

ABSTRACT

RENO, DEBORAH LYNN. Exploring The Process Of Civic Engagement: A Phenomenological Case Study. (Under the direction of Conrad Glass.)

Research expresses the need for society to develop ways that encourage civic responsibility. As the need to educate and encourage citizens to be more civic-minded increases, higher education, communities and agencies need to learn more meaningful ways to engage constituencies in the process that will result in greater civic responsibility. The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to describe how collaborative experiences influence civic engagement. Utilizing collaborative learning methods, while emphasizing specific learned skills (attributes) within small groups, both youth and adult experiences within the process tended to be enhanced and meaning was found within the experience. Although the study did not set out to develop a model for engaging citizens in decision-making, elements described within participant experiences contributed to developing a civic engagement model that fosters a sense of voice, empowerment, and meaning resulting in the likelihood of enhancing civic responsibility for those involved in the process.

EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
CASE STUDY

by

Deborah Lynn Reno

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION

Raleigh
2003

DEDICATION

The culmination of my doctorate is dedicated to my parents, A. Dryden Reno and Elizabeth W. Reno, and my Heavenly Father. I also dedicate this to my sister, Beth Forrest, my brother, Bobby Reno, and life-long friend, Melissa Picudella. If it were not for their faithfulness and example of “living a life worthy of the calling one receives,” (Ephesians 4:1, NIV) my journey would not have led me to strive to achieve this educational experience.

First, to my Lord and Savior, who is Provider of All Things, giving wisdom and understanding that guided the creation for the study’s conceptual framework. I dedicate the findings and meaning this experience provided me and, hopefully, to a community of people. I thank you for instilling within me a passion for helping people to develop themselves personally. I also thank you for giving me a passion to help others recognize personal value within conversation, realizing they can make a difference.

To my mother, whose example of commitment and faith to those around her impressed upon me to assist those around me to feel valued and respected within the work I do and with each person I meet. Thank you for your tremendous encouragement, endless support and willingness to continually edit paper after paper through my educational career.

To my father, whose endless passion to learn and educate those around him, influenced my thinking and reflecting on each step and phase of my doctorate. Being blessed with his dry sense of humor brought me through times, which may have left one in despair if not taken lightly. This is also his doctorate that he had always wanted to achieve.

You fought the good fight, you finished the race, you kept the faith.”

2 Timothy 4:7, NIV

BIOGRAPHY

Deborah Lynn Reno was born on January 8, 1972 in Waynesboro, Virginia. She is the daughter of Dryden and Elizabeth Reno. The Reno family lived in Mechanicsville, Virginia for 17 years. Since the death of her father, her mother has retired from teaching in Englewood, Florida to teach missionary children in Guinea, West Africa.

Deborah L. Reno focuses on the quality of one's life, as well as building community. Her passion is to serve and create opportunities for individuals to develop greater skills to lead more effectively within work environments and communities. She also seeks to create greater awareness for how mutual partnerships between youth and adults enhance opportunities for life-long learning.

In 1990, she enrolled at J. Sargeant Reynold's Community College and transferred to Longwood College in January 1992, where she received her Bachelor of Science in Psychology in May 1994. In 1996, she received her Master's degree from Syracuse University in Counselor Education. While completing her doctorate, Deborah worked at North Carolina State University with 4-H Youth Development Department coordinating the state level of their National Campaign on the Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century, as well as the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness, which provides climate surveying and strategic planning for community colleges and universities across the nation.

Administratively, she has been employed with Longwood University, Virginia and North Carolina School of the Arts, North Carolina, within the profession of Student Services.

She currently works at NC State University as the Coordinator for Educational Programs and Training for the Shelton Leadership Initiative.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The pursuit of a graduate degree is a journey and process. Although the graduate experience is ultimately the responsibility of one person, it is not achieved without the help of others who have inspired, encouraged and supported the one experiencing the journey.

I would like to take this opportunity to humbly thank those who have contributed to making the doctoral journey meaningful for me. As a journey is a process, so my remarks of thanks will be to acknowledge those when they entered the path contributing to my journey.

To C.D. Merricks and Peggy Dodson, who encouraged me to pursue my doctorate degree. I greatly appreciated their support as I traveled from North Carolina School of the Arts to North Carolina State University weekly for class. The ease of knowing my supervisor, colleagues and staff had everything under control allowed me the opportunity to focus on my studies, yet complete administrative responsibilities I was expected to do. Many experiences I gained from working at NCSA, I carried into the framework of this study.

To Dr. Mitzi Stumpf, one of my dearest friends is the first person who befriended me as I began this journey. I am grateful for her friendship in many ways. Many times she would actively listen and help me process through obstacles I was facing, whether it was writing a paper, completing a project, or identifying the problem statement for my dissertation, which always seemed to be a problem. We were a team through this journey but she led the way for me. If it were not for Mitzi encouraging me to submit my resume to 4-H Youth Development, I would not have completed my doctorate journey as I did.

To the department of 4-H Youth Development, the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Development, and Office of Extension and Engagement, I am grateful for the

experiences gained during the last two years of my doctorate. I am indebted to you for believing in me and supporting me as a colleague, as well as financially. To the Office of Extension and Engagement, I am grateful for the trust you placed in me to enter into a community and engage youth and adults in developing a Sustainable Community Plan.

To the Youth and Adults in Martin County who participated in the Youth Partnership Project, I thank you for allowing me to be a part of engaging the community in developing a Sustainable Community Plan and taking a risk not knowing how community members would ultimately engage themselves in the process. I thank you for allowing me to engage yourselves in identifying meaningful ways to enhance civic responsibility.

To Jennifer Brown, my friend and accountability partner, who assisted to keep my eyes focused on things not of this world but of the Word. Her faithful encouragement in times of distress kept me going during my research phase of the doctorate. Williamston High School's gathering would not have been as successful without her technological talents and assisting me that day. Her self-less service to others is commendable.

Finally, to my Doctoral Committee, I am truly grateful to you for your willingness to serve on my committee. To Dr. Conrad Glass, I am indebted to your commitment as my Chair and making the journey one that was as pleasant as the graduate experience could be. To Dr. Thearon McKinney, I thank you for the initial opportunity to engage in youth-adult partnerships that helped me identify my true passion in life. To Dr. John Pettitt, I thank you for serving on my committee and listening in moments of despair. To Dr. Colleen Weissner, I am grateful for your encouragement and support throughout my qualitative research experiences. To all my committee members, I can not extend to you enough, how meaningful it was to have all of you share in my

passion and make this journey one of hope and affirmation in what I hope to continue to pursue in life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	x
Chapter 1: Introduction	
Identifying the Problem	1
Youth Adult Partnerships.....	2
Role of Education	3
Need for Project	5
Statement of Problem.....	6
Purpose of Study	8
Significance of Study.....	8
Limitations of Study.....	10
Glossary.....	12
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework	
Introduction	13
Concern for Civic Engagement.....	14
Higher Education’s Role.....	16
Youth-Adult Partnerships	19
Sociocultural Perspective	21
Integrating Learning Methods	25
Attributes within Groups.....	30
Conceptual Framework.....	36
Chapter 3: Process of Inquiry	
Introduction	40
Research Design	40
Case Study.....	43
Community Background	44
Researcher’s Role.....	44
Study Context.....	46
Process of Youth Partnership Element	46
Preparatory Activities	46
Education Committee	50
High School Sustainable Community Gatherings	50
Research Participants and Sampling Procedure	54
Data Collection Methods.....	55
Data Analysis.....	59
Ethics within Study	61
Methods for Confidentiality	61

Chapter 4: Research Findings	
Introduction	63
Researcher Reflection	64
Data Analysis.....	65
Theme: <i>It's Been Like a Process</i>	65
Theme: <i>If You Don't Try, You'll Never Know</i>	70
Theme: <i>For One, It Was a Small Group</i>	76
Theme: <i>It's What the Community Makes of It</i>	84
Summary	95
Chapter 5: Insights, Discussions and Implications	
Introduction	97
Insights Gained from Questions	98
Discussions and Implications.....	110
Higher Education	112
Community Agencies.....	113
Further Research	114
Conclusions	114
Appendices.....	118
Bibliography.....	147

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure. 1. Conceptual Framework	page 39
Figure 2a. Reno's Conceptual Framework for Enhanced Civic Engagement	page 116
Figure 2b. Reno's Proposed Elements that Enhance Civic Responsibility	page 117

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“In a democratic community, the need for and the stress on democratic values, civic understanding and the readiness and willingness to participate in community decision-making should be a thread that runs through all our education.”

Chapman & Aspen, 1997, p. 170

Identifying The Problem

During the past three decades, civic well being of our nation has declined. Differing agencies continue to address greater concern for youth civic disengagement (Fredericks, Kaplan, & Zeisler, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2002; and Branson, 1999). In 1999, the “New Millennium Project” reported by the *National Association of Secretaries of State (NASS)* found, in general, youth lack knowledge, interest and trust concerning American politics and public life (Branson, 1999). Disengagement occurs most often when those who are affected by decisions are not included in decision-making and implementation processes (Fredericks, Kaplan & Zeisler, 2001). However, adults are leading contenders in making decisions for resources and programs in communities, which ultimately affect the youth adults serve.

Delli Carpini (2002) describes engaged citizens having “motivations, resources, [and opportunities] to participate effectively in public life in a variety of ways” (p. 3). He suggests one’s attitude, resources and behavior to influence the level of civic engagement. Delli Carpini suggests when a person believes their participation is valued and contributing to the cause, the more civic minded he or she will be. He proposes a person’s belief that he or she can make a difference in the community means that he or she will feel more connected to the environment, which leads to feeling valued more within the experience. Klindera, Menerweld and Norman (2001) propose youth being viewed as equal partners in settings of decision-making provides adults an opportunity to see youth as “thoughtful and contributing people” (p. 1). Therefore, having youth and adults

making decisions within the same setting may assist adults in developing new perspectives and changing attitudes regarding youth's ability to be contributing members in a community.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

The *idea* for youth-adult partnerships dates back to 1974 during the National Commission on Resources for Youth. The Commission stated “there is mutuality in teaching and learning and where each age group sees itself as a resource for the other and offers what it uniquely can provide” (National Commission on Resources for Youth, 1974, p. 227). Camino (2000a) argues for mutuality within teaching and learning, as well as the power provided to youth in decision-making to define whether the youth-adult relationship will be one of partner or one of authority. Camino's research found adults experiencing greater difficulty than youth in developing a mutual relationship across age groups. She proposes community action will more likely be achieved when using cooperative methods within the decision-making process. She also recommends youth and adults having equal opportunity to be heard and being flexible and open to different perspectives within the decision-making process.

Collins and Branham (1999) suggest creating collaborative opportunities, inclusive of youth and adults, as an essential avenue towards enhancing the youth civic engagement movement. They suggest collaborative opportunities influence betterment of the entire community. The “New Millennium Project” reported youth's belief that utilizing a participatory approach to teaching government courses encourages youth involvement in the community (Branson, 1999). By participating in a communal process of decision-making, the sense of ownership and empowerment through self-fulfillment increases because the outcomes are understood (Kothari, 1996). Camino (2000b), and Hoover and Weisenbach (1999) concur that youth need to be active members in the decision-making process. Developmentally, providing youth opportunities to participate leads to fulfilling needs for belonging and independence

(Kothari, 1996), as well as stronger communication and leadership skills, improved competencies and higher self-esteem (Kothari, 1996; Kirby & Coyle, 1997).

Role of Education

Since the founding of this nation, higher education institutions have been perceived as resources to its surrounding communities (Urban & Wagoner, 2000; Boyte & Kari, 2000). As a participant in creating a nation, Thomas Jefferson believed educational ideals needed to be interconnected within political theory in order for change to occur. Education and politics were one in the same (Urban & Wagoner, 2000; Jewett, 1997). Jefferson's framework reflected the Enlightenment period, which continues to assist in shaping America. Enlightenment implied offering, "hope, welcomed change, and questioned entrenched authority" (Urban & Wagoner, 2000, p. 62). True believers of the Enlightenment rationalized no need to regulate human action once the concept of natural order was understood by community as a whole (Urban & Wagoner, 2000). Education was central to this rationalization. Educational institutions were viewed as the resource, which housed these educational opportunities for its surrounding regions.

Public education continues to state its purpose today: to educate the student who lives within the borders of the state (Colgan, 1994). Boyte and Kari (2000) and Colgan (1994) contend higher education needs to revert back to Thomas Jefferson's original ideal, which was to promote public citizenry. The document, *World Declaration of Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century (1998)*, stressed the need for higher education institutions to become more aware of the importance of socio-cultural and economic development. The document emphasized education's responsibility to engage its citizens in democratic and accessible education to better meet the needs of the community.

The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (1998) contends that higher education institutions are receiving greater pressure from government to

contribute to regional development. Although most institutions' mission statements promote regional development, the challenge for institutions is to become more grounded in their understanding of engagement in the development process. The UNESCO's, *Framework for Priority Action for Change and Development of Higher Education (1998)*, states "government and policy makers should develop innovative schemes of collaboration between institutions of higher education and different sectors of community to ensure that higher education and research programmes effectively contribute to local, regional and national development" (p. 16). OECD (1998) proposes higher education institutions need to shift from material to non-material assets like knowledge, skills, and culture, and view regional citizens as important contributors to the development of political and economic activities.

Thanki (1999) views higher education's role within regional development as a valuable asset because the university is a product of the region. Forrant, et. al. (2001) provide insight to how the University of Massachusetts at Lowell has engaged in research around the role of the public university and its responsibility as an active participant in the process of regional development. The university has established interdisciplinary, cross-campus partnerships to collaboratively provide resources to the community. Higher education institutions (HEI) that are able to expand their knowledge on characteristics, which define the local region, will be able to identify ways to better serve the stakeholders within its community. Stakeholders within HEI's are those organizations and people who have the potential to interact with institutions. Ultimately, higher education institutions should view their role as being the "gateway" to the community (OECD, 1999).

Mawby (1998) stresses the point that higher education is in a state of crisis concerning a positive public image. He iterates decision-makers have little confidence in higher education institutions' understanding of needs in community or how the institution should serve the community to meet societal aspirations. Mawby argues that strengthening community-

collaborations with the youth and families is “credible response” to the crisis facing institutions today. Providing youth a voice in community collaborations may assist to promote public citizenry, particularly since they may soon enroll in these institutions. One community collaboration, which institutions have begun to embrace, is the concept of sustainable community development (Farrant, et. al., 2001; OECD, 1999). Higher education institutions seeing youth and families as contributors, and providing opportunities to actively participate in community decisions, Mawby (1998) argues, will be a contributing element towards building community support for higher education.

Need for Project

Martin county in North Carolina has engaged the process of developing a Sustainable Community Plan for its community. Sustainability is viewed as an on-going process, in which citizens address current needs, while not limiting their ability to meet needs of future generations within the community (Farrant, et. al., 2001). Developing a vision towards establishing a sustainable community requires the local community to consider at least three factors: economic development (Huckle & Sterling, 1996), environmental stewardship (Roseland, 1998), and quality of life (Flint & Houser, 2001). The first two characteristics are straightforward factors and easier to understand. However, quality of life involves consideration of many social aspects of the community. It involves asking *all* community members, or stakeholders, to engage in making long-term decisions about what he or she wants the community to look like in the future (Flint & Houser, 2001). Youth, who are the leaders of tomorrow, are also valuable resources and emerging leaders of today (Delli Carpini, 2002; Guajardo & Graber, 2002). This community believes it is imperative to engage youth in assisting to identify needs within the community, as well as envisioning what the leaders of today and tomorrow want their community to be in the future for it to be sustainable.

Statement Of Problem

Current research shows that most youth are more likely to be disengaged than engaged in civic issues (Galston, 2001; Hudson & Robinson & Robinson, 2001). Youth disengagement is disconcerting because youth have played a vital part in civic life since WWII (Delli Carpini, 2002). The continuance of democracy is dependent on American youth. How civically engaged youth are today will determine how engaged they will be in the future (Delli Carpini, 2002). Research shows that youth who are actively involved in community planning are more likely to be civic minded (Fredericks, Kaplan, & Zeisler, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2000). Youth who are civically engaged are more likely to have a positive relationship with the community; preserving the community as well as enhancing the community (Camino, 2000a). Viewing youth as a central entity within the creation of solutions can assist in bridging relations among youth, adults, and the community at large. Fredericks, Kaplan, & Zeisler describe the concept of youth voice as involving the “inclusion of young people as a meaningful part of the creation and implementation” of the solutions which affect them (2001, p. 1). Although research has shown collaborative methods valuable in enhancing the level of satisfaction and commitment towards achieving desired outcomes, emerging research suggests a greater need to explore how collaborative methods and the interactions between youth and adults influence civic mindedness (Kirby & Coyle, 2001; Zeldin, McDaniels, Topitzes, & Lorens, 2001). Embracing a more collaborative approach in the decision-making process assisted youth-adult relationships by fostering mutuality within the teaching, learning and action of results (Zeldin, McDaniel, Topitzes, & Lorens, 2001).

Galston (2001) suggests one contributing factor for decline in civic engagement is lack of civic knowledge. As concern for youth civic engagement increases, the need for educators and practitioners to consider how youth-adult interactions influence the experience continue to grow

(Hughes & Curnan, 2000). In the field of education, research shows societal influences (Feldman, 2000), collaborative methods (Bruffee, 1999, Thompkins, 2001), and learned skills (Brookfield, 1999) as important variables to consider within the learning experience. However, little research had been done to explore how these variables relate to one another within the process of decision-making. Therefore, in order to better understand how youth-adult interactions can enhance the level of civic engagement, further research needed to explore the relationship between how a community approaches problem-solving and what learned skills used within the decision-making process better assist in providing a more meaningful experience for those involved in the process. This new knowledge will foster greater civic engagement among youth, more informed dialogue, and more meaningful ways to engage all citizens in the decision-making process.

Purpose Of Study

The overall purpose of this phenomenological case study was to describe how collaborative experiences influence civic engagement. The study addressed how a community approaches problem-solving, and what learned skills used within the decision-making process, better assist in providing a more meaningful experience for those involved in civic engagement processes. The study also explored whether change in perception of the youth-adult interaction influenced how meaningful the experience was for those involved; and if there was a change in perception, if this contributed to a greater level of civic engagement and commitment from the participants? To explore the phenomena, the study addressed the following two questions: (1) How do youth and adults who are engaged in developing a sustainable development plan describe their experience within the process of the project? and (2) What role does the implementation of a collaborative method play in enhancing civic engagement involving both youth and adults, if any?

Significance Of Study

The founding ideals of Thomas Jefferson instilled in the American people, fostered a sense of hope, faith and responsibility for fostering a democratic community. In a letter to James Madison, Jefferson wrote, “The people are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty” (Pangle & Pangle, 1993, p. 74). Jefferson proposed education’s main purpose was to assist citizens in managing concerns of community (Pangle & Pangle, 1993). Centuries later, education continues to embrace Jefferson’s concept for engaging local citizens on how to best manage, or sustain, their own communities as a central entity for sustainability (Forrant, et. Al., 2001). The document, *World Declaration on Higher Education for the twenty-first Century: Vision and Action* (1998), declared higher education’s core mission was “to educate, to train, to undertake research and to

provide services to the community [and] must be preserved, reinforced and expanded” (<http://www.unesco.org>, retrieved on September 12, 2002). The document also declared higher education’s need to better integrate with the whole educational system, specifically with secondary education. Quality of services higher education needs to provide should be connected with the solutions of problems within its communities (<http://www.unesco.org>, retrieved on September 12, 2002).

As research continues to explore education’s role in re-connecting with its regional communities (Figueira-McDonough, 2001; Sherman & Torbert, 2000; Farrant, et. Al., 2001), it also suggests youth voice is central to creating solutions for community development (Chibucos & Lerner, 1999; Branson, 1999; UNESCO, 1998), as well as sustainability (Farrant, et. Al., 2001). Although research has identified engaging citizens, both youth and adults, in community decision-making, research in sustainability has not described what bearing the process plays when engaging local citizens, specifically youth, or how the process may or may not lead to the participants having a more meaningful experience within the process.

This study sought to explore how mutual relationship between community involvement and educational involvements contribute to the framework for developing a sustainable plan. New knowledge in this area will contribute to practitioners, educators, and businesses utilizing shared knowledge and resources. This new knowledge will also assist citizens becoming more aware of community affairs and how they can contribute to sustaining their future. The significance of the current study also provides new knowledge on the integration of learning methods inside and outside of the classrooms. The study sought to explore how youth and adult interaction contributes to the cognitive development process. The study also sought to explore how learned skills (or attributes) within the structure of small group learning methods contribute to the meaningfulness of the experience. Although research has been done on youth-adult partnerships

(or learning experiences in decision-making) within youth organizations, this study was based within the school setting, yet not associated specifically with classroom experiences. Educators integrating community issues into class experiences may lead to youth who are more civic-minded. The current study also expands on the knowledge National 4-H Council and other youth organizations have contributed to the body of knowledge valuing youth-adult partnerships enhancing the youth development movement.

Limitations of Study

There are several limitations within the current study. One contributing limitation was each school's flexibility to design the collaborative method implemented within the school, as well as each school structuring the format of the gatherings differently. Some schools chose to do the gatherings on multiple days and one chose to do the events in one day. And one school chose to not have an opening session for their students and cancelled the large group session due to academic priorities. This limited the ability to see a broad range of continuity from school to school. Another limitation was how the elite participants were selected to participate in the study. Most school officials selected the participants from their school. There was only one young person who participated in the initial interview phase that was not originally selected by the school principal. The two participants who self-selected not to complete the second interview also brings a limitation to the study. It is a limitation because this school was not represented in the final analysis describing the group experiences or if perspectives changed due to experiences. Another limitation is that all nine elite participants did not participate in both interviews, minimizing the validity of participant perspective through the experience.

Participants at one school were interviewed after the experiences but not before the experiences. However, these participants were asked a majority of the questions, which guided

the initial interview during the second interview phase. Finally, my dual role as researcher and professional, coordinating the project, may have contributed to study bias. However, several strategies were implemented to minimize subjectivity: offering participants the opportunity to review my findings to determine whether my findings were accurate; attempting to portray discrepant information within my findings respective to differing participant perspectives; identifying someone with whom I could debrief the process of the study to enhance the accuracy of the context; and identifying someone to check the accuracy of my coding and presenting the data ethically.

The next sections address the conceptual framework for the study as well as the methodological approach used to explore the phenomena of engaging youth and adults in developing a sustainable community plan for their community.

GLOSSARY

Collaboration. A mutually beneficial relationship between two or more parties who work toward common goals by sharing responsibility, authority, and accountability for achieving results...The purpose of collaboration is to create a shared vision and joint strategies to address concerns that go beyond the purpose of any particular party (Chrislip & Larson, 1994, p. 5).

Collaborative Learning Method. An activity to engage individuals, young people and adults in active exchanges of ideas within small group settings. Collaborative learning has been viewed as a part of a broader movement towards a “participatory democracy, shared decision-making, and non-authoritarian style of leadership and group life” (Bruffee, as cited in Trimbur, 1989, p. 605).

Community Development. Engaging *all* members in a project or process, both youth and adults, and inviting everyone to actively participate in the discussion, and appreciating what each person can possibly contribute to the conversation. Community development also means bringing people to the table not normally provided the opportunity to have a voice, especially the young people.

Discussion. An alternately serious and playful effort by a group of two or more to share views and engage in mutual and reciprocal critique (Brookfield, 1999, p. 6).

Sustainable Community Development. A continual course of action towards preserving a community by implementing approaches, which engage all constituents/stakeholders in future oriented decision-making around economic development, transportation systems, community design, and resource use within the local constituency. It involves “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Daniels, 2001, p. 1).

Visioning Process. Visioning involves “bringing together community members, environmental and social groups, and representatives from the private and public sector for a series of discussions about where a community should be headed” (Daniels, 2001, p. 11).

Youth. Individuals who are 12-19 years of age.

Youth Voice. “The inclusion of young people as a meaningful part of the creation and implementation” of the solutions, which affect them (Fredericks, Kaplan & Zeisler, 2001, p. 1).

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

“Youth voice is not about young people taking over. It is about young people and adults working together in partnerships based on mutual respect.”

Beilenson, 1993, p. 11

Introduction

The conceptual framework is viewed as the element within research, which provides understanding and direction for underlying assumptions guiding a study (Babbie, 1998). The conceptual framework should provide the reader an “[1] understanding and belief; [2] mak[e] sense of things, and [3] hav[e] a coherent picture of [the holistic construct] being studied (Farmer & Rojowski, 2001, p. 87). It is a process of theorizing frameworks of knowledge, which explain a certain phenomena. Integrating different concepts and identifying areas lacking within research assist to identify areas in need, for further exploration (Farmer & Rojowski, 2001). Vygotsky (1986), Feldman (2000) Meacham (2001), Bruffee (1999), and Thompkins (2001) have conducted research pertaining to the relationship between the cognitive development process and collaborative learning methods. Brookfield and Preskill (1999) have researched how learned skills or attributes enhance the learning experience in the classroom. However, I believe societal influences, implemented methods, and skills or attributes present within the learning experience can also be applied within any context. For the purpose of this study, the context focuses on the process of community decision-making. This chapter provides the reader a holistic perspective, integrating theory and concepts that assist in describing the conceptual framework guiding the current study.

Concern For Civic Engagement

Engaging youth as mutual partners in the structural framework for making decisions concerning the community is an essential component towards enhancing the likelihood of youth becoming more civic-minded. In, *A Tribe A Part*, Hersch (1998) advocates individuals should look at adult culture first, to better understand the youth culture and adolescent needs. Hersch suggests today's youth spend more time alone than any other generation, which contributes to lacking a sense of community. Understanding the essence of adolescence assists communities to begin to understand benefits of involving both youth and adults in decision-making; and how mutual involvement contributes to the development process. Hersch (1998) recollects from a conversation with a youth, his perspective of adolescence. This young man described it as,

[A] journey, a search for self in every dimension of being. It is about dreams, fears, and hopes, as much as about hormones, SAT scores, and fashion. It is about endless possibilities as well as dead ends. It is searching, testing, and experimentation. It is growth: it is undeniable that the young person at any one point in time will be different one year later – different physically, intellectually, emotionally, and experimentally.” (p. 17)

This epiphany from an adolescent perspective provides greater insight for how an adolescent is processing this stage of his life and searching for self-identity. At the heart of adolescent years youth are faced with the need to fit in with peers, and finding their own identity. However, youth also desire to fit into the adult community; realizing they will soon be an adult.

These developmental years, when the adolescent is learning how to be him or herself, filtering societal perspectives, and trying to make sense of his or her world, Brown (1996) proposes that adult perspectives on youth culture are non-supportive for assisting youth through this endeavor. Brown's work is grounded in the adolescent role and norm transitions, taking a developmental and contextual perspective (Brown, 1990). His research suggests adult attitudes toward youth culture as a barrier. When asking adults to describe adolescents, 78 percent of the

categories were negative attributes. He also reported only 38 percent of adults believe today's young people are able to make America a better place to live in the future. Youth are also viewed as poor decision-makers. The Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (2001) reported the findings of an ethnographic study involving 186 countries concluding that young people in America are more excluded from community decision-making than in any other country studied. Eliminating young people from decision-making processes minimizes opportunity to overcome false stereotyping, skepticism or hard feelings. Elimination of youth also minimizes the opportunity for youth to interact and learn from adults on how to be more successful in decision-making skills and practices.

Chapman and Aspin (1997) propose involving schools in the communities as one way to create social change. They suggest civic engagement will only be enhanced if civic education is integrated into school curriculum. Chapman and Aspin believe people will more likely participate in community decision-making when individuals are informed and educated on their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Civic education involves,

- “educating young people in democratic understanding;
- promoting opportunities for parents and members of the community to participate in school decision-making; [and]
- promoting involvement in community agencies in the life of the school” (p. 170).

Formal education (primary, secondary, and higher) has the ability to be viewed as a vital connector and resource for its citizens and building community.

