problems and findings were posited by the researcher, and as a group this information was shared and reflected on. The reality of the findings were confronted by those present and conclusions and recommendations drawn from that data. Thus,

the biases and reality of the participants were altered. Although the participants advisor was generally present, he functioned as a peer and not from a power stance throughout the exchange.

Celebrations

There are many activities that became common practice of the MIS support group. One that originated sometimes spontaneously and other times at the prompting of the mentor/advisor was the celebration of accomplishments and milestones of each of the participants. Typically the evening would begin with participants arriving individually or in clusters with assorted food dishes, paper supplies, and ice. They would engage in animated conversation taking place in small groups. Greetings consisting of hugs, waves, and handshakes were exchanged while at the same time catching up on what had been happening since the previous session. As the group would grow, the meetings participants would gradually begin to gravitate towards the living area or a large den where a circle would begin to form and eventually someone, either a participant or the mentor/advisor, would raise their voice with the announcement that the meeting was about to begin and for everyone to take a seat.

Meetings usually initiated with the posing of the question "Who wants to tell us what has been going on with their research since our last meeting?" What would follow from that moment on were short updates by individuals. It was routine to hear brief reports like "This week I turned in my second draft of my proposal!" Hearing this announcement, the group would erupt in cheers, applause, and exclamations of congratulations. "Last week I got the okay to distribute my proposal to my committee members and schedule my defense." Every time an announcement of this nature was made, it was a reminder to the rest that they too could reach these goals. Once again the crowd would burst into congratulations. Another participant announced:

After our discussion at the last meeting on linear thinking and writing, I went back to my current draft. I've already forgotten which one it is, there have been so many! I went back to my Adult Ed section and changed things. I filled in the pockets that were blank and finished my methodology section. Yesterday, I turned in my proposal to my advisor.

Expressions of congratulations such as "You go girl!", "Alright now!", "Way to go!", and much more could be heard. Another person made the announcement that they had completed a findings chapter and turned it in to their advisor for review, and once again the participants erupted into

applause on another milestone reached.

Major events like a final defense would be more extensively reported on and in great detail. Completers would generally begin their account of events even with details of their thoughts from the evening before. On many a recount of events, emotional highs and lows were told one following the other to paint a very clear picture to all attendees of the emotional mood swings which are experienced. This would usually be followed with an episode by episode tale, from the point the completer awoke the morning of final defense until the usual celebration of completion. Participants typically were enraptured with the account and hung on to every word of the speaker.

I pulled an all nighter going over my overheads and getting organized for my defense. I was so nervous that I couldn't sleep anyway. But then as I was driving to campus, I started falling asleep! I rolled down my window to let the cold air hit me in the face, had my radio blasting and if anybody saw me they must have thought that I was insane because I was literally slapping myself to keep awake! I don't know why I was so worried. Things got started. I did a short overview of my study, and then the committee began to talk. It didn't seem like a defense! First one committee member and then another would talk about my findings. Next thing I knew time was up! I didn't even get to show all my overheads! Then the committee asked everyone to step outside while they "deliberated". It was only 10 minutes, but it felt like eternity. They called us all in and announced that I was granted the degree of doctor. I have to make a few

changes and add a few things as to be expected,
but I can't believe it's over! I did it! I'm done!
I Made It So!

The group would erupt in laughter during the comic aspects of accounts, be tense during the nervous remarks, and cheer at the final result. As participants reported on the details of their defense, a demystification of the dissertation process would take place for all that attended the meeting. The demystification consisted in that abstract things such as the actual order of events during the defense would become concrete facts to all of the listeners. The MIS participants were able to see concrete examples of things that others that go through this process only hear or worry about. MIS participants were able to listen to dissertation completers critically reflect on these events after the process was completed. It was significant to see the confidence and the positivity with which a completer would conduct their report to the group. This in turn provided an opportunity by the group to analyze the elements.

It should also be noted that on occasion MIS participants extended their demonstration of support to actually attending the final defense of other participants. At first MIS members just attended the meetings. However, after more became familiar with the process, some began to

help the student who was defending by bringing the food to the meetings. This was only done with the consent of the committee and student defending their study. It was another indication of the degree of support the group lent one another as well as the strength drawn from the support of peers during the defense process. Furthermore, to attend the final defense of an MISer gave a peer the opportunity to witness the actual final stages of "Making It So". This served to spur on those still pushing towards their goal that they too could "Make It So". Those peers that attended a final defense were also asked to participate in the "debriefings" with their observations of the defense process at the next MIS meeting.

On the agenda of one particular meeting was the celebration of the final defense of "Pooh". On this occasion after she reported to all the participants a detailed account of her defense seasoned with remarks from witnesses that were present, the MIS participants brought out a cake prepared to celebrate the achievement. On the cake were the words "Made It So!" Also, a tee shirt was presented to her with the signatures of all of the participants present at that meeting. It was a time of great celebration. "Pooh" stated, "I couldn't have done it as well without all of your

support. Guys, it's as much your final defense as mine."

The first adult learning principle exercised by the participants of the MIS support group in Celebrations was that of the reflective practitioner. All of the participants would enjoy the report of the events celebrated and simultaneously would reflect on the process involved in completion. This was performed by the participants envisioning what they individually needed to do to reach the goal of Making It So.

The MIS participants were also empowered during these celebrations as in a Freirian practice they unveiled their reality in the descriptions and sharing of the process of the dissertation defense. Through the dialogical process of the completers naming their reality, a transformation of perspectives occurred within all of those present and participating in these celebrations. A demystification of the total process would progressively take place in their realities and eventually became a reality.

It's Not Over Until the Paperwork Is Done

Once the final defense is held, there are usually some revisions and corrections recommended by the committee to the new doctor. Also, there are a series of forms and procedures required by the university to complete the

process. After some of the first participants completed their dissertation process, they continued to share with and help others participants of the MIS support group. Two participants prepared a list of requirements and protocols that should take place as the process is finalized (see Appendix F). This information was shared at a very interactive meeting in which all participants engaged. The group was advised of the existence of a graduate college thesis handbook that contained information on the processes and procedures of the document as required to be turned in after the final defense. Participants were also made aware of additional payments that must be made to the university for binding fees, additional costs if the dissertation is to be copyrighted, how many copies should be made of the dissertation on the required university bond paper, forms submitted to the graduate college, and deadlines. The initial completers prepared a handout that delineates all of the procedures (see Appendix F), reminding everyone that the final defense is not the end; in other words, you are not really done until all of the paperwork is complete.

Almost a year after the meetings had taken place for the completion celebration of one MIS participant, another useful resource was provided to the participants. After the

now customary detailed account of the events that had transpired during the dissertation defense, this MIS member conducted an activity that highlighted a list of elements beginning with each letter of the alphabet that she considered necessary to achieve completion (see Appendix E). What was significant about the activity was the creativity in its delivery. The participant had prepared an Easter egg hunt, strategically placing plastic eggs throughout the home of the host. Inside each egg was a cutout of each letter of the alphabet and the element. The hunt was conducted, eggs collected, and each element read by the successful hunter. The activity was an instructional strategy that created enormous enthusiasm and excitement in the participants, rekindling their desire to achieve the goal of completion and reviewing critical elements of the dissertation process.

One adult learning principle that guided the participants of the MIS support group in the activity of informing all of the procedures required for submission of documentation was the concept of self-directed learning. One of the primary tenets of this concept is that of identifying resources for learning. In informing the participants of MIS of all of the existing resources available with requirement information, the participants were identifying the resources

they needed to learn these procedures, become familiar with the processes, and thus comply.

The Circle of Learning

One activity that was a common practice from the very beginning of the MIS support group meetings was what the group liked to call "the circle of learning". Once the group had participated in their initial social moments, someone within the group would generally call everyone to task. At that time, the group would gather in whatever part of the home had been decided and would form a large circle as best possible. Some would sit in chairs, and others would sit on the floor. Everyone situated themselves to enable a clear view of all present and to thus best hear what was to be shared.

After the first few meetings, the group began the practice of beginning with an update on events that had taken place since the prior meeting. A final defense, the completion of a draft of a chapter, participants that had set a date for comprehensive exams, the completion of these exams, a proposal defense. On occasion it could be what would take place at the meeting: someone delivering a completed proposal or chapter to their advisor for his review.

Each of these events was celebrated and words of

encouragement expressed by all present. The group would then proceed to whatever tentative agenda of topics to be covered that had been planned for that evening. The agenda could consist of someone that had reached a milestone providing an account of the events. All present would listen and ask questions of the peer with the purpose of obtaining further insight into that part of the dissertation process that was being discussed.

As one MIS meeting evolved, Dr. Conti mentioned that he had been reviewing a final draft of the dissertation of one of the participants that was present. He mentioned that as he read there was a portion of this paper that had impressed him greatly and he wanted to share it with the group. He proceeded to read the last four pages of this person's dissertation where she spoke of the participants of her qualitative study. The description was vivid and rich and had an impact on all participants present. The author was then asked to share with the group the events that had transpired during her research which she proceeded to do from the beginning until the end. In this specific case, the author had worked studying some lifelong learners who were senior adults and had utilized the metaphor of a tree through her writing. She had so artfully described her

participants that as the dissertation was read a person would be impressed as to have met these people personally. All of the participants that were present were greatly impressed with her account. This researcher was so impressed with this specific dissertation that he came to the decision that he wanted to do a qualitative study of the participants of the MIS support group. In so doing, his objective came to be to give a voice to the participants with all of their efforts, struggles, and most of all successes so that perhaps others that embarked in pursuit of a doctoral degree could have if not a small support group as a resource, at least the account of events to help them also MAKE IT SO.

The guiding adult learning principle implemented by the participants of the MIS support group in the Circle of Learning was the concept advocated by Myles Horton that knowledge and learning is enhanced by the group. In posing questions to one another MIS participants understood as did Horton that in so doing they helped "people examine what they already knew. By questions, you help people to know what they already know but don't know they know" (Horton, 1990, p. 10). In asking these questions of one another MIS participants sought answers to how the dissertation process is conducted and how research is performed. In the Circle of

Learning the participants supplied one another with the resources each individual needed to meet their needs and complete the dissertation process.

Group Dimensions

As the MIS group met with the purpose of reviewing how to write a research proposal, they alternately operated within both the Task and Social-Emotional domains and the Group and Individual domains. As a group, they functioned on an informational level learning the process to determine and focus a research topic. The process was discussed utilizing a reference sheet (see Appendices B & D) to logically and sequentially observe the total dissertation process and furnish information to all of the participants.

On an individual basis, each participant had the opportunity to critically reflect on the different elements that embodied the research proposal. The individuals could then analyze if their own introduction proposal was logically presented in a movement from the general to the specific. The individuals could assess if their major concepts were clearly and logically presented and how this related to the study.

In the Human dimension on an individual basis, encouragement was received in reflecting on milestones of

progress achieved by others. At the same time, individuals were encouraged throughout the process to break the proposal into smaller components (see Appendix D) which in turn afforded an individual with a sense of task achievability. Reflecting on the different components of the proposal and assessing which of these elements had been satisfactorily produced supplied each individual with an assessment of where that person was at in the total process.

The MIS support group members gathered to share milestones, and in the Work dimension this was executed in the Social-Emotional domain. A free flowing sharing of different episodes constantly then lead to a reflection of these milestones. This reflection was performed by both the Group and the Individual. With the sharing of experiences, the Group and the Individual would receive encouragement in hearing different episodes. When a participant shared with the group that on occasions the direction that a committee would lead the participant in would seem illogical or irrelevant but then later would lead to a stronger overall study, the group and individual were encouraged and would receive the message to place trust in the committee. A message that repeated itself on many instances was how the participants found that working with the committee was like

working with a group of peers who were interested in the overall success of the participants and that they anticipated that the participants would produce a contribution to the field.

The participants of the MIS support group operated in the Work dimension as they held Research Finding Meetings. Participants operated within the Individual domain as they verbalized findings for their peers and in a sense were defending their dissertation. Findings and conclusions were presented to the group, and this operated as a dry run for the final defense. At the same time, participants had the expectation of receiving feedback from their peers and of obtaining additional insight into areas that they may have missed during the analysis of data and conclusions. The group operated in the Task domain learning elements and procedures of the final defense thus preparing themselves for their own final defenses.

The participants of the MIS support group operated within the Human dimension during celebrations both in the Individual domain and the Group domain. This was performed by the participants both in the sharing of milestones and in reflecting on these milestones achieved by the participants. The participants also invested time in learning the elements

and procedures of the final defense in celebrating and sharing the accomplishments of the completers. Each episode was broken down in an event-by-event account providing the opportunity for all present to ask questions and clarify the procedures all with an atmosphere of openness and camaraderie and was done in a non-threatening environment. Some of the discussion focused on the content of the event being celebrated while other parts of the discussion dealt with the participants feelings and perceptions during the event.

The participants of the MIS support group operated within the Work dimension in both the Individual and Group domain as they conducted activities that informed the participants of the procedures of completion of the dissertation process. The participants sought to be informed of all of the processes required by the Graduate College and the College of Education of Oklahoma State University by those presenting their completed dissertations to the group. A complete list and samples of documents that delineated these requirements were furnished to any interested attendee with the specific purpose of presenting information to demystify this final aspect of the dissertation process (see Appendix F).

The participants of the MIS support group operated within the Human and Work dimensions as they participated within the Circle of Learning. As the participants broke down the dissertation process into its various elements they operated within the Task domain. This was shared and discussed by participants who had reached completion of that part of the process. In so doing, participants repeatedly had the opportunity to ask questions, clarify portions that they may not fully understand, and thus, have many opportunities to learn each aspect of the dissertation process on both an Individual and Group level. All of this was done within an environment of sharing, amidst socializing with one another and laughing at the humorous episodes of completers maintaining a non-threatening atmosphere.

The activities of the MIS support group included all domains depicted within the Group Dimensions grid. These dimensions are interwoven within the activities of MIS participants. An undulation from Task to Social-emotional domains occurs throughout the entire process of activities. When MIS sessions would become very Task oriented a shift would occur generated within the group towards the Social-emotional dimension or the opposite. This resulted in a

relaxation of group emphasis and served as a release of tensions. Elements that can be considered part of the Work dimension were experienced at both an individual and a group level. The participants operated alternately within all domains of a group. Thus, MIS participants were able to maintain group purpose, cohesiveness, and a continuity of meetings and activities.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

Competent professionals are returning to institutions of higher education to seek doctoral degrees. Despite the rigorous entry requirements for doctoral programs, large numbers of these adult learners are not completing the program requirements. One reason for this may be that doctoral students do not have a support system within higher education based on adult learning principles that provides on-going opportunities for interaction with other learners and faculty to aid the students in completing their goals (Bair & Haworth, 1999, p. 16).