Galston (2001) proposes that recent research finds a correlation between “civic information and civic attributes” (p. 2). He states that political knowledge of high school and college graduates has declined over the past half century. He suggests two contributing factors to this decline in political knowledge: (1) effectiveness of formal civic instruction decreases and (2)

weakness in outside processes. Galston proposes civic engagement of community members is enhanced by how informed one is and by how one comes to understand the civic knowledge provided. He contends greater civic knowledge increases consistency on community views and assists individuals in becoming less skeptical of public affairs. Galston states, “Ignorance is the father of fear, and knowledge is the mother of trust” (p. 3). Finally, Galston proposes civic knowledge supports democratic values and, ultimately, assists individuals becoming more participative in issues pertaining to community.

Niemi and Hepburn (1995) suggest civic instruction is vital during adolescence and early adulthood because of psychological and social changes occurring within individuals. He also stresses the importance of educators assessing civic instruction because those are the years during which our community characteristically educates youth on citizen responsibility through course work. His research suggests civic instruction integrated during adolescence and young adulthood contributes to lifelong civic engagement.

Higher Educations Role

Chapman & Aspen (1997) state, “In a democratic community, the need for and the stress on democratic values, civic understanding and the readiness and willingness to participate in community decision-making should be a thread that runs through all our education” (p. 170). One might suggest higher education’s role within regional development is a resource for educating surrounding communities on the importance of being civically engaged in community. The Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (1998) contends higher education institutions are receiving greater pressure from government to contribute to its regional development. Although most institutions’ mission statements promote regional development, the challenge for institutions is to become more grounded in their understanding of engagement in the development process. The UNESCO’s, Framework for Priority Action for Change and

Development of Higher Education (1998), states “government and policy makers should develop innovative schemes of collaboration between institutions of higher education and different sectors of community to ensure that higher education and research programmes effectively contribute to local, regional and national development” (p. 16). OECD (1998) proposes higher education institutions need to shift from material to non-material assets like knowledge, skills, and culture, and view regional citizens as important contributors to development of political and economic activities.

Thanki (1999) views higher education’s role within regional development as a valuable asset because the university is a product of the region. The University of Massachusetts at Lowell has engaged in research around the role of the public university and its responsibility as an active participant in the process of regional development (Farrant, 2001). The university has established interdisciplinary, cross-campus partnerships to collaboratively provide resources to the community. University of Massachusetts at Lowell’s sustainable community development embraces this concept of community collaborations. Farrant suggests strategic planning is only successful with regional development through reflection and continuous dialog with all members involved in the process: students, staff, faculty, enterprises, administrators, and community members. The current study focuses on the structure and processes involving youth in deciding what are assets and non-assets in the community. Therefore, I will not elaborate on the concept of sustainability, other than the importance of knowing fundamental elements of sustainability: environment, education, community, economy, and amenities.

Daniels (2001) elaborates on how the institution can assist in community sustainability. One element that contributes to sustainability is civic instruction and using service-learning within instruction. Kaiser-Drobney (2001) states service-learning can lead to empowerment. She

developed a model for engaging secondary-aged students in this form of learning through, “The I CARE Model”.

“I” stands for *Identify*, introducing the importance of individuals or groups to identify assets and needs necessary to address within the community, as well as who is more appropriate to address what has been identified. “C” stands for *Collaborate*. Collaboration involves identifying ways to best partner with community members or organizations to tackle the identified objective. “A”, or *Act*, represents need for authenticity within activity in order to meet community needs and appropriate academic needs of students. “R” refers to importance of *Reflecting* on experiences. What have people learned from participating in the process and what steps need to be taken next. Finally, “E” represents *Encourage*. It is important to acknowledge work and contributions done by those involved in the process. Kaiser-Drobney also suggests *encouraging* as addressing need for creating reports that summarize experiences; evaluate the experiences; refine goals and objectives for future experiences; as well as beginning the process again for identifying areas of need and assets to better the community.

Although Kaiser-Drobney’s research addresses service-learning methods with youth that are task-oriented in community settings, like food shelters, I suggest service-learning can also occur within the context of the school setting Galston (2001) proposes the importance of integrating civic knowledge in school curriculum, while Brown (2001) proposes that involving youth in decision-making assists youth in becoming more civically engaged. Therefore, integrating a collaborative decision-making method and service-learning method within the school potentially enhances the civic engagement process.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

According to Collins and Branham (1999), creating collaborative opportunities, inclusive of youth and adults, is an essential avenue towards enhancing youth civic engagement movements.

They suggest collaborative opportunities enhance quality of life within communities. The “New Millennium Project” reported young people’s belief that utilizing a participatory approach to teaching government courses encourages youth involvement in the community (Branson, 1999). By participating in a communal process of decision-making, the sense of ownership and empowerment through self-fulfillment increases because the outcomes are understood (Kothari, 1996).

Camino’s (2000b) research supports the need for youth to become active members in the decision-making process. In order for social change to occur, Camino asserts the need to demonstrate specific practices within the youth-adult partnership. Mutuality within teaching and learning, as well as how empowered youth are within decision-making contributes to whether the youth-adult relationship will be one of partner or one of authority (Camino, 2000a). Camino’s research found adults have greater difficulty than youth in developing a mutual relationship across generations. Camino proposes community action will more likely be achieved when using cooperative methods within the decision-making process. She also recommends equal opportunity for youth and adults having to be heard and being flexible and open to different perspectives within the decision-making process. Communication and coaching were additional elements described by Camino to contribute to the youth viewing their role as important and meaningful to the partnership. The conceptual framework for this study integrates the holistic concepts identified by Camino; however, the framework also suggests collaborative methods benefit youth-adult partnerships.

Zeldin, et. al. (2001) found both youth and adults benefit greatly when mutually involved in community decision-making. Although some adults had unconsciously stereotyped youth, Zeldin described how perceptions of youth competence increased when both youth and adults were making decisions within youth programming organizations. Adults described the youth as

competent and “crucial contributors” (p. 1) to the decision-making process. Zeldin also found level of commitment and energy of adults enhanced because of the youth’s involvement in the decision-making process. The adults also became more committed to the community. One adult voiced, “Youth bring energy, fresh perspectives, knowledge of young people, and a sense of community to decision-making processes” (p. 3).

While youth bring new perspective and energy, youth described adults as bringing knowledge and experience to decision-making processes. Zeldin proposes mutuality among youth and adults to create “synergy” (p. 4). If youth do not play a significant role within the structure of the decision-making process, synergy will less likely occur within the experience. He suggests attitudes are more likely to change when interactions are goal-oriented and have a clearly defined purpose, occur over an extended amount of time, and outcomes are perceived as meaningful (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and National 4-H Council, 2001). Although this research supports the framework of the current study, the research is based on youth involvement in organizations. The current study seeks to explore how this knowledge can be implemented in the community, specifically within the school setting.

A Sociocultural Perspective

Understanding the elements within the adolescents’ cognitive development process will contribute to educators and practitioners gaining greater insight for how group work activities assist individuals in achieving higher levels of thought. This new knowledge will also provide implications for educators on how group work contributes to cognitive development processes. Finally, understanding how particular learning methods influence participant commitment within experiences will also assist educators and practitioners in working within a small group experience.

Thompkins (2001) suggests an effective group involves all members in the group having an opportunity to contribute to the formation of knowledge being developed. Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and Piaget (1926) emphasized how social interaction contributed to cognitive development process (referenced from Ben-Ari & Kedem-Friedrich, 2000). However, Vygotsky (1926/1997) proposed the way in which cultures and societies approached problems influenced how an individual's cognitive development progressed through life. Vygotsky, unlike Piaget (1952), also viewed cognitive development as dependent on interactions with others. He also believed children gained greater understanding for how the world functioned through problem-solving exchanges with adults and other peers (Feldman, 2000; Meacham, 2001). Vygotsky's (1926/1978) sociocultural theory assists in understanding factors that are meaningful to a given culture. What children learn from their culture influences the type of skills he or she will develop (Feldman, 2000). Fernyhough (1997) contends that in order for a child to fully develop his or her , thinking processes, beliefs, and values, the creation of an adult-child partnership must be present.

Brookfield and Preskill (1999) elaborate on how Vygotsky's theory extends throughout the lifespan. Vygotsky's research demonstrated an infant's experience reaching for a spoon. They proposed that the infant's desire for relationship with the spoon and the spoon not responding, led the infant to make several attempts to get the spoon to respond. Not until the mother responded by pushing the spoon closer to the infant's reach, did a relationship occur. However, the learning experience occurred collaboratively with the mother and child, instead of with the spoon and child. Vygotsky concluded that knowing is a process involving other people. Collaborative learning occurred with the child comprehending that reaching for the spoon triggers a response from the mother and the mother comprehending when the child is reaching for the spoon, she assists in the learning by pushing the spoon closer to the infant.

As individuals develop, previous knowledge is stored and used in new knowledge experiences (Brookfield and Preskill, 1999). They suggest experiences become more complex through the lifelong learning process. A tool used to assist in solving problems is speech. Bruffee contends Vygotsky's theory suggests the most critical moment in intellectual development is when speech and practical activity merge. Brookfield and Preskill state,

As a result of this engagement of speech in learning and thought, every function in our cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people..., and then inside. Instrumental speech therefore both helps us do everything we attempt to do and socializes everything we do. Conversation – direct, indirect, or internalized – makes even solitary tasks into collaborative ones. Once we begin to use speech instrumentally, we work together, whether we work together or apart. (p. 139).

“Dorm rapping,” during the college years, suggests the inseparability of knowledge, discussion, emotional engagement, and social relationship to be inseparable. They propose the process of working through problems continues to be collaborative, as in childhood. However, the process is done internally instead of externally. As an adult, external problem-solving occurs when stress arises or new knowledge formation occurs. The complexity of situations may differ from infancy to adulthood, but the process for understanding the situation is the same. Vygotsky (1926/1997) calls this the zone of proximal development.

A central entity to Vygotsky's theory is the state in which an individual enters the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The zone of proximal development is the innermost part of Vygotsky's theoretical construct (Doolittle, 1995). The potential for cognitive growth is contingent on what he or she can accomplish alone (focusing on the lower end of cognitive growth) and what he or she can achieve with assistance from a more knowledgeable person (focusing on the upper end of cognitive growth). “What lies in the zone of proximal development at one stage is realized and moves to the level of actual development at a second. In other words, what the child is able to

do in collaboration today he [or she] will be able to do independently tomorrow” (Vygosky, 1987, p. 211).

Feldman (2000) describes Vygosky’s concept for this period of development as the level at which a child’s cognitive abilities increase but will not fully be achieved without assistance from someone who is more competent than he or she. Vygotzky suggests cognitive development will only progress when there is new information presented by someone who is more skilled in the area within the proximal development zone. This assistance is also referred to as scaffolding, which is the support for learning and problem solving that encourages independence and growth. Scaffolding assists children in contemplating and structuring a task in an appropriate manner. The successful completion of a task allows the child to then model how to complete the task to someone who is in the proximal development zone (Rogoff, 1995). Vygotzky (1986) suggests the next step for the individual is for him or her to reach a “new level of consciousness” (p. 203). This new knowledge is formed when the individual is able to comprehend multiple concepts and make connections between them creating new knowledge (Meacham, 2001). Although critics suggest Vygotzky’s precision for his conceptualization of cognitive growth is limited and lacking focus on how specific information is processed and synthesized within the cognitive development framework, his work has contributed significantly to understanding the importance of cultural, societal and relationships in enhancing the cognitive development process (Feldman, 2000).

Thompkins (2001) contends the Vygotskian view suggests social interactions (direct or indirect) as the intermediary avenue for knowledge construction utilizing different forms of communication. Such forms consist of expressions, actions, and written and oral language. Lee and Smajorinsky (2000) identify four principles that reflect Vygosky's theory:

- learning to intercede initially on an interpsychological level cultivating personal cultural pieces with those that others possess, which then transcends into an intrapsychological level.
- learning intrapsychologically involves interactions with a more knowledgeable person, also known as scaffolding.
- influencing individual cultural expectations and personal history based on concepts of meaning, which is established through strategies the individual possesses.
- learning is a constant process and learning outcomes are based on prior knowledge, makeup of the activity, structure of the learning setting, and quality of social interaction among members in the group.

Learning takes place through the process of inquiry. The inquiry process involves a period of time for an individual to question, explore and develop meaning with the information being filtered and ultimately synthesized. There are two overlapping learning communities in the classroom setting: (a) teacher and student and (b) professional team utilizing the classroom experience as professional development (Lee & Smargorinsky, 2000). Therefore, integration of teaching methods that includes group work, assists students in the learning process. Although the current study's focus centered around non-formal learning methods outside the classroom, I suggest collaborative learning methods are beneficial in any context working towards solving problems or engaging in conversation about issues that affect those involved in the process. Two

known teaching methods inclusive of group activities are cooperative and collaborative learning methods, which will be discussed in depth in the next section of the chapter.

Integrating Learning Methods

One aspect of formal education is to provide individuals different avenues for achieving higher levels of thinking or learning. Bruffee (1984) suggests learning opportunities are a process by which one recognizes what is occurring around him or her and joins in on the conversation. There are many different practices educators apply to assist students in achieving higher levels of thought or progression through the cognitive development process. Practices are either formal (traditional) or non-formal (non-traditional). Traditional practices tend to be directive, oriented on lecture, and utilize minimal interaction between peers. Teachers' questions do not demonstrate higher cognitive level thinking because answers require factual information without any opportunity to explain answers further (Adams & Krockover, 1999). Non-formal learning practices incorporate small group exercises, which support opportunities for creative problem-solving, conceptual learning, and oral language proficiency enhancement (Cohen, 1986). Cooperative and collaborative learning are two theories that reflect Vygotsky's philosophy of cognitive development. Cooperative and collaborative learning theories focus the value of working in small groups for the learning process (Feldman, 2000) and for creating independence that is critical in sustainability.

Cooperative learning methods are designed more for practitioners working in primary education. Two goals of cooperative learning are to create an environment where individuals work respectfully together and strive to overcome cultural biases (Bruffee, 1995). Cooperative learning focuses on designing activities for groups that involve tasks, problems, and projects (Hamm &

Adams, 1992). Being confronted with multiple interpretations of a particular situation enhances the critical thinking process and assists to understand multiple perspectives (Bruner, 1996). Supporters of cooperative learning suggest that problem solving in conjunction with others encourages individuals to be more alert. When individuals are interacting and conversing with others in a team assignment, all members become more involved in the learning process (Hamm & Adams, 1992). Hamm and Adams (1992) suggest that engaging students in the learning process will encourage individuals to make connections between new information and prior knowledge. Practitioners of cooperative learning believe individuals gain greater understanding of the world through interaction with others. Hamm and Adams also suggests creating a learning environment that supports an individual informally struggling with ideas before shaping his or her thinking framework to be critical in the developmental process.

Researchers (Nevin, Smith, & Udvari-Solner, 1999; West & Oldfather, 1996; Doolittle, 1995) portray cooperative learning experiences as instructional methods that are adaptable to many grade levels and subject areas. The heterogeneous setting is structured to support peer interaction, positive interdependence, and individual accountability, as well as interpersonal skill development. Students view one another as resources. Students are also expected to meet group expectations. Success is achieved through the success of all members in the group instead of success been achieved individually. Adams and Hamm's (1990) report research on cooperative learning to enhance academic performance with low and high achievement students. These authors also suggest individual initiative, self-esteem, and social relations are improved during a cooperative learning method. The small group setting provides students an opportunity to ask questions and challenge peer perspectives within a safe setting. When structuring learning activities in small groups, Adams and Hamm recommend teachers to organize desks in a circle, provide expectations

for behavior, assign roles to each member (facilitator, checker, reader, recorder, and encourager), and allow all students to be active participants in the evaluation process.

The goal of collaborative learning is to engage individuals in active exchanges of ideas within small group settings. Collaborative learning has been viewed as a part of a broader movement towards a “participatory democracy, shared decision-making, and non-authoritarian styles of leadership and group life” (Bruffee, in Trimbur, 1989, p. 605). Proponents of this learning method suggest this framework increases interest among group members. It also promotes critical thinking on the topic (Gokhale, as cited in <http://scholar.lib.vt.ejournals>, May 1, 2002).

Collaborative learning is considered a process of negotiation and collective decision-making. The opportunity for individuals to share and be engaged in the learning process, assists individuals in taking ownership and becoming critical thinkers (Trimbur, 1989).

A collaborative community encourages a shared responsibility for learning and seeks to promote continued conversation among individuals within the setting. Learning is achieved through interactions with others. Collaborative experiences have been viewed as an indirect form of teaching where problems are presented to the student to solve within a small group setting. There are no assigned roles provided to members in the group, instead, roles emerge within the group experience (West and Oldfather, 1996).

Bruffee (1999) extends the method of collaborative experiences provide an opportunity for individuals to engage in conversation and reflective thought. Conversation is the most significant context during collaborative experiences. Individual knowledge is established and preserved within the community of knowledgeable peers. Normal discourse and dialog occurs by members in a group during the process of collaborative experiences. During the phase of discourse, individuals process fact with context, which assists individuals in achieving higher levels of thought. It is important for individuals to challenge beliefs and collectively negotiate development of new

standards of thought. “Education is not a process of assimilating the truth but...a process of learning to take a hand in what is going on by joining in the conversation of mankind” (p. 647).

Like cooperative learning (Hamm & Adams, 1992), collaborative learning methods have been proven to enhance individual ability to retain information longer and achieve higher levels of thought (Gokhale, as cited in <http://scholar.lib.vt.ejournals>, May 1, 2002). The small group format assists members in understanding how power can be gained through collaborative conversations with others (Trimbur, 1989). Vygotsky’s study (1926/1978) supports how collaborative situations enhance an individual’s ability to perform at higher intellectual levels (Gokhale, in <http://scholar.lib.vt.ejournals>, May 1, 2002).

Bruffee (1995/1999) suggests cooperative and collaborative learning are one in the same. Although there may be some disagreement around terms and practices, the overall goals parallel one another: learning is achieved at higher critical levels of thinking when working in small group settings. Bruffee (1999) contends both practices support the idea that human relationships are central to welfare and success. Cooperative and collaborative practices extend Dewey’s philosophy viewing school as a social institution and experience as education. Social experience is viewed as constructive conversation.

Understanding the differences in the two methods assists practitioners in defining what practices are more appropriate for achieving a desired outcome. First, it is important to understand that the learning theories were originally developed for two different age populations: cooperative learning focuses on primary education and collaborative learning focuses on higher education. However, both practices have been used in secondary education. Practitioners of cooperative learning assign roles to group members, whereas collaborative practitioners have one person identified the reporter for the group. In collaborative experiences, the reporter is assigned by members within the group, and not by the practitioner. Cooperative instructors tend to intervene

and quiz members during the activity as well as assign grades to the group as a whole. However, collaborative practitioners are not encouraged to evaluate the group process or interrupt the group during the learning activity (Bruffee, 1995). In college settings, teachers tend to emphasize self-governance as imperative to the collaborative experience. Level of accountability is not as strong in collaborative experiences as it is in cooperative experiences, where structure within the group setting is established and expected during the group activity (Bruffee, 1999).

Both cooperative and collaborative learning attempt to eliminate individual competition, however, collaborative learning neither encourages nor exploits competition among different groups. Collaborative learning methods also suggest dissent amongst individuals can be beneficial to the learning process. Group members that question, rebel against the assignment or others in the group, are viewed as powerful tools toward understanding and achieving a higher intellectual level of thought. Collaborative learning contends that an answer presented today may not be the same tomorrow (Bruffee, 1995). Although critics of collaborative learning believe this method of learning stifles individual voice and creativity, developmentally both learning methods support Vygotsky's (1926/1978) desire to understand how cultural, societal and relations enhance cognitive development process and engage students in a more meaningful learning experience (Feldman, 2000).

Although research suggests cooperative learning is a learning method beneficial for the classroom settings, the current study proposed a less authoritative structure for learning as more beneficial to the overall experience of those involved in decision-making processes. The current study had co-facilitators (youth and adult) whose responsibilities were mutually shared. However, the current study supports the need for roles identifying within small group settings (two facilitators and a recorder). The current study also suggests providing guidelines for the conversation process and making recommendations for how the structure of small groups to

encourage a greater likelihood of individuals having meaningful experiences within the learning process.

Practices used within collaborative learning were central elements for design of the current study. It was recommended the atmosphere encourage mutual dialog among youth and adults within the small group setting. All participants were encouraged to participate in the conversation. Because there were multiple groups discussing the same topic, outcomes changed and expanded throughout the experience. Utilizing elements of cooperative methods enhanced accountability within the small group and the design of shared responsibility for all participants assisted to develop greater cohesion within the group as well.

Attributes Within Groups

Bruffee (1999) contends that knowing is a process within collaborative learning where interaction and conversation between individuals is viewed as inseparable. As described in above sections, Bruffee proposes Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory describes how community and relationships are vital to the developmental process throughout the life span rather than within a period of time, such as childhood. I support both Vygotsky (1926/1997) and Bruffee's (1999) views. However, the current study suggested societal relations are not the only contributing elements within collaborative learning experiences that assist in achieving higher levels of knowing or thought. This study suggested attributes, dispositions, or learned skills within collaborative learning method holistically contribute to how meaningful the experience will be for those involved in the process.

Brookfield and Preskill (1999) identify nine dispositions that they feel contribute to discussions within the classroom experience to becoming more democratic. They suggest

discussion within the classroom assists all members in feeling they are contributing to the learning process. Dispositions present in conversation address needed elements within the setting but also personal responsibility of those involved in the discussion. Although this learning approach may take longer to cover topics, Brookfield and Preskill believe learners are more likely to remember material being discussed if they are a part of creating the topic of conversation. The current study's context was not centered on traditional topics within a class setting. I suggested collaborative learning methods, as well as Brookfield and Preskill's identified dispositions, as imperative elements within any problem-solving activity. Therefore, I believed it is important to define and elaborate on the nine dispositions at this point. They are: (1) hospitality; (2) participation; (3) mindfulness; (4) humility; (5) mutuality; (6) deliberation; (7) appreciation; (8) hope and faith; and (9) autonomy.

Those who are to participate in conversation need to feel invited to participate. *Hospitable*, the first disposition, referred to how the environment has been structured or designed for individuals within the experience. The environment needs to support openness for participants to talk freely, reflecting mutual respect and interest for learning new ideas. Hospitality also supports willingness of participants to address questions. Having a hospitable environment encourages a balance in the conversation between seriousness and light heartedness (Palmer, 1993, cited in Brookfield & Preskill, 1999).

Participation, a second disposition, refers to the importance of every individual engaging in the conversation. Brookfield and Preskill (1999) propose that the more individuals engaged in the discussion, the more memorable the learning experience will be for all those involved in the process. They suggest small group interactions assist individuals, who may not otherwise feel comfortable, to speak in large groups. Individuals may feel freer to speak more openly in the small group setting. Within the environments' design, individual comments need to be perceived as

valued contributions to the conversation. Individuals guiding the discussion, for instance teachers or facilitators, can encourage embodiment of this disposition by asking follow-up questions, rephrasing statements spoken, clarifying ideas, and bridging different points of views to draw connections between group member discussion.

It is also important to be aware of conversation holistically. Therefore, *mindfulness* is a disposition that Brookfield and Preskill believe contributes to how meaningful the learning experience will be for those involved in the process. Being attentive to conversation consists of individuals being completely engaged in what others are saying within the discussion. It is important to listen patiently to others and to assist the conversation not in becoming fixated on topics that pertain only to a few members in the group. Brookfield and Preskill speak to Kingwell's (1993) notion of tact within discussion. Kingwell suggests there are appropriate ways to address individuals within conversations without minimizing personal principles. Portraying tactfulness within conversation, Kingwell proposes, can assist groups in becoming more cohesive.

Brookfield and Preskill (1999) suggest learning is uncertain; it is an ever-revolving process. *Humility* is willingness of an individual to admit his or her lack of knowledge. It also involves individual awareness of what others can contribute to conversation and believing one can learn from all situations, as well as from all within situations. Those who are vulnerable to being humble are more likely to work authentically with others involved in the conversation.

Another disposition Brookfield and Preskill identify is *mutuality*. Acting with mutuality means individuals recognize how their own development is dependent of others' development within the experience. Mutuality consists of individuals valuing all resources available to them being valuable within the context of learning and all participants as important resources for the learning process. Brookfield and Preskill suggest participants within conversation will be more likely to take risks when they feel their opinions are perceived as beneficial. When all opinions are

received in a manner or addressed in a manner that is non-defensive, participant confidence is raised. When confidence level is enhanced, individuals are more likely to feel they can learn from the experience.

The willingness to discuss subject matters openly, and in depth, is the essence of the next disposition, *deliberation*. Deliberation within discussion encourages individuals to participate in expressing points of view. However, the expression should be one that is supported with true evidence and knowledge on the topic being discussed. The conversation should be presented respectfully for those engaged in the dialog. Deliberation should be reflective in thought and all participants should have an opportunity to be heard. Brookfield and Preskill propose that deliberation is difficult to achieve in its true essence. Although deliberation was a part of the learning method within the current study, actual time allowed within the context was limited. This limitation of time and duration for deliberation may be viewed as a limitation to the study; however, the opportunity for exposure of individuals (teachers, parents, and students) to deliberating practices may have encouraged the desire for them engage in future practices of deliberation.

An emotional element within conversation to consider is *appreciation*. Brookfield and Preskill contend appreciation received by individuals within conversation facilitates people to drawing closer to one another, as well as raising the level of trust within the group. Appreciation also assists in building community amongst group members and motivates individuals to participate more in conversation. A practice of appreciation is for individuals to make positive comments about what someone has said within the conversation, as well as agreeing with what someone has said in the discussion.

Without individuals feeling a sense of *hope* and having *faith* in the experience, the potential for the experience to be meaningful is minimized. Brookfield and Preskill propose the

conversation would not need to continue. Hope provides members belief that new ideas and understanding can be achieved through the interaction of conversation. Brookfield and Preskill believe hope and faith are underlying elements of the learning method. Hope sustains people when faced with problems and faith enables us to continue in the process and work through troubling times. Within a collaborative experience, hope and faith involve believing all members engaged in the conversation will bring new insight and direction for the discussion.

The final disposition, Brookfield and Preskill (1999) address, *autonomy*, enables the learning method to come full circle. Autonomy is achieved when one feels he or she is an individual and a part of the group. The authors suggest autonomy is considered a moment in time for those involved in the conversation, and not a constant. It is important for an individual to feel he or she can address points of view and stand his or her ground on a subject matter, as long as he or she is receptive to adjusting opinions when credible information is added to the conversation. Being able to take a stand on opinions, Brookfield and Preskill argue, is an imperative element in order for democratic discussion to be fulfilled.

Learning Methods Modeled Within Study

Learning methods used in the current study were structured after those used for the National Conversation on Youth Development. Therefore, I believe it is important to provide the reader findings that reflect experiences described by both youth and adults who participated in National 4-H Council's, National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century. The findings support Brookfield and Preskill's (1999) dispositions of democratic discussion. Although Brookfield and Preskill's dispositions refer to democratic discussion in the classroom, I believe their understanding of discussion applies to the premises for creating effective and meaningful collaborative experiences in any setting. Throughout the experience, individuals who recalled feeling invited to participate in the conversation (*hospitality*) were more likely to engage in

the discussion. While working in small groups, the more youth contributed to the conversation added to depth and meaning of the overall experience (*participation*), while those who felt ignored, contributed less to the discussion.

Youth identified their overall experience as more meaningful when they felt listened to during the conversation and in interactions with the adults (*mindfulness*). When adults listened attentively and asked follow-up questions during discussion, youth became more involved and engaged in the process of discussion. Youth also suggested, that the adult's willingness to recognize his or her limitations of knowledge or experiences (*humility*), assisted youth in contributing more to the discussion. The presence of dispositions mentioned above allowed greater opportunity for dialog and recommendations to be established. This practice also contributed to minimizing the perception of adultism and creating an opportunity to experience equal partnership. It also led youth and adults to appreciate differing views allowing for trust and relationships to develop within the dynamics of the group (*appreciation*).