Individuals encounter many barriers in their pursuit of graduate degrees such as the daunting task of completing the dissertation process. This dynamic has created a group of learners that the literature and higher education community have labeled "All But Dissertation" or ABD (Hanson, 1992, p. 3). However, there is one group that has overcome these obstacles. This group is known as the Make It So (MIS) support group. MIS is a grassroots support group of Oklahoma State University graduate students in the Adult Education program.

The purpose of this study was to describe the activities implemented by the Make It So (MIS) support group of the Adult Education graduate program at Oklahoma State University. These activities were categorized into different domains of action. This was accomplished by (a) an analysis of the activities performed at their meetings, (b) a categorization of their actions as being in either the Task domain or Social-Emotional domain, and (c) a review of their actions categorizing these under either an Individual domain or a Group domain of the support group.

This study was a qualitative case study. Data were collected from the historical records of the meetings of MIS related to activities of the group. The framework of data categorization utilized was derived from the existing literature on the study of group dynamics. The data were examined and the activities grouped into either the Human or Work dimension. Each dimension consisted of two poles. The data were then scrutinized and rated into one of four domains of action. The data were evaluated in either Task or Social-Emotional domains as two poles of the Work dimension, or evaluated in the Individual and Group domains as two poles of the Human dimension. This allowed for a simple categorization and presentation of the interrelation of the

activities of the Make It So support group. The method of analysis of the data utilized in this study was the constant comparative method.

Summary of Findings

One of the activities of the MIS support group was to focus on getting the dissertation started by generating a research proposal for submission and defense to their doctoral committee. To accomplish this task the participants segmented the proposal into its various elements, and conducted discussions throughout numerous meetings over what ingredients should be included in these elements. Emphasis was placed on verbalizing the purpose of a study, what major concepts should be included, and talking about how a participants research would provide a contribution to the field. To aid in this purpose MIS members utilized existing handouts (Appendix B & D) and new handouts were generated by completers (Appendix A).

Another activity of MIS meetings was to carry out discussions on the elements embodied in the structure of a dissertation. The strategy of this approach was to break down the parts that make up the dissertation into more manageable tasks. MIS members would then conduct discussions that resulted in a demystification of the total process.

Visual aid were also used for this purpose (Appendix B) and new ones also were created by completers (Appendix C and E).

In an early stage of MIS gatherings the group would convene with the purpose of providing the opportunity for a participant to present research findings to the group for input. These meetings allowed the presenter to practice verbalizing their findings in preparation for a final defense. It also gave the presenter an opportunity to receive input from peers resulting in the fine tuning of conclusions and recommendations. As MIS gatherings became larger, research findings meetings became a separate event with the participants attending by invitation of the near completer. This change in practice allowed for a more directed and productive meeting.

Very soon after MIS began the celebration of milestones became a common and important element. A debriefing of milestones became a part of celebrations, both on the part of the completer of a milestone as well as on the part of observers. As a result of these detailed account of events, a demystification of the dissertation process would take place for all that attended the meeting. Another significant effect of celebrations on participants was to observe the confidence and the positivity with which a completer would

conduct their report. Detailed recount of events furthermore provided an opportunity for the group to reflect on and analyze the different elements that were completed.

One other activity carried out by MIS was a review of forms that had be completed and procedures required by the university to conclude the dissertation process. This activity generated spontaneously from the first completers of the group and was a practice that continued in subsequent meetings were final defense events were shared. As a result of this new handouts were generated for the group covering this aspect of the process (Appendix C and F).

MIS participants began early on to practice what they liked to call the Circle of Learning. Debriefings were common. All present listened and asked questions with the purpose of obtaining further insight into that part of the dissertation process that was being discussed. In the Circle of Learning the participants supplied one another with insights and resources that individuals needed to complete the dissertation process.

MIS participants alternately operated within both the Task and Social-Emotional domains as a group and as individuals. These dimensions are interwoven within the activities of MIS participants. An undulation from Work to

Human dimensions occurs throughout the entire process of their activities. As a result, MIS participants were able to maintain group purpose, cohesiveness, and a continuity of meetings and activities.

As a result of the findings of this study the following broad conclusions can be drawn about MIS:

1. MIS learners are aware of the adult learning principles they are implementing.
2. Demystification is consciousness raising.
3. MIS learners are practicing perspective transformation.
4. MIS is utilizing a participatory approach.
5. MIS learners are reflective practitioner researchers .
6. MIS is an Enhancing Community.
7. An advisor can function as a catalyst of self-direction.

Awareness of Adult Learning Principles Implemented

The participants of the Make It So (MIS) support group sought to translate into practice adult learning principles as a guide to their activities. The role of experience was of dominant importance as a resource for learning the various components of the dissertation process. However, experience in itself was not sufficient to provide the quality of learning sought by MIS participants. Critical reflection on the experiences shared by the participants was of major importance to produce learning that effected change. Self-directed learning was at the helm guiding their

activities. Finally, the principal objective of the participants was to empower themselves and attain the completion of the dissertation and research process. MIS participants exercised these adult learning principles operating within the Work and Human dimensions in all domains.

Experiences of the participants of the MIS support group were important as a resource. Experience for the MIS participants was understood in the definition posited by Eduard Lindeman as "first of all, doing something; second, doing something that makes a difference; third, knowing what difference it makes" (Lindeman, 1926/1989, p. 87). The participants shared their experiences as they advanced through the dissertation process. MIS members considered one another as a learning resource that provided an opportunity to analyze the dissertation process as each member moved through the different stages of writing and research. In breaking down the dissertation into its various elements and sharing the experiences of the participants, MIS members removed the seemingly formidable barriers they perceived in the task of completing the dissertation process.

MIS participants operated within the Human dimension in the sharing of experiences. MIS members operated within the

Individual domain in learning from these experiences. They performed in both the Social-Emotional domain and the Task domain as they shared experiences as a consistent exercise of the group.

The importance of the sharing of experiences to MIS participants was not limited to a resource for learning. Experiences were utilized as a catalyst for critical reflection by MIS members. Each experience was broken down to its primary elements and reflected upon. This critical reflection was performed as a Group and on an Individual basis seeking application in the reality of each participant. Critical analysis was performed by MIS participants operating within the Task domain.

Self-directed learning was a basic premise of all participants of MIS. Each of the participants were in control of the direction and planning of their learning of the dissertation process, the diagnosis of their learning needs, and the identification of the resources needed to meet those needs. For the participants of MIS, the dissertation process became "a highly deliberate effort to gain and retain certain definite knowledge and skill, or to change in some other way" (Tough, 1978, p. 250). MIS participants operated in the Human dimension and in the Task

domain to accomplish this objective.

MIS participants sought to take control of their circumstances and empower themselves to complete the dissertation process. The participants shared experiences and viewpoints. Through dialogue MIS participants reflected on the reality of their experience and knowledge of the research and dissertation process. As this reality was identified by the individuals and reflected upon, the individual recognized practices to change their reality.

Participants of the MIS support group implemented adult learning principles in pursuit of completing the doctoral research and dissertation process. Through the sharing of experiences, and critical reflection on these experiences a demystification of the dissertation process occurred resulting in that the participants learned the diverse elements of the dissertation and completed the process in less time than the national average.