Youth viewed their generation and future in hopeful terms. The framework of the event supported and instilled a sense of hope, within both youth and adults, for the future (*hope*). Adults gained a new perspective on youth's desire to be responsible citizens in the community and youth gained new insights into how adult roles and experiences can assist them to grow in knowledge and understanding of how community operates. During and after the seven-month experience, individuals recalled reflecting on interactions with all constituents (*autonomy*). It provided individuals an opportunity to process and reflect on how collaborative decision-making can impact communities and how the experience challenged his or her current perspectives. It also allowed each to grow personally, as well as within relationships (Reno, 2002).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is a process of theorizing frameworks of knowledge, which explain a certain phenomena. Integrating different concepts and identifying areas lacking within research assist in identifying areas of need for further exploration (Farmer & Rojowski, 2001). The framework is viewed as the element within research that provides understanding and direction for underlying assumptions guiding a study (Babbie, 1998). Although cognitive development research pertaining to methods and skills (or attributes) enhancing the learning experience have been used in the classroom (Feldman, 2000; Meacham, 2001; Bruffee, 1999; Thompkins, 2001; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999), I believe societal influences, methods implemented and skills or attributes present within the classroom experience can also be applied within any context (refer to figure 1). This study's context was grounded within a community's initiative to engage youth in contributing to development of a sustainable plan through a collaborative decision-making process.

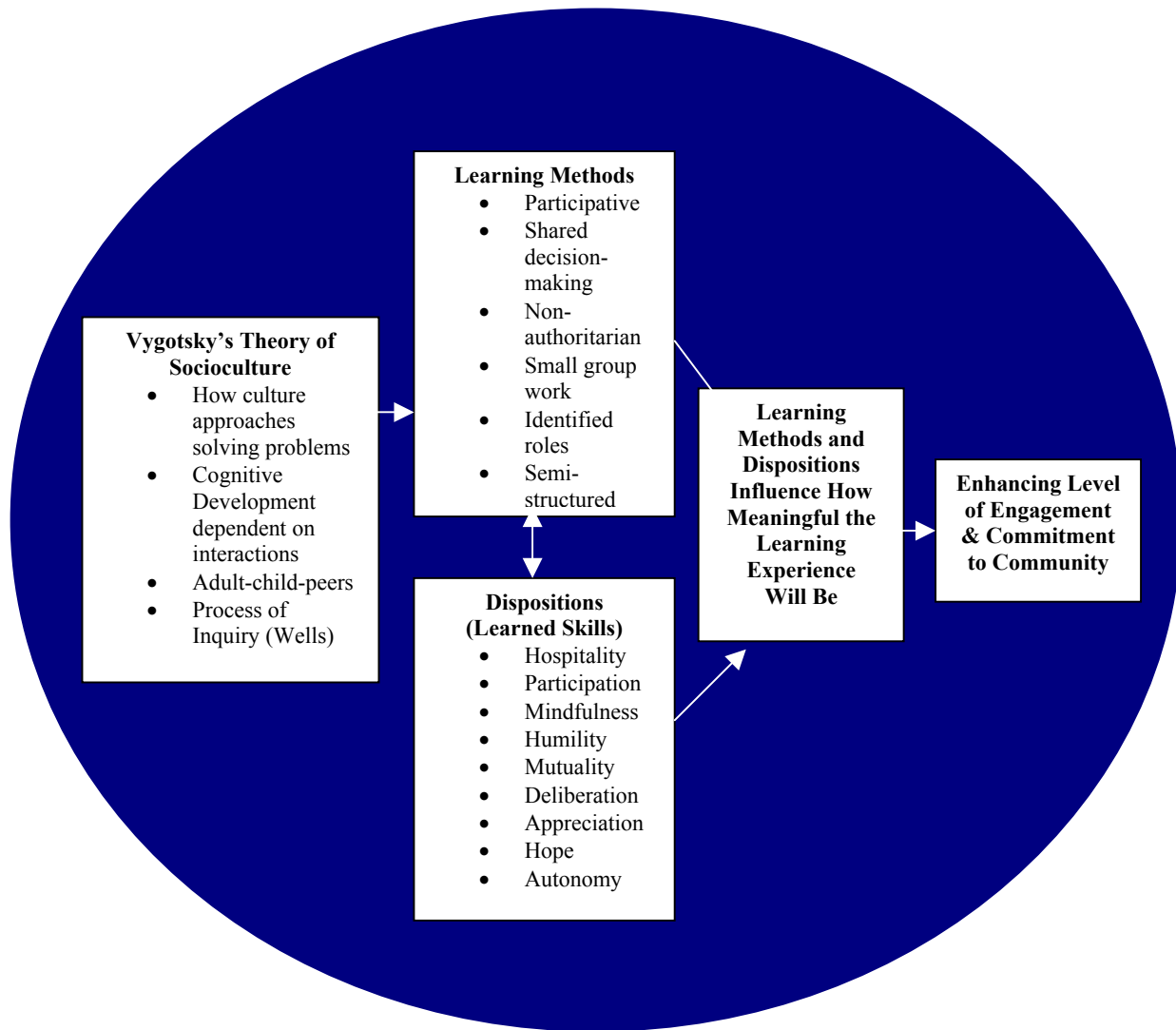
The community's approach was significant because current research shows how youth civic involvement has declined in the past decades (Galston, 2001; Hudson & Robinson, 2001). The decline in civic engagement is disconcerting because continuance of democracy is dependent on American youth. How civically engaged youth are today will determine how engaged they will be in the future (Delli Carpini, 2002). Research shows youth who are actively involved in community planning are more likely to be civic minded (Fredericks, Kaplan, & Zeisler, 2001; Delli Carpini, 2000). Youth who are civically engaged are also more likely to have a positive relationship with the community; preserving the community as well as enhancing the community (Camino, 2000a). Viewing youth as a central entity within creation of solutions can assist in bridging relations among youth, adults, and the community at large.

The current theory guiding the conceptual framework was Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory. When addressing techniques used in formal education, Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory assists the educator in gaining greater insight for how small group interactions influence the learning process. Incorporating practices of cooperative and collaborative learning methods encouraged individuals to share ideas, learn how to cooperate within group settings (West & Oldfather, 1996), and be more sensitive towards meeting diverse needs of others. The learning methods also provided individuals to explore new ways of enhancing proficiency in oral language, effective conceptual learning, and engage in creative problem-solving (Cohen, 1986). Thompkins' (2001) defines effective groups as groups where all members contribute equally in discussion while forming new knowledge, and such groups are more likely to be experienced when using a collaborative or cooperative learning method. Bruffee (1995/1999) and others (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000; Adams & Hamm, 1990) concur with Thompkins' definition and emphasize how cooperative and collaborative learning methods can be used effectively throughout the educational process.

Bruffee (1999) contends knowing is a process within collaborative learning where interaction and conversation between individuals are viewed inseparable. As described in above sections, Bruffee proposes that Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory describes how community and relationships are vital to the developmental process throughout the life span and not just within a period of time, like the childhood years. I support both Vygotsky (1926/1997) and Bruffee's (1999) views. However, the current study also suggested that societal relations are not the only contributing elements within the learning experience that assist in achieving higher levels of knowing or thought. This study suggests that attributes, dispositions, or learned skills within the collaborative learning method holistically contribute to how meaningful the experience will be for those involved in the process.

As described in depth previously, Brookfield and Preskills' (1999) identified dispositions are imperative elements for establishment of the democratic classroom. However, this study suggested incorporating (1) hospitality; (2) participation; (3) mindfulness; (4) humility; (5) mutuality; (6) deliberation; (7) appreciation; (8) hope and faith; and (9) autonomy, in any setting to help the learning experience become more meaningful for individuals involved in the processes. This study explored how the process within the collaborative method of decision-making influenced participant experiences and civic engagement. The study sought to understand the role the community's approach to problem-solving plays within the experience. And finally, the study explored how interactions between youth and adults contribute to the collaborative decision-making process.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: Developing A Meaningful Learning Experience Within the Process of Civic Engagement



CHAPTER 3: PROCESS OF INQUIRY

“Education is not a process of assimilating the truth but...a process of learning to take a hand in what is going on by joining in the conversation of mankind.”

Bruffee, 1999, p. 647

Introduction

The phenomenological case study I conducted sought to understand how active youth involvement in community decision-making contributes to youth becoming more involved in the process and ultimately, more civically engaged in the community. Shaped by the research questions outlined in chapter one and the conceptual framework described in chapter two, the study explored the process for engaging youth and adults in community decision-making. More significantly, the study explored how the process within the collaborative method of decision-making influenced participant experiences. As a northeastern community in North Carolina began an initial implementation of a grassroots approach towards engaging local citizens as part of developing a sustainable community plan, local authorities and community members (both youth and adults) had an opportunity to view its citizens as valuable assets for making decisions for its community. The uniqueness of the study rested in the hand of the schools and community leader's desire to engage youth in the process. More specifically, the leaders requested the involvement of all four public high schools in the process of developing a sustainable community plan.

Research Design

Qualitative research formulates a holistic construct from the exploration of a process of inquiry that seeks to understand a social or human problem (Nasser, 2001). Using a qualitative research approach in a study is most appropriate when “[1] immature concept(s) owing to a visible

lack of theory and/or previous research, [2] a notion that available theory may be inaccurate, inappropriate, incorrect, or biased, [3] a need to explore and describe the phenomena and to develop theory, and [4] a phenomenon that may not be suited to quantitative measures” (Morse, 1991, as cited in Nasser, 2001). Although the initial phase of the Sustainable Community Partnership project is foreseen to last two years, the duration of the Youth Partnership component of the initial phase was nine months. The nine-month project was a phenomenon, process, and multiple events that assisted nicely to approach the strategy around a phenomenological case study. This section will provide the reader information to support a blended qualitative research design.

Phenomenology is dedicated to the exploration of describing experiential structures as they present themselves. Edmund Husserl in 1913, the founder of phenomenology, identified phenomenology as the study of essences and further defined it as

The study of the structures of consciousness that enables consciousness to refer to objects outside itself. The study requires reflection on the content of the mind to the exclusion of everything else.

(<http://www.connect.net/ron/phenom.html> retrieved on November 4, 2002)

A colleague of Husserl’s, Martin Heidegger, expanded on this approach, claiming phenomenology to address what is not normally described within everyday life experiences (<http://www.connect.net/ron/phenom.html>, retrieved November 4, 2002). This form of study is also used to provide insight on mental images based on structures within phenomena (<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu>, retrieved November 4, 2002). Creswell (1998) defines a phenomenological study as describing the “meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (p. 51). This study focused on how multiple communities (four high schools) approached decision-making within the context of a specific county project. The study explored how the structure of the decision-making process influenced the participants’ experiences, in order to develop a framework for a standard method that could

be utilized inside or outside the classroom. The context being studied was an emerging construct, which theory and practice has had minimal information to contribute to the body of literature on the topic.

Mulenga (2001) proposes the use of case studies in research having become more popular because it provides the opportunity to examine a complex phenomena, “through a detailed analysis of a limited number of events or conditions and their relationships” (p. 130). Creswell (2003) describes the researchers’ role within a case study to “explore in depth a program, an event, an activity, a process, or one or more individuals. The case(s) are bounded by time and activity” (p. 15). Stake (2000) advocates that a case study focus on one specific context that may be simple or complex. The specific context has an overall purpose with integrating parts within it. And finally, the context has a defined structure or order to it. The importance of a case study is to understand how and why occurrences happen within the construct. To understand the construct, it requires in-depth exploration of the interdependencies of all the parts and to identify emerging themes within the construct of the study (Mulenga, 2001). The context of this study took place within an extended period of time. It was a complex process of events that had a defined order for how the process was carried out within the context. Therefore, the blended phenomenological case study research design assisted me through the exploration process of this study. The blended approach allowed me the opportunity to explore the holistic process of the Youth Partnership component within the Sustainable Community Partnership Project, as well as identify emerging themes throughout the phenomena.

Case Study

Collaborating with the Superintendent of schools and high school administrations, N.C. State University's Office of Extension & Engagement, the Department of 4-H Youth Development at N.C. State University, Audubon International and the local Cooperative Extension Service, this community began its grassroots approach by engaging its youth in developing a sustainable community plan. The purpose of the Youth Partnership component of this project was to assist in fulfilling the needs of social community development objectives that have been identified in the literature about sustainable community development. They were: empowerment; participation; consultation; equality; social mobility and cohesion; and cultural and institutional identity (Flint & Houser, 2001; Farrant, et. al., 2001). Approximately, 1500 youth in the four local high schools had an opportunity to participate in youth voice for this initiative. In January 2003, outcomes from a Youth Assessment on Community Environment (YACE) survey provided a benchmark to assist in leading discussions, in each high school, on needs in the community.

Engaging youth in this process also requires involvement of parents and guardians, as well as other adults involved in the lives of these youth. Therefore, parents and school affiliates were invited to participate in the process of identifying needs necessary for the community to be sustainable, during the Sustainable Community Gatherings. The central question asked to those participating was, "What elements need to be present in the [environment] for the community to be sustainable?" A Youth Partnership vision was established using four theme areas:

- Environment: Focusing on natural resources (water quality and preservation, and economic development) and human resources (social/welfare and transportation);

- Community: Focusing on people, public involvement, and crime;
- Life-Long Education: Focusing on schools, jobs, technology, and continuing education;
- Amenities: Focusing on facilities, preservation of culture, recreation, and events.

A Youth Partnership Summative Forum followed the individual Sustainable Community Gatherings to establish a summative recommendation report of needs and strategies identified by community members within the school system.

Community Background

Martin County, in which the case study resides, was established in 1774. It is located 80 miles from the coast, neighboring a river. The county's population of a little over 25,000 has maintained its size since 1990. Historically, the community has continued to provide economically for its community through its lumber, textile, peanuts, cotton, and shipping points by river and railroad. New economic ventures, within the county, include development of an agricultural complex facility for equestrian and other spectator events in the community. The county is also constructing a trail that will connect the downtown area with the bordering river (<http://www.visitmartincounty.com>). The community is described as encompassing the elite and non-elite. For the most part, individuals work in the mills and factories within the community. Generationally, the young know what path their lives will lead, depending on their parents' paths. If education is in store for the young, leaving the community is their reality. "If it is not, working in local factories will be their destiny" (personal communication, retrieved on September 8, 2002).

Researcher's Role

As the researcher, my role consisted of collecting and analyzing data. Therefore, it is important to assist the reader in understanding my frame of reference coming into the study

(Merriam and Simpson, 1995). This case study had multiple premises for me personally. Serving others is a passion for me. My previous experience working with students at a residential high school and former colleges, as well as working with North Carolina 4-H Youth Development for the Centennial Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century in 2001-2002 (National 4-H Council, 2002), has enriched my life by seeing communities join together for a common purpose; to build community within a context. As the youth partnership coordinator for this project in North Carolina, I was responsible for collaboratively working with professionals on North Carolina State University's campus, Audubon International, local officials, administrators, teachers, parents and most importantly the youth, within the community. My educational background in counseling assisted me in collecting data, especially during the interviews with participants.

In my role, it was important for me to be able to assist all community members in understanding the holistic context of sustainability and how the youth partnership component contributed to the community developing a sustainable plan. The knowledge I gained from the collaborative method approach used within 4-H Youth Development's, *Conversation of Youth Development in the 21st Century (2002)*, provided a general construct for the approach used in the current study. Findings from the same experience provided insight to characteristics that I believed enhanced some of the participants' experiences within the collaborative method approach. These perspectives have been influential in understanding how to engage youth and adults in a collaborative approach to decision-making, and how small group experiences can be more meaningful and engaging when certain methods are used within decision-making.

Study Context

Referring to the context of the study described in chapter one, the purpose of the Youth Partnership component for the Sustainable Community Partnership project was to assist in fulfilling the needs of social community development objectives that have been identified in the literature concerning sustainable community development. Identified objectives within sustainability, defined for this project were: empowerment; participation; consultation; equality; social mobility and cohesion; and cultural and institutional identity (Flint & Houser, 2001; Farrant, et. Al., 2001). Approximately 1500 youth from the four local high schools had an opportunity to voice their perspectives on how the community can develop a holistic sustainable plan. The next section will describe components within the process of the Youth Partnership Project. The description will be important for the reader to gain a better understanding of the process since one of the main purposes of the study was to explore the process *within* the context.

Process of Youth Partnership Component

Preparatory Activities

As an extension institution, North Carolina State University was approached by one of its counties to assist them in strategic planning initiatives for their community, specifically focusing on sustainability. N.C. State University's Office of Extension and Engagement approached Audubon International (an educational consulting organization) to partner with the county and university for this project. Negotiations between the three partners progressed from March 2002 through July 2002. Acquiring certification of Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programs (focusing on economic and environmental development), Sustainable Community Development (focusing on business and tourism), and the Youth Partnership Project have been the three primary components that interweave within the holistic picture of the project. Audubon International's responsibilities

focused on assisting the community in gaining certification of their natural life and environmental programs. North Carolina State University's responsibilities focused on the latter two components of the project. Although N.C. State University's Office of Extension and Engagement played a significant role within this partnership, the Department of Parks, Recreations and Tourism Management assisted with the business and tourism component and the Department of 4-H Youth Development assisted with the Youth Partnership component. For the purposes of this study, the timeline discussed in this section speak specifically to the Youth Partnership component of the project.

The initial phase of the Sustainable Community Partnership Project was primarily the Youth Partnership component. In September 2002, a member from the Office of Extension and Engagement, the local Cooperative Extension 4-H Agent, and myself met with the Superintendent and four high school principals to discuss the holistic Sustainable Community Partnership for the community; and more specifically, how we hoped they would actively participate in the Youth Partnership Project. The following issues were addressed specifically with the youth component: two youth and one adult representatives identification from each school to participate on the Education Committee; timeline for the project (Appendix A) and Youth Assessment on Community Environment (YACE) survey (Appendix B). How the collaborative method for Sustainable Community Gatherings could be conducted at each local high school was also addressed.

From the initial meeting with administrators, an Education Committee was established and the project was underway. In early October 2002, an initial meeting occurred with committee members in their community. The meeting attempted to assist members in understanding the purpose of the Sustainable Community Partnership, the Youth Partnership component and how their role contributed to the youth piece being structured within their high school. An initial tool

to engage the youth was the assignment of taking pictures describing their perspective of the community. We asked the youth to focus on areas of need or desires for change that may assist to preserve the community. The pictures were used to help educate peers within their schools about sustainability, as well as to introduce the Youth Partnership Project to school communities. Pictures were placed on large boards. Individuals were asked to describe how each picture represented sustainability to them. Having youth understand how significant their role was within the project, as well as how valuable their voices were to the outcomes of the project was a vital component to achieve to enhance likelihood for meaning to transpire within the experience.

A second meeting in October was organized for the committee to meet with the team members from Audubon International, as well as with adults who were identified as key stakeholders in the county that might contribute to developing the sustainable plan. This meeting assisted the Education Committee in understanding the concept of sustainability and viewing the project from a holistic perspective. Stakeholders in attendance were local officials, environmentalists, school administrators, church affiliates, economic developers, and members of the farming community.

During the month of October and November, the project began with the students in the schools taking a survey called the Youth Assessment on Community Environment (YACE). Due to North Carolina State University's policy on human subjects, each student was required to have parental permission prior to taking the survey. Therefore, a consent form was sent home with each student (Appendix C). Each administrator was given authority to administer surveys to their students, as they believed would be most beneficial for the project. Schools administered the surveys to students during homeroom or first period classes. The survey was designed to provide initial information to the community on sustainability from the youth perspective. Out of 1500 young people in the community, 809 youth completed the survey (54%). The survey reported that

young people were least satisfied with the community meeting youth amenity needs and most satisfied with the community meeting their environmental needs. Overall, youth reported their number one concern in the community to be the need of a safe place for young people to hang out. Youth reported giving respect to one another being of greatest importance to them.

Between January and March 2003, outcomes from the survey provided a foundation to assist in leading discussions or “Sustainable Community Gatherings” on the needs in the community in each high school. A Summative Sustainable Community Gathering followed the individual high school Sustainable Community Gatherings. In late April 2003, a panel of eleven youth presented final recommendations that came out of the meetings, to the community.

Between the months of January and February 2003, youth and adults were identified to assist the facilitation of the school Sustainable Community Gatherings. Ideally, representatives from schools were to meet to structure the Sustainable Community Gatherings to best meet their environmental needs and assist school members in feeling a part of the organization of the project. Only two of the schools followed through with this recommendation. I met with school administrators and teachers at the other two schools to design and coordinate their school gatherings. However, the committee participation continued to assist with committee members being informed about the project and assisted them to inform their peers about the project. Between January and March 2003, facilitators were trained to assist them in the collaborative method experience. One of my roles was to create a facilitator guidebook for those responsible for leading the group discussions.

The facilitator guide used some strategies and methods from National 4-H Council’s Conversation on Youth Development, as well as other collaborative methods described in chapter two of this study. In addition, the facilitator guide included the attributes Brookfield and Preskill (1999) describe as contributing to democratic discussions in the classroom. The four schools

conducted individual Sustainable Community Gatherings within a three-month period. A summative Sustainable Community Gathering followed the last week in April 2003, with representatives from *all* four schools attending.

Education Committee

The overall purpose of the education committee was: to represent the voices of youth, colleagues, and community; inform peers, colleagues, and community about the purpose of the project; create and develop ways to engage peers, colleagues, and community in discussions on community needs; provide personal experience and knowledge about community and the environment; and assist in developing a final list of needs and strategies to include in the final Sustainable Community Plan

High School Sustainable Community Gatherings

Collaboratively working with each individual school, the Youth Sustainable Community Gatherings were structured using the collaborative method approach specifically designed for the purposes of this project. Ideally, young people and adults were to be placed in small group settings with a youth and adult leading the discussions. Within each group, a smaller number of adults than youth were to be present in order to maximize opportunity for youth voice. Ideally, a group of students, parents, volunteers, teachers, and community members were to have participated in the Sustainable Community Gathering at each school. Only one school designed their school gatherings using a model similar to the structure described above. This school invited community businessmen and businesswomen, as well as leaders, to assist the young people to facilitate the discussions in each group. The other three schools designed group discussions with teachers facilitating. Every high school student had the opportunity to participate in group discussions.

The gatherings were to include a large group session as well as small group discussions. Depending on the high school, the events took one and four school days to complete. The small

group sessions focused on identifying action steps to be taken forward to community leaders in a final presentation to assist them in developing sustainable community efforts in the community. Results of the Sustainable Community Gatherings were framed around four theme areas: 1) Environment; 2) Community; 3) Life Long Education; and 4) Amenities.

We recommended one student and one adult facilitator per 6-10 people; one Volunteer Helper for every 2-3 small groups to assist the facilitators as needed; and one student to assist with writing down what is being discussed in the group. Three schools elected to use specific class times to minimize the confusion and disruption of the school day for both students and teachers. Group sizes ranged from 8 to 20 students, depending on the class. Two schools elected to conduct an overview session of the project with all their students, like an assembly, and then have their small group discussions during different class periods on different days. Another school elected to have only one group discussion for a single class period. However, one school elected to design their event over the length of three hours, incorporating an overview of the project to the student body through media, Channel One, two small group sessions having a young person and community member facilitate the discussion, and the homeroom teacher moderating the group.

Ideally, each small group setting is arranged with school desks in a circle or chairs around tables, if there are tables in the room. This allows participants to write opinions down on paper. Group facilitator(s) designed how the chairs were organized. Some chose to have students make a circle or semi-circle and others chose to keep the traditional classroom setup. For each small group, pieces of paper were provided to participants to use during the discussion, as well as information and guidelines to start the discussion. Each group was asked to participate in dialog around a central question: “What elements need to be present in the [environment] for the community to be sustainable?” The facilitators explained the definition of sustainability. Each school determined whether groups were to talk about all four theme areas or less than four areas.

Two schools chose to have different groups discuss different theme areas within the group discussions and two schools chose to have all groups discuss all theme areas. Facilitators then shared with the group the top four areas of concern within the theme area that were identified by respondents who took the survey.

Once the top areas for a theme were shared with the group, the facilitators were encouraged to ask members to go around and state what was written on individual papers. A student recorder wrote down the comments presented by all the participants in the group. Next, the facilitators assisted the group by having them select up to five of the ideas presented and discussed to use for examples. After each group member had shared his or her ideas, the facilitators were encouraged to open the discussion to the whole group to discuss why each idea was important and how it would help the community.

The next step in the collaborative method was to eliminate duplicate ideas and narrow the ideas down to a smaller number, without minimizing any ideas that may be beneficial to the outcomes. This was a critical time in the process when the facilitators needed to be careful not to introduce any bias in the recording of ideas. It was important for the facilitators not to show preference for a particular idea, put words in participant's mouths, or revise the participant's work without his or her permission. The task was to help each person in the group feel heard, as well as come to a consensus on the groups' top five priorities.

After everyone in the group had an opportunity to talk about action ideas he or she believed to be important for the community, participants voted on which action ideas were most important to them. It was important for the facilitators to clearly word the instructions so that group members understood what to do. The facilitators also needed to assist the recorder in writing down the action ideas most important to the group. Having two individuals framing the content hopefully assists to capture a clearer picture of what the group was recommending for the

theme area. Action ideas needed to be clearly written to assist others in understanding what the group was trying to say. In the small group, participants were asked to vote for the five action ideas they considered most important for their desired future. The facilitator brought the complete list from the group discussions to the Youth Partnerships Coordinator to assist in the large group session.

Once the large group reconvened, several students and adults were asked to report to the large group what was shared during the individual group discussions. Some of the participants were on the Education Committee but it was not a requirement. After participants reported to the large group, the Youth Partnership Coordinator moderated the large group discussion by assisting the school community to identify the top five action ideas under each Sustainable Communities theme. The Youth Partnership Coordinator collected all the information written down during the small group sessions for each school and typed up the recommendations. All information was then shared with school administrators: small group recommendations and final school recommendations. A final report was developed for each high school. The report explained the Youth Partnership Project, results from the survey and final recommendations for the community to focus on. The report was written around grade level to provide an avenue of comparison between grades.

After every school had participated in a Sustainable Community Gathering, the county Summative Forum was conducted using the same format as the individual gatherings. However, the members present in the final forum had representatives from each high school, as well as adult community members. The outcomes of the final forum were presented in a final report. The report explained the Youth Partnership Project, results from the survey and final recommendations for the community to focus on. The report was written around each school to provide an avenue of comparison between schools. A committee of eleven youth, identified by school administrators,

designed the presentation and presented the information to community members during a formal presentation.

Research Participants And Sampling Procedure

The purpose of this study was to describe how collaborative experiences influence civic engagement. The study addressed how a community's approach to problem-solving, and what learned skills used within the decision-making process, better assist to provide a more meaningful experience for those involved in the process. The study also sought to explore whether a change in perception of the youth and adult interaction influenced how meaningful the experience was for those involved, and if there was a change in perception, did this change in perception influence participants desire to be more civically engaged? Participants in this study were selected through a nominated sample based on their involvement in the entire process of the youth partnership component of the project.

Essentially, the community had five events within the case study that provided significant opportunity to explore the collaborative method implemented within each context. Identifying at least two individuals to participate interviews at each location assisted me to better explore the youth and adult interactions within the collaborative method experience. Therefore, a youth and adult were asked to participate in the study from each school. Participants were invited to participate in both the individual school gathering and the summative forum that had representatives from each high school present at the event.

The individual(s) were selected based on their involvement with the Youth Partnership component of the project. I selected participants through my interactions with education committee members, as well as through my interactions at each high school during planning

meetings and facilitator trainings. Each of them attended one of the four high schools.

Administrators approved the youth participating in the interviews prior to my asking them if they would like to participate in the interviews. The youth who participated in the interviews were all graduating seniors. There were a total of five adult participants. There were two teachers, a school counselor, a principal, and a community leader.

Once individuals had been identified as candidates for the study, I sought approval from each school principal prior to approaching the young person or adult associated with the schools. All participants were asked to sign a consent form before he or she could participate in the study. The youth participants were required to have their parent or guardian sign the consent form, as well as themselves.