Demystification as Consciousness Raising

As participants in graduate education, MIS participants are a less powerful group under the dominance of the faculty/institution (Hinchey, & Kimmel, 2000, p. 20). Graduate students must comply with the requirements established by the institution and faculty in order attain

the desired degree. Thus, graduate students are on the lower end of the established structure and are subordinate to both the institution and faculty. Required courses, comprehensive examinations, and the writing and defense of a dissertation are some elements established by the power structure. The graduate student must comply within fixed acceptable norms of rigor established by the institution and faculty of a program to attain the doctoral degree.

Freire (1970/1999) postulated that when the oppressed reflect on their situation, this leads to action on their part (p. 48). The graduate students of the Adult Education program of Oklahoma State University were confronted with institutional and program requirements that, for many of them, were alien and burdensome to fulfill. As one white female participant put it, "You don't know what your doing"! Many of the tasks that were required of these graduate students were difficult in nature, and the students were inexperienced to perform them. Yet, throughout the study of adult education, these adult learners became familiar with others before them that had faced learning tasks and had overcome them. In becoming familiar with the history of adult learning and the varied approaches that adults have used to surmount learning opportunities, the learners of the

Adult Education program were inspired to seek a solution to their own learning challenge of compliance with the requirements of the doctoral program.

Freire (1970/1999) posited that as people had a deepened consciousness of their situation they could comprehend that their reality was susceptible to transformation (p. 66). Resignation gives way to the drive for change, and people feel in control, thus empowering them to change their reality. The work of Myles Horton with adult learners in the Appalachian Mountains was an inspiration to those in MIS. The idea of a support group as a resource was not foreign to these adult learners whereas an emphasis on group work was a logical extension of a format utilized in many of their classes. The creation of a support group with the utilization of the experiences of others as a resource to satisfy the diverse needs of the participants was a logical approach.

As MIS participants approached the research and dissertation process, they perceived it as an unknown and difficult process. As a group, MIS participants systematically dissected the process into its different elements by means of dialogue and the sharing of experiences. The participants became aware that their

current state of non-completion could be changed. The research and dissertation processes were not unsurmountable tasks. Through consciousness raising or demystification, MIS participants realized that they could take control of the task of dissertation completion and transform their reality to achieve their goal. Through participation in dialogue and naming their current state, they increased their awareness of their condition. Thus, the motivation to produce change became stronger. MIS participants performed this both as a group and individually.

Practicing Perspective Transformation

Transformative learning is the process of learning through critical self-reflection resulting in the reformulation of a meaning perspective allowing a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative understanding of one's experience (Mezirow, 1990, p. xvi). Meaning perspectives are understood to be the assumptions that make up the frame of reference used by individuals to interpret the meaning of experiences. Authentic learning is considered to transpire when actions are taken premised on these insights.

The participants of MIS practiced an examination of their meaning perspectives through critical reflection on

the experiences of other participants. Through the sharing of experiences with one another, individual MIS participants had the opportunity to evaluate their assumptions and understandings. Individuals could confront their perceived reality with the reality of other participants. In so doing, MIS participants challenged their beliefs and biases in reference to the research and dissertation process and adjusted accordingly. Critical self-reflection of their challenged assumptions and beliefs thus resulted in a transformation of their meaning perspectives. This change would not have taken place at such an early stage of the process without the input of MIS participants. Typically a confrontation of established beliefs and biases takes place during the final preparation of the dissertation initiated by an advisor who reviews the document, or at the candidates final defense prompted by committee members.

As this process of confrontation of reality unfolded, MIS participants experienced authentic learning. The participants of MIS became acquainted with other perspectives that challenged their own understandings and biases. This challenged them and moved them to develop different responses than they would have without coming into contact with these diverse experiences. As a consequence, as

suggested by Mezirow, authentic learning has taken place. The participants of MIS sought to dialogically demystify the research and dissertation process by breaking it down into its fundamental elements. These actions stimulated the transformation of their perspectives.

A Participatory Approach

The principal objective of MIS members was to complete the dissertation process. National statistics pointed to the fact that most doctoral students would either take an average 7 to 9 years to complete the task or not complete the dissertation at all (Bair & Haworth, 1999). One of the targets of all doctoral candidates is to make a contribution of original research to their field (Council of Graduate Schools, 1997, p. 5). MIS members chose to take a participatory approach to make this contribution.

As many MIS participants approached the end of their course work, the selection of a research project had not yet been determined. Also, the majority of MIS participants faced the task of learning how to conduct research for their dissertation. Among the multiple issues faced by MIS members were topics such as the need to learn the elements of a dissertation, how to write in a scholarly manner, and how to overcome situational barriers. The technique of choice of

the members of MIS was to take on research and the dissertation process in a participatory manner. As the group gathered and began their meetings with the customary questions of "what is your study about?", "what are your major concepts?", and "why is your research necessary and what contribution will your study provide to the field of adult learning?", all attendees became engaged in the research of their peer. The practice of verbalizing a response to these questions could sometimes be difficult, but the benefits reaped in sharing were very frequently expressed: "Having to tell all of you was like sweating bullets. I didn't think it would be so hard, but it has helped me to have to do it. Your input has been invaluable to me."

Participatory research occurs "where people research their own problems" (Horton, 1990, p. 11). The members of MIS assembled to research their paramount issue which was completion of the dissertation process. MIS participants approached research as a group. Participants would help one another in determining worthy research topics. They also aided one another in finding answers to problems that arose throughout the process such as those related to a methodological approach, to various ways to report findings,

and to determining and presenting conclusions based on the data collected.

The participants of MIS made great efforts to maintain a non-threatening atmosphere within the group to encourage the free flow of ideas. As Myles Horton discovered, "We also found people had to dream, to say what they wanted, even if they had no way of expressing it in their lives" (p. 13). An environment was furnished that enabled people to say what they wanted to accomplish, and this promoted the discovery of problems. It was not a requirement within the group to be able to verbalize problems eloquently. The fear of not sounding scholarly was not of concern to MIS participants. All participants of MIS were encouraged to express their ideas freely. As a group and with the participation of all present, details could be worked out and refined.

Very important to the group was that a dream or research idea had to be verbalized and named. Once this particular was born and verbalized, the group would join in fostering its development and aiding in seeing it to completion with ideas, encouragement, and support. As told by one participant, "The sharing in the group is amazing....It makes me want to stay, and it makes me want to keep helping people and giving them articles, and doing

Reflective practitioners are professionals who critically question their assumptions and revise their actions based on the context in which they work (Schön, 1983, p. 68). MIS as a group would question their assumptions about the research and dissertation process. Within the context of sharing research experiences, individual members identified relevant situations or problems that they needed to address. MIS participants "framed", or using the term from Freire that participants preferred "named", those situations they deemed important. This naming would be done within the group context, yet the process of reflection and reaction to these named problems was dealt with on an individual level. On an individual level MIS participants made judgements and exercised various tactics in their own research projects calling on an intuitive sense of professional correctness. As commented by one participant, "I was able to make a link that demonstrated my contribution to the existing adult learning literature....a common thread from the very beginning of my study that helped me organize everything all the way". The environment of MIS meetings supported the development and the practice of reflective research practitioners.

An Enhancing Community

things like that. You just can't imagine the supportive environment." In the words of another MIS member,

You have all these people going, 'Okay, let's help you, let's help you.' They're willing to do it, and they're happy to do it. I mean everybody in that room said something to me.

The dynamic of the MIS group in support of a peer in need was always commented on by a completer.