Data Collection Methods

Utilizing a combined strategy approach in the study assisted me to better understand the nine month process of events in the community and how the concept for engaging local citizens, specifically young people, will contribute to developing a sustainable community plan for its community. The study also sought to explore the collaborative learning process and describe how skills used within the setting influenced the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2003). Through this study, my desire was to gain insight through interactions with participants who were a part of the Youth Partnership Project. This assisted me to better understand how and what meaning, if any, was constructed due to participant's involvement in the collaborative experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Within this section, I discuss the methods used to collect data from the study.

Creswell (2003) proposes qualitative research to use multiple methods for collecting data in a study. I used an observational protocol when recording observation data. Several observational approaches that were used during the nine-month process was through the use of field observation; keeping a researcher journal, having the participants keep a journal; collecting photographs taken by youth in the community; being an observer; as well as conducting elite and informal interviews. Field observations, also referred to as direct observations, consisted of visits to sites and attending activities. This technique assisted in collecting additional information about the topic of study. Due to the study extended over a period of time, reliability was enhanced due to multiple opportunities to conduct direct observations at each site (Farmer & Rojewski, 2001). The field observations were conducted while attending a variety of meetings with the community who contracted with North Carolina State University and Audubon International, individual school representatives, as well as the individual school Sustainable Community Gatherings and Summative Sustainable Community Gathering held between January and march 2003. The county Summative Sustainable Community Gathering involved representatives from all four high schools partnering for the event.

Documents provided me the opportunity to make inferences about areas within the community, as well as about the events conducted in the study. Documents are viewed as stable data collection because they can be reviewed on a continuous basis (Yin, 1994). I collected pamphlets from the Visitor center that identified a historical perspective, as well as attractions the community has identified for tourists. I collected local news articles written about the ongoing project as well. Another source that emerged during the course of the study was video. Video captured people's words and interactions during one large group session and the final presentation.

The principle method of data collection was the use of a semi-structured interview format with the nine individuals identified as elite interviewees to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon from a holistic perspective, considering the geographical location, youth and adult, and role as an active participant within the phenomenon of the case study (Creswell, 1998). The individuals were identified through their participation as an Education Committee member; student facilitator; teacher; counselor; principal; or community leader. Identified candidates associated with the school were approved by the school administration prior to their participating in the study. Farmer and Rojewski (2001) suggest interviews are the most important source of data collection for a case study. Each elite participant was asked to participate in two interviews: one prior to the school gathering and one after the school gathering. Interviewing participants prior to the event assisted me in making connections with participant perceptions of the experience as well as exploring whether change in perception toward youth and adult interactions and citizen engagement occurred as a result of the experiences.

Two interview guides (Appendix F) were used to formulate a final analysis for the event viewing it holistically from youth-adult perceptions as well as assisting to describe how the youth and adults interactions played in defining the overall experience for participants (Creswell, 2003). This study asked all elite participants to sign a consent form reflecting the purpose of the study, his or her role in the study, and how the descriptions of the experience would be used in the study.

Once participants were confirmed, interviews with each elite participant were to be set up prior to each high school conducting their Youth Partnership Gathering. Participants were contacted by phone for the initial interview and informed they would be receiving information regarding the study and a consent form that needed to be signed before they could participate in the study. Participants were informed that they could choose not to participate in the study if they were uncomfortable. Due to schedules, only seven of the nine elite participants were

interviewed. Three of the four young people were interviewed prior to the school Sustainable Community Gathering experiences. Four of the five adults were interviewed prior to the school gatherings. A youth and adult elite participant from one school were not interviewed prior to their school gathering.

Participants were provided a journal to write about his or her experiences during the events. A guideline was provided to assist participants in documenting their experiences. However, only one young person participated in the journaling exercise. The interviews were recorded using a tape recorder. The interviews were conducted using the first interview guide. Each interview lasted thirty minutes to one hour. I asked the participants to allow additional interview time to clarify data collected, if needed, after the initial interview. No extended formal interview time was necessary during the initial interviews. A professional transcription agency was contracted to transcribe the interviews verbatim. The agency provided a hard copy of each interview. Transcribed interviews were also saved on a disk. Every tape was placed back in the researcher's possession after the agency completed the transcription services. The researcher listened to each interview twice, while reviewing the transcriptions done by the agency. Each participant had an opportunity to review his or her transcript after the interview.

After the Summative forum had been conducted, a second interview was set up with each participant in the study. The interviews were set up by phone. The second interview guide was used to conduct the interview with four of the participants who were a part of the initial interview phase. Both interview guides were used with the three participants who were not able to interview during the initial interview phase of the study. Asking the participants questions from the initial interview guide assisted to bring some continuity to the analysis of participants' perspectives. A young person and adult from one school location did not complete the final interview. Therefore, only three of the school's final perspectives provided insight to the

findings of this study. I asked the seven participants to allow for additional interview time to clarify data collected, if needed, after the second interview. No extended formal interviews were necessary.

The same professional transcription agency was contracted to transcribe the second interviews verbatim. The agency provided a hard copy of each interview to the researcher. Each transcribed interview was also saved on a disk. Every tape was given back in the possession of the researcher after the agency completed the transcription services. The researcher listened to each interview twice, while reviewing the transcriptions done by the agency. Each participant had an opportunity to review his or her transcript after the interview. One participant provided me her journal recordings after her last interview.

Data Analysis

As the researcher, I attempted to provide a thick description of the phenomenological case study that Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) define as “statements that re-create a situation and as much of its context as possible, accompanied by the meanings and intentions inherent in that situation” (p. 549). Within the qualitative study, it was important to provide descriptions for the study’s validity. Although the validity of qualitative research has been debated (Lincoln & Guba, 2000), Creswell and Miller (2000) propose qualitative research to convey authenticity and credibility because its findings are conveyed by the viewpoint of the researcher, participant, or other observers associated with the event.

Creswell (2003) identifies eight strategies a researcher may use to check the accuracy of findings within a study. I used five of the eight strategies defined by Creswell. (1) First, I attempted to triangulate different sources of information collected during the study to build on a

consistent rationalization for emerging themes. Sources consisted of field notes collected from informal meetings with principals; committee members; local officials; other stakeholders; participant information; news media, media and field observation. (2) I offered participants the opportunity to review my findings to determine whether my findings were accurate. (3) I have also portrayed discrepant information within my findings respective to differing participant perspectives. This study also sought to understand perceptions participants held within their involvement in the process. (4) Because the study was conducted over a nine month time period, the prolonged time in the field provided me the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the context of the study. (5) Finally, I identified someone whom I could debrief the process of the study to enhance the accuracy of the context. The person listened to each account within the study and asked questions accordingly.

A hybrid-coding scheme utilizing Lofland's (1971) analytic structures and Bogdan, and Biklen's (1992) coding families, emerging themes were identified through the use of interview transcriptions, descriptions of pictures, news media, school video and field observation experiences conducted during the research experience. Moustakas's modification of Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method (Creswell, 1998) mutually contributes to the interviewer self-reflection of personal bias, horizontalization, textual description, structural description, essence and participant account of the phenomenon. Using words of participants, quotations were used to describe experiences. Using long, short and text-embedded quotations, a narrative of the participant's experiences was described (Creswell, 2003). In relation to the codes used, 'Process,' 'Perspective,' 'Strategies,' and 'Meaning' were most commonly identified as indicators contributing to the phenomenon studied in this case study. After coding and recoding the transcribed interviews, participant experiences threaded similar descriptors that assisted in establishing the following in

vivo emerging themes: “It’s been like a process,” “If you don’t try, you’ll never know,” “For one, it was a small group,” and “It’s what the community makes of it.”

Ethics Within Study

The protection of participants was important to this study as individuals were asked questions regarding his or her experience within a county led project. Eisner and Peshkin (1990) propose the researcher sensitivity conducting him or herself in a way that will not cause harm to participants. They also promote the researcher’s responsibility to know right from wrong. I believe I did my best to protect the participants in the study beyond expectations set forth by North Carolina State University.

The minors provided critical data to the study since the focus of the study desired the understanding of how youth involvement in decision-making can enhance community involvement when identified learning methods are used and particular attributes within the experiences are present. The youth participants’ ages ranged between 15 and 18 by the time the study concluded. The participants who were minors provided data to contribute to the body of knowledge concentrated on a comprehensive method for engaging youth in decision-making that may be used in different contexts. The minors were in a position to voice their opinions about the process of the project, collaborative methods used within the small group discussions, and perceptions for how youth-adult interactions can be improved.

Methods For Maintaining Confidentiality

As the researcher, I followed the ethical guidelines described by Glesne and Peshkin (1992) outlined by the American Anthropological Association in order to assure the credibility of the

study, community and participants in the study. I took the responsibility to inform participants about the study, explained the purpose of the study and spoke true to the nature of the framework for the study. Due to the nature of the study, involving local officials, community citizens and minors, protecting the anonymity of the participants was essential to this study. Community officials in Martin County, North Carolina have graciously allowed their identification to be known for the purposes of this study.

Participants in the study are described as youth, young person, adult, or community member. If participants described experiences “off the record,” the comments are not shared within the analysis of the study. In phenomenology, “bracketing” is essential in constructing meaning of participants. Therefore, I attempted to minimize sharing personal experiences within the interview process with participants (Creswell, 1998).

Storing data was another form of confidentiality addressed during the study. To assist in the process, I developed a master list of types of information gathered during the study. I kept backup copies of computer files that were placed on two hard drives and two disks. The participants anonymity was kept using alias names.

For purposes of the interviewing process, high quality tapes were used for audio-recording information. Original data collection materials were kept in one location. Data materials collected were in my possession, as well. If at any time, I believed I had breached confidentiality, I informed participants and my committee chair. No further steps were needed to address the situation.

In the next chapter, findings from the study will be described using the words spoken by elite participants. The data analysis will assist the reader in better understanding the significance for the outcomes for the study.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

“Education runs through the social aspects, runs through the environmental, and runs through the economic things. I think this project with the youth through the schools is probably one of the most important parts of this whole Sustainable Communities Project.”

Community Leader, March 2003

Introduction

In this chapter, I attempt to describe the experiences of those involved in the study. As a phenomenon, understanding the meaning and how the experience has impacted those participating is central to grounding the significance of the outcomes for an experience. Descriptions reflecting the nine individual’s experiences have emerged from within the layering of analysis. Although individuals themselves are not identified, I describe the essence of the holistic experience.

The interviewer’s method self-reflection to minimize personal bias, horizontalization, textual description, structural description, essence and participant account of the phenomenon assisted to help themes emerge from the data (Creswell, 1998). Utilizing a hybrid-coding scheme, ‘Process,’ ‘Perspective,’ ‘Strategies and Framework,’ and ‘Meaning’ were most commonly identified as indicators contributing to the phenomenon studied in this case study. The following in vivo themes emerged: *“It’s Been Like a Process,” “If You Don’t Try, You’ll Never Know,” “For One, It Was a Small Group,”* and *“It’s What the Community Makes of It.”*

The remaining sections of this chapter provides insight to the researcher’s experience as well as the participants’ experience. An in-depth description of the four themes provide insight to the participants’ experience; and how the length of time within the process, contributed to participants finding meaning within their role as a participant in the project, as well as their role as a citizen in the community.

Researcher Reflection

In this study, it was important for me to reflect on my responsibilities as a professional and a researcher. It was my responsibility and privilege to assist administrators, teachers, staff members, community members, parents, leaders, and, most importantly, the young people to immerse themselves in the initial efforts of a countywide project towards the development of a sustainable plan for the community. As you will come to find through the themes that emerged, engaging themselves in this study, for some, began as just another project or academic research study. It was also viewed as valued time taken away from the regularly scheduled curriculum needing to be taught. Initially for the young people, it was viewed as a project with great ideals. But it was also an experience that the young people were uncertain whether their voice would be perceived as a valuable entity for the larger context of the Sustainable Communities Partnership.

However, as the process of the project evolved and more people became involved in active dialog, meaning was transformed. The hopes for my role, as professional and researcher within the community, were grounded. An administrator in the study commented, “That’s the meaningful piece, when you have someone that you can work with, who is the liaison, who telephones you, who keeps you abreast on what’s going on; you took me step by step by step. And you constantly communicated with me.”

I have been blessed with the opportunity to be a part of this community and to feel affirmed that both the young people and adults engaged in the study understood my pure motives for beginning to assist citizens in emerging themselves within empowering opportunities concerning civic engagement. A younger person commented,

[S]eeing everyone so involved, I guess made me feel a true sense of importance about the program. Just the opinions and the strong will of others...how they’ve shown their will. What they feel needs to be changed in Martin County. These meetings made me feel like I have a duty or responsibility to make sure who needs to hear them; hear them.

A community leader remarked, “the young people realize that this was a project that was done basically from the heart as well as from an academic standpoint, and I think that was one of the things that truly made it a success.” Although the framework of the study was to explore the process of civic engagement within a community, I found myself personally defining, developing, and refining my own personal responsibility within civic engagement. That made it meaningful for me.

Data Analysis

“It’s Been Like A Process”

The first theme, “*It’s Been Like A Process*,” lays a foundation for the participants’ understanding of the context, structure, and involvement within the context of the project. For one, understanding the context, which in this case was the development of a sustainable communities plan, meant being able to comprehend and inform others about the purpose for developing a sustainable plan and how the Youth Partnership Project connected with the Sustainable Communities Project overall. For some, it was complex and hard to initially understand. One adult in the initial interview commented,

People are just not sure of what it is and what’s going on. Getting them to understand with the county and the tidal waves—I think that they didn’t understand how relevant this really can be. How good it can be.

Another adult stated,

I don’t know. It does seem to be shrouded in mystery the whole process. I have had people come to me and I’ve tried to explain to them what I know and today I finally told some people, ‘I just think it is going to be something we have to go through and experience, a process.’ You know, I didn’t know what to tell them because I haven’t been through it yet and if we have been kind of leading up to it and the kids know something is coming, so you go through something you really don’t know.

Although the context was complex, participants gradually began understanding the context as they became more embraced in the Youth Partnership Project. One strategy provided the young people the opportunity to take pictures they felt described their community. One youth commented,

When we were taking the pictures it took me a little while trying to figure out exactly what we were supposed to be taking pictures of . We figured out that we were supposed to take things that we thought either need to be fixed in the environment or things that we wanted to preserve here. So when we got to the presentation [an initial meeting with North Carolina State University and Audubon International]...I was glad to see that we were on track and that some other people were from all areas representing the county.

Another understanding of the process by an adult was, “Now that I have a better idea of what it is, I think it’s just getting the students near Martin County to work together...and the students have input on what the project might be.” A youth framed it, “I guess a way of trying to—first step, find out the needs of the community, and then maybe set forth to bring whatever type of needs we’re looking for into the community somehow.” And an adult stated,

I feel that people see that this is a necessary thing that we’ve got to do for the survival and sustainability of Martin County. One group, or one entity, can’t do it. Everybody has got to work together in this because everybody has got a stake in it. If we want Martin County and Williamston to be strong and to survive, we have got to work together. I hope the individuals in the community will support us and help by being a part of everything that we want to do. This is going to be sustainable communities, and the youth partnership. This is not going to be a six-month project. At minimum this is a two to three year project, setting the basis for where we are going to be 10, or 20 years from now. It’s not something that we are going to do overnight.

Understanding the Process: Framework and Structure

The framework and structure of the Youth Partnership Project also assisted with participants understanding the process. Within the framework and structure, the goals identified and the sequence of events contributed to participant's understanding. Informing participants of the goals and strategies of the project were described as being essential components for any project in order to reach desired outcomes. A community leader shared, "I think you have got to have goals to work towards. You have got to have the strategies to meet those goals. I think this gives us another tool to work with to accomplish where we want to be, and some structure to get [us] where we are trying to reach." Each component of the project assisted participants in understanding the goals of the Youth Partnership Project and how it fit into the Sustainable Communities Project. One component was continued communication and dialog around the context of sustainability and how the Youth Partnership Project contributed to the larger project. One adult mentioned,

It's gotten better. The first [meeting], I had no clue what was going on...It was more about sustainable communities. And that one...I [thought] we must be out of place, that's for Williamston, that's not for the whole county. And then you talked with the facilitators, it got better; I knew what you were looking for. Then when the group came together, the students had some input, they understood...Just a clear set of goals for what the project is, and what you expect of the people involved.

The structure also contributed to individuals' understanding of the process; whether it was within the opening session; the small group session; the school forum; or the countywide forum. Each person drew understanding of the project at different points of the process. One youth described the sequence of events stating, "so far with the meeting—for instance tonight, our little PTSA meeting..., I guess we're going to get a lot of ideas. And involving the schools,...is the best way to get to the youth who will be here the longest." An adult stated, "talking to the faculty and letting them know what was going on [helped a lot]. And the book...prepared was real nice too.

Letting them know that they are a big part of it as well, I think that helps a whole lot.” One youth felt the sequence of events that took place in his school needed possible restructuring by stating,

I think we should have communicated to everybody in the school before we did the communication [group sessions] part. Cause, in a way, the people who were interested in it, they went ahead and said what they thought. But some people didn’t really understand what it was all about.

However, the adult from the same school suggested the structure met their school’s needs.

She commented not having an opening session was the best way to conduct the structure of the process stating,

I think it was better the way it turned out, where the students made a small group and then they were able to give it back...my students [going] to the facilitator meeting, then [giving] them the information they were suppose to ask about, when they came back in their smaller groups, they were more comfortable with their homeroom...where if it had been [throwing] them into larger groups, they wouldn’t have talked.

One school chose to structure the events all in one day. As an administrator, she believed it was important to involve teachers and students in structuring the day’s events. As an administrator, knowing her school environment and structuring the events to best meet their needs was valuable to her. It was a well thought-out plan. As she described her way of thinking through the structuring of the process, she commented,

I’ve made sure that communication is maintained with youth. I met with [teachers]. I said, ‘Let’s put together an agenda. Let’s look at how we want our day to go.’ I said, ‘We’ve got from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. to put this together.’ We looked at the fact that we had from 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. I said, ‘Let’s handle it as much like a typical school day as possible. We need to be putting in breaks, because it is a long time for students to sit there. How do we do it? Do we have more than one session, or do we switch? Do we switch [community members]?’ I think at one time that is what I had done. I had switched speakers. So, we looked at the structure of the day, and we also looked at the speakers who had committed. We looked at the number of homeroom groups too...The facilitator needed to see, first of all, what our typical day is like. That facilitator needed to know that you are working with students.

After the opening session and small group sessions, knowing her students best, the administrator chose a different way for all her students to participate in the closing forum. She chose to have the

youth and adult facilitator come to a centralized location and televise the closing forum through Channel One, where all students could see and hear what was being discussed during the forum.

When asked about it, the administrator commented,

I felt good about it. I really did, because I was afraid that if we moved to the auditorium I'd have some students in there who were not interested. One's who wouldn't take the discussions seriously. I wasn't sure of the kinds of responses that I would get, as I wasn't even there with the Channel One. I knew that it was more closely monitored, and it was more of a situation that I could control...It needed to be in a more controlled environment, rather than having an entire school where there could have been some comments made that were not even relevant to the kinds of things we did...At the same time in showing it over Channel One, the rest of my student body could see, this is what happens when you have people who are really interested in it, people who are really attentive to the kinds of questions that they are asking. People who are reactive, but reactive in a positive way...They had their engagement. They had done that important piece, and now they needed to see how all of it was coming together.

Understanding the Process: Community Involvement

A final understanding of the Youth Partnership Project was the involvement of community citizens. Understanding the process meant involving, parents, teachers, students, and other community members. One youth shared,

The meeting, the little meeting we're going to have tomorrow, I think [it will be hard] because I know no one has really seen much besides [the] committee and its involvers. But when the school gets into it, and the outside community, I think it will start to really have some changes.

Another youth commented, "If we can get older people involved with it...like our parents. Some parents will help us out, but we need a lot of them. We are going to need more than two parents, we need them all." And by having them a part of the process, the youth shared, "we will have a lot more leadership and a lot more money." Having youth involvement was central for one adult commenting,

It will fit *if* the students have a hand in it. *If* there's something that students can do, *if* it's a workable idea, and *if* they enjoy doing it. I don't know what the project would be, but a sustainable community, I still say [that] it needs to be Martin County, rather than just Williamston.

However, the community leader spoke on even a broader spectrum for the importance of community involvement. He believed the success of the project was dependent on everyone's participation in the community, especially those whose voice is rarely heard. He shared,

I think just involving everybody in it is important especially since we have talked about sustainable communities as being [the] disenfranchised or those that normally don't have a voice. In reaching out into the community through the schools, or through any other avenue that we have—we can help. That is because we will be getting more involvement, and building it from the grass roots up, instead of from up, down.

As participants began to understand the context of the Youth Partnership Project and sustainability, they began to understand how the two elements connected with one another. Although participants' understanding of the projects and how they related to one another occurred at different times, the openness to give the project a chance, and take the risk, gradually enhanced by those involved in the experience.

"If You Don't Try, You'll Never Know"

The second theme, *"If You Don't Try, You'll Never Know,"* described how taking risks may or may not create a sense of anticipated hope for people involved in the beginnings of a new project. Past experiences or preconceived notions were described as influencing individual perspectives. Due to past experiences, confidence in believing the community really cared about bettering the community and meeting needs, especially young people's needs, also influenced participant's level of commitment to the experience. Although there was initial apprehension about the experience contributing to the experience being perceived as taking a risk, the ability to perceive an underlying possibility of renewal, hope and opportunity for bettering the community took precedence.

Perspective: Past Experiences and Perceptions of Youth and Adults

How one perceived the interaction to be with youth and adults contributed to the level of apprehension about the experience of youth-adult group work. Both the young people and adults

participating in the study had little to no experience being a part of youth-adult group work or decision-making practices. It was a new phenomenon that initially presented a level of apprehension within both the young people and adults. Referring to past experience or preconceived notions, several adults viewed it as one more project. One administrator viewed it as one more thing to add to the other burning items to work through with teachers. The administrator's initial perspective on the project was,

It is a job, and it is going to be a difficult job. I knew my outlook transfer to my teachers, and I knew that [then] transfer to my kids as well. I was so cautious about it that I think I was distant...but I was just so cautious about it because it was just one more thing to me.

Another adult shared,

I think the credibility of the whole project is going to be stronger, quite honestly than I first thought it was going to be. I first thought it just be a project. We go through the motions, and we put it on the shelf.

A young person's apprehension about the project centered on his perception of the community's commitment to improvement due to past experiences. He commented,

Confidence in improving our community, I think, is not as high as it should be...we had introduced...a recreation center at [a meeting]. Everybody was, of course like, 'Oh, we're never going to get that,'...but maybe if we had more confidence, you know,...more will try to get involved and change something.

Little to no experience working within youth and adult decision-making also enhanced the level of apprehension about the project. Both adults and the youth commented how youth are generally perceived with negative connotation, and how they hoped this experience might present new perspectives for 'youth' having valuable insight for contributing to their community.

For instance, one youth mentioned,

[Adults] are always thinking that we are leaving, there is nothing we can do so we are just going to be closed-minded for now. 'It's hard to get them to participate,' they're always thinking, 'When we graduate we'll never come back,' 'We're not sending our children here'...I think it is going to be hard. A lot of parents just want to do it themselves sometimes, but need us to help sometimes too. We are going to hang out if we can build it.

The adults also recognized that young people aren't always given the credit they deserve and opportunity to contribute to decisions, which will affect them. One adult commented, "usually the adults want to do something for the children and the best thing is [to] talk to the kids and find out what they [are] interested in." Another adult mentioned,

Quite often we don't give our children the credibility that they should have. Especially today, young people are exposed to many more things than I was when I was coming up. They have more of a global perspective, and a wider...perspective than we did.

Although most of the participants had not had the opportunity to experience youth and adult group work prior to this experience, those that had experienced these opportunities expressed the value of the interactions and recognized that the opportunity to work within youth-adult group work was minimal in the past. One adult shared,

The more you can get kids involved, the more they will be involved with it as time goes on...I think once you get youth involved in decision-making they will take pride in their school, pride in [their] community and things they do.

A young person who participates on adult committees within the community shared,

I don't think a lot of people have been in this situation before where they can attend a town meeting, where they can just come up and express their opinions. A lot of times kids...[have] no way to challenge lately, where a decision has been made and the students have tried to voice their opinions and they have not been able to.

However, the young person strongly believed in the value of young people having the opportunity to interact with adults in this type of setting. She commented,

A younger person is important to be involved in committees, like [this] with other people because you [are] shown the correct way to voice your opinion but at the same time being able to listen to other people's opinion and really think about what they are saying and not just think your way [is] the only way, or the right way.

Perspective: Taking Risks

Being asked to participate in a project that had never been done before in the community contributed to participants viewing their participation as taking a risk because of the unknown and

uncertainty for the outcome. Participants were initially cautious of their involvement because of the fear of failing due to preconceived notions or past experiences, as well as having the concept that if things are good, why change them. Participants recognized that creating change was difficult to accomplish because it took effort that some people are not willing to commit. As one adult shared, “Sometimes people are resistant to change, but really have opportunities that we need to jump on. We shouldn’t be hesitant in doing it. An adult revealed,

To tell you the truth, I put it on the back burner as long as I could. I really did. Time was of the essence, and then I felt badly about it. I finally just said, ‘Come on; This is something that has to be done. If you want to do it, let’s do it well. Let’s see where it takes us.

Another adult expressed how change in routine tends to cause adults, in general, to resist the desire to take a risk. She commented,

I know, people, adults have to give things an opportunity, they have to give things a try...if you don’t try, you are going to fail. If you don’t try something, you’ll never know if it have been a benefit or not and oftentimes people have this kind of negative preconception, ‘Oh gosh, we have to give up class time to do this. I need to do this and I don’t need to be spending time on [this]...sometimes, you have to...slow down...and just get off the subject every once in a while and talk about things that matter to [young people]. I don’t think they get that very often.

The young people also recognized change to be difficult for individuals to achieve but described how change is needed and can be accomplished when provided all the information concerning how the change can take place. Change within a rural community may be even more difficult because of the richness of desired historical preservation. The idea of change also makes people think what they have come to know as normal ways of life, will probably not be the same, which then leads people to think ‘why change something that doesn’t need to be fixed?’ For instance, one young person shared,

A lot of people are afraid of change, you just don’t change good things; this is the way my *Dad* did it, this is the way my *Granddad* did it, this is the way my *Great Granddad* did it; and its comfortable and works for them and it works for us so don’t change it, but I think there *needs* to be a change if Martin County is going to

go anywhere in the future. If not, it's just going to continue to gradually diminish. So, I think people's eyes need to be open that change is a *good thing* and is needed.

After understanding the perspective, that change was a good thing, participants believed helping others understand how change can occur was needed. Communication was going to be the key to help people understand change was needed in the community. One element necessary to communicate was recognizing change not be easy but if all the information and resources about the project were communicated to everyone, change may gradually occur. One young person commented,

I have to say first of all that everything is harder than you can expect. Even though, . . . just saying, 'Okay. Well, I'm going to take this little survey. And we're going to do this. And then we're going to do this.' People are very set in what they believe, . . . You're going to have to present them all of the information and make them see that the decision that you're trying to do . . . the things you're trying to do are right. And then they'll come along. They're not just going to go along with it right away.

Perspective: Opportunity and Hope

After participants processed through their fears and past experiences, the project being perceived as taking a risk generally turned individuals' thinking into the project possibly bringing about positive change in the community. They viewed the project as a process that might create synergy, opportunity and hopes for a better community. It was the hope that adults listen to youth voice, and hopes that the information that the young people present contribute to the community's views for a better future. The school events may also provide an opportunity to build more meaningful relationships between students and teachers. One adult commented,

So many times people get into their own little role, roles that they play each day and they think that they have to follow and you really don't get a chance to have dialogue so there might be an opportunity where [the students] can feel free to open up if they have a problem, or if they have something they want to share. Maybe if nothing else, that will come out of [the experience], which be real positive.

The experience was viewed as an opportunity for young people to share their own ideas about the community. For this community, it was seen as a first step. One adult shared,

I think that a lot of times decisions are being made without involving the youth. This will give them the opportunity to speak about how they feel about things. I think it will be great.