Reflective Practitioner Researcher

The most complete form of self-directed learning "occurs when process and reflection are married in the adult's pursuit of meaning" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 58). MIS members had a clear understanding of their preferred learning strategies. They shared their research experiences with one another as a support group. They critically reflected on these experiences to learn about how to soundly conduct scholarly research and benefit from their efforts by completing their individual research projects. MIS members confronted their understanding of what research involved, and in exchanging experiences with one another, they became aware of a range of alternative possibilities of their understanding of research. In so doing, MIS participants manifested the concept of autonomy in self-directed learning (p. 58).

The participants of MIS are Centering Individuals. Centering Individuals "grow throughout their life in an attempt to master new areas of knowledge" (Forrest, 2002, p. 219). Other characteristics of Centering Individuals are that they use personal experience as a guide for further growth, and they actively engage with people and objects outside of themselves to create a web of relationships (p. 219).

As a result of this web of relationships formed by centering individuals a unique dynamic develops.

When centering individuals relate with one another, they can form an Enhancing Community. Such communities come about organically and without external force or pressure. A common purpose that the community hopes to achieve motivates individuals in that community to combine their efforts. While seeking to fulfill that purpose, relationships between community members display an equality. In addition, individuals in a community exchange resources with each other in a reciprocal fashion. The Enhancing Community gels with trust among individuals in the group and forms a bulwark of solidarity. Also, the community contains at least one leader who is a member that guides and helps the community without constraining them to courses of action. (Forrest, 2002, pp. 219-220).

For the participants of MIS the common purpose was the completion of the dissertation process. They combined their efforts towards this objective in the creation of the support group.

MIS participants operated as a democratic community. The work of Myles Horton at Highlander gave them a model of how to operate. Highlander furnished the process. The MIS members supplied the context. The members of MIS shared their resources and experiences in a reciprocal fashion within a non-threatening atmosphere. Myles Horton illustrated this aim of his practice by describing it as creating "little islands of decency, places for people to be human" (Horton, 1990, inside cover). In the words of an MIS participant, "It's like coming to charge my batteries. It pumps me up. The atmosphere is so positive and encouraging that it keeps me going. I couldn't wait to get here". MIS members were united in their purpose. Coming together as a group, exercising adult learning principles, and the sharing of experiences were the tools of choice to achieve their purpose of learning how to complete the dissertation process.

Advisor as Catalyst

The MIS community had their advisor, Dr. Gary Conti, operating as a leader and had their dissertation committee members functioning for them. Stephen Brookfield describes six principles of effective practice for the teaching-learning transactions. The sixth principle is that "the aim

of facilitation is the nurturing of self-directed, empowered adults" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 11). However, as adults "we are generally enclosed within our own self-histories" (p. 19). We have perspectives and biases that have become so much part of our worldview we are not even aware of how entrenched they are in our thought patterns. To truly become self-directed learners, adults must be free of objectives and evaluative criteria set by external authorities. However, "unless an external source places before us alternative ways of thinking, behaving, and living, we are comfortable with our familiar value systems, beliefs, and behaviors" (p. 19).

The advisor of many of the MIS participants was an active attendee to the gatherings. Within the context of the MIS support group, the advisor operated as a facilitator and a catalytic agent challenging the group members to question their assumptions and biases. The advisor was present "to challenge learners with alternative ways of interpreting their experience and to present to them ideas and behaviors that cause them to examine critically their values, ways of acting, and the assumptions by which they live" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 23).

This function was also undertaken by many of the

committee members of MIS participants. As a consequence of the teaching philosophy and the unambiguous understanding of the committee members that the nature of the Ed.D. is to apply theory into practice, for many of the members of the committees the development of the research project was perceived as a collaborative effort. Starting with the proposal defense and continuing with comprehensive examinations, the committee worked with the candidate to assist them in making a contribution to the knowledge base. As one MIS participant told the group, "My perception was that my committee was working with me contributing their knowledge with my own research to help me produce a better and stronger study. I felt like I was working with peers instead of being supervised".

Within this context, the final defense of the dissertation became an exchange of ideas based on the findings and conclusions of the research. The final defense was not employed as an opportunity to attack the quality of the final document nor the candidate. Unfortunately this is something that occurs in too many instances within higher education. The chair and advisor of the committee of MIS participants worked very closely with the candidate in preparing a strong final document for defense. MIS

gatherings also contributed to the development of a better document inasmuch as findings and conclusions were presented to the group and additional input was received that resulted in the strengthening of the final document. With a very strong final document that had been reviewed by many, it allowed for the final defense to become an intellectual exchange of ideas that stemmed from the research findings. Thus, the final defense came to be known as a celebration instead of a defense. This would have been impossible if not for the constant guidance and support of the advisor, the committee members, and the other members of MIS.

Community versus Individual

A controversy exists in the field of education. Traditional Ph.D. programs stress the individual and independent research in the creation of new ideas. In Ed.D. programs the focus has been on the reflective practitioner who translates knowledge into practice and as in the work-world focus is placed on teamwork or working together. The students learned about adult learning principles in the classroom because that was their field of study. Through the group activities in the classroom they developed a sense of camaraderie and community. This set the stage for the students to proceed and be successful with the creation and

development of MIS.

Nonetheless, there was at least one student who, by comments made by that person, clearly operated in the individual mode. After attending a few meetings that person did not continue to attend MIS meetings. There were also some participants that attended meetings and as individuals obtained what they wanted from the group. These people did not continue to participate in the group nor provide any contributions back to that community.

Many participants continued with the group after completion and made contributions to the group such as the documents demonstrated in appendices A, C, E, and F. Those that continued with the group after completion continued their professional development through helping with the development of others. An evolution of group participation transpired in a movement from peers teaching peers to experts teaching novices. This evolution further demonstrates that a community already existed and the learners that gathered in the MIS support group meetings elevated that community to a higher degree of group performance.

The community understood adult learning principles and theory and applied them. As a result their success was to be

expected. However, the group practiced reflection on these adult learning principles. While adult learning principles can be expected to work in a general setting, higher education places special restrictions on the nature of the learner. That the MIS support group was able to function with success demonstrates that adult learning principles are successful even in the setting of higher education. MIS made a contribution to produce better practitioners albeit its participants were already sound in that area. However, the greater contribution of participation in the MIS support group was that it contributed to the development of robust researchers.

In addition to class members that attended MIS meetings in the pursuit of learning how to complete the dissertation process, there were others that also attended. These people were family members that in some cases became regular attendees that participated in activities and group discussions. They also contributed in many ways to the development of the community. With the attendance of these people members of MIS got to know family members of participants which in turn, helped solidify a sense of community.

One element part of the adult learning strategies

implemented by MIS and that was not explicitly part of the adult learning literature and practice was the act of celebrations. This element was introduced by the groups advisor Dr. Conti. What celebrations did was name the process and institute an atmosphere where these adult learning principles could operate. As part of celebrations the use of food and other treats had the aim to establish an atmosphere, both physically and psychologically, that allowed adult learning principles to function. The food element could be referred to as "the chocolate factor" since for many participants chocolate was the treat of choice. Thus, the use of food and treats was an important climate setting element and had as a frame of reference the seven step program model proposed by Malcolm Knowles, specifically the first step which is the establishment of an environment conducive to adult learning (Knowles, 1970, p. 41).