From the youth perspective, the experience was also viewed as an opportunity to begin a dialog with adults. There was a desired hope the adults take the opportunity to listen to the young people. One youth commented,

I'm kind of hoping that they will listen to us, because we really never had a project where [adults] came in and sat down with us. This is a first, so maybe they will listen and learn something from what we are talking about. Maybe it will work, I hope so.

The experience was also viewed as an opportunity for the overall community. The experience was an opportunity to assist young people in understanding their connection within the community and it was an opportunity to create a new method of learning within the school day. One young person commented,

I hope that everybody gets involved, and actually takes an active role and doesn't sit there and say, 'This is stupid.' I hope they see the big picture that this is really important... We have been given a chance that nobody else has been given and we can really make a difference, if we take this opportunity and vitalize it to what is possible.

An adult shared,

I am so excited about the results we are going to get from [the project]. It is going to be interesting, because being a stakeholder in this thing, I am hoping that the public, all of the parents, the educators, and all those involved will listen as well. I just think it is going to take everybody's involvement to listen and take the things they say to heart, and not just something they write down.

The same adult expanded on the thought, expressing how he viewed the project as an opportunity for the educational system to reach their young people using this method stating, "I think our school system needs to look at how we can use our education system to reach these young people, and to keep them in Martin County."

A young person stated, "I think tomorrow's going to be a first step—a really big step for the whole community, getting the whole school involved and bringing out all these opinions—I

think that will raise a lot more ideas and open opportunities.” And finally, one adult perceived the project to be an opportunity to assist the young people in building self-esteem, stating,

I think the project is good because for the first time, kids do get a chance to voice their concerns, their opinions, and there are actually people who are going to listen to it, and possibly have some action on the concerns they have. It [might] give them a little self-esteem, a little pride that their voice can make a difference.

As participants continued to develop greater understanding for the project, they gradually began immersing themselves more into the project. As they immersed themselves in the project, viewing it as an opportunity and less as a risk, participants assisted to help others understand the project’s purpose and what the project might contribute to the community. Once participants began to feel better about their role within the project, greater understanding for the project and how it contributed to the community, enhanced their experiences in small groups.

“For One, It Was a Small Group”

Participants described their group experience to contribute to greater understanding of the project and how it related to their role within the community that captures the next theme, *“For One, It Was a Small Group.”* Elements within the group work participants contributed to the experience was the size of the group, as well as different attributes they believed were either present or needed to be present within group work. After the group experiences had occurred, participants described the importance of understanding where the information go next. They wanted to know what actions take place by leaders in the community.

Strategy: Size

An element that participants expressed contributing to the group discussions was the size of the group. All group sessions were held within a classroom. Due to the nature of the school setting, size of the group varied school-to-school, as well as classroom-to-classroom. However,

participants tended to find the experience more beneficial the smaller the group size. One adult shared, “the ones that were smaller...I thought [were] good,” and a young person stated, “For one, it was a small group.” Participants’ identification of a good size ranged from three to twenty people within the group experience. One adult mentioned, “anywhere from four, up to fifteen.” Another adult stated, “fifteen or twenty.” However, a young person firmly stated the smaller a group could be structured, the greater the dialog was for those involved in the experience. He stated,

It might be better if we actually had like small—instead of like at the last meeting. We had like nine people. If we had lots more groups of three and got ideas together and wrote them like they did on their little board. And get people to argue back and forth. So everybody could see both of [the] views.

Participants described the smaller group setting to allow all individuals within the group to have an opportunity to share opinions and offer the opportunity for an open dialog. One youth commented,

As I said, we had six, seven, eight students and the two adults. That really gave everybody a chance to speak. We had all that time but that gave an ample opportunity for you to speak and everybody felt a little bit more comfortable.

Another youth shared,

Everybody wanted to get the word out and share what they felt. Everyone was talkative in the discussions like in a small group. When you came in you gave us another sheet for us to divide up into even smaller groups. I think that helped out because everyone there had different opinions. Maybe half of the group or three fourths of the group thought so while other people thought, ‘He was kind of shy to share his own opinion.’ But when you divided everyone into even smaller groups, everyone thought that whatever we said would be heard.

The number of youth and adults within the group was also described as influencing how the discussions would be and how they may end. Having a small group made it comfortable for people to share with one another and encourage sharing by individuals who may not normally voice their opinions to share. One adult shared,

You're going to have some students who will talk, but they need the push to get up in front of a group. They...haven't matured yet, to get into that place where they feel comfortable with it, with the topic...some students just need a small group first.

Making sure the groups were balanced was of concern to an adult. She commented,

It was good. [However,] instead of just saying, 'You all stay in this group, and you all in this group,' ...make sure the groups are [a] little bit better balanced.

Finally, feeling comfortable within the discussions contributed to the size of the group. A young person commented how the group atmosphere contributed to individuals feeling more comfortable to share with one another. She stated, "The one big thing is just the small group atmosphere. It was relaxed, everybody was comfortable." As participants described how the small group contributed to their experience, attributes within the experience were also shared, and will be described next.

Framework: Attributes Within the Group Experience

The small groups described attributes that contributed to the experience. Attributes described within the small groups spanned from participants' perception of the facilitator's role to how people anticipated the community taking action on the ideas. Within the group experience, participants shared insight for how hospitality, mutuality, participation and deliberation contributed to the small group discussions. When these attributes were present, participants developed a greater sense of hope coming out of the experience.

As individuals came together for the group experience, the facilitator's approach to the group experience set a foundation for how the participants interacted within the group. One adult mentioned, "I think you just need to get a mediator...there needs to be somebody to kind of bring out the discussion in the different groups." How *hospitable* the facilitator was assisted in developing a safe environment for both youth and adults contributing to the conversation. For instance, one

young person shared, “[our facilitator] was really nice and really positive and made everyone feel like they were saying stuff worthwhile.”

The group feeling hospitable also contributed to how the facilitators set up the group structure and described the desired outcomes for the group experience. The format of the group session fostered open dialog. One adult stated,

[Facilitators] made semicircles. Some of them, on that particular day, [there were] very small homeroom groups so everybody could talk. I noticed that the facilitators were trying to learn the names of the students. They were calling upon them, and in some instances they were redirecting them. They probably saw them going down another road, and they would redirect that discussion.

Another adult commented,

I think it was a very comfortable environment, because we were basically in a round-table discussion, and there was no ‘head of the table’..., and it was basically a youth led and facilitated discussion that we had. And I think that everybody was comfortable. The young people were comfortable discussing their ideas with the leaders and with the adults without feeling intimidated, without feeling, maybe, degraded or put down.

Having both youth and adults at the table was viewed as a positive first step. One youth commented, “The youth and adults both being at the same table is a first step.” But then he went on to share how there are limits to speaking freely without mutual respect being present. He remarked, “...being respectful, of course. I mean it’s your own opinions, but there’s a limit to speaking your free mind.” Therefore, another attribute participants described within the group experience was *mutuality*. Youth and adults respecting each other’s opinions and feeling valued within the discussions contributed to the experience. A youth described mutuality as, “[adults] listen[ing] to you and you listen[ing] to them. That way you understand what’s going on.” For the most part, both youth and adults expressed mutual respect being present within the experiences. An adult described the experience as a, “very worthwhile, open discussion on the issues. And there was respect going both ways.” A youth expressed, “I thought everything I said was actually [being] heard.”

The idea of youth and adults being at the same table, exemplifying mutual respect, lead participants to describe the experience as taking it to a different level. One adult responded,

They were all able to offer insight on a different level, but the students feel, 'Well, you don't know anything.' [Adults] talked to the students [as] equals... [one man from a Representative's office] talked, and when the students would shout back, he pull them out, [and say], 'That's not what you said before.' When you asked for the whole presentation, well, they give part of it, and I noticed he say, 'That's not all you said,' and they come on out with [it]. So they were really encouraging to the students. He encouraged students to speak up. And when they did, he asked. As far as being a facilitator or a motivation in their group, he continued to pull the students out.

Although most of the participants commented how mutuality was present within their group experience, one participant shared how the absence of mutuality affected a youth's experience.

When describing the experience, the adult explained how she seized an opportunity with the young person, showing him how one can learn within all situations. Learning opportunities occurred for the student as she allowed the student to voice his concerns with her, listened attentively to him, validated his opinion, and encouraged a dialog with him in order to process his experience. She shared,

One of my students was a little bit upset with the reaction, and the responses of the facilitator. I looked at him, and I said, 'What's wrong?' And he said, 'I'm just getting mad... I told him, 'Just try to cooperate.' The next day I followed up with him, and I asked, 'What were you angry about?' He was saying, 'It was like he disagreed with my opinions, and I thought that my opinions were pretty good.' I said..., 'The purpose of that was not to agree, or to disagree, it was just trying to get more discussion.' He said, 'I became frustrated.' I said, 'Well, you shouldn't have become frustrated. That just lets you know that he doesn't see it your way. Now you need not try to convince him, but he needed to know that you did differ in his opinion. If you handled it as a young man should, then you could move on to something else. Don't try to be contrary to everything everybody is talking about.

One recommendation made to address group dynamics that did not display mutual respect, was to make the groups smaller. Another recommendation was to have more time with the adults prior to the youth-adults group work to educate adults on the importance of mutual respect within the youth-adult group experience. One youth stated,

If you put [a group] with maybe two kids and one older person or two older people and one kid, then you'll get them to interact with each other. And maybe you can talk to the older people beforehand and make sure that they're not...that they realize these kids are your future. And you need to respect them and try to listen to what they're saying, not just keep straight on your ideas.

Another youth described how one can learn within experiences even when the group size, ratio of youth and adults, and mutual respect may not be present. She summarized an experience stating,

I think that no matter if you're an adult or a child, at 50/50 there's always going to be someone in the group who doesn't speak up as much. There's always somebody who speaks up more. I think I almost liked it better with the kids because they seemed more willing and more open to more things. I mean, every idea isn't possible, but some of the adults—the kids were coming up with more ideas and the adults were more set in their ways. I just think the young people were more open to more things and it seemed like the adults had just closed their eyes to some possibilities. And maybe that's a good thing because they know more than we do. But I really think that you shouldn't shut out the youth because they might think of something that an adult n't.

As the discussion within the group experience progressed, participants shared how the *participation* of all members within the group made the experience for them. How the facilitator had set the stage for the desired framework for discussion, fostering a hospitable environment with mutual respect helped individuals feel comfortable voicing their opinions more freely. The setting provided an opportunity for people to be more open and to get involved. One adult commented, "I saw a lot of people really getting involved, and talking it out." It was an opportunity for people to pull information together around one setting. One adult shared his view, the more people involved, the better, stating, "if more people are giving you ideas instead of the squeaky wheels gets the grease type of idea." More people became active in the dialog when they saw others engaging in the discussion. A school that designed the teacher's responsibility to be more a moderator role than an active participant described some teachers having difficulty not participating in the discussions once everyone became engaged in the group work. An adult reflected,

I saw the teachers also taking a part in explaining some of the things the students had some concerns about. Teachers were explaining why this is happening here, and this is the purpose of this. There were teachers who were also involved in the discussions themselves. I heard one of them say, 'Well, I know I'm not supposed to be saying anything, but I just need to say this. Can you write this down?'

A youth suggested having more opportunities for participants to have leadership roles within the experience to possibly enhance the group experience. Having a leadership role was described as contributing to greater commitment from all participants and belief that their role contribute to the community, not just this group experience. He remarked,

Maybe if people had the opportunity not only to just be heard in that setting, but if everybody had the opportunity to be a leader...If everybody felt as if they were almost the active member, that it was their project. And when you have a whole group of people thinking this is what I'm doing, and this is what I'm doing for my community, then you get people who will work harder and more things get done quicker.

As some conversations grew deeper within the group experience, the dialog grew towards a level of *deliberation*. Deliberation involved participants reviewing and processing others' opinions and perspectives within the group. It also meant that participants understood that everyone was not going to agree with each other on issues but involve narrowing the ideas and coming to consensus on issues and ideas being discussed within the group. Both youth and adults shared insight on how deliberation was present within the experience. One youth stated, "[Youth] all have different perspectives and they can bring different things to the table. Things I couldn't bring because I don't know about them." Another youth commented,

People's opinions vary...That can be a problem or conflict for all those ideas. But just sharing each other's opinions and hearing...each other's opinions and hearing what each of us has to say, that would be a big asset.

The deliberation within the group experience was viewed positively because it was seen as people coming together for a greater purpose. One youth stated, "I think it's more positive because it seems like everybody is coming together and they're working towards the same goal. And everybody seems like they want to."

As individuals began to see everyone working toward a common goal or purpose, some participants expressed a new sense of hope within their experience. One adult recounted a facilitator so engaged in the day's events that she commented,

I had one [facilitator] who was very enthusiastic. As a matter of fact, he stood up during our Channel One presentation. He was still very much engaged in it at that time. I think, as a matter of fact, he said that we needed to do more of this kind of thing.

The group being small and having certain attributes present within the group established a framework for the experience, but some participants perceived the overall group experience to be determined by their perspective of what may come next. Participants in the group experience wanted to know their participation, deliberation, and transpired sense of hope would be followed up with some form of community action.

Strategy: Community Action

Bringing youth and adults to the table was described as beneficial to the experience when the group was small and certain attributes were present within the group. Participants expressed the hope and desire for the ideas to be taken to the next level and not just stay within the classroom. One adult commented,

I hope some of the ideas that students come up with will actually materialize, not just be an idea we discuss in a classroom, but we can take it to the next level and actually, I think it would mean to [the] children, students to see something, an idea they had, actually materialize and I hope that will come out of it ultimately.

Both youth and adults commented how valuable each person's view mattered and how one contributed to the overall discussion. Both youth and adults described the importance of the other's presence at the table. One youth remarked,

The best part of [the group], definitely was having the older people there because you got to see not just the child's perspective of 'Go[sh], we want all this stuff,' but you saw some of these older people who were more like, 'Okay, how are we going to do this?' They were more set in not just having goals, but 'how do we get these goals to happen here in Martin County?'

Another youth stated,

Having the adults there, I think knowing who they were and how easily they can make change—I don't know...at the same level or stance as they were...they were open to listen to [us]. You really felt like what you were saying—you were sure it go further than just talking and chatting. Something would be done.

Participants also recognized value within the leaders' interactions with young people being part of the experience. One adult mentioned,

The one thing that probably has impressed upon me the most is the statement that the young man said, that he knew he had a mayor, and he had never met him and he was glad to see him. And I think that the need for the leaders in the community to react, or interact, with our young people is probably more evident now than it has ever been before. And just because we are leaders—and, yes, we may be seen in certain circles as leaders or elected officials or whatever—that we need to expand that circle not only for visibility, but to let them see the leaders working in the community outside these certain meetings...that we have, you know, [we are] working out in the community with people trying to get their input.

Community action for a young person meant making a permanent partnership. It meant seeing a beginning, not an end of something. She stated,

It's kind of an exciting start. And I think especially if they take it and they make it more permanent, as I said at the other meeting. I don't know how you could have a youth committee—or through the commissioner when they have their meetings or something—but I really think that if they make it a permanent thing, then it will be very ongoing and they will be constantly getting new young people who have new ideas and are faced with different challenges.

As the process of engaging young people and adults in identifying needs within their community to be more sustainable, the small group experiences provided a different avenue for strategic planning in the community. The size of the group and attributes described within the experience provided insight into how meaning within the experience may transpire.

"It's What the Community Makes of It"

The final theme, "*It's What the Community Makes of It*," emerged once participants experienced the school and county group discussions. After participants felt their voice had been

heard and valued, felt empowered to make change in their community, and developed a sense of hope that the community would take action on the ideas presented, some participants found meaning within the experience. This section will provide insight to some of the participants' found meaning in developing of a greater understanding of the project's purpose. Meaning was also found within the youth voice and building community relations. And still others found meaning in hopes of future opportunities and lessons learned within the experience. The next section describes meaning found within the project from the participant's perspective.

Meaning: Purpose and Looking at the Broader Spectrum

Participants developing a deeper understanding for the purpose of the Youth Partnership Project, and how it related to the community developing a sustainable community plan, set the stage for the overall project to become more meaningful for some participants. It was not an instant understanding but one that transformed throughout the process of the project. Participants found meaning in understanding the true essence of sustainability and how it related to them, personally.

Meaning developed through interactions participants experienced with others; interactions with young people and interactions with adults. Having interactions with community members they had never had the opportunity to know on a personal level, especially brought meaning for some of the participant's experiences. Participants' understanding for the broader purpose of creating a sustainable plan, associated with the interactions with others within the process, created a level of interdependence between community members. A new appreciation for others was beginning to transform.

As participants continued engagement in the project, their understanding of sustainability, the Youth Partnership Project, and what their role was from a holistic perspective helped them find meaning within the experience. Understanding the purpose grew deeper as participants had

the opportunity to engage themselves in group discussions at the school level and then on a county level. Only one school had invited community members to participate in their group discussions; so for most participants, having more adults at the table during the county discussion, created a new understanding for the project. Meaning transpired through their understanding of the goals and seeing the broader spectrum. One adult commented,

The one at the county was much broader. It involved much more...it was different parts of the county being talked about. They talked at a different level, in that meeting...The goals were different. The goals were broader...They were different because it involved,...talking to kids who [were] probably 17, 18, and then all the adults that were in there too. So they were definitely talking about something else.

Participants also described their experiences as meaningful because of the interactions with different people. The adults found meaning in the young people's involvement in the discussions and young people found meaning in having the adults at the table, as well. One adult remarked,

I think that the young people themselves [made it meaningful]—because like I say, the caliber of people that we have working in this are those that are going to be the leaders no matter where they are, whether it is in our community or off at college or at the community where they decide to reside in when they graduate. But the aspect of this is not only for them. It is for this—we need to look at this twenty-five percent of the kids that are going to be remaining in Williamston and Martin County and realize that we have got to do something to raise their standards, to meet their expectations,...to improve the quality of life for them as well as our community as far as sustainability.

A young person found meaning in the group discussions because it gave him a wider view of the potential of his role within the community. Having the opportunity to engage in a mutual dialog with leaders and adults in the community educated him on governmental operations and procedures. It helped him learn that change can't happen over night but that it may take years to see ideas implemented. Having the opportunity to understand the processes helped him accept others' opinions, even when he may not agree with the point of view. The young person commented,

It gave me a wider view. Especially coming from a small town, I would say that as a whole we are kind of narrow-minded...we see Martin County. I mean, I have

been to a lot of leadership things so I see a little bit bigger than I would if I was just the regular kid. But I think this really lets you see how government works in a way, and like how things start, and that everything that you do now probably started six years ago, and it is a really long process and that you need to just—there's lots of steps that you have to set up and go through...you see how long everything is objective, you know, work for it for a long time to get the things you want.

Participants having multiple opportunities to engage in dialog around the same topic, but at different levels, instilled meaning within the experience for those involved. Having representation of differing community members across the county, contributed to some of the individuals finding meaning within the experience. One youth stated,

I not only got to share my own ideas, I learned from others. Maybe different views that I never felt before—I understood then. It taught me how to explain everything in the topics we had. It was how everyone got along and shared their opinion. Something always good came out of it.

Another youth found meaning within the project through words spoken by a peer. Listening to her peer helped her establish within her mind that a connection had been established; a bridge had been built between the community and young people. She commented,

One of the best things of the whole day to me was when [a student]...said, 'I did not know that he was the Mayor. I didn't know he was a Commissioner.' And that really to me just shows a link had been made between the youth and the community members and the people that run our community and you can make decisions to change it...[it] made me think, 'Wow, this really has made a difference. This one day has changed a lot.' I'll probably always remember that.

One adult found meaning within her experience when she connected the different components of the project together: youth voice, youth-adult partnership and community connection. The adult made meaning out of the synergy created when bringing all these components together. However, if the community chose to not respond to the youth voice after giving them this opportunity, it would be more detrimental to the survival of the community because the youth would perceive their voice as invaluable than valuable to the community. She shared,

I see the suggestions of our youth along with adults who are working with this. I see that they have some very bright ideas, and a creative way of thinking. I would think that if we chose to ignore the input that they have given us, it could be the worst travesty ever. Too often when any community tries to sustain itself, you listen to the voices of the adults...the youth piece is the most critical piece, and the most essential piece of this whole partnership that we are doing. It would behoove us to listen to them, because they are going to be the ones who are going to hopefully be returning to our community to sustain it. If we don't listen to them then we have set ourselves up for a community that becomes extinct.

As meaning grew within participant's understanding and holistic purpose for the project, some people began to see how empowerment and voice contributed to the experience being meaningful.

Meaning: Voice and Empowerment

Participants described their experience within the project to provide an opportunity for youth voice to be heard. Having the opportunity to voice their opinions created a sense of empowerment within some participants. Both youth and adults commented that the youth voice is not often listened to or viewed as something that really provides value within community decision-making. As participants gradually became engaged in the project, voicing their opinions became more comfortable and generated an empowering thought process to the whole idea of what one is capable of doing when a part of creating change in the community.

The project was seen as an opportunity to be heard. One adult remarked, "I think it was good here...because the students had a chance to really get their voices heard." Another adult saw the experience meaningful because it provided her students an opportunity to voice their opinions with few restraints within the structure of the group work. She shared,

[A] positive thing about it is that my students had an opportunity to express themselves with few restraints. It wasn't controlled by their curriculum, but instead it was controlled by some questions that were of interest to them. Too often our curriculum, the structure of the day, and even accountability keeps that from happening. They felt good about that. When you listen to them, they have some wonderful things to say. They want answers. They need answers, and they need to be heard. This was their opportune time to do it.

The youth found the experience meaningful because they saw it as an opportunity for their peers to be heard. One youth commented,

I think this was the first time ever—that I remember or know of—that the youth really got that opportunity. And a large group of youth, not just one person who is a representative of this little council but an entire population got to speak.

There was genuine care for how others were experiencing the project that ultimately influenced their own experiences. A youth stated,

I hope maybe by interacting in this that my peers did see, in a way, that what you say and what you do now does count and does hold things for the future, and that you really need to try.

Seeing their peers feeling valued and heard within the group discussions contributed to their own experience being meaningful. A youth mentioned,

It just gave them the opportunity to speak about what they thought. And they actually got heard. The group gave everyone a chance to comment. Some ideas you really don't think about until you hear something from others... Seeing everyone so involved I guess made me feel a true sense of importance about the program.

The more exposure youth and adults had as a part of the discussions, the more comfortable everyone became. One adult shared, "It made them feel good to be a part of a group like that, to be able to talk and feel comfortable doing it."

People developed a sense of empowerment for what they could personally do within their own community. Sense of empowerment developed as young people felt their voices being heard and as adults acknowledged the value of offering their young people the opportunity to be heard.

One adult commented,

I hope it will bring up some ideas that the youth and the adults will share. I feel like it will. I think in the past that the youth felt like they were not included. I think in the past, some people resisted change, especially people in our leadership. I think it will make people want to say more. I really do. I think it will encourage people to open up.

Adults within the experience developed a sense of responsibility to better meet the needs of the young people in their community. From their participation in the experience, adults

reflected on their personal roles for how to make change occur within their community. One adult mentioned,

There is a lot more work that I need to do that will enable my students to be able to speak more freely. So I don't have to do this, per se, but I can have more forums or symposiums within my school that will afford everybody the opportunity to [speak more freely].

The role of leaders in the community was also assessed. One adult commented,

I think basically just by accepting the responsibility of being in leadership positions...creates a responsibility for them...rather than the person, the arm-chair quarterback, that sits down and talks about things, the leaders have to be involved.

Like the adults, the young people also reflected on their responsibility as citizens in the community. When the young people felt their voice being heard and valued by the adults, the meaning of voice transformed into empowerment. The young people were making meaning out of their experiences comprehending that their role within the community is what they choose it to be. Before this project, young people did not realize they could be a part of creating change in their community. One youth shared,

Before this all, I would probably say that I didn't have hardly any influence in the decisions in my community. I know most of the town...but I don't know any people from out of my town...I know their names, but I never really interacted with them and this...gave you an opportunity to at least...see where they're coming from...even if you don't agree with them.

Another youth mentioned, "...given this opportunity and being able to go into that room and make a presentation, I feel empowered that what I say, they are going to listen to me and it's going to be important." As youth and adults' sense of responsibility within the community grew, the importance of building community relations also tended to grow.

Meaning: Building Community Relations

Youth and adults having the opportunity to work together towards a common purpose, enhanced the value of voice and empowerment, but also enhanced some of the participants' awareness to build community relations. Having an opportunity for young people to interact with

community leaders, assisted in changing the perception some youth had of adults. One youth commented,

I think that's improved...people...who normally would not get the opportunity to talk to the mayor, they got the chance that day and I think that changed the idea that he's some far off distant person...He's a real person to them now and not just an idea.

Youth's perception of their involvement in the community also changed. One youth reflected on an idea generated out of a group discussion about an "Adopt-a-Highway" concept across the county. He valued his peer's suggestion and was able to relate it to how the project could promote interrelations between the different schools across the county, building community relationships.

He shared,

I do see things could happen with [the Adopt-a-Highway]. Because, it's like [a] school drive, you know, and we could go out there and clean it up all the time. And we could have those weeks where [our school] plays [that school]. I can see already where they take the trashcans and go on their road and pour it all out so that they have to go clean it up. I still think little things like that [could be] set as your school thing. The more things that you tie into the school and school tradition the more things would get done.

Meaning was also transformed when one was able to connect how all entities within the community contributed to the sense of belonging, developing an interdependent relationship. One adult reflected by stating,

If teachers can build relationships with students, and parents can build relationships with students, and people in our community can build relationship with students, then there is a sense of belonging. If I belong to, I will want to become a part of more. If I feel that you need me, if I feel that you value me because of whatever type of relationship there is that is wholesome and vital to my well-being, then students will remember the community as a place they want to come back to. 'When I grew up, everybody was concerned about me. I had a wonderful relationship with different people.' These are the kinds of things that they're going to be saying, 'Well, I want to bring my children back to that community because that's what they gave me' and it appears that they're still doing it.' So I think that it's important...many times you think teenagers don't want a good relationship, but they really do.

Some participants' experiences led them to believe more should be done towards building the community relationships. One adult was disappointed in the lack of participation by adults, in general. He valued the experience and wished more adults would have participated in the experience; especially the youth presentation at the end of the project. He stated,

I would have liked to [have] seen a little bit more participation from...[the] school community...I know everyone can't be everywhere at the same time. But I have loved to have seen more school board members at the presentation; I have loved to [have] seen more school administrators at the presentation, and maybe even some teachers. And I was kinda surprised. I think that the parents of the young people supported it pretty well, but to that extent there was not a lot of other parents...I will say since then that the media coverage has been very good and gotten the message out into the community, because many places I go I hear [about] it.

One thing a young person mentioned is that he would have liked to have seen more involvement of parents in the group discussions at the schools. He shared,

Involv[ing] the parents in the community...Everyone probably knows something that needs to be changed and knows maybe some way about doing that...I guess just trying to implement the community as a whole.

Although there were some disappointments concerning the lack of adult participation, some participants described their experience as providing opportunities within the community, as well as for them personally.

Meaning: Opportunity

Having the opportunity to participate in the project stimulated some participants to reflect on their involvement and what they felt should happen next because of their experiences. One young person shared how her experience has helped her define more of what she hopes to do in the future. She commented, "When I first came into this I said I wanted to do community redevelopment and it's made me want to do it more." Because of their experiences, some participants believed there was value in having the school system the central vehicle for

implementing the project. One adult recognized the value it brought to teachers and education. He stated,

[It] gave an opportunity for the teachers to direct [the students] in that direction. It kind of gives you a focus for education, to let them know why they're in school. And it kind of gives them a chance to really put what they learn here in school to work in the community and in the county and then they learn too a lot of things they didn't know. I mean because I know, especially in the big groups and the small ones, the teachers were able to interject—or the group leaders, not only the teachers but also just the group leaders were able to interject.

It was seen as an equal opportunity for young people to share their views about what they wanted their community to be in the future. A young person mentioned,

I guess it was a way to get our views as students as to what needs changed in Martin County. I think it was a great way to get those out there for people who need to hear them. In the past, our views may not have been heard or they may have been overshadowed. Maybe our idea wasn't as important as others. But that Youth Partnership Program gave everyone a chance for equal opportunity.

Bringing the youth perspective provided the community an opportunity to hear fresh perspectives for bettering the community. The youth perspectives were appreciated for their ability to see the cup half-full rather than viewing the cup half-empty, like adults can do at times. Having both types of attitudes present, tended to minimize the attitudes adults may have about ideas not being possible. An adult commented,

Bring[ing] in the vision of a group like the young people that had not had preconceived ideas of 'this won't work,' or, 'that won't work,'—all they see is that they go in with open eyes, and they have...the vision that 'we can do this,' and they don't really see why we can't. And it seems like sometimes as adults we get together and have a pity party and say, 'We have tried this, and that didn't work.' But I think with the dynamics of the group being the younger and the older, that we didn't, the adults didn't complain as much, and we listened and were excited by their vision and their outlook.

Because of the synergy created within the youth-adult group experience, some adults began focusing their attention on how to create more opportunities for students, teachers and the community to interact with one another. One adult commented,

I felt good about the opportunity,...because it happened, I needed to capitalize on it. The point, the question now is, 'Where do I take this?' I could let it drop, but I don't feel that I should. I need to come up with ways, with the assistance of the faculty and staff here to do more in getting the community involved in our schools. That's what I'm going to do, that is certainly a part of, should be a part of any school improvement plan, to involve not only parents, but also the community.

Meaning: Lessons Learned

Through the process of developing a sustainable plan, participants found meaning within lessons learned from the experience. One adult mentioned, "I've learned a lot in just this one project, myself." Through the experience, youth and adults learned new things about themselves and their role in the community. One adult shared,

I've learned more importantly, that in any school that is in a community, people feel close to that school. They want to do all that they can do to make their school and their community the best school, and I felt good about that, I really did. I felt very, *very* good that those that were able to participate, they felt good about coming...It was something different. It was something that I felt was challenging...but I felt *good* that it had happened, and I felt *good* about my role too, that I got a chance to meet some of these people that I'd been hearing about.

Some participants also learned that change takes time and persevering through times of change is critical when determining the outcomes. A young person shared how his experience helped him understand that sharing perspectives with others may bring forth different perspectives but found it important to hear different perspectives in order to challenge opposing perspectives and hopefully improve current ways of thinking and doing. He commented,

The different ways in which you need to improve...challenge me...Definitely, whatever obstacle I have would now from this experience with the sustainable community meetings,...[help me] to implement changes and find out the necessary changes that need to be made...and then try to strive for that.

Learning from others was also meaningful. An adult shared how she had learned something from a youth at one of the group meetings about not quitting at the first sign of trouble. She stated,

One is when the young man said, 'Bring all the schools together, and just because there's trouble, don't cancel it because there's trouble but keep going. Try it again, and maybe it'll work out.'

Some participants learned from the experience that there is a greater need for community leaders and youth to have opportunities to interact with one another. An adult mentioned,

It's been a learning experience, because I've always felt that youth and community and leaders all need to work together. I still believe that. I now have even more hope that the community will listen. They're forced to listen, because...if we don't listen, we won't have this community anymore. And if we don't have this community anymore, what will we have?

A community member also learned through his experience that it is time to listen to the young people while the "iron is hot". He learned that young people do care about their community and want to contribute to making it a better place to live in the future. However, he also learned that if the community doesn't do something now while it is fresh on people's minds, people's interest may dissipate. He shared,

I think the most important thing is we cannot let this report sit on a shelf somewhere; that we do have to take action on it. And we also see that the young people want to be involved. So, I think that taking the issues and addressing their recommendations and looking at their greatest concerns in the report is very important, because if we don't act now—I mean, I guess you say, 'Strike while the iron is hot,' and it is as hot as I think it has ever been or ever probably will be in the future. Now is the time to address these concerns.

As the Youth Partnership Project component for the Sustainable Communities Partnership in Martin County drew to a close, youth and adults found meaning through their experiences within the process. Meaning transformed through their understanding of the project's purpose, community relations, opportunities within the community, and lessons learned because of their experiences in the project.

Summary

In summary, this chapter described some of the participant's experiences within the Youth Partnership Project. The data analysis provided insight to the participant's experiences through their understanding of the project and its process; participants' perspective of their experiences

within the project; strategies used within the project; and meaning developed from their experiences within the project. The questions that guided the study were:

1. How do youth and adults who are engaged in developing a sustainable development plan describe their experience within the process of the project?
2. What role does the implementation of a collaborative method play in enhancing civic engagement involving both youth and adults, if any?

The final chapter will address the above questions that assisted me in exploring elements within the process of civic engagement. The chapter will also speak to insights constructed from the literature review, as well as contributions of the study and possible future research needs based on the findings of study or information not found within the study.

CHAPTER 5: INSIGHTS, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

“Transformative learning...is a process where meaning making becomes continually more clarified although it doesn’t have to follow clearly defined steps or stages.”

Mezirow, 1998, p. 11.

Introduction

The data collected for this study present a view on how to use classroom collaborative methods within the process of civic engagement in the context of a county’s effort to develop a sustainable communities plan. This study specifically focuses on the young person’s and adult’s role within community decision-making together, and how it contributes to the experience of civic engagement. In this study, I explored how the process of civic engagement can potentially influence the development of citizens becoming more civic-minded when they are a part of creating change within their community for sustainability. Studies related to civic engagement, youth voice and higher education result in listings of factors that limit or support success in these areas (Oates, K., 2001; Schneider, C, 2001; Reardon, K., 1999; Boyte, H. & Skelton, N., 1997).

While giving an account of the influences are important, describing the main themes that emerge is just as critical to the analysis of the research (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998; Fullen, 1991). Fullen (1991) suggests research findings viewed in isolation form a “system of variables that interact to determine the success or failure” of a change effort (p. 102). Within this study, I have attempted to provide insight to what I have learned about the process of engaging young people and adults in community decision-making utilizing a form of collaborative methods out of the context of the traditional classroom. The following section discusses the insights harvested from the data.

Insights Gained From the Questions

This study has explored elements within the process of civic engagement. My intentions were to gain knowledge in how a community approaches problem-solving, and what learned skills used within decision-making, aid in providing a more meaningful experience for those involved in the civic engagement process. The questions that guided the study were:

1. How do youth and adults who are engaged in developing a sustainable development plan describe their experience within the process of the project?
2. What role does the implementation of a collaborative method play in enhancing civic engagement involving both youth and adults, if any?

How do youth and adults who are engaged in developing a sustainable development plan describe their experience within the process of the project?

I defined sustainable community development as, “a continual course of action towards preserving a community by implementing approaches that engage all constituents/stakeholders in future oriented decision-making around economic development, transportation systems, community design, and resource use within the local constituency. It involves ‘meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Daniels, 2001, p. 1).” If we accept this definition of sustainable community development, then moving toward an interdependent civic engagement model that engages young people and adults in making decisions to enhance sustainability should be a key goal. The framework used for this study addressed how societal influences, collaborative methods, and learned skills within a learning experience contribute to a more formalized process of civic engagement through the development of a sustainable community plan.

Several insights emerged from the analysis that demonstrated particular significance in developing an interdependent civic engagement model. These insights include: communication; leadership; goals and structure of the process; past experience and perspective; and community involvement.

Communication. Communication with and between different entities connected to the project assisted individuals to understand the purpose of the Youth Partnership Project, their role within the project and how the Youth Partnership Project connected with the community's initiating efforts to develop a Sustainable Communities Plan. As time grew closer to implementing different parts of the project, individuals became more involved, felt comfortable taking risks and being involved in the project when they felt they were receiving support and informed of information through regular communications. It was important to communicate with administrators throughout the whole process of organizing their school gathering, as well as when time came closer to carrying out the event.

As a liaison for the project, it was described as an important factor, to listen to the administrators, teachers and students orchestrating the event, as well as provide insight when needed or asked about what strategy or methods may assist the event to be meaningful for those participating. Communication was valued when identifying students and teachers to participate on a committee; determining how to best administer the survey; identifying young people and adults to facilitate group discussions; informing stakeholders of the project's progress; communicating the project's purpose to the school community or working with young people to assist in preparing to present final recommendations to the community. The greater the opportunity for communicating with administrators; teachers; students; parents; community leaders and the community, at large; the more meaningful the experience was for those who participated in the civic engagement process because people felt the time spent in communicating with them,

exemplified them personally being valued within the process. Those who felt left out of the communications were less likely to feel valued within the process. The less opportunity to communicate with students and teachers in schools, the less engaged the school community continued to be in the process of the project.

Leadership. The study offers several ideas concerning the importance of leadership being a contributing factor for which the level of interdependence can be enhanced within a civic engagement model. Leadership roles involved myself as the liaison, school administrators, and community leaders. How leaders perceived the value of the project contributed to how accessible people within their authority had with participation in the project. For instance, as the liaison for the project, I was very passionate about serving the community. Therefore, I pursued different avenues to connect the young people with their schools and the community. Communicating the purpose of the project, goals of the project and value of the project was a contributing factor for whether the school actively participated in the events.

Leadership within the school system was initiated from the top with the Superintendent valuing the project and encouraging the administrators to engage their school community in the project. Initially, the project was viewed as another project; but each school's leader was able to identify one aspect of the project that might assist the school, whether it was the data provided from the survey; the creative learning method; or service-learning component; for accreditation purposes. Administrators finding value in the project were more likely to communicate with me, as the liaison. School leaders were more likely to involve teachers and students in assisting to design the layout for their school gathering. They were also more participative, viewing themselves as partners in the process, rather than myself being viewed as someone from the outside coming in to do a project. School leaders who valued the project were more concerned about what happened next in the process and what their responsibility would be in assisting their young people in

continuing with the project once the school events had been completed. They were also sacrificial of their time by continuing to communicate regularly with their school community on the progress of the project and continued to make time to participate in events that followed the school event. School leadership that did not value the project's purpose provided less access to school community members that ultimately limited youth opportunity to provide insight for the structure of the events.

Initially, community leaders believed it was important to bring different sectors of the county together to understand the purpose of sustainability. Communicating and involving all stakeholders was a valued element for the leaders. Community leaders' value of the Youth Partnership Project grew after results from the survey were available. The data provided them insight to how the young people perceived the community and possible plans after completing high school. As the community leaders began having dialog with youth concerning needs of the community, the youth became more excited about their contributions to the project that ultimately created a greater value for the project. Once leaders had the opportunity to participate in discussions with young people, their level of commitment and sense of need to take action on ideas presented by students, enhanced as well. As each event occurred, community leaders felt it important to inform community members through different forms of news media and actively sought media participation to inform the public. Community leaders also recognized a greater need for them to interact with community members in order to better understand the needs that enable them to better serve their community.

Goals and Structure of the Process. Two factors that assisted to enhance the level of interdependence were the goals and structure of the process. Communicating the goals of the project helped individuals understand what the purpose was for the project and how people viewed they would be able to contribute to the overall project. Knowing the goals was viewed as a

tool that helped individuals to accomplish desired outcomes. Individuals wanted to know each step of the process, the desired goals to be achieved and what would be expected of them in order to reach the desired outcomes. However, leadership determined how much time could be devoted to explaining the goals of the project that contributed to teachers and students understanding the goals of the project. As goals were articulated and refined, more individuals became aware of the project's purpose, what it was trying to achieve and how the structure of the project supported the goals communicated. The less amount of time spent on communicating the steps and goals of the project, the less committed the school community was to implementing the project in a meaningful way within the school.

The structure of the school gathering was also a factor in the study. Designing school gatherings meant the leadership needed to know how to best meet the needs of their school. Each school structured the event differently. Leadership that continued to actively engage students and teachers in the design of their school event experienced greater participation by those involved in the discussions. I found that leadership that also engaged their school community in an introduction session, group sessions and a town hall meeting, had students and teachers interested in what actions be taken next in the process. However, interdependence within the civic engagement model was enhanced when the school conducted the event on one day and invited key stakeholders in the community to assist in facilitating group discussions. Leadership that provided separate facilitator training sessions for the students and adults also assisted individuals in becoming more aware of the structure and how to communicate it to others. Interdependence was also present within both town hall meetings that had key stakeholders actively participating in the group discussions with the youth and adults associated with the school.

Past Experience and Perspective. Past experiences of youth and adults in group-work together, generational perceptions, and taking risks were factors contributing to the civic

engagement model enhancing or limiting interdependence within the process. Opportunities to engage in youth-adult group work experiences were minimal by those who participated in the project. Therefore, apprehension was present for both young people and adults in what they believed would occur or transpire out of the experiences together. Perception of the community's commitment towards bettering the area was lacking. Youth perceived the adults not to value their opinions. Adults recognized this tendency for viewing youth; however, the adults in the study also hoped their perspective would change and it be seen as an opportunity for young people to have a voice in making decisions in their community. Although youth were apprehensive about their role being valued, they were also hopeful for the opportunity to change the negative perspective adults tend to have of young people.

Individuals viewed their involvement in the project as taking a risk because they were uncertain of what to expect when working with young people and adults in group-work. Taking risk meant putting aside their fear of failing and not achieving the goals set out for the project. It also meant understanding change would not occur overnight but view it as an ongoing partnership between students; teachers; administrators; community leaders and parents. It meant they needed to make a greater commitment to the project than they had originally anticipated, and it required more effort and time. They also viewed it as taking time because people, in general, like the comforts of 'this is how we do it' and 'have always done it,' 'so why change it,' mentality. It requires educating everyone in the community on the importance of making the community better so the environment can be more likely to sustain itself.

Building Community. Community involvement, as well as the hope and opportunity for outcomes of participating in the civic engagement model expanded the level of interdependence between those engaged in the project. Community involvement meant engaging *all* members in the project: youth, teachers, parents, community members and leaders. Involvement meant inviting

everyone to be at the table of discussion and appreciating what each person could possibly contribute to the project. Involvement also meant bringing people to the table that are not normally given the opportunity to have a voice, especially the young people. Adults perceived the youth's perspective to bring new creative ideas to the table with endless possibilities; yet realistic, for the most part. Youth tended to perceive the community leaders and adults to bring knowledge and resource for how to implement the ideas presented at the table, as long as they believed mutual respect was present.

The hopes and opportunities that participants perceived the project to present, were also a factor influencing the experience. Hopes were found within the openness of others, both youth and adults. Opportunity was found in the project being implemented through the school system, which was described as the vehicle that runs through all elements of sustainability. The project was seen as an opportunity to build more meaningful relationships between students and teachers; between students and community; and between schools and community. It was an opportunity for youth voice to contribute to making their community something they want to come back to after they completed their education, if they were to leave the community after high school. The project was also described as an opportunity for the school to engage their students in a new collaborative learning method, which enhanced their level of thinking and how dialog between youth and adults can be used within the school experience. And finally, the project was an opportunity for both youth and adults to define and redefine their role within the community and how everyone can contribute to developing a Sustainable Communities Plan.

What role does the implementation of a collaborative method play
in enhancing civic engagement involving both youth and adults, if any?

I defined a collaborative learning method as an activity engaging individuals, specifically young people and adults, in active exchanges of ideas within small group settings. Collaborative work has been viewed as a part of a broader movement towards a “participatory democracy, shared decision-making, and non-authoritarian style of leadership and group life” (Bruffee, as cited in Trimbur, 1989, p. 605). If we accept this definition of collaborative work, then moving toward an interdependent civic engagement model, that engages young people and adults in decision-making, will provide the opportunity for democratic learning skills to be introduced and hopefully developed throughout one’s life. The concept of developing democratic learning skills throughout one’s life should be a key goal.

Several factors emerged from the analysis, which demonstrate particular significance towards the enhancement of life-long democratic learning skills. These factors include: elements within a collaborative learning method and meaning developed from the experiences.

Elements Within a Collaborative Learning Method. Three central components influenced participants’ experiences toward an interdependent commitment of civic responsibility: size of the group, attributes within the group experience and steps toward community action taking place following the events. Although the *size* of the groups varied from school to school, and group-to-group, all participants described their experience involving a greater level of democratic discussions when both young people and adults were present, and the number of participants in the group were less rather than more. The size of the group was also described as contributing to people’s opportunity to speak; the fewer participants in the group, the greater opportunity to speak within the discussion, which also contributed to people’s comfort to speak within the group experience. People who normally may not speak in larger groups were more likely

to speak in the smaller group setting. As the smaller group size was described as contributing to the experience being more positive, the attributes within the small group influenced the participants' experiences even more.

Within the small group experience, several *attributes* were described as influencing participants' experiences. Attributes described as influencing the group experience were hospitality, mutuality, participation and deliberation. Roles assigned within the collaborative learning method assisted individuals to feel more a part of the discussions. Having *hospitable* facilitators leading the discussions and making the rest of the group members feel welcomed and comfortable assisted participants in sharing more within the discussions. It was helpful when the group setting was structured in a circle with the facilitator informing participants of what was to take place within the group discussion; encouraging group members who voiced their opinions; and encouraging an atmosphere that was comfortable for both young people and adults to speak freely about the topics.

Participants' described their experiences as more meaningful when *mutuality* was present within the collaborative learning method. The presence of mutual respect within the group experience contributed to participants feeling their voice being valued, which then encouraged participants to be open for greater discussion within the group. Presence of mutuality led youth and adults to describe the collaborative learning method as taking it to a higher level of thought. It provided an opportunity for adults to learn new creative ways of thinking about the community. It challenged young people to speak more freely with adults and to gain a greater understanding for community policy making, as well as community strategic planning. Having young people and adults present in the group discussions also allowed participants to learn that democratic discussion does not always mean that everyone will agree with one another; rather, it is an opportunity to hear different opinions and respect one another in the process of discussion.

Adults had greater difficulty expressing initial respect than the young people. Having greater dialog with adults when training them to facilitate group work with young people was described to possibly assist in developing a greater level of mutuality from the beginning of the discussions.

Participation of all members within the group contributed to the experience as well. How the facilitator designed the group experience to be influenced how participative individuals were within the discussion. The more encouraging the facilitator was with individuals, the more group members tended to participate. Leadership roles assigned to group members were described to possibly enhance the level of youth participation because the role placed a greater sense of ownership or responsibility on individuals and connecting it to their responsibility to the community.

As group member's participation tended to develop into deeper levels of conversation, the dialog grew towards a level of *deliberation* within the group discussion. As mutual respect grew among members, participants felt more open to present different opinions and process how the opinions be beneficial or not beneficial for the community. The deliberation process allowed individuals to draw closer to conceptualizing a greater purpose for the discussions; that the discussions were not something just to be shared within the present discussion but a discussion needing to continue into further discussions that then transpired into strategies for the community to consider on a larger scale. The level of deliberation began to transform into a sense of *hope* that the community would not only listen to the recommendations brought forth from the group discussions, but that the community would take action on the recommendations presented to them.

Whether or not participants perceived the *community* taking *action* on the recommendations presented to them, was the final contributing element for individuals involved in the experience. Individuals who did not believe the community would take action on the recommendations were

less likely to continue with the project. As individuals personally heard and saw that community leaders were taking action on the recommendations, individual commitment to the project and community grew stronger. Both young people and adults developed a greater understanding and sense of responsibility to their community when they felt their voice did make a difference and change was possible when actively engaged in making decisions for their community.

Meaning Developed From The Experiences. Meaning within the process of civic engagement developed when participants gained a greater understanding for the *broader spectrum* of the purpose. A greater sense of civic engagement also developed as participants perceived their *voice* to be valued in the process and felt *empowered* to contribute to the community, which ultimately assisted in *building community relations*. Participants were more civically engaged when they felt *opportunities* were in the future for themselves in the community, as well as in the personal lessons learned being a part of the project. The more participants were able to understand how the Youth Partnership Project connected to the Sustainable Communities Project, the more likely they were to perceive a *broader spectrum* for how both projects connected to the greater good of the community at large and the community's future. Community relations between young people and adults enhanced as more opportunities to interact and engage in dialog grew. A broader perspective for the purpose of the project grew when young people and community members and leaders were both present in the group discussions. Young people were less likely to connect the school event to the greater community when they did not have the opportunity to engage themselves in discussions with community leaders. Young people were also more likely to find meaning within discussions with community leaders making a connection to what role they personally could have within the community now. A broader spectrum for the project was captured when understanding how youth voice, youth-adult partnerships and community relations connected with one another.

Participants described the experience meaningful when sharing *voice* was encouraged and young people felt *empowered* to become actively involved in their community. Youth *voice* and *empowerment* meant the youth believed they could make a difference in their community by being a part of the decisions being made for their community's future. Both adults and young people felt empowered because of the opportunity provided to all participants to voice their opinions and feel heard within the process. A genuine care for others made their own experiences more meaningful. As participants developed a sense of empowerment within the process, adults were more likely to develop a greater sense of responsibility to better meet the needs of the young people in the community. As the young people observed the adults developing a greater sense of responsibility to meet their needs, the young people developed a greater sense of responsibility for their community as well.

As young people and adults began to develop a greater sense of responsibility for their community, participants gradually became more aware of the importance for *building community relations* and how community relations will assist in developing a sustainable community. Youth and adults called the process meaningful because they made the connection for how the schools and the community could help one another and learn within the process. Building community relations between businesses, governmental agencies, and schools contributed to the development of an interdependent relationship between entities creating a greater sense of belonging in the community. Although adults were a part of the process, both youth and adults who participated in the project desired more participation of parents. Participants believed having a greater number of community members, specifically parents, involved in the process would have made the experience more meaningful.

How the experience was structured provided youth and adults an equal *opportunity* to be heard. Adults valued the new and creative ideas the young people contributed to the discussions.

Past experiences and preconceived notions about youth and adults tended to change when mutual respect was present within the group experience. The synergy created between the young people and adults tended to encourage the adults to focus on how to provide more opportunities to engage the youth in youth-adult partnerships.

Finally, participants were more civically engaged in the process when they were able to describe *lessons learned* within their experiences. Participants learned about themselves as well as what role they could or should have within the community. Participants learned that change takes time and that it is important to persevere through times of change in order to overcome obstacles that may get in the way of creating a positive change for the community. Participants also found it meaningful that youth and adults were able to learn from one another during the group discussions, which tended to enhance the development of an interdependent relationship between the people and their connection with the community. Participants also learned that there is a greater need for community leaders and young people to have more interactions with one another. Adults learned that young people do care about their community and young people learned that adults care whether they participate in making decisions for their community.

Discussion and Implications

A proposed civic-engagement model and collaborative learning methods for how to engage youth as equal partners in shared decision-making emerged from the framework design and phenomenon of the Youth Partnership Project conducted through the secondary school system in Martin County, North Carolina. Similar to the experiences of participants who participated in the National 4-H Council's, *Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century* (2002), individual's participation and engagement within the experiences varied; however, a mutual theme that threaded through them was his or her perception of being a part of

something bigger than him or herself. This larger than life mentality led individuals toward a greater sense of commitment to the discussion, being open to new and varying viewpoints, feeling empowered, and believing he or she could make a difference in their community.

Although society tends to perceive youth lacking the desire to interact with adults or wanting to make a significant contribution to their community, Tell (2000) proposes this notion is a misperception. She suggests the opportunity for youth and adults to interact is beneficial to one's cognitive development. Larson (2000) speaks to an adolescent's development contributing to intellectual enhancement. However, limited opportunities exist for adolescents to experience societal support and opportunities to enhance their cognitive development within practices involving youth and adult decision-making. Western society provides limited opportunity for adolescent responsibility, yet when society considers someone to be at an adult age, he or she is expected to be independent and is expected to take control of life responsibilities.

Through the phenomenon of this Youth Partnership Project, a sense of responsibility was established because expectations of objectives being met and an opportunity to make recommendations for their community were provided within the experience. The civic engagement model used within the case study supported cognitive development practices and the discussions led adolescents and adults to have the opportunity to practice initiative and enhance his or her intellectual knowledge on the topic of meeting youth needs in a way that will enhance him or herself and the community (Kumar, 1996). The excitement of being a part of developing a Sustainable Communities Plan for their community allowed the youth an opportunity to experience Brookfield and Preskill's (1999) dispositions of democratic discussion. Although Brookfield and Preskill's dispositions refer to democratic discussion in the classroom, the conceptual framework described in the current study supports the model providing effective and

meaningful collaborative experiences, forming a proposed civic engagement model (refer to figure 2).

Higher Education

Education institutions and communities have gradually resurfaced the need to revitalize citizenship, civic vitality and social responsibility in order for our society to become more civic-minded. The most commonly used source to determine the index of civic engagement is voter participation. Younger people continue to vote less than older citizens. With two-thirds of high school students continuing on to postsecondary education, the need for higher education to address civic engagement is important to the sustainability of our democratic society (Schneider, 2001). The current study explored how a partnership between North Carolina State University, Audubon International, and a high school system in a rural community could engage its community in making decisions to sustain it's community. The Office of Extension and Engagement drew a connection between the need to engage young people, who tend to be left out of community decision-making, because of the breadth of community contact the project reach through the school system (youth, administrators, teachers, parents, and community members).

New disciplines in higher education, like Environmental Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, Continuing Education Centers, and others, are inclined to utilize knowledge to advance the perceptions of needed changes in the development of society, whereas established disciplines within higher education have gradually focused less on civic issues (Bender, 1997). Newly established fields of study implement specific curricula to “foster forms of learning that are engaged, action-oriented, and hands-on” (p. 4). Learning methods include: collaborative inquiry; experiential learning; service-learning; project-based learning; and integrative learning (Schneider, 2001). The current study was constructed using collaborative methods within the decision-making process that support Schneider's research.

Greater emphasis has also been focused on the partnerships created between higher and secondary education institutions. Higher education institutes are encouraged to organize their campuses that link them to the community, promoting resources available through the institution and higher education assisted community school sites located on the campus (Benson & Harkavy, 2002). Checkoway (2001) proposes that research-based institutions have a significant value in being able to contribute to civic engagement, contributing to greater student learning, faculty involvement, enhancing “institutional capacity,” and connecting democratic practices and diversity as meaningful educational goals. The current study’s research supports the possibility for higher education institutes to contend to community needs through the utilization of campus resources.

Community Agencies

The collaborative methods and proposed civic engagement model documented here have implications for creating a culture of respect and partnership with youth as equal partners. Hughes and Curnan’s (2000) logic model threads outcomes to program strategies. This model supports principles of Community Youth Development (CYD) whereby youth are involved in their own development. Youth are viewed as partners with adults, which assists in creating a culture of respect, partnership and appreciation among members. CYD’s principles view youth as having strengths and societal rights, as well as youth viewing the world without boundaries.

Although research suggests youth and adult partnerships essential in developing youth systems (National 4-H Council, 1997; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Hughes & Curnan, 2000), most frameworks are designed with a “diagnostic problem model” approach to youth development. This approach is not supportive of youth developing healthy practices, enhancing intellectual development, or positive peer or adult relationships. Programs need to make conscious efforts to engage youth in the process. Making sure that young people have a place to be heard and feel engaged in the process will be imperative to learning outcomes (Kurth-Schai,

1988). Such practices will assist in changing the paradigm shift from a culture of non-partnership to a culture of viewing youth as equal partners in youth adult decision-making activities. “Youth voice is not about young people taking over. It is about young people and adults working together in partnerships based on mutual respect” (Beilenson, 1993, p. 11). Community agencies that embrace a civic engagement model, which fosters an equal partnership between youth and adults, incorporating collaborative methods instilling hospitality, participation, and deliberation will tend to lead to more meaningful experiences for those participating, as well as greater commitment.

Further Research

Higher education, secondary education and community agencies are focusing on the need to engage their targeted populations in becoming more civic-minded and socially responsible within their communities. The current study found that involving young people in community decision-making through their schools provided a greater outreach of civic-engagement for the community. Research needs to continue exploring how communities engage all their citizens in making decisions concerning their community (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996); how involving youth and adults in collaborative decision-making concerning their community may contribute to transformative learning (Taylor, 1998); and how future communities who embark on developing a sustainable community (Winer & Ray, 2000) can utilize the civic-engagement model proposed in the current study.