Another practice the MIS group used to provide an environment conducive to adult learning was to hold their meetings in participants homes. Early on in the groups gatherings one meeting was held on campus in a classroom. All of the participants of this meeting commented that the atmosphere was perceived as restrictive and not as comfortable as those meetings held in homes. It was decided

by the group from that moment on that meetings should be held in participants homes as it was of great importance to all of the participants to have a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere.

The different adult learning elements implemented by both the faculty and the students all fell together as pieces in a puzzle. The adult education program was holistic in nature in that the courses led to the development of a dissertation proposal. The dissertation proposal led into and fed the comprehensive examinations. Those examinations in turn led into the final defense of the dissertation. The creation of the MIS support group by the learners, their sharing of experiences, and their celebrations all reinforced a holistic approach that contributed to an climate that galvanized the development of the practitioner.

In the final analysis, the empowerment of the MIS participants began early on in the dissertation process with the selection of their committee. The selection of committee members with a clear understanding of the fundamental differences of the nature of the Ph.D. and the Ed.D. was instrumental to a successful completion. Thus, the selection of committee members of similar philosophy, paired with participation in this support group that implemented adult

learning principles, and the sharing and reflection on learning experiences all contributed to the empowerment of members of MIS.

A Transformation

We had no clear understanding of what we had set out to do. Like caterpillars we squirmed and walked along our way with an understanding that we had a mission to fulfill. With the help of our advisor functioning as a mentor, we were supplied with direction and focus. With each other as advocates and with one another as sounding boards, resources, shoulders to cry on, and friends offering support, we began to weave the cocoons of our individual tasks.

As we continued our journey, we learned what research and scholarly writing was all about. We pushed on as larvae that weave a cocoon. Throughout the process of critical reflection, our convictions and beliefs were challenged with information and experiences. If you asked any of us what was the critical moment of change, I doubt any one person could tell. All that can be said is that at some point the squirming larvae became a beautiful butterfly that spread its wings in the wind of its research work.

It was a long and at times painful transformation. Each

one of us did not fully understand the metamorphosis that took place. Our efforts were tentative and on occasion confused. Yet, by reflecting, sharing, and consoling one another, the image of what each of us had become became visible to each individual.

The individual participants of MIS were enhanced by the group.

Individuality...is enhanced by being part of a group, instead of telling people they should go it alone, they should be competitive, they should, you know, they should compete with their fellow man. We say, work together, and you'll be a better person. (Moyers, 1990, p. 4)

Within MIS, we operated as equals and with the willingness to share and listen to challenges and suggestions from one another. In the process, we became researchers. Using the words of one completer, "I did it! I'm done! I Made It So!"
YES! We unquestionably MADE IT SO!

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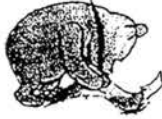
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Appendix A

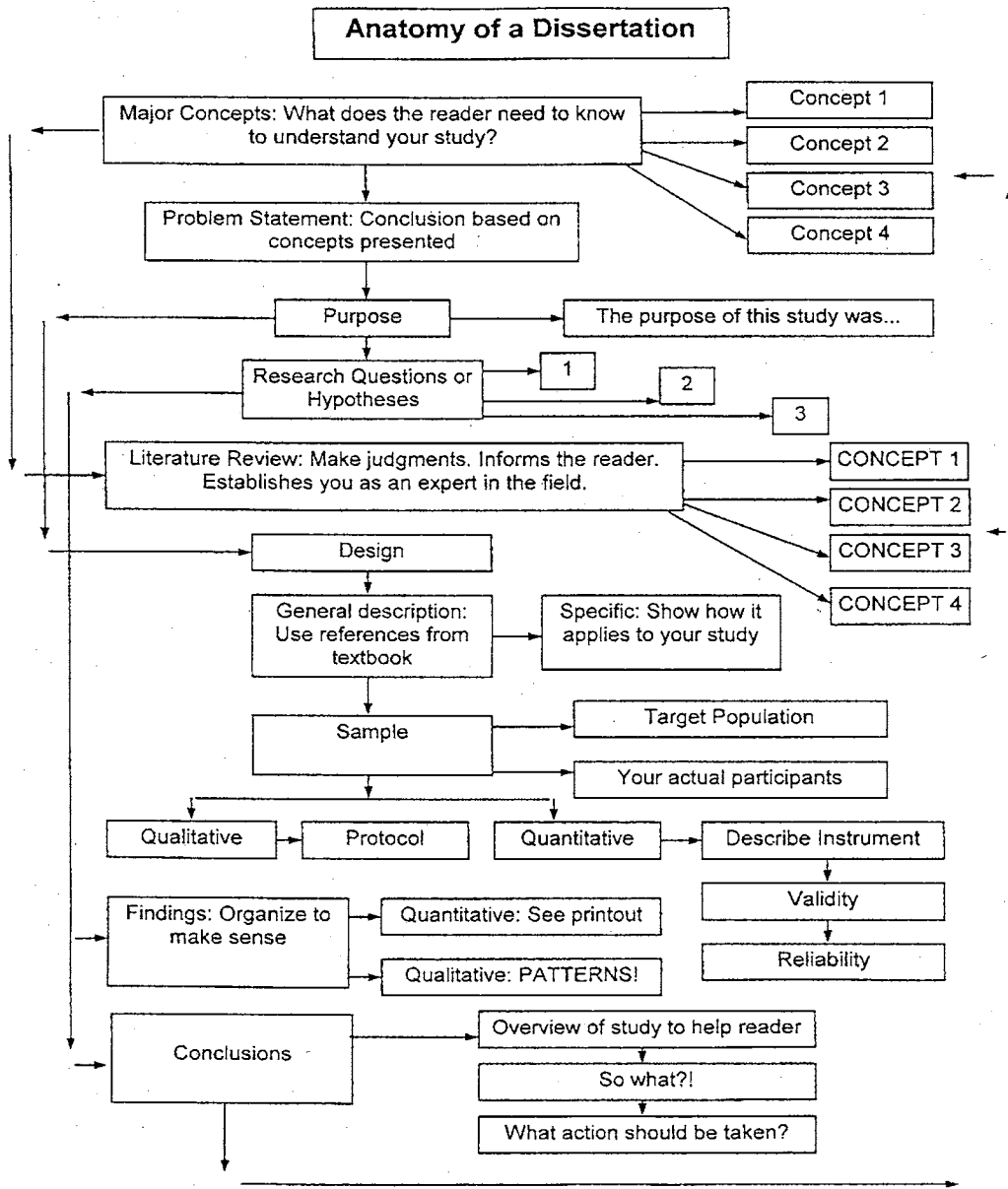


Special News from the 100 Aker Woods: Pooh's Proposal Points

- ☺ Learn from my APA, punctuation, and formatting flub-ups (see draft examples)—there were a bunch of them!
- ☺ Regarding those pesky citations and corresponding references: Create your reference pages as you go along—record page numbers as you go along! Believe me...you won't remember where you got them!
- ☺ Keep in mind your proposal is not an exercise in creative writing. You can express yourself elsewhere
- ☺ First person pronouns (*we*, *our*, etc.)—throw them out of the woods
- ☺ Stay away from the phrase "defined as"—this makes Christopher Robin cranky!
- ☺ Remember your Jr. High lesson—always have a topic sentence to each paragraph
- ☺ Commas and parentheses interrupt the flow of your brilliant thoughts—use sparingly
- ☺ You know that cute quote, song lyric, or movie line you want to use? Forgettaboutit!
- ☺ Celebrate those remarks in your margins such as "nice", "darn, his is good stuff", and ☺
- ☺ When you're rumbley in your tumbley, get a little something weet (like HUNNY!)
- ☺ Use as few words as possible to get your point across
- ☺ Weave short sentences in among the long ones—they pack punch!
- ☺ Two words: WORD PERFECT
- ☺ The most important proposal-writing advise from Pooh: Always, always listen to Christopher Robin and do exactly what he says!!



Appendix B



Appendix C

THE FINAL CHAPTER

-OR-

WRITING THE CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

-OR-

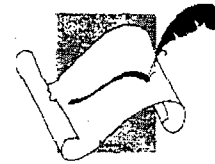
HOW TO GET FINISHED AND GET ON WITH YOUR NEW LIFE AS A DR.

- ★ As you write your Findings, write a short (1-2-3 paragraphs) summary of each Finding section (questionnaire results, interview answers, focus group results—whatever makes sense to your study) and label it with the sub-heading Summary. You'll be glad you did later.
- ★ Look at your study's historical influence: The Introduction (Chapter 1) and Lit. Review (Chapter 2) are the **past**. That's what everyone else says or has said about your study's major concepts. The Methodology (Chapter 3) and Findings (Chapter 4, 5, 6, how ever many you need) are the **present**. The Findings is the analysis phase. Now comes the fun part. Your final chapter is the **Future**. This is where **you, the researcher and scholar create the NEW KNOWLEDGE!** You're the expert, so go for it! The Conclusions piece is where you say "so what?" and the Recommendations piece is where you say "here's what action I, the expert, say needs to be taken". Look at the Conclusions as a noun or subject area and the Recommendations as action or verb area. None of this is original from me, I got all of this from Gary! **The creation of the new knowledge is simply describing what you already know. You are pulling it together to show the reader in a clear and concise way!**
- ★ Begin your final chapter by refreshing the reader with a review of your major concepts (if you've forgotten what they are because it's been so long ago, look at your Introduction, Chapter 1). This will be 2-3 good paragraphs—usually 1 ½ to 2 pages. Look at other people's completed dissertations.
- ★ Very important: End your memory refresher with "Therefore, the purpose of the study was to.....". Cut and paste this from your Chapter 1. This is the only place you can repeat anything in your study and you need to repeat this verbatim.
- ★ Provide a one paragraph "design" description. Again, look at our buddies' work.
- ★ Re-read your Summaries. Write up a "summary of the summaries". This may be a few pages (probably 4-8), it just depends on how big your Findings were. Gary's colleague, Bob Fellenz, said that any reader should be able to know what the study is about and what the Findings were by reading this section.
- ★ Very important: next, build a linking paragraph. This paragraph will indicate your intent to link your Conclusions & Recommendations back to the major concepts of your study and back to the Lit. Review. This short paragraph could look something like: "The problem for this study was conceptualized around the concepts related to ____ (#) main areas. Those areas are _____, _____, _____, _____ (however many you have). Conclusions and Recommendations were drawn related to each of those ____ concept areas".
- ★ Go back to each of your main concept areas and break your Conclusions and Recommendations down into each of those areas. Have a centered Heading (major concept) and sub-headings at the left margins with Conclusions and Recommendations. Depending on your study and your preference, you may want to list one Conclusion, your support paragraphs, then some Recommendations OR you may want to list several Conclusions, supporting paragraphs, and some Recommendations.
- ★ When pondering your C & R, think about what the implications of your Findings are to different types of people and organizations. Ask yourself "what does this mean to practitioners?", "what to researchers?", "what does this tell us about adult learning?", etc.
- ★ You may feel writing up the C & R is hard (I did). As Gary says, it's hard because it requires thinking, analysis, reflection, and courage PLUS most of us have never done this before! **You can do it!**

HOPEFULLY, THIS LITTLE SHEET WILL BE HELPFUL TO PEOPLE IN ALL THREE ATLAS GROUPS:
NAVIGATORS, THE INFORMATION SHOULD HELP YOU PLAN; PROBLEM SOLVERS, IT SHOULD HELP
YOU TELL YOUR STORIES; ENGAGERS, THIS SHOULD MAKE THE PROCESS MORE FUN ©

The Proposal or Getting the Research Started...

1. Introduction
 - a. Building a case for a problem vs. A statement
 - b. What are the major concepts you're concerned with?
 - c. So what! or Who cares!
 - d. Think: 7-10 pages
 - e. You still don't have a study!
2. Problem Statement
 - a. How do your concepts link together?
 - b. Fairly brief section
 - c. In good writing, this would be conclusion to Introduction section
 - e. Remember: You are showing that a problem exists that needs to have new knowledge created about it
 - f. Emphasize your special focus or concern with the problem
 - g. You still don't have a study!!
3. Purpose Statement
 - a. State **clearly and succinctly** exactly what you are going to do
 - b. Usually starts with "The purpose of this study..."
 - c. Narrows the general problem to your specific task
 - d. Important: This governs everything you do. People will relate your final product to this section.
 - e. Be careful in this section
 - f. Now you have a study!
4. Research Question
 - a. Research questions vs Hypotheses
 - b. Focus and give specific direction to your Purpose Statement
5. Procedures
 - a. Lay out exactly **HOW** you are going to do the study
 - b. Extremely important to committee members because shows if study is possible
 - c. Here discuss appropriate elements such as design, population, sample, instruments, observations, site visits, and/or how data will be handled
 - d. After reading this, committee should know exactly how you are going to conduct the study
 - e. Note: You do not have to defend your design--only describe it
6. Steps for action
 - a. Talk with everyone to get ideas and reactions
 - b. Narrow idea with your chairperson
 - c. Write the first draft (Feel good☺); Now you are on the way to completing your doctorate!!
 - d. Get chair's reaction (Feel bad☹)
 - e. Second draft (Feel great☺☺)
 - f. Get chair's reaction
 - g. Final revisions
 - h. Submit to committee members approximately two weeks before Proposal Defense meeting

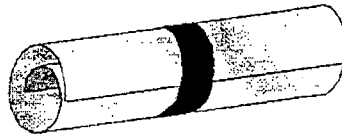


Appendix D (continued)

- i. Start saving for snacks for meeting
- j. Proposal "Defense"--a discussion to cover all possible bases
- k. Start your research...

Converting Proposal to the Dissertation

1. Chapter 1
 - a. The Introduction, Problem Statement, Purpose, and Research Questions
 - b. Add where appropriate Significance of the Study, Definitions, Limitations and Delimitations, and Assumptions
2. Chapter 2
 - a. Write 10-15 page papers on each major concept introduced in the Introduction
 - b. Evaluate and synthesize NOT just report
 - c. What does the reader need to know?
 - d. Show you are an expert!
 - e. Interest is the important thing
3. Chapter 3
 - a. Design of the Study (Hint: Go from general to the specific. Explain general from the literature and then show specifically how it works in your study. Your study is more important than the general!)
 - b. Population and Sample: Who were the participants? What did they look like?
 - c. How was data collected?
 1. Quantitative study: Instrument with lots of information on nature of the instrument, scoring, validity, and reliability.
 2. Qualitative study: Interview or observation schedule. General overview or organization of questions used.
4. Chapter 4
 - a. Report your findings
 - b. Quantitative study: Your printout is your outline. Plan on 2 or 3 days
 - c. Qualitative study: Organize your findings into meaningful **patterns**. Your head is your outline. Plan on ∞
 - d. Qualitative studies may need several findings chapters for different topics
5. Chapter 5 or Final Chapter
 - a. Brief overview of problem, design, and major findings
 - b. Link every conclusion to a finding or group of findings
 - c. Findings are NOT conclusions; a conclusion is "so what"
 - d. Problem of Conclusion vs. Pattern for qualitative studies
 - e. Recommendation: Action to be take based on a conclusion
 - f. Relate to Resesarch Questions





SEARCH NO MORE!