Conclusion

Research expresses the need for society to develop ways, which will encourage civic responsibility. As the need to educate and encourage citizens to be more civic-minded increases,

higher education, communities and agencies need to learn more meaningful ways to engage constituencies in the process that will result in greater civic responsibility. The purpose of this study was to explore the process of how leaders initiate developing a sustainable community development plan engaging their young people in the community. Utilizing collaborative learning methods, while emphasizing specific learned skills (attributes) within small groups, tended to enhance both youth and adult experiences within the process. Although the study did not set out to develop a model for engaging citizens in decision-making, participant descriptions contributed to developing a civic engagement model.

Figure 2a. Reno's Conceptual Framework for Enhanced Civic Engagement

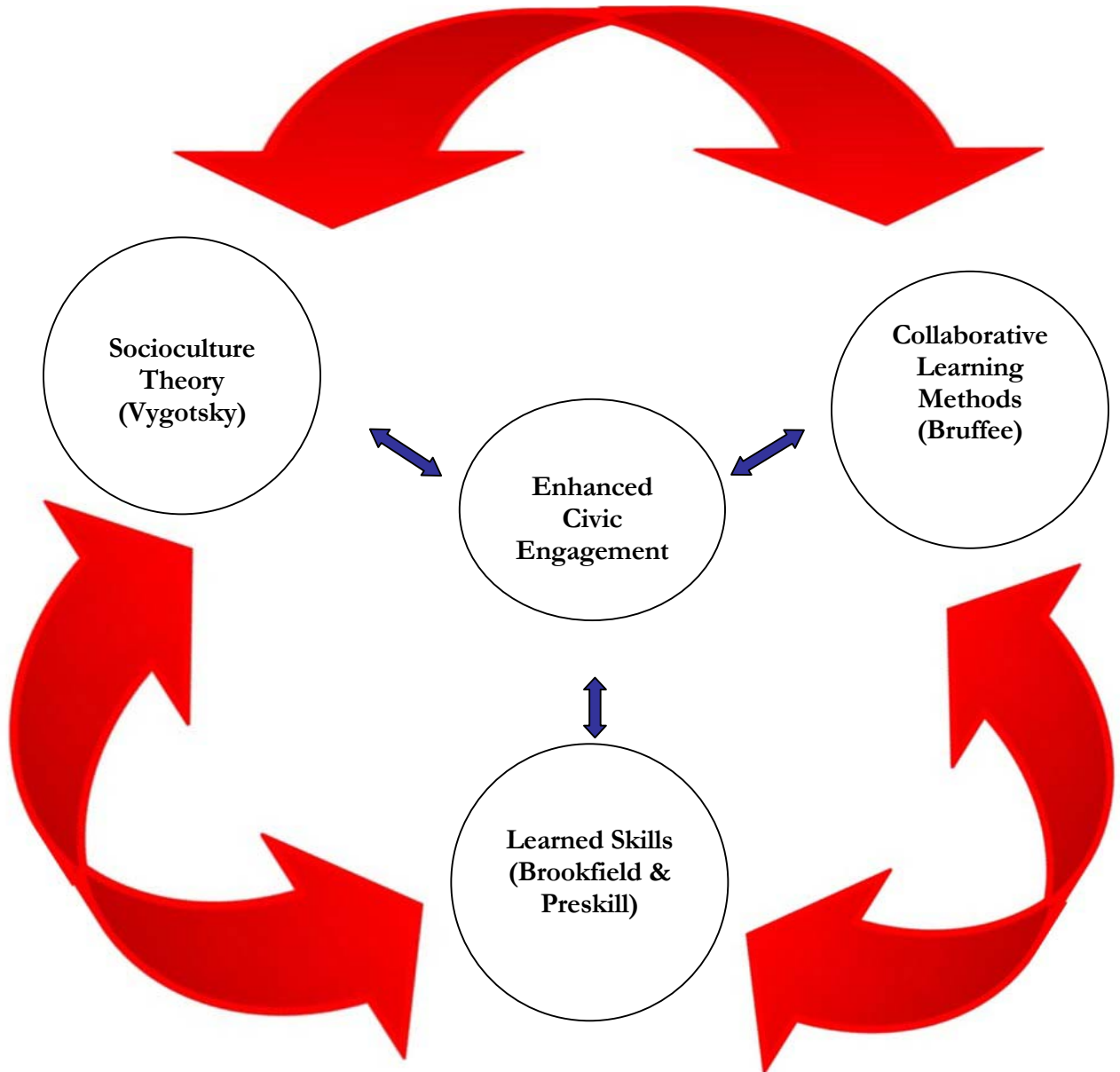
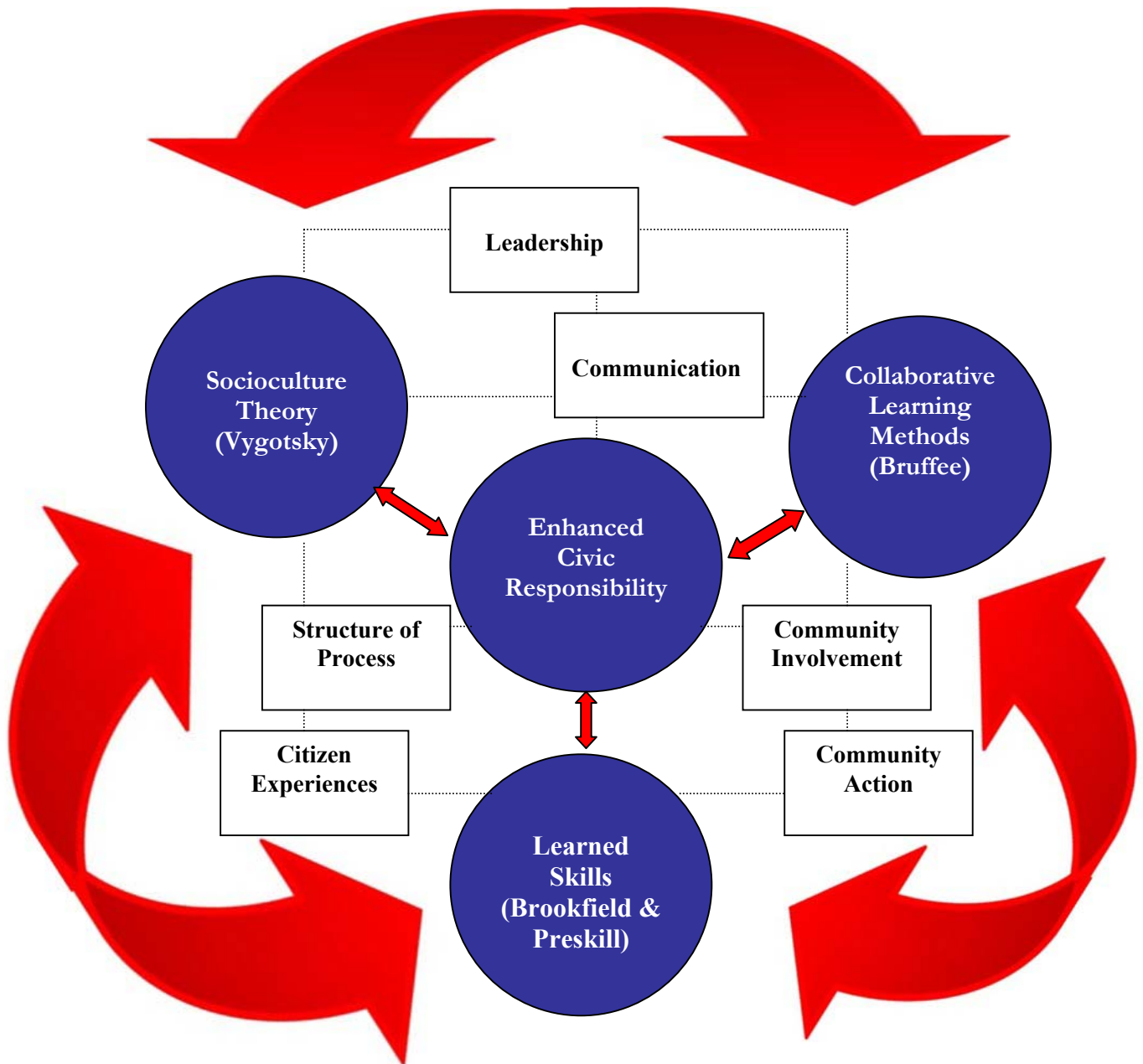


Figure 2b. Reno's Proposed Elements to Enhance Civic Responsibility



APPENDICES

**Sustainable Community Partnership Project
Youth Partnership – Martin County
Time Line**

- **6 January** – Letters went home to parents with report cards inviting them to participate in his or her student’s school event
- **7 January** – Williamston and Roanoke H.S. provided consent forms to students again to take home for parental permission; I spoke to Williamston H.S. students and teachers over Channel 1 concerning the survey, project and process of events (8:00am) during homeroom
- **14 January** – Williamston and Roanoke H.S. students who returned consent forms completed surveys
- **15 January** – Community Workshop (3:15 pm at Telecenter)
- **15 January** – Committee Meeting at Telecenter (6 pm)
- **16 January** – Roanoke H.S. – facilitator training (3:15 pm)
- **16 January** – Community Workshop (6 pm at Telecenter)
- **17 January** – Jamesville H.S. – facilitator training (1:30-2:00 pm)
- **23 January** – Jamesville H.S. – Orientation meeting for project and process (2:15-3:00 pm)
- **30 January** – Jamesville H.S. – First Small Group Session (9:30-10:15 am)
- **4 February** – Jamesville H.S. – Second Small Group Session (8:45-9:30 am)
- **10 February** – Bear Grass H.S. – Speak at PTA Meeting about project and process (7 pm)
- **11 February** – Bear Grass H.S. – First Small Group Session (1:30-2:15 pm); Second Small Group Session (2:15-3:00 pm)
- **12 February** – Bear Grass H.S. – Wrap-up Sessions (7-9th – 8:30-9:15 am; 10-12th – 10-10:45 am)
- **12 February** – Jamesville H.S. – Wrap-up Sessions (7-9th – 1:30-2:00 pm; 10-12th – 2:15-3:00 pm)
- **13 February** – Roanoke H.S. – First Small Group Session (9:30-10:15 am); Second Small Group Session (10:15-11:00 am)
- **28 February** – Williamston H.S. – Overview of project and process (8-8:20 am); First Small Group Session (8:30-9:15 am); Second Small Group Session (9:15-9:45 am); Large Group Session (10-10:45 am)

APPENDIX B

Youth Assessment on Community Environment (YACE)

The purpose of the YACE survey is to provide youth a voice in assessing current perceptions of the community and identifying needs the community should consider to assist in developing a sustainable community where people will want to continue to live in the future. The survey is designed on a five point likert scale (**Strongly Agree (SA)**, **Agree (A)**, **Neutral (N)**, **Disagree (D)**, and **Strongly Disagree (SD)**). Please read the following questions carefully and answer the questions to the best of your ability.

Environment

- 1 Keeping the community clean is important to me
- 2 I am satisfied with the community transportation services available to me
- 3 Educating the community on how air pollution and other environmental factors affect the environment is important to me
- 4 Preserving water quality in the community is important to me
- 5 There is enough open/green space in the community
- 6 I have access to healthcare services if I need them
- 7 I believe it is important to provide healthcare services to all members in the community
- 8 I believe more green space needs to be available for recreation areas in the community
- 9 I believe it is important to bring in more businesses to better meet the needs of our community and encourage people to stay here
- 10 I believe it is important to provide better housing and maintenance to homes within the community

Community

- 11 I am satisfied with the school activities that are available to me (i.e., chorus, band, football, drama, etc.)
- 12 The variety of activities available to me in the community meet my needs (i.e., Scouts, church, 4-H, etc.)
- 13 The school works with outside agencies to best meet the needs of the students (i.e., after-school programming, health education, etc.)
- 14 It is important to volunteer in the community
- 15 The people in my community care about what happens in the community
- 16 The people in my community care about each other
- 17 The amount of crime in the community is of concern to me
- 18 I am aware of leadership opportunities I can be involved with in the community
- 19 I volunteer in the community if I knew where to go for information
- 20 I am proud to live in my community
- 21 I am more likely to give respect to a person when I am given respect as well
- 22 I have at least one positive adult role model in my life

Life Long Education

- 23 The use of up-to-date technology is available to me in school
- 24 I am satisfied with the educational resources the community provides to meet my needs
- 25 The school library resources meet my needs
- 26 The community library resources meet my needs
- 27 Meeting the student educational needs is important to my school
- 28 I plan on furthering my education in the local community college after completing high school
- 29 I plan on attending a four-year institution after completing my high school education
- 30 Keeping current in my field will be important to me after I complete my education
- 31 I believe the local community will meet my professional needs
- 32 My family culture and personal experiences within the community contribute to my learning
- 33 I have access to learn a trade and be skilled in a profession (i.e., Auto mechanics, hair design, electrical, etc.)

Amenities

- 34 I participate in structured activities after school (i.e., work, volunteer, school activities, etc.)
- 35 I believe cultural differences are respected in the community
- 36 There is a uniqueness in the community that is important to continue generation to generation
- 37 I am satisfied with the amount of recreational opportunities available to me in the local community
- 38 I am satisfied with the number of events the community holds for everyone to attend each year
- 39 I am satisfied with the events the community provides for family entertainment
- 40 The community has an established safe place for youth to hang out
- 41 I believe it is my responsibility to contribute to bettering my community environment
- 42 There are resources in the community that I can go to for help when I need it

Customized Questions Specific to Community

43 What career choice(s) are you currently considering?

Accountant/Bookkeeper	Actor/Actress
Agriculture	Architecture
Artist/Musician	Biologist
Biotechnology	Business
Cashier	Computer Programmer
Construction	Cook/Chef
Doctor	Electrician
Electronics	Engineer
Finance/Banking	Fireman
Forestry/Timber	Government
IT/Data Processing	Lawyer
Librarian	Manager
Manufacturing	Mechanic

Military	Natural Resource Manager
Newspaper/Television/Media Specialist	
Nurse/Radiologist Specialists	Pastor/Minister
Pharmacist	Photographer
Pilot	Police Officer
Psychologist/Psychiatrist	Real Estate
Receptionist	Retail/Salesperson
Scientist	Secretary
Social Worker/Public Services	Teacher
Truck Driver	Veterinarian
Waiter/Waitress	Other

44 My plans after high school are to:
 work full-time and live out of the local community
 work in local community full-time and live in local community
 work in local community part-time and pursue further education
 attend local community college
 attend 4-year institution and live in local community
 attend 4-year institution away from local community
 attend a specialty school for hair design, fashion, culinary, etc.
 enter military service
 other

45 If I plan to leave the community to pursue further education out of the local community, I:
 plan to return to the local community once I have accomplished my goals
 plan to live somewhere else within the state
 plan to live out of the state

46 Please rank the following items of greatest need for the community to focus on (1- being greatest need and 6 - being least need):

Having access to healthcare	1 2 3 4 5 6
Having a clean environment	1 2 3 4 5 6
Having open space to play	1 2 3 4 5 6
Living in safe neighborhoods	1 2 3 4 5 6
Having access to good education resources	1 2 3 4 5 6
Having access to safe recreational facilities	1 2 3 4 5 6

47 Gender

Male
 Female

48 Race/Ethnicity

African American
 Asian American
 Caucasian
 Hispanic
 Native American
 Other

49 Year in School

7th
 8th
 9th
 10th
 11th
 12th

Sponsored Programs and
Regulatory Compliance
Campus Box 7514
1 Leazar Hall
Raleigh, NC 27695-7514

919.515.7721 (fax)

**From: Debra A. Paxton, IRB Administrator
North Carolina State University
Institutional Review Board**

Date: September 25, 2002

**Project Title: Williamston/Martin County, North Carolina; Sustainable Communities
Project – Youth Partnership**

IRB#:192-02-9

Dear Ms. Reno:

The project listed above has been reviewed in accordance with expedited review procedures under Addendum 46 FR8392 of 45 CFR 46 and is approved for one year. **This protocol expires on September 16, 2003, and will need continuing review before that date.**

NOTE:

1. This board complies with requirements found in Title 45 part 46 of The Code of Federal Regulations. For NCSU the Assurance Number is: M1263; the IRB Number is: 01XM.
2. The IRB must be notified of any changes that are made to this study.
3. Your approval for this study lasts for one year from the review date. If your study extends beyond that time, including data analysis, you must obtain continuing review from the IRB.

Please provide your faculty sponsor with a copy of this letter. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Debra Paxton, NCSU IRB

APPENDIX D

October 8, 2002

Dear Parents and Students,

Martin County and the Town of Williamston are creating a sustainable community plan. By viewing our problems as one community, we hope to better address the issues community members believe to be important.

Martin County wants to ask local community members to help in creating a Sustainable Community Plan, and we are very interested in using students' opinions to guide our decision-makers now and in the future.

We all know we need more and better jobs and economic development, but we feel other factors are just as important. We hope your family can take part in making long-term decisions to help improve our quality of life, while maintaining our community's environmental resources.

To help us do this, we would like your high school student to be a partner in this effort.

To begin this process, we are asking students to complete a survey. The Youth Assessment on Community Environment (YACE) survey will give us a profile of Martin County's needs. The 49-question survey -- to be filled out during the school day -- will ask students about their feelings on the environment, quality of life, educational resources and career options. However, the survey is only the beginning of this youth partnership. We will use the findings during a Youth Partnership Forum (a town meeting) for all students during school. At this forum, students will discuss community concerns and develop a list of needs and strategies to include in the final Sustainable Community Plan.

The Youth Partnership, YACE and the Youth Partnership Forum are sponsored with the collaboration of Dr. Tom Daly, Martin County Schools superintendent; high school principals; the 4-H Youth Development Department at N.C. State University and Martin County Cooperative Extension; and Audubon International.

We hope you will carefully consider this opportunity to help plan for our community's future. Your child won't be able to participate in the Youth Partnership until he or she returns the enclosed consent form. It explains the project, what we expect of the students and the project's process.

We hope you and your family will become involved in the county project as it progresses.

Regards,

Deborah Reno
4-H Youth Development
N.C. State University

Dr. Tom Daly
Superintendent
Martin County

Danny Butler
4-H Agent
Martin County

APPENDIX D
North Carolina State University
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Study: PHENOMENOLOGICAL CASE STUDY: EXPLORING THE PROCESS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Principal Investigator: Deborah L. Reno

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Conrad Glass, ACCE in College of Education

You are invited to participate in a research study. Martin County is engaging in developing a Sustainable Community Plan for the present and future of the community. With the collaboration of the Superintendent of schools and staff, the Department of 4-H Youth Development at N.C. State, Audubon International, and the local Cooperative Extension Service, a Youth Assessment on Community Environment will be conducted in each of the local high schools (four) in the Winter of 2003. Participants of the study will be a part of the individual school events. The school events will consist of small group discussions identifying needs and ideas to better the community's future. Focusing on:

- a. Environment: Focusing on Natural Resources (water quality and preservation, and economic development) and Human Resources (social/welfare and transportation);
- b. Community: Focusing on people, public involvement, and crime;
- c. Life Long Education: Focusing on schools, jobs, technology, and continuing education;
- d. Amenities: Focusing on facilities, preservation of culture, recreation, and events;

INFORMATION

1. Procedures of Study: The individual will be asked to keep a journal, answering questions provided by the researcher (Debbie Reno). The participants will be asked to participate in two interviews. One interview will be conducted before the school event and the second interview will be conducted after the school event. Participants will be asked for the interviews to be audio taped each time of interview.
2. The questions being asked of the participants will focus on his or her involvement in the small group discussions, interactions within the experience, and interactions with youth and adults.
3. The information collected from the interviews will be used to identify how the process of community decision-making can be more beneficial to all participants involved in the process.
4. The participant will have the opportunity to review his or her transcript of the interviews to approve the accuracy of the recording of the interview.

RISKS

- There should be no risks to the subject for completing this survey.

BENEFITS

The benefits of participating in this project will be the following:

- Providing input to Martin County on the needs of youth in the community
- Being a part of making decisions, which affect youth in the community
- Having a voice in determining what the individual wants the community to be in the future

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept strictly confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link you to the study.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Debbie Reno, at 4-H Youth Development, NCSU-Box 7606, Raleigh, NC 27695, or (919) 515-8484. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Matthew Zingraff, Chair of the NCSU IRB for the Use of Human Subjects in Research Committee, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-1834) or Mr. Matthew Ronning, Assistant Vice Chancellor, Research Administration, Box 7514, NCSU Campus (919/513-2148).

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

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

Subject’s Name (please print) _____

Subject's signature _____ Date _____

Parental Permission

“I have read and understand the above information and agree to allow my child to participate in this study.”

Parent/Guardian Name (please print) _____

Parent/Guardian signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX E: Facilitator's Guide

Sustainable Community:

Sustainable Community Partnership Martin County



**Williamston H.S.
Sustainable Gathering 2003**

Property of Reno

Dear Facilitator:

Imagine 1500 people—youth and adults—gathering across the county taking part in discussion about how youth and adults can make a difference in preserving their community. This dream is about to become a reality through the Sustainable Community Partnership Martin County is in the process of participating.

The Youth Partnership Project component of the Sustainable Community Partnership between Martin County and the Town of Williamston, Audubon International, N.C. State University, and Cooperative Extension in Martin County, is designed to have maximum impact in a concentrated period of time. We believe engaging youth and adults, as partners, is the most powerful way to take action that truly impacts the whole community. The results of these Gatherings, part of the Youth Partnership Project, will be shared with local community members, officials, and the Steering Committee for the Sustainable Community Partnership project for Martin County.

The Facilitator's Guide was written for volunteer leaders who may be facilitating for the first time. Admittedly, individuals with more facilitation experience will not need this much detail.

The purpose of the Facilitator's Guide is to:

- Prepare the facilitators to successfully conduct the small group session at the event
- Suggest procedures to get local input while maintaining uniformity across the county

We know that facilitating groups can be complex and requires a unique set of skills. We greatly appreciate your willingness to serve as a facilitator for this collaborative event. When youth and adults feel they have been heard, they will be more committed to participating in developing a better future for their community, which hopefully will lead to sustaining the community.

Thank you for your commitment and involvement in the Youth Partnership Project!

Property of Reno (2003)

Table of Contents

Letter to Facilitators	2
Introduction	
Facts	3
Guiding Principles	4
Responsibilities	4
Goals	4
Before the Event	5
During the Event	6
Questions for Facilitating Discussions	7
Guiding the Discussion	7
Appendix I: Attributes within Group Work	13
Appendix II:	
Central Question	16
Elements of Sustainability	16
Environment	16
Community	17
Lifelong Education	18
Amenities	19

Property of Reno

Facts:

- The Youth Partnership Project is a component of the Sustainable Communities Partnership Martin County and the Town of Williamston is doing within the county. Unlike any previous efforts to better the community, this project is inviting all citizens to be actively a part of identifying needs in the community as well as identifying what makes the community unique and special; an environment, which you enjoy being a part.

The purpose of the individual high school gathering is to begin educating youth on what sustainability is and defining what sustainability would mean to them if they were to continue living in the community (refer to Appendix II - Sustainability). During the gathering, discussions will focus on identifying actions that will increase the potential for making a difference in the lives of youth and enhance youth's desire to continue living in the community once they complete high school and/or educational goals.

- High school students, parents, teachers, community members, political and business leaders and others will be invited to participate in the high school Gathering sessions. The groups will identify the most important actions that will assist in creating a sustainable community plan for Martin County and the Town of Williamston.
- After each high school Gathering, a report will be created that highlights the most important actions and describes examples of sustainability projects the high school has identified will be prepared and submitted to assist in designing the Sustainable Communities Summit. The purpose of the Sustainable Communities Summit is designed to assist in creating final recommendations for the Sustainability Communities Plan from local citizens associated with the high school system.

Property of Reno (2003)

Guiding Principles for Facilitators

As a facilitator of the Sustainable Communities High School Gatherings, I will . . .

- Facilitate the process in a uniform manner including involvement of students and adults, seeking input and reporting results so that the results will be reported as consistently as possible across the county.
- Focus on actions that can be taken to assist our high school and community in becoming a sustainable community.

Responsibilities of Facilitators

- Participate in an orientation for facilitating the Sustainable Communities High School Gathering.
- Participate in the Sustainable Communities High School Gathering.
- Facilitate a small group session at the Sustainable Communities High School Gathering.
- Assist as needed in developing a report of actions resulting from the high school gathering.
- Participate in the Sustainable Communities Summit and facilitate during the event if time allows.

Goals of the High School Gatherings

- To begin and **continue dialogue** about what sustainability should be in your community.
- To increase awareness of youth needs in the community regarding sustainability.
- To identify new youth development **strategies**.
- To increase **communication** about and **commitment** towards youth meeting youth needs in the community.
- Preserve community heritage important to youth.

Property of Reno (2003)

BEFORE THE EVENT: MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

Materials Needed

Make signs for each room to identify the theme area the groups will be discussing in the room. The themes are: 1) Environment; 2) Community; 3) Lifelong Education; and 4) Amenities.

For each theme you can add descriptors. Use the following descriptors:

- Environment: Natural Resources (water quality and preservation; and economic development) and Human Resources (social/welfare and transportation)
- Community: People, public involvement and crime
- Life-long Education: Schools, jobs, technology and continuing education
- Amenities: Facilities, preservation of culture (heritage), recreation and events

Small Group Arrangements

- There will be one student and adult facilitator per classroom, one teacher to assist the facilitators in leading discussion, and one student to assist with writing down what is being discussed in the group.
- **If possible, arrange the chairs in a circle. If the room has tables, arrange the chairs around tables (if there are tables in the room). This will allow participants to write opinions down on paper.**
- For each group, pieces of paper will be provided to participants to use during the discussion, as well as information and guidelines to start the discussion.

Property of Reno (2003)

DURING THE EVENT: THE WORKING AGENDA

Description:

A group of students, parents, volunteers, teachers, and community members will participate in the Sustainable Communities Gathering. Every high school student will be a part of the discussion. The meeting will include an overview session, small group discussions with and a closing session. The event should last approximately three hours.

The small group session will focus on identifying action steps that can be taken to enhance sustainable community efforts in the community. Results of the Sustainable Communities Gathering will be framed around four themes: 1) Environment; 2) Community; 3) Life Long Education; 4) Amenities

Time Line of Sustainable Communities Gathering February 27th:

- 7:45-7:55 am – Homeroom-Channel One-Daily Announcements
- 7:55-8:10 am – Introductions and Overview via Channel One
- 8:10-8:12 am – Introduction of Facilitator in classrooms by teachers
- 8:12-9:12 am – First Group Session
(Topics for Discussion:
Environment and Educational Resources)
- 9:12-9:21 am – Break
- 9:21-10:21 am – Second Group Session
(Topics for Discussion:
Quality of Life and Career Options)
- 10:21-11:00 am – Closing Session (Library)
(Shown via Channel One)

Property of Reno (2003)

Question for Facilitating Small Group Discussions:

1. "What elements need to be present in the [environment] for the community to be sustainable?"
 - We want to know what actions we can take in this community to address this question. At first, you will work individually and silently. After a few minutes, participants should be asked to share action ideas with the rest of the group.
 - Here's how it will work: Using the blank paper provided for each small group, write action ideas on the sheets.

Suggestions for Guiding the Discussion:

- Using the paper provided, the recorder will write down the ideas presented from group members while the facilitators guide the group discussion.
- To begin the discussion, ask members to go around the group and state what is written on individual papers. The facilitator may encourage the group members to start with an action word such as create, build, establish, or develop and then add the action idea.
- Next, choose up to five of the ideas presented and discussed to use for examples.
- After each group member has shared their ideas, open the group to discuss why each idea is important and how this will help the community.

Examples of Ideas and Action Plans:

- Idea: Provide more knowledge base employment opportunities for youth in schools

Property of Reno (2003)

- Action: Incorporate “Job Ready” at all high schools in County.
 - Advertising Agency hire youth for inputting computer data
- Idea: Environmental Preservation
 - Action: Start a recycling program in our high school.
 - Action: Enforce regular maintenance of retention ponds
 - Action: Increase publicity for car pooling to decrease air pollution

Steps: Encourage the participants to write as many action ideas as they can. Ask if there are any questions before they begin. Tell them to begin. Let them work for 5 minutes by themselves. When 3 minutes have passed, announce that they have two more minutes to complete their action ideas. The facilitators should open discussion with each member reading to the rest of the group what was written down on their piece of paper.