Clues for Completing Your Doctoral Process

A=Apply: apply all you have to give to the dissertation/doctoral process

B=Bug: bug someone besides our Proud Advisor--use your resources

C=Completion: master word in your vocabulary--there is no alternative!

D=Deadline: avoid creating deadlines that are self-imposed or are un-realistic

E=Excellence: excellence is all that counts in your dissertation.

F=FUN: the whole process is GREAT Fun!!

G=Gary: Gary's time is limited, use some new docs to help you.

H=Help: Help is available, you just have to ask--don't be a loner.

I=IRB: stands for Internal Review Board--they approve our research.

J=Jump: jump ahead & do some other things while you're waiting

K=Keep: keep your focus no matter what the frustration.

L=Lead: lead--it's your dissertation, you own it.

M=Margins: 1.5" on left; 1" on top, and both sides. Courier 12 pt. font

N=Never underestimate the power of Gary's advise--do what he says!

O=Obsessed--get obsessed with your dissertation & get it done!

P=Pride: Be proud that you are in the MOST elite doctoral program!

Q=Questions: Comp. questions--you'll usually get them soon after your proposal meeting--you have approximately 3 weeks to finish them.

R=Roller coaster: you may feel you are on a roller coaster, especially toward the end of your writing process---hang on and enjoy the ride!

S=Strategies: adopt all of the 15 learning strategies at your disposal.

T=Touch: stay in touch with the MIS group--they are a BIG support

U=Understand the Gary Conti priority order

V=Vita: you need one for the end of your dissertation.

W=Work...hard work...hard work will pay off--there is NO substitute.

X=Xylophone: an instrument you can take up when you are DONE!

Y=You: you are the key to your own success. You can do it!

Z=Zipadeedoodah! You're going to be a Dr.!!!!!!



Appendix F

Things You Need to Know to Graduate

Dissertation Details

Just date it; don't marry it!

Do everything Gary tells you to do with the document.

Separate out chapters into individual files (Chapter 1, Chapter 2)

You will combine all the chapters when the final draft is ready to submit to the committee.

Any time you take something out, put it in another file and save it.

All new additions to document are put in bold to save advisor time looking for revisions.

Make sure the bond paper is going right side up—OSU top.

When making copies, run back page first (back to front).

Signatures on signature page needed for final copy.

Final draft copy—final draft dates

Final copy—final copy dates

You can copy your dissertation free at the computer center in the North Main building second floor. All you need to do is take them the paper. This is because you are a student.

The draft copy title page must be signed by your advisor.

Make sure the draft is submitted by your graduation semester's deadline that is listed in the catalog. Place the draft in a manila envelope, UNBOUND. On the envelope have your name, home and business phone number, degree (Adult Education), and advisor's name.

The OSU thesis bond paper may be purchased in the OSU-Tulsa bookstore for \$25.99 a ream.

The copy center in Engineering North (located directed behind the library, in the basement) will make the final copies for \$.10 a page. This includes both the copying charges and the bonded paper. Also, they provide the all important envelopes for the four copies and the six copies of the abstract. If copy center has the dissertation to them by 8:00, they could have the copies ready by noon.

If you want someone to take your dissertation to the printer, get your signature pages signed, check for any corrections a week later, and send your copies to be bound you can pay Kay Porter \$225. Her number is 405-744-5958. Remember to let her know that Courier New 12 is what you want; she has tendency to make unnecessary corrections. Tell her it is ready to print!

Committee notebooks with your completed dissertation draft:

3-ring binders with Chapter tabs

Title page

Table of Contents (you ARE using WordPerfect, right?)

Deliver to your committee at least two weekends before your Celebration of Knowledge.

Committee Meeting Details

Call the School of Education Studies 584-0300 (Tulsa local number). They will transfer you to the Stillwater office and to set up your room reservation.

Make an announcement sheet of your dissertation defense. All faculty, students, and public are welcome.

Have your cell phone ready to call all the important people who made this moment possible.

Appendix F (continued)

At the Defense

Take a tape recorder both to the defense and to Gary's follow up meeting following the defense. Make six copies of the signature page on OSU bond paper. Have them at the defense to quickly get signatures that you need for the final copy of your dissertation..

Overheads-Use your white paper copy of the overhead to put your notes on for you to use at the defense.

Ask your committee members if they would like a copy of the final paper. If they say, yes, ask them how they would like for it to look (bound or notebook).

Graduate College Details

Any changes to the plan of study are due in the graduate college the first week of the semester you are graduating. If there are changes, print your transcript from the internet, highlight courses to be added to your plan of study; use a copy of the old plan of study and highlight what courses will be replaced. Give to Dr. Conti two weeks before the beginning of the semester in which you plan to graduate so he has time to make the changes and initial them in the graduate college.

Make sure degree is finalized and in the Graduate office.

Make a copy of all paperwork regarding universities-transfer credits.

Make sure you sign the dissertation agreement form in the graduate college office when you turn in your final dissertation

Graduation Details

Quality book binding charges \$25.00 per copy, OSU charges \$110.00 for copies for the institution, in addition \$0.10 per page will be charged on your Bursar account. Pay binding fees and other miscellaneous fees in the graduate college. Pick up required forms from Pat Anderson in the Graduate College before heading to the Student Union and paying the Bursar. Make copies of this paperwork and return them to Pat Anderson.

OSU bond paper at OSU bookstore for final 4 copies due to Graduate College only.

Pomp and Circumstance

You can do both Stillwater and Tulsa graduations.

Obtain brochure from the Student Union bookstore for current prices.

Invitations-Go to bookstore very early in the semester.

The graduation announcements are about \$35.00-40.00.

Gown rental for a cap, gown, and hood is about \$25.00.

Purchasing the gown starts at about \$275.00 and up.

The hood is about \$88.00 to purchase and a decent hat is about \$50.00 to \$60.00.

After the Defense

Enjoy life! You ***Made It So!!***



VITA 2

Ivan Figueroa

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY OF PRACTITIONER RESEARCHERS:
HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THE HUMAN AND WORK
DIMENSIONS OF AN ADULT EDUCATION DOCTORAL STUDENT
SUPPORT GROUP

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Biographical:

Education: Graduated from Cecilio Lebrón Ramos High School, Patillas, Puerto Rico in May 1977; received Bachelor of Arts degree in History from University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras, Puerto Rico in December 1984; received Master of Science degree in Adult Education and Human Resource Development from Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December 2000. Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in July 2003.

Experience: Employed as Manager and Area Supervisor by Git-N-Go Convenience Stores, 1984-1991. Employed as Bilingual Customer Service Representative, Sales Representative, and Export Representative with Hilti and Hilti Latin America, 1991-2002. Employed as Adjunct Instructor by Tulsa Community College, summer of 2002. Oklahoma State University Department of Foreign Languages Spanish Instructor, fall 2002 to present.

Professional Memberships: Phi Kappa Phi