Writing Action Ideas

Steps:

1. Announce that they will be sharing their action ideas but not discussing them just yet. Beginning at one point of the-circle, ask the first person to read their action ideas aloud. Next, take the paper from them to give to the person who has been identified as the recorder for the group.
2. Remind participants in the group that it is important for all members in the group to have an opportunity to share their ideas first before everyone expands on their ideas.

Property of Reno (2003)

Probing Questions

1. This method requires more skills on the part of the facilitator. It involves asking a few probing questions so that the group reflects on the action ideas being presented. The discussion will be focused around a more thoughtful, emotional side of the action ideas and the impact the action may have on the students, families or communities. Be careful that the discussion does not extend beyond the time allowed!
2. It is best not to ask questions that only can be answered with a “yes” or “no” response. Pose the question thoughtfully and then patiently wait for the responses. You do not need to ask all of the questions suggested. Probes are only used to jump start the conversation and to help people make sense of the ideas presented.
 - a. These questions tend to begin with Why, How, What and Where.
3. Be sure that everyone is included in the discussion. If someone is silent ask gently “(NAME) what would you like to add to this discussion?”
4. Suggested probes to begin the conversation:
 - a. “Looking at what has been written down, what is your initial thought?” “Which action ideas catch

Property of Reno (2003)

Voting on Top Five Priorities

Steps:

1. After everyone in the group have had an opportunity to talk about action ideas he or she believe to be important for the community, the participants will need to vote on which action ideas are most important to them. The instructions should be clearly worded so they understand what to do.
 - a. The facilitators will need to assist the recorder in writing down the action ideas most important to the group.
 - b. The action ideas need to be clearly written in a way that other individuals reading it will be able to understand what the group is trying to say is important to them.
2. In the small group, participants are asked to vote for the five action ideas they consider most important for their desired future.
3. The facilitator will bring the complete list from the group to the Youth Partnerships Coordinator to assist in the large group session.
4. Once the large group reconvenes, a facilitator from each group will report to the large group.
5. After each group reports from group discussions, the Youth Partnerships Coordinator will assist the large group in identifying the top five action ideas under each Sustainable Communities theme.
6. The group will then be called on to vote on the top five priorities.

Instructions for Returning to the Large Group (Includes a 15 minute break)

Steps:

1. Ask the group if they have any comments about the process or the results of the voting. Be careful not to let this develop into a long discussion. Most people will be ready for a break! Express a light-hearted but sincere appreciation for the efforts of the small group participants. Ask them to return to the large group within 10 minutes.

Property of Reno (2003)

Implementation of Attributes within Small Group

Implementing specific attributes in small group discussions assist in the conversation being more open. There are nine attributes reported to assist in group discussion. They are: (1) hospitality, (2) participation; (3) mindfulness, (4) humility, (5) mutuality, (6) deliberation; (7) appreciation; (8) hope and faith; and (9) autonomy. Discussion assists all members in feeling he or she is contributing to the topic being discussed. Attributes present in conversation address what needs to be present within the setting but also personal responsibility of those involved in the discussion. Although the learning method may take longer to cover topics, it is suggested that learners are more likely to remember the material being discussed if they are a part of creating the topic of conversation. The nine attributes will be explained in greater detail below:

1. **Hospitality** - The environment needs to support openness for participants to talk freely, reflecting mutual respect and interest for learning new ideas. Hospitality also supports the willingness of participants to address questions.
2. **Participation** - The more individuals engaged in the discussion, the more memorable the learning experience will be for all those involved in the process. They suggest small group interactions to assist individuals who may not otherwise feel comfortable to speak in large groups. Individuals may feel freer to speak more openly in the small group setting. Individual comments need to be perceived as valued contributions to the conversation. Those who are guiding the discussion, can encourage the presence of participation by asking follow-up questions, rephrasing statements spoken, clarifying ideas, and/or bridging different points of views to draw connections between group member discussion.
3. **Mindfulness** - Being mindful in conversation consists of individuals being completely engaged in what others are saying within the discussion. It is important to listen patiently to others

and to assist the conversation not to become fixated on topics that only pertain to a few members in the group.

2. **Humility** - The willingness of an individual to admit his or her lack on knowledge. It also involves individuals being aware of what others can contribute to the conversation and believing he or she can learn from all situations, as well as others within the situations.
3. **Mutuality** - Acting with mutuality means individuals recognize how their own development is dependent of others development within the experience. Mutuality consists of individuals considering all the resources available to them being valuable within the context of learning and that all participants are important resources for the learning process. When all opinions are received in a manner or addressed in a manner that is non-defensive, participant confidence is raised. When confidence level is enhanced, individuals are more likely to feel they can learn from the experience.
4. **Deliberation** - Deliberation (equal time to speak) within the discussion encourages individuals to participate in expressing points of view. However, the expression should be one, which is supported with true evidence and knowledge on the topic being discussed. The conversation should be presented in a manner of respect for those engaged in the dialog. Deliberation should be reflective in thought and all participants should have collaborative involvement in the airtime.
5. **Appreciation** - Appreciation received by individuals within the conversation assists people to draw closer to one another, as well as raise level of trust within the group. Appreciation also assists in building community amongst the group and motivates individuals to participate more in the conversation. A practice of appreciation is for individuals to make positive comments about what someone has said within the conversation, as well as agreeing with what someone has said in the discussion.

1. **Hope and Faith** - Without individual's feeling a sense of *hope* and having *faith* in the experience, the ability for the experience to be meaningful is minimized. Without hope and faith, it is suggested there would be no need to continue the conversation. Hope provides members the belief that new ideas and understanding can be achieved through the interaction of conversation. Hope and faith have been noted as be the underlying element of any discussion. Hope sustains people when faced with problems and faith is what enables us to continue in the process and work through troubling times. Within a collaborative experience, hope and faith involves believing all members engaged in the conversation will bring new insight and direction for the discussion.
2. **Autonomy** - *Autonomy* enables the learning method to come full circle. Autonomy is achieved when one feels he or she is their own individual yet a part of the group. Autonomy is suggested being considered a moment in time for those involved in the conversation and not something constant. It is important for individuals to feel he or she can address points of view and stand his or her ground on a subject matter, as long as he or she is receptive to adjusting opinions when credible information is added to the conversation. Being able to take a stand on opinions is imperative for open discussion to be achieved.

Brookfield, S. & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms*. California: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Property of Reno (2003)

Appendix II: Elements of Sustainability

Overall Question

“What elements [resources] need to be present in the [environment] for the community to be sustainable?” The first question asked is, “What does sustainability mean?” and “How does it relate to me?” What you need to ask yourself are questions like, “What are things that I like about my community?” and “What would make this a more enjoyable place to live in the future?” “What are assets (i.e. property, belongings, material goods, etc.) to improve the environment so people will want to live in the community?”

The following section provides the facilitator(s) questions to assist group members to begin the discussion, as well as a brief understanding for what each theme area represents.

Environment – This theme area focuses on the physical environment, economic development, healthcare services, and transportation.

Probing Questions:

- How important is educating people on air pollution, water quality and keeping the community clean, to you? What education needs to be implemented in school or the community? What programs or activities are currently happening in the community and what and how could the community be addressing these areas differently to better connect with the community?
- What are your opinions on the community’s beautification? How nice are building locations; landscaping; green space available for recreation and community use? When you think of your community, can you identify areas you like and dislike in how the community looks? How are conditions of homes and businesses? What and how could the community better itself in its beautification?
- Do you believe health services are available to people in the community? What transportation services are or need to be considered in the community? What are some ways people in the community could address the needs of citizens in this area?

- What businesses do you believe would help the community? What services do you believe are meeting and are not meeting the needs of young people and the community at large? What do you believe are agricultural or businesses make the community unique and a place where people would want to live or visit? Thinking about what you would like to do after you finish education, what businesses or services would you want to have in the community where you live?

Community - This theme area focuses on the activities, programs, resources, community opportunities and how people feel about living in the environment.

Probing Questions:

- What activities do you believe are available to you in school? Out of school? Do the programs and activities available to you meet your needs? What are activities/ programs that might be helpful for young people and community members in general?
- How do you feel about volunteering services? Do you know about different ways to volunteer in the community? Do you feel it is needed? If you were interested in volunteering, do you know who you could contact or find out information about volunteering in the community? What activities would you be interested in becoming involved with in the community?
- Do you believe there are enough leadership opportunities for young people? What are some programs/activities that are in the community? How do you feel young people should be considered to participate in leadership roles in the community?
- How safe do you feel living in the community? Do you believe stealing and crime should be of concern to community members? What education or actions could be taken to address safety in the community if this is an area of concern for you?

- How do you feel people treat one another in the community? How would you like people to interact with one another? What programs/activities would assist in this area if it is of concern to you? Do you believe there is a positive role model in your life? What are characteristics about them you would like to be? How can you take steps to be more like that person and help others as well?

Lifelong Education – This theme area focuses on how technology, education, job availability, family and personal experiences assist individuals in the community and whether appropriate resources are available to meet the needs of the community.

Probing Questions:

- How important is education in the community? What is the connection with technical and community college resources? Are programs available to you if you wanted to attend the community college? Is it important to keep up to date on technology? Is it important to keep up with new ideas in a career or job? Do you believe the community will have job opportunities for you? If not, what types of businesses would need to be placed in the community for you to stay in the community?
- How does family and/or personal experiences contribute to who you are as a person and what you want to do or be in the future? How can you share, keep and/or change to better yourself and/or the community?
- What resources are available to you in school, out of school, as well as the community library to assist you with your education? What resources should the community be considering to better the environment in this area?

Amenities – This theme area focuses on activities available out of school. It also looks at what makes the community unique and something that should continue in the community, as well as hang out places for people and events available to family and young people in the community?

Probing Questions:

- What activities are available to people after school? Do you believe there should be more or less activities available? What would you like to be available to young people after school? Do you believe there are safe places for young people to hang out in the community? What type of place would be nice for young people to have available to them? How would it be managed?
- What responsibility do you feel community members should take in making the community what he or she wants it to be? Do you feel change is possible in the community? What steps would need to be taken for change to occur in the community if people wanted to make change to better the community? What is currently in place for people to talk about the community and making decisions?
- What recreational opportunities are available to young people? What facilities are available? What could help the community? What events are available to community members? What events would you like to have available to you?

Property of Reno (2003)

APPENDIX F

Initial Interview Guide

Context

The purpose of this interview is to collect information from participant experience prior to the individual high school Youth Partnership forums within the Sustainability Community Partnership Project. This information will assist the primary investigator (interviewer) in identifying emerging conceptual categories around the experience(s). The interviewer will use the guided interview questions to interview the selected individuals who have been actively engaged throughout the experiential process. The interviewer will actively listen and respect the interviewee while he or she is addressing the questions. The interviewer will also place assumptions concerning her perception of the experience aside, in order to actively embrace the participant's perspective of the experience(s). If at any time, the interviewee is uncomfortable, or like for the interviewer to eliminate information from the data collection, she or he has that right to address the interviewer. The interview will be audibly recorded and the interviewer will take notes during the interview to assist with the transcription process after the interview has been facilitated.

Directions

The interviewer will ask the interviewee the following nine questions. The interviewer may ask follow-up questions from remarks provided by the interviewee (for clarification, trigger of thought, etc.). The interview will take approximately one hour to complete.

Interview Questions

1. Describe how you became involved in the Youth Partnership Project?
2. What has been your involvement in the Youth Partnership Project and/or the Sustainable Community Project within your community?
3. How do you perceive your role to be as a part of making decisions to better your community? What role do you feel you play within the decision-making process of the experience?
4. How do you feel the youth partnership project will contribute to the community developing a sustainable community plan?
5. Will you share with me some insights that you have gained from being a part of the experience up to now?
6. What do you hope the youth partnership project will contribute to the community?
7. How do you feel the interactions within the small group discussions will be for both youth and adults?
8. When working in small group activities and making decisions, what is important for you to interact with others and what do you believe needs to be present for the experience to be beneficial for participants?
9. Could you describe any thoughts you may have about the youth forums and the possible outcomes that will transpire from the experience(s)?
10. Is there something you feel I haven't asked you, that you wished I had asked? What that be?

APPENDIX G

Second Interview Guide

Context

The purpose of this interview is to collect information from participant experience throughout the Youth Partnerships component within the Sustainability Community Partnership Project. This information will assist the primary investigator (interviewer) in identifying emerging conceptual categories around the experience(s). The interviewer will use the guided interview questions to interview the selected individuals who have been actively engaged throughout the experiential process. The interviewer will actively listen and respect the interviewee while he or she is addressing the questions. The interviewer will also place assumptions concerning her perception of the experience aside, in order to actively embrace the participant's perspective of the experience(s). If at any time, the interviewee is uncomfortable, or like for the interviewer to eliminate information from the data collection, she or he has that right to address the interviewer. The interview will be audibly recorded and the interviewer will take notes during the interview to assist with the transcription process after the interview has been facilitated.

Directions

The interviewer will ask the interviewee the following nine questions. The interviewer may ask follow-up questions from remarks provided by the interviewee (for clarification, trigger of thought, etc.). The interview will take approximately one hour to complete.

Interview Questions

11. Could you describe the process of the Youth Partnership Project in your own words?
12. How you describe the forum experience(s)?
13. What characteristics were present within the small group sessions (how did people interact, structure of discussion, etc.)?
14. Could you share with me some insights that you had from being a part of the experience?
15. How has the experience affected you, personally or how you look at others? Could you give me some examples?
16. you tell me about your thoughts on how this experience of working with a group made up of youth and adults in making decisions, has affected your view of working with others?
17. How do you perceive your role to be as a part of making decisions to better your community?
18. Could you describe one experience that captures the whole thing for you?
19. Is there something you feel I haven't asked you, that you wished I had asked? What that be?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, D. & Krockover, G. (1999). Stimulating constructivist teaching styles through use of an observation rubric. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 36, 955-971.
- Agenda 21. Report from United Nations: Sustainable Development. Retrieved on September 12, 2002 from <http://www.un.org/esa/sustbed/agenda21text.html>
- Babbie, E. (1998). *The practice of social research*, 8th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Beilenson, J. (1993). Looking for young people listening for youth voice. *Social Policy*, 24, 8-13.
- Ben-Ari, R. & Kedem-Friedrich, P. (2000). Restructuring heterogeneous classes for cognitive development: Social interactive perspective. *Instructional Science*, 28, 153-167.
- Benard, B. (1997). *Changing the condition, place and view of young people in society: An interview with youth development pioneer Bill Lofquist*. In the report, Resiliency in Action, Bouncing Back From Risk and Adversity: Ideas for Youth, Families, and Communities, p. 7-12.
- Bender, T. (1997). *Politics, intellect, and the American university*. Daedalus, Winter.
- Benson, L. & Harkavy, I. (2002). Universities and community schools, 2002. *Universities and Community Schools*, 7, 1-2.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1992). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*, 2nd ed. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- Boyte, H.C. & Kari, N.N. (2000). Renewing the democratic spirit in American colleges and universities: Higher education as public work. In T. Ehrlich, *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education* (pp. 124-146). Phoenix, AZ: The American Council on Education and the Oryx Press.
- Boyte, H.C. and Skelton N. (1997, February) The Legacy of Public Work. *Educational Leadership*, 54, 12-17.
- Branson, M. (1999). Making the case for civic education: Where we stand at the end of the 20th century. Speech given at the *We the People...National Conference of State and District Coordinators* in June 1999. Washington, DC.
- Brookfield, S. & Preskill, S. (1999). *Discussion as a way of teaching: Tools and techniques for democratic classrooms*. California: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

- Brown, B. (1990). Peer groups and peer cultures. In S. Feldman & G. Elliott (Eds.), *At the Threshold: The Developing Adolescent*, p. 171-196. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Brown, B. (1996). Visibility, vulnerability, development, and context: Ingredients for a fuller understanding of peer rejection in adolescence. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 16, 27-36.
- Bruffee, K. A. (1999). *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the Authority of knowledge* (2nd ed.). Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Bruffee, K. A. (Jan/Feb 1995). Sharing our toys. *Change*, 27, 12-18.
- Bruffee, K. A. (1984). Collaborative learning and the conversation of mankind. *College English*, 46, 635-652.
- Bruner, J. (1996). *The culture of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Camino, L. (2000a). Putting youth-adult partnerships to work for community change: Lessons from volunteers across the country. *CYD Journal*, 1, 27-31.
- Camino, L. (2000b). Youth-adult partnerships: Entering new territory in community work and research. *Applied Developmental Science*, 4, 11-20.
- Chapman, J. & Aspin, D. (1997). *School development: The school, the community and lifelong learning*. London, England: Cassell Wellington House.
- Checkoway, B. (2001). Renewing the civic mission of the American research university. *Journal of Higher Education*, 72, 125-47.
- Chrislip, D & Larson, C. (1994). *Collaborative leadership: How citizens and civic leaders can make a difference*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Cohen, E. (1986). *Designing groupwork: Strategies for the heterogeneous classroom*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Colgan, C. (n.d.). Administering higher education in a democratic community. In freedom papers. Retrieved December 3, 2001, from <http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/freedom/freedom5.htm>
- Collins, T. & Branham, D. (October, 1999). *Developing shared youth and adult leadership within communities*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Rural Education Association, Colorado Springs, CO.
- Creswell, J. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*, 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Sage Publications.

- Creswell, J. & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39, 124-130.
- Daniels, M. (2001). *Creating sustainable community programs: Examples of collaborative public administration*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Delli Carpini, M. (2002). *The youth engagement initiative*. From The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved on September 17, 2002 from <http://www.pewtrusts.com>
- Doolittle, P. (1995, June). *Understanding cooperative learning through Vygotsky's zone of proximal development*. Paper presented at the Lilly National Conference on Excellence in College Teaching, Columbia, SC.
- Eisner, E. & Peshkin, A. (Eds.). (1990). *Qualitative inquiry in education: Debate*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Farmer, E. & Rojewski (2001). *Research pathways: Writing professional papers, theses, and dissertations in workforce education*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Feldman, R. S. (2000). *Development across the life span (2nd ed.)*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
- Fernyhough, C. (1997). Vygotsky's sociocultural approach: Theoretical issues and implications for current research. In S. Hala (Ed.), *The development of social cognition*. (pp. 65-92). England: Psychology Press/Erlbaum, Taylor & Francis.
- Flint, W. & Houser, W. (2001). *Living a sustainable lifestyle for our children's children*. Lincoln, NE: Authors Choice Press.
- Farrant, R., Pyle, J. Lazonick, W., & Levenstein, C. (2001). *Approaches to sustainable development: The public university in the regional economy*. Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.
- Fredricks, L., Kaplan, E., & Zeisler, J. (2001). *Integrating youth voice in service-learning*. Produced by the Education Commission of the States' Initiative Compact for Learning and Citizenship. Colorado: Education Commission of the States Distribution Center.
- Fullen, M.G (1991) *The new meaning of Educational Change*, Cassel Education Ltd.
- Gall, M., Borg, W., & Gall, J. (1996). *Educational research: An introduction, 6th ed*. White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers.
- Galston, W. (2001). Civic education and civic engagement among youth Americans. *CBE Basic Education Online Edition*, 45, 7-10.

- Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.
- Gokhale, A. A. *Collaborative learning enhances critical thinking*. Retrieved April 21, 2002, from <http://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/JTE/jte-v7n1/gokhale.jte-v7n1.html>
- Guajardo, M. & Graber, D. (2002). *Youth and adult partnerships: A narrative of a collaborative experience*. Retrieved on September 17, 2002 from <http://www.utexas.edu/academic/uip/inside/cyprojects/yli/long.html>
- Hamm, M. & Adams, D. (1992). *The collaborative dimensions of learning*. New Jersey: Ablex Publishing Corporation.
- Hersch, P. (1998). *A tribe apart: A journey into the heart of american adolescence*. New York: Ballantine Publishing Group.
- Hoover, A. & Weisenbach, A. (1999). Youth leading now: Securing a place at the table. *New Designs for Youth Development*, 15, 29-36.
- Huckle, J. & Sterling, S. (1996). *Education for sustainability*. London, N1 9JN: Earthscan Publications Ltd.
- Hudson & Robinson, C. (2001). *UM awarded \$4.57 million to create research center on civic learning and engagement*. Retrieved on October 1, 2002 from <http://www.inform.umd.edu/campus/info/departments/instdv/newsdesk/relationses/2001/>
- Hughes, D. & Curnan, S. (2000). Community youth development: A framework for action. Retrieved September 17, 2002 from <http://www.cydjournal.org/>
- Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development (ICCYD) (2001). Rejecting the isolation of youth: Adults and organizations dramatically benefit. *The Nonprofit Quarterly* retrieved on October 7, 2002 from <http://www.tsne.org/print/224.html>
- Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development and National 4-H Council. (2001). *At the table: Making the case for youth in decision-making*. Chevy Chase, MD: Innovation Centers/Tide Center.
- Jewett, T.O. (1997). Thomas Jefferson and the purposes of education. *The Educational Sustainable Community Gathering*, 61, 110-13.
- Kaiser-Drobney, A. (2001). Engaging youth in their communities: The ultimate tool for sustainability. In Mark Daniels *Creating Sustainable Community Programs: Examples of Collaborative Public Administration*, p. 271-281. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers.
- Kirby, D. & Coyle, K. (1997). Youth development programs. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 19, 437-454.

- Klindera, K., Menderweld, J. & Norman, J. (2001). Barriers to building effective youth-adult partnerships. Retrieved on September 17, 2002 from <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/transitions>
- Kothari, R. (March 1997). *Youth participation in youth development*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Community, Mexico City, Mexico.
- Kumar, V. (1996). *Control of Collaborative Interactions*. <http://www.cs.usask.ca/grads/vsk719/academic/890/project2/node5.html>. Retrieved on April 21, 2002.
- Kurth-Schai, R. (1988). The roles of youth in society: A reconceptualization. *New Designs: For Youth Development*, 7-13.
- Larson, R. (2000). Toward a psychology of positive youth development. *American Psychologist*, 5, 170-183.
- Lee, C. & Smargorinsky, P. (2000). *Vygotskian perspectives on literacy research: Constructing meaning through collaborative inquiry*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluence. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Ed.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 2nd ed., 163-18
- Lofland, J. (1971). *Analyzing social settings*. California: Wadsworth.
- Martin County, North Carolina Web Page. Retrieved on September 26, 2002 from <http://www.vitismartincounty.com>
- Mawby, R. (1998). Mobilizing university expertise to meet youth needs. In R. Lerner and L. Simon *University-community collaborations for the twenty-first century: Outreach scholarship for youth and families*, 367-388. New York: Garland.
- Meacham, S. (2001). Vygotsky and the blues: Re-reading cultural connections and conceptual development. *Theory Into Practice*, 40, 190-199.
- Merriam, S. & Simpson, E. (1995). *A guide to research for educators and trainers of adults*, 2nd ed. Malabar, FL: Krieger.
- Mezirow, J. (1998) "Postmodern critique of transformation theory: a response to Pietrykowski," and "Transformative learning and social action; a response to Inglis," *Adult education quarterly*, 49 (Fall) 65-67 and 70-72.

- Mulenga, D. (2001). Case study research. In E. Farmer and J. Rojewski's *Research pathways: Writing professional papers, theses, and dissertations in workforce education*, 91-106. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Nasser, F. (2001). Selecting an appropriate research design. In E. Farmer and J. Rojewski's *Research pathways: Writing professional papers, theses, and dissertations in workforce education*, 91-106. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- National Commission on Resources for Youth (1974) *New roles for youth in the school and community*. New York, NY: Citation Press.
- National 4-H Council. (2002). *The national conversation on youth development in the 21st century: Final report*. Chevy Chase, MD: National 4-H Council.
- National 4-H Council. (1997). *Creating youth/adult partnerships*. Maryland: National 4-H Council. (<http://www.fourhcouncil.edu>). Retrieved on May 10, 2002.
- Nevin, A., Smith, K., & Udvari-Solner, A. (1999). Cooperative group learning and higher education. In J. S. Thousand, R. A. Villa, & A. I. Nevin, *Creativity and Collaborative Learning: A Practical Guide to Empowering Students and Teachers* (pp. 103-114). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Niemi, R. & Hepburn, M. (1995). The rebirth of political socialization. *Perspectives on Political Science*, 24, 7-16.
- Oates, K. (Summer/Fall 2001). Promoting Progressive Pedagogies: A Case for Community Based Undergraduate Research. *Peer Review*, 3-4, 19-20: Washington, DC: AAC&U.
- Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) (1999). The response of higher education institutions to regional needs. Report from *Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education*. Paris, France.
- Pangle, L.S. & Pangle, T.L. (1993). *The learning of liberty: The educational ideals of the american founders*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.
- Phenomenology*. Retrieved on November 4, 2002 from <http://www.connect.net/ron/phenom.html>.
- Piaget, J. (1926). *Language and thought of the child*. Harcourt, NY: Brace.
- Piaget, J. (1952). *The origins of intelligence in children*. New York: International Universities Press.
- Reardon, K. (1991). *Persuasion in Practice*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.
- Rennekamp, R. (1993). Double standard for youth involvement. Retrieved on September 17, 2002 from <http://www.joe.org/joe/1993fall/f2.html>

- Rogoff, B. (1995). Observing sociocultural activity on three planes: Participatory appropriation, guided participation, and apprenticeship. In J. V. Wertsch, P. del Rio, & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind* (pp. 139-164). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Reno, D. (2002). [Collaborative experiences enhance constituent commitment]. Unpublished raw data.
- Roseland, M. (1998). *Toward sustainable communities: Resources for citizens and their governments*. Stony Creek, CT: New Community Publishers.
- Stake, R. (2000). Case studies. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research, 2nd ed.*, 435-454. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Schneider, C. (2001). Toward the engaged academy. *Liberal Education*, 87, 18-27.
- Taylor, E. (1998). *The theory and practice of transformative learning: A critical review*. In ERIC
- Taylor, s. & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource, 3rd edition*. Indianapolis, IN: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Tell, C. (December 1999/January 2000). Generation what? Connecting with today's youth. *Educational Leadership*, 57, 1-7.
- Thanki, R. (1999). Do we know the value of high education to regional development?, *Regional Studies*, 33, 84-92.
- The case study as a research method*. Retrieved on November 4, 2002 from <http://www.gslis.utexas.edu>.
- Thompkins, C. (2001). *Learning to facilitate construction of understanding: a case study of supplemental instruction leaders*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, North Carolina State University, Raleigh.
- Trimbur, J. (1989). Consensus and difference in collaborative learning. *College English*, 51, 602-616.
- UNESCO (1998). *Framework for priority action for change and development of higher education*, Paris, France.
- Urban, W. & Wagoner, J. (2000). *American education: A history*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
- Vygotsky, L. (1962). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in community: The development of higher psychological processes*. (Eds. M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Vygotsky, L. (1986). *Thought and language*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.

- Vygotsky, L. (1987). Thinking and speech. In L.S. Vygotsky, *Collected Works* (vol 1. pp. 39-285). New York, NY: Plenum.
- Vygotsky, L. (1926/1997). *Educational psychology*. Florida: St. Lucie Press.
- West, J. & Oldfather, P. (1996). Children's voices on group work: A playlet. (Reading Research Report No. 49). University of Georgia and Maryland.
- Winer, M. & Ray, K. (2000). *Collaboration handbook: Creating, sustaining, and enjoying the journey*, Saint Paul, MN: Amherst H. Wilder Foundation.
- World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century: Vision and Action. Adopted by the World Conference on Higher Education on October 9, 1998. Retrieved on October 7, 2002 from <http://www.unesco.org/education/>
- Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods*, 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Zeldin, S., McDaniel, A., Topitzes, D., & Lorens, M. (2001). Bringing young people to the table: Effects on adults and youth organizations. *CYD Journal*, 2, 20-27